

## **Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies, edited by Shailoo Bedi and Jenaya Webb**

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Special Focus on Refusing Crisis Narratives

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## Book Review: *Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies*

Bedi, Shailoo, and Jenaya Webb, eds. (2020). *Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies*. London: Facet Publishing, 213pp, \$138.40.

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In January 2020, I was at the Ontario Library Conference and decided on a whim to attend a panel discussion on Visual Research Methods. Little did I know that the panel was composed of the editors and many of the authors of *Visual Research Methods: An Introduction for Library and Information Studies*, discussing some of the work that would appear in the book. Although I had attended the panel out of vague interest, I left with ideas about how I could incorporate these methods into my own work, and many questions about how I might do so. After eagerly anticipating the publication of *Visual Research Methods* for almost a year, I was delighted to finally read the book.

*Visual Research Methods* aims to bring together various reflections and “practical examples of visual research in action” (xxii) to provide an introduction and overview of the possibilities for these methods in library and information science (hereafter LIS). The book does not aim to be a comprehensive source on visual research methods, as the discussion of these methods exists in other fields (Rose 2012). Instead, Bedi and Webb bring focus to the growing use of visual research methods in LIS, building from key work such as Hartel’s iSquare research (2014) and Pollak’s (2017) discussion of visual research methods for LIS. The purpose of this book is therefore to claim the value of visual research methods for our field by compiling reflections and examples of how they are being used. Both co-editors have a background in visual research methods and published an article together which discusses the value of photo elicitation (Bedi and Webb 2017). All chapter authors and editors discuss the value and possibilities for visual research methods in LIS, and one of the strengths of the anthology is to bring together reflections from both experienced and novice researchers who are using visual research methods in LIS.



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The book is organized into two parts. In part one, the editors prime the audience to understand the context and history of visual research methods in LIS, as well as practical considerations for conducting a project involving visual research. One of the recurring themes throughout this section is how our identities and context impact how we interpret and create visual information. The editors suggest that LIS researchers need to carefully consider and document our epistemological and methodological frameworks for research involving visual information.

Part two contains six chapters which offer insights and reflections on the use of visual research methods from across library and information studies. The chapters show visual research methods being used in library UX studies, library space-planning, studies of abstract information concepts, arts-based research, and archives. A large breadth of visual research methods are showcased, including the draw-and-write technique, photo studies, graphic, photo and object elicitation, cognitive mapping, and participatory 3D laser scanning. Although the chapters are written by many authors and use different methods to different ends, most chapters contain a strong reflective component. The authors don't always discuss the findings of their studies in depth, but reflect on the methodological process used, and value of visual research to their study. As a result, the overall tone of the book tends not to be too prescriptive, but readable and reflective.

The whole book is peppered with useful tidbits of advice and exemplars of visual research done well. Jess Whyte and Chelsea Misquith's chapter on using the draw-and-write technique and object elicitation proved an excellent example for discussing positionality and the impact of methodological considerations on a project. Andy Priestner's article reminded me that the products of visual research can also "provide compelling evidence" to administration when used in UX studies (143). Rebecca Noone's article left me thinking for hours about how we move through spaces. Unlike the other chapters, Angela Fritz does not reflect on the use of a visual research method but discusses the possibilities of visual analysis for archival research and digital storytelling. I'm not an archivist, but similar to other chapters, I found myself wanting to learn more about how the author has used this method in their practice.

Upon opening this book, my hope was that it would provide experienced advice and reflections on the use of visual research methods in LIS. My hopes were fulfilled with this publication. The book provides a well-balanced discussion of visual research methods, with considerations for the benefits and navigating challenges that come with visual research. As someone who is embarking on their first project which uses these methods, this book serves as both an inspiration for what's possible, as well as a guidebook of what to consider. *Visual Research Methods* is an excellent anthology which showcases the variety, application, and possibilities for visual

research methods in LIS. This book will provide LIS academics and library workers of all types (academic, public, archival) examples of visual research methods in action, and reflections on the power of these methods, not only to answer research questions, but to engage with research participants. I hope that this book inspires an explosion of visual research in LIS, and suspect it will become a reference-point for the LIS field for years to come.

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