How Do Experts Use Digitized Photographs?  
Qualitative Methods for Theory Development

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Research Goals
Define relationship between building and using digital image archives
• Build theory on “expert” use of digitized visual resources
• Extend theory of the “record” to encompass “archival quality”
• Apply qualitative methods (grounded theory) to archival user studies

Grounded Theory Analysis
“Grounded theory aims to move qualitative inquiry beyond descriptive studies into the realm of explanatory theoretical frameworks, providing abstract, conceptual understandings of the studied phenomena.” Charmaz 2006, p. 6.
• Exploratory, flexible interviews
• Transcribed recordings, coded by line
• “Memo-writing” initial ideas
• Cross-case analysis
• Iterative theory development and testing

Q. Analytical rigor and reproducibility?

Phase 1 Interviews
Initial contact by email (consent form)
Recorded interviews by telephone (45 min. each)
• Biographical summary
• Experience with photographic research
• Identify project for further investigation
• Initial consent for onsite interview

Phase 2 Interviews
Onsite, recorded, semi-structured, in-depth interviews (2.5 hrs. each)
• Origins and purpose of specific project
• Expertise and collaborative community
• Technology and tools used for research
• General decision making strategies for the project
• Properties of individual items chosen (visual, technical, archival)

Q. Visual expertise test?
Q. Interviewer bias?
Q. Evolving interview protocol?

Selection of Experts
Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division staff identified 20 potential candidates, based on these criteria:
• Cross section of typical “expert” users
• Recent (18 mos.) significant use of digitized holdings
• Evident sophistication in approach to research
• Tangible product expected

Q. Representative?
Q. Selection bias?

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Fig. 1. Visual Inquiry Modes