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

Paul Conway
School of Information
University of Michigan

NSF

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?

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?

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
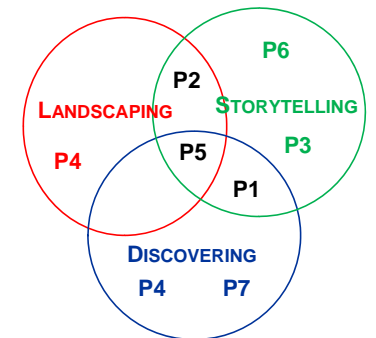- Properties of individual items chosen (visual, technical, archival)

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

Beyond Retrieval: Phase Two Interview Data						
	Recording			Transcript		
Participant	Hours	Minutes	Total Min	Pages	Paragraphs	Words
1	3	27	207	60	618	26,047
2	2	28	148	42	367	19,538
3	2	44	164	50	417	24,356
4	2	46	166	46	404	21,139
5	2	21	141	41	404	18,344
6	2	18	138	44	466	19,064
7	1	24	84	26	288	10,768
TOTAL	17	28	1048	309	2,964	139,256
Mean			150	44	423	19,894

Fig. 1. Visual Inquiry Modes

LANDSCAPING — P4, P2
STORYTELLING — P6, P3
DISCOVERING — P4, P7
P5, P1

P1. Civil War   P2. Turkestan Alb.   P3. Lewis Hine, NCLC   P4. Roots Music, FSA   P5. Russell Lee, FSA   P6. Jack Delano, FSA   P7. Baseball Players