

*Article*

# Elfreda Annmary Chatman in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: At the Intersection of Critical Theory and Social Justice Imperatives

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## ABSTRACT

Elfreda Annmary Chatman (1942-2002) is considered a pioneer library and information science (LIS) scholar for her theory development and ethnographic approach to understand information behaviors of understudied populations (e.g., female inmates, janitors, the elderly, poor people, female retirees, etc.). This article discusses the limited contemporary relevance of her contributions to information science research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when subjected to an epistemological assessment from critical theory and social justice imperatives. Progressive scholars operationalize this intersection in terms of action-oriented and socially relevant outcomes achieved via information-related work to extend the LIS professions beyond its historical shackles. They also encourage community-engaged scholarship and community-wide changes via partnering with and providing programs to people on society's margins. Scrutinizing Chatman's legacy in terms of these attributes helps extend the discourse and identify its trajectory, especially relevant in the context of today's political and cultural climate. Some factors that influenced Chatman's work are traced within an emerging, yet narrow, trajectory and scope of information science research of those times. Select evidence and examples discussed in this narrative illustrate some of these perceived limitations while critiquing Chatman's contributions and still valuing their significance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Elfreda Annmary Chatman (1942-2002) is considered a pioneer library and information science (LIS) scholar for her theory development and ethnographic approach to exploring information behaviors of understudied populations (e.g., female inmates, janitors, the elderly, poor people, female retirees, etc.).<sup>1</sup> She was instrumental in shifting the privileged information science researcher's White-IST (White + elitist) gaze towards marginalized populations, their inner lives and experiences, and their construction of meaning.<sup>2</sup> This article discusses the contemporary relevance of Chatman's contributions to information science research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and their limitations when subjected to an epistemological assessment and scrutiny from an intersection of critical theory and social justice imperatives. The implications of an amplified assessment of her contributions are also considered.

Some factors that influenced Chatman's work are traced within an emerging, yet narrow, trajectory and scope of information science research of those times.<sup>3</sup> This critique of Chatman's legacy is, thus, also a critical commentary on the past and present evolution and limitations of LIS scholarship and praxis. Among others, these included a newly incipient bent of qualitative research in LIS within the dark shadow of quantitative approaches.<sup>4</sup> Further, we can construe an imbalance in Chatman's work towards solely

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<sup>1</sup> Crystal Fulton, "An Ordinary Life in the Round: Elfreda Annmary Chatman," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 45, no. 2 (2010): 238-259; Reijo Savolainen, "Everyday Life Information Seeking: Approaching Information Seeking in the Context of 'Way of Life'," *Library & Information Science Research* 17, no. 3 (1995): 259-294.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous reviewer; Chris Bourg, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Librarianship," *Feral Librarian*, March 3, 2014; Cheryl L. Branche, "Diversity in Librarianship: Is There a Color Line?" In *The Twenty-First Century Black Librarian: Issues and Challenges*, eds. Andrew P. Jackson, Julius Jefferson Jr., and Akilah Nosakhare (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2012), 203-206; Bharat Mehra and LaVerne Gray, "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS to Further Real Transformations," *The Library Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2020): 189-239.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Johan Lor, "Revitalizing Comparative Library and Information Science: Theory and Metatheory," *Journal of Documentation*, 70, no. 1 (2014): 25-51; W. Boyd Rayward, "The History and Historiography of Information Science: Some Reflections," *Information Processing & Management* 32, no. 1 (1996): 3-17.

<sup>4</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018); Raya Fidel, "Qualitative Methods in Information Retrieval Research," *Library & Information Science Research* 15 (1993): 219-247; Raya Fidel, "Are We There Yet?: Mixed Methods Research in Library and Information Science," *Library & Information Science Research* 30, no. 4 (December 2008): 265-272; Hope Olson, "Quantitative 'Versus' Qualitative Research: The Wrong Question," *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science* (2013), <https://doi.org/10.29173/cais414>.

“stuffy,” information-focused theory development that did not sufficiently account for context, and perpetuated the self-importance of the profession.<sup>5</sup> The constrained conceptualization of fashionable information science theory is not surprising owing to their biased Anglo/Euro-centric sociological and anthropological disciplinary roots.<sup>6</sup> That, too, which internalized positivist/postpositivist approaches and representations of research solely delivered through exclusive networks, limited their community impact and societal significance.<sup>7</sup> Select evidence and examples discussed in this narrative illustrate some of these perceived limitations while critiquing Chatman’s contributions and still valuing their significance.

The analysis presented in the article uses a lens of critical theory and social justice to highlight and extend Chatman’s work, especially relevant in the context of today’s political and cultural climate. Since the origins of information science in the 1970s, its significant flaws include a narrow definition of “research,” historically perpetuated resistance to community engagement, and unhealthy economic factors underlying its scholarly publication business.<sup>8</sup> These have likely contributed to its limited placement in

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Ingwersen and Kalervo Järvelin, *The Turn: Integration of Information Seeking and Retrieval in Context* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2005); Diane Kelly, “Measuring Online Information Seeking Context, Part I: Background and Method,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 13 (November 2006): 1729-1739; Tefko Saracevic, “Information Science,” *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 50, no. 2 (1999): 1051-1063; Lauro Snidaro, Jesus Garcia, James Llinas, and Erik Blasch, eds., *Context-Enhanced Information Fusion: Boosting Real-World Performance with Domain Knowledge* (New York: Springer, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Blaise Cronin, “The Sociological Turn in Information Science,” *Journal of Information Science* 34, no. 4 (2008): 465-475; Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom, “The Use and Misuse of Anthropological Methods in Library and Information Science Research,” *The Library Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (April 1995): 161-199.

<sup>7</sup> Diane Crane, *Invisible Colleges* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Michael Dudley, “The MMIWG Report, Genocide and Epistemic Injustice,” *Decolonized Librarian*, July 15, 2019; Mehra and Gray, “An “Owning Up” of White-IST Trends in LIS”; Leslie R. Shade, “A Gendered Perspective on Access to the Information Infrastructure,” *Information Society* 14, no. 1 (1998): 33-44; Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey C. Bowker, “How to Infrastructure,” in *Handbook of New Media*, edited by Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Birger Hjørland, “Library and Information Science: Practice, Theory, and Philosophical Basis,” *Information Processing & Management* 36, no. 3 (May 2000): 501-531; Bharat Mehra, Bradley W. Bishop, and Robert P. Partee II, “A Case Methodology of Action Research to Promote Economic Development: Implications for LIS Education,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 59, no. 1-2 (2018): 48-65; Joseph Wronka, *Human Rights and Social Justice: Social Action and Service for the Helping and Health Professions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2016); Ayoung Yoon and Andrea Copeland, “Toward Community-Inclusive Data

contemporary society.<sup>9</sup> As a result, it has been slow to develop greater situational relevance and contextual impact beyond its academic “ivory towers” of Anglo/Euro privilege and exclusion.<sup>10</sup> This is closely tied to an inability in the LIS professions (broadly construed) to substantively implement ideals of fairness, justice, and equality/equity (i.e., social justice) beyond their lip service for all people in and out of its ranks.<sup>11</sup> These include minorities based on race, ethnicity, national origins, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, education, economic status, and other constructed variables of identity,

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Ecosystems: Challenges and Opportunities of Open Data for Community-Based Organizations,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 71, no. 2 (2020): 1439-1454. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24346>.

<sup>9</sup> Karen E. Fisher, Joan C. Durrance, and Marian Bouch Hinton, “Information Grounds and the Use of Need-Based Services by Immigrants in Queens, New York: A Context-Based, Outcome Evaluation Approach,” *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 55, no. 8 (June 2004): 754-766; Minelle Mahtani, “Challenging the Ivory Tower: Proposing Anti-Racist Geographies Within the Academy,” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 13, no. 1 (2006): 21-25; Bharat Mehra, Hope A. Olson, and Suzana Ahmad, “Integrating Diversity across the LIS Curriculum: An Exploratory Study of Instructors’ Perceptions and Practices Online,” *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 2011): 39-51.

<sup>10</sup> Blaise Cronin, “Knowledge Management, Organizational Culture and Anglo-American Higher Education,” *Journal of Information Science* 27, no. 3 (2001): 129-137; Luanne Freund, “Contextualizing the Information-Seeking Behavior of Software Engineers,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 66, no. 8 (August 2015): 1594-1605; Birger Hjørland, “The Foundation of the Concept of Relevance,” *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 61, no. 2 (February, 2010): 217-237; Patrick Wilson, “Situational Relevance,” *Information Storage and Retrieval* 9, no. 8 (August 1973): 457-471.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Benoit, “Critical Theory and the Legitimation of Library and Information Science,” *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science* 12, no. 4 (October 2007): paper colis 30. <http://InformationR.net/ir/12-4/colis30.html>; Sarah T. Roberts and Safiya Umoja Noble, “Empowered to Name, Inspired to Act: Social Responsibility and Diversity as Calls to Action in the LIS Context,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 512-532; Punit Dadlani and Ross J. Todd, “Information Technology and School Libraries: A Social Justice Perspective,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 329-359.

behavior, and diversity.<sup>12</sup> It is indeed one of the professions' Achilles heels.<sup>13</sup> Some readers might perceive this as a contentious statement. An honest assessment of historical and contemporary trends in the LIS professions reveal otherwise. Evidence is visible through its entire historical and contemporary existence in the form of numerous White-IST instances of unfairness, injustice, and inequity, irrespective of the verbiage used to the contrary.<sup>14</sup> Mehra and Gray discuss these trends during six normative phases in LIS and call for an "owning up" of a "racialized library history, White-IST information research, exclusion in LIS education, lip service of LIS diversity (self-deception), tokenism and limited inclusion in LIS, and retribution and reconciliation" for real transformations to occur.<sup>15</sup> Over the years, a lack of social justice in LIS is evidenced in its exclusion of people of color in its composition and service constituencies; gender inequities in salary differentials; the continued privileging of positivist/postpositivist research; and a bias against qualitative, interpretivist, or humanistic approaches.<sup>16</sup> Other social injustices

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<sup>12</sup> Alana Kumbier and Julia Starkey, "Access is Not Problem Solving: Disability Justice and Libraries," *Library Trends* 64, no. 3 (Winter 2016): 468-491; Jamie Ann Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i2.26>; Brett C. Stockdill and Mary Yu Danico, eds., *Transforming the Ivory Tower: Challenging Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia in the Academy* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Johannes J. Britz, "Making the Global Information Society Good: A Social Justice Perspective on the Ethical Dimensions of the Global Information Society," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 59, no. 7 (May 2008): 1171-1183; Nicole A. Cooke, Miriam Sweeney, and Safiya U. Noble, "Social Justice as Topic and Tool: An Attempt to Transform an LIS Curriculum and Culture," *The Library Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (January 2016): 107-124; Bharat Mehra, "The Non-White Man's Burden in LIS Education: Critical Constructive Nudges," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 60, no. 3 (July 2019a): 198-207.

<sup>14</sup> Freeda Brook, Dave Ellenwood, and Althea Eannace Lazzaro, "In Pursuit of Antiracist Social Justice: Denaturalizing Whiteness in the Academic Library," *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (2015): 246-284; Tomaro I. Taylor, "Review of Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 6, no. 7 (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Mehra and Gray, "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS," 192.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Hildenbrand, "The Information Age Versus Gender Equity? Technology and Values in Education for Library and Information Science," *Library Trends* 47, no. 4 (Spring 1999): 669-685; Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2005), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4nj0w1mp>; Carole L. Palmer, "Aligning Studies of Information Seeking and Use with Domain Analysis," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 50, no. 12 (March 2000): 1139-1140; Kerin E. Putnam, "Gender and Salary Differentials for Administrative and Professional Staff in Metropolitan Chicago Special Libraries." Research/Technical Report (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University,

include a mistreatment of faculty of color; favored canons emerging from solely Anglo/Euro-centric origins (at the cost of Asian, African, Aboriginal/Indigenous, and other non-Anglo/European epistemologies); and a trepidatious response to provide information services considered taboo according to mainstream public opinion (such as those related to mental health and depression, Autism Spectrum Disorders, HIV/AIDS, LGBTQ+ people, etc.); amongst others.<sup>17</sup> For example, demographic reports on race/ethnicity indicate that the library field remains primarily female and white.<sup>18</sup>

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Department of Library and Information Studies, May 1992); Laura Sheble, "Research Synthesis Methods and Library and Information Science: Shared Problems, Limited Diffusion," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 67, no. 8 (May 2015): 1990-2008; Otto Tuomaala, Kalervo Javelin, and Pertti Vakkari, "Evolution of Library and Information Science, 1965-2005: Content Analysis of Journal Articles," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 65, no. 7 (April 2014): 1446-1462; Wayne A. Wiegand, *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South: Civil Rights and Local Activism* (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Greg Chester and A. Neelmeghan, "Information Professional: Knowledge and Skills Development for Serving Marginalized and Rural Communities," *Webology* 3, no. 3 (September 2006); Nicole A. Cooke and Joe O. Sanchez, "Getting it on the Record: Faculty of Color in Library and Information Science," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 60, no. 3 (July 2019): 169-181; Archie L. Dick, "Whose Model. What Context?: Cultural Bias And The Nested Model Of Context Stratification For Information Seeking And Retrieval," *Proceedings of the World Library and Information Congress: 72<sup>nd</sup> IFLA General Conference and Council, 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea* (The Hague, Netherlands: IFLA, 2006); Charles Kamau Maina, "Traditional Knowledge Management and Preservation: Intersections with Library and Information Science," *International Information & Library Review* 44, no. 1 (2012): 13-27; Bharat Mehra, "A Phase-Model of the Cross-Cultural Learning Process of LIS International Doctoral Students: Characteristics and Interventions," *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science & Technology 2005 Annual Meeting: Sparking Synergies: Bringing Research and Practice Together @ ASIST '05, 42, Charlotte, NC, October 28–November 2* (Silver Spring, MA: ASIS@T, 2005); Christian Schlögl, "International Visibility of European and in Particular German-Language Publications in Library and Information Science." In Hans-Christoph Hobohm (ed.), *Information Science between Virtual Infrastructure and Material Living Environments, Conference Proceedings of the 13th International Symposium for Information Science (ISI 2013), Potsdam, 19–22 March 2013* (pp. 51-62) (Glückstadt: Verlag Werner Hülsbusch, 2013); Julian Warner, "W(H)ITHER Information Science?/!" *The Library Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (April 2001): 243-255.

<sup>18</sup> American Library Association, "Diversity Counts," 2012; Department of Professional Employees, "Library Professionals: Facts and Figures," 2019; U. S. Census Bureau, *DataFerrett. Current Population Survey* (Washington, DC: U. S. Census Bureau and U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018); U. S. Department of Labor, "Table 11: Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, Annual Averages, 2018" (Washington, DC: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Similarly, despite efforts to recruit and retain nonwhite faculty, LIS education remains exclusive and has kept its doors closed to people of color who experience racial battle fatigue, structural precarities, impolite hostilities, and mistreatment and abuse in its ranks.<sup>19</sup>

Some of these shortcomings may have shaped the limited placement of LIS in today's professional hierarchies and professional prestige within the contemporary social and cultural order. These factors may have also influenced the present-day reality where LIS professionals are conspicuous in their absence as key players in society and community dynamics. José Aponte, former director of the San Diego Library District, discussed some issues surrounding their absence during his talk entitled "Dancing with the Elephants: Stay Relevant in Extraordinary Times" at the 2009 Nevada Library Association Annual Conference.<sup>20</sup> Even today, LIS professionals are missing from the proverbial "table" sitting with these so-called "elephants." They include the significant players in economic decision-making, political networks, and those shaping public (mis)perceptions surrounding the nature of our work compared to say, computer scientists, engineers, business management administrators, economists, judges, doctors, and other well-recognized authorities in their areas of expertise.<sup>21</sup> Scholars have also characterized vocational awe and white saviorism as related attributes that have curtailed the LIS professions in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Association for Library and Information Science Education, "Association for Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report (Faculty Section)," 2018; Cooke and Sanchez, "Getting it on the Record"; Christine Pawley, "Unequal Legacies: Race and Multiculturalism in the LIS Curriculum." *The Library Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (2006): 149-168.

<sup>20</sup> Salvador Avila, *Serving Latino Teens* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2012), 38.

<sup>21</sup> Joan C. Durrance and Karen E. Fisher-Pettigrew, "Toward Developing Measures of the Impact of Library and Information Services," *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 43-53; Bharat Mehra and Robert J. Sandusky, "LIS Students as Community Partners in Elective Courses: Applying Community-Based Action Research to Meet the Needs of Underserved Populations," in *Service Learning: Linking Library Education and Practice*, ed. Lorie Roy, Kelly Jensen, and Alex Hershey Meyers (Chicago, IL: American Library Association Editions, 2009), 153-168; Evgenia Vassilakaki and Valentini Moniarou-Papaconstantinou, "Identifying the Prevailing Images in Library and Information Science Profession: Is the Landscape Changing?," *New Library World* 115, no. 7/8 (2014): 355-375; Toni Weller, "A New Approach: The Arrival of Informational History," in *Proceedings of the XVI International Conference of the Association for History and Computing, (Amsterdam, Netherlands, September 14-17 2005)*, 273-278.

<sup>22</sup> Carli Agostino and Melanie Cassidy, "Failure to Launch: Feelings of Failure in Early Career Librarians," *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 14, no. 2, (2019), <https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v14i1.5224>.; Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe and Librarianship: The View We Tell," *In The Library With The Lead Pipe*, January 10, 2018; Ron Starker, *Transforming Libraries: A Toolkit for Innovators, Makers, and Seekers* (Bothell, WA: Grafo House Publishing, 2017).

Many of these limitations in LIS have obviously to do with a contextual embeddedness in a dysfunctional nation with its deep roots of historical racism in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Also, an often unchallenged White-IST cultural inheritance and a corporatization of the global academy in a neoliberal society has shaped widespread discounting of the “caring” professions.<sup>24</sup> We continue to see a proportional disrespect for the humanities and social sciences (within which LIS is placed), compared to the natural sciences, business, engineering, etc. Many professions and disciplines during Chatman’s times inherited these troublesome realities and actualities. Even so, does a comparative assessment warrant a complacency in LIS to maintain its status quo and refrain from critical self-reflection? Does it mean that LIS should continue making “sanitized” claims about the work of “pedestalized” (i.e., glorification by placing on a pedestal) scholars of the past and the present without highlighting the limitations of their contributions? Or does it require the LIS professions to acknowledge the lapses of their “gods and goddesses” of the past within their limited cultural/academic environments, and honestly recognize the inadequacies that resulted in the profession’s evolution? In this article, the author draws attention to such questions. This article also seeks to prompt a re-examination of the profession’s ideological, epistemological, philosophical, and praxis-based issues in light of its history, nature, composition, and current practices that provide grounds for the perpetuation of social injustice, lip service, and a defensiveness when questioned of its complacency.<sup>25</sup> This narrative highlights some of the shortcomings that shaped Chatman’s own limited legacy, owing to its embeddedness in a narrowly

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<sup>23</sup> David James Hudson, “On “Diversity” as Anti-Racism in Library and Information Studies: A Critique,” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v1i1.6>; Clay Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Philip G. Altbach, “Globalization and the University: Realities in an Unequal World,” in *International Handbook of Higher Education*, eds. James J. F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2007); Pam Belluck, “Panel Suggests Brown U. Atone for Ties to Slavery,” *New York Times*, October 19, 2006; Rebecca de Souza, *Feeding the Other: Whiteness, Privilege, and the Neoliberal Stigma in Food Pantries* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019); Richard Hugman, *New Approaches in Ethics for the Caring Professions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS.”

<sup>25</sup> John T. F. Burgess, “Reconciling Social Responsibility and Neutrality in LIS Professional Ethics: A Virtue Ethics Approach,” in *Information Cultures in the Digital Age*, ed. Matthew Kelly and Jared Bielby (Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS, 2016), 161-172; Kay Mathiesen, “Informational Justice: A Conceptual Framework for Social Justice in Library and Information Services,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 198-225; Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS.”



operationalized discipline importing its approaches from social scientific sources with their own inadequacies (within a restricted Anglo/Euro privileged academy).<sup>26</sup>

It would be unfair if this author did not recognize that analyzing history is always problematic. In an owning of a biased process of personalization, looking into the mirror of history calls to attention who is looking, at what aspects, through what perspectives, and in what choice of words, among other limitations.<sup>27</sup> Thus, I take full ownership of my “new” gaze of analysis that has shaped this critique of the past from perceptions that have emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>28</sup> A precise set of words, in the language selected intentionally to externalize any person’s cognitive processes, represents essential imports, ideas, and constructs that result from very specific social and cultural circumstances. These also relate to an awareness of the conditions of knowledge evolution over the years within a certain socially constructed life experience.<sup>29</sup> Any investigative assessment of the past is indeed “situated.” This situatedness is not merely bound to the communicating medium of language, but also molded via the neoteric means of concept building, logic, deduction, interpretation, rationalization, expressions, and abilities.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, so did Chatman’s contributions have their own shortcomings based on the flawed limited developments in the LIS professions of the times in which she was writing, though how many of these were acknowledged is highly questionable.

Some readers might not agree with the premises presented here. Few might get shifty or complacent in their comparison to other disciplinary scholarship while justifying lapses in LIS. There might even be some who brand the writing in a perceived place of justified or misplaced frustration and anger towards the profession. Others could rely on Anglo/Euro-centric rules of prescriptive logic and organization of thought to discount the message. All reasonings are merely perceptions, accurate or not. Irrespective of the critiques, and even if readers firmly deny the limitations in LIS, it is still worthwhile to keep an open mind about the possibilities based on the reading of the evidence.

The American Library Association’s Bill of Rights recognizes libraries as forums for information and inclusion of all ideas. Their policies guide library services to include a

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<sup>26</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, “The Diffusion of Information Among the Working Poor,” PhD. diss., (University of California at Berkeley, 1983).

<sup>27</sup> C. Behan Mccullagh, “Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation,” *History and Theory* 39, no. 1 (February 2000): 39-66; John-Paul Wilson, *Political Bias and Historical Writing: A Case Study of Nicaragua’s Sandinista Revolution and its North American Historiography and Social Science, 1981-1990* (New York: St. John’s University, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Carol Bertram, “Exploring an Historical Gaze: A Language of Description for the Practice of School History,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 429-442.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Philip Roberts, “Re-visiting Historical Legacy: Towards a Disciplinary Pedagogy,” *Literacy Learning: The Middle Years* 21, no. 1 (February 2013): 15-24.

recognition of “all points of view on current and historical issues,” challenge censorship, and resist the “abridgement of free expression and free access to ideas.”<sup>31</sup> This author believes that these apply as pointers not only for librarians but, also to information science researchers and other readers of LIS scholarship. The author presents this critical article as an alternate viewpoint, supporting various claims with evidence and analytical examples to help us possibly reevaluate some of our assumptions, blinders, and denials. In this process the author takes ownership of any gaps that emerge.

## CRITICAL THEORY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INTERSECTIONS IN CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE

There has been some recent discourse over the past decade surrounding critical theory and social justice in LIS.<sup>32</sup> The following are a few relevant points of context to set the stage for this discussion. The Frankfurt School coined the term “critical theory” in sociology and political philosophy drawing on the critical methods of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud in the 1930s Germany. The purpose was to offer an introspective appraisal and analysis of the social order and ethos using knowledge from interdisciplinary origins.<sup>33</sup> Critical theory also seems relevant and applicable in the critique of Chatman’s theories, owing to their origins primarily in the social sciences, without consideration of its shortcomings.<sup>34</sup> Theory in a critical mode seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them,” challenging/changing the structural “base and superstructure” as well as the social relationships and institutions that support them.<sup>35</sup> Critical theory fosters advanced measures for the transformation of conventional

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<sup>31</sup> American Library Association, “Library Bill of Rights,” 1996, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Bales, *Social Justice and Library Work: A Guide to Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Chandos Publishing, 2018); Annie Downey, *Critical Information Literacy: Foundations, Inspiration, and Ideas* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2016); Gloria J. Leckie, Lisa M. Given, and John E. Buschman, *Critical Theory for Library and Information Science: Exploring the Social from Across the Disciplines* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010); Bharat Mehra, “Introduction,” *Library Trends: Social Justice in Library and Information Science & Services* 64, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 179-197.

<sup>33</sup> Trent Schroyer, *The Critique of Domination: The Origins and Development of Critical Theory* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Kim M. Thompson, “Remembering Elfreda Chatman: A Champion of Theory Development in Library and Information Science Education,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 119-126.

<sup>35</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum Publishers, 1982), 244; William Outhwaite, “The Roots of Habermas’s Thought,” in *Habermas: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009), 5-18.

constructions, prevailing mores, beliefs, habits, customs, philosophical conceptualizations, and activities to advance a progressive society.<sup>36</sup> Its scope encompasses an inclusion of points of view of the underrepresented in research, to jointly evaluate controversial problems that address existing cultural values, social practices, ideological frameworks, and information processes.<sup>37</sup>

Postmodern critical theorists would argue that Chatman's contributions never politicized social problems "by situating them in historical and cultural contexts, to implicate themselves in the process of collecting and analyzing data, and to relativize their findings."<sup>38</sup> It can be debated as to what extent her research changed the circumstances, and the external, environmental sociocultural and socioeconomic factors that contributed to the imbalanced power dynamics and conditions of the underserved populations she was studying. Further, the question arises as to how "participatory" Chatman's qualitative approaches were, in the extent to which these populations were included in *shaping* the information-based analysis that emerged in her assessment of them.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, what seems missing is the involvement of these populations beyond their status as "objects" in gathering feedback from them about their agency and the actions that they (and/or others) could take to change the status-quo conditions they were experiencing.<sup>40</sup>

Critical race theory (CRT) in the social sciences discusses these in relation to race and power categorizations in the legal sphere, and recently every dimension of the

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Craig J. Calhoun, *Contemporary Sociological Theory* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); A. Michael Froomkin, "Habermas@Discourse.Net: Toward a Critical Theory of Cyberspace," *Harvard Law Review* 116, no. 3 (2003): 751-873; Jurgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993); Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity: Development and Contemporary Relevance of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 49.

<sup>39</sup> Bharat Mehra, Ann Peterson Bishop, Imani Bazzell, and Cindy Smith, "Scenarios in the Afya Project as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Tool for Studying Information Seeking and Use Across the 'Digital Divide,'" *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Technology* 53, no. 14 (2002): 1259-1266.

<sup>40</sup> Sandra L. Barnes, Lauren Brinkley-Rubinstein, Benadette Doykos, Nina C. Martin, and Allison McGuire, *Academics in Action! A Model for Community-Engaged Research, Teaching, and Service* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

modern social and cultural experience.<sup>41</sup> In conjunction with critical feminism, critical jurisdictional studies, class imbalances analysis, gender and women's concerns, and other Marxist approaches, an extended CRT problematizes contemporary economic and political realities in a neoliberal society from an intersectional perspective.<sup>42</sup> These new directions highlight the importance for scholars, educators, and policy makers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to avoid objectifying the "marginalized" as "others."<sup>43</sup> They call for a constructive evaluation of people on society's margins in recognizing their capacities and capabilities within an *asset-framed relationship* (instead of a deficit-based model) within research partnerships and collaborations.<sup>44</sup> These further acknowledge them as subjects of engagement in participatory research to identify dialogic actions that stakeholders take together to strengthen a democratic society.<sup>45</sup> Chatman's contributions and role as a scholar reflected gaps in missing some of these dimensions of thought and action.

Social justice scholarship in LIS challenges the "lip service" verbiage on diversity and impact of the professions beyond their historical shackles.<sup>46</sup> These include expanding information science research beyond a mere quantification that attempts to validate a

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<sup>41</sup> Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 105-126; Lewis R. Gordon, "A Short History of the 'Critical' in Critical Race Theory," *American Philosophy Association Newsletter* 98, no. 2 (1999); Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69-91.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); de Souza, *Feeding the Other*.

<sup>43</sup> Sune Qvortrup Jensen, "Othering, Identity Formation and Agency," *Qualitative Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 63-78; Karen Lumsden and Emily Harmer, *Online Othering: Exploring Digital Violence and Discrimination on the Web* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel A. Farber and Suzanna Sherry, *Beyond All Reason: The Radical Assault on Truth in American Law* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997); Gary Paul Green and Anna L. Haines, *Asset Building & Community Development*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Karen A. Hacker, *Community-Based Participatory Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013); John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 1993); Garth Stahl, Joseph Nelson, and Derron Wallace, *Masculinity and Aspiration in an Era of Neoliberal Education: International Perspectives*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Maggie Farrell, "Leadership and Social Justice," *Journal of Library Administration* 56, no. 6 (2016): 722-730; Bharat Mehra, Kevin Rioux, and Kendra S. Albright, "Social Justice in Library and Information Science," in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences*, eds. Marcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 4820-4836.

search for an objective reality, according to positivist and postpositivist traditions.<sup>47</sup> They also call for academic institutions and others (including libraries, museums, archives, research centers, etc.) to position themselves beyond constructions of neutrality, and no longer as passive observers of enfolding community dynamics.<sup>48</sup> Social justice and inclusion advocacy transforms LIS to act in providing tangible evidence of change via concrete information-related deliverables that justify investment of public financial and community support.<sup>49</sup> Increasingly, progressive LIS scholars are conceptualizing and operationalizing an integration of critical theory with social justice towards action-oriented, socially relevant outcomes achieved via information-related work.<sup>50</sup> They encourage community-engaged scholarship to generate community-wide changes and deliver information-related products via partnering with and providing programs for people on society's margins.<sup>51</sup> To what extent were these elements included in Chatman's work is worthy of attention and will be explored in the following section.

### SCOPE OF CHATMAN'S CONTRIBUTIONS: A "DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD"

Chatman focused her career on information behavior studies of socially disadvantaged people. This discussion highlights a few examples of their "small worlds," a term coined by Victoria E.M. Pendleton and Elfreda A. Chatman to represent the contextualized

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<sup>47</sup> Bharat Mehra, "Information ACTism in "Trumping" the Contemporary Fake News Phenomenon in Rural Libraries," *Open Information Science Journal* 3, no. 1 (2019b): 181-196.

<sup>48</sup> Bharat Mehra, "What is 'LGBTQ+' Information? Interdisciplinary Connections," in *LGBTQ+ Librarianship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Emerging Directions of Advocacy and Community Engagement in Diverse Information Environments*, ed. Bharat Mehra, 3-14 (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2019c).

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Bales and Tina Budzise-Weaver, *Transformative Library and Information Work: Profiles in Social Justice* (Oxford, UK: Chandos Publishing, 2020); Marcia A. Mardis and Dianne Oberg, *Social Justice and Cultural Competency: Essential Readings for School Librarians* (Santa Barbara, CA: The International Association of School Librarianship, 2020); Mehra and Sandusky, "LIS Students as Community Partners in Elective Courses."

<sup>50</sup> Nicole A. Cooke and Miriam E. Sweeney, eds., *Teaching for Justice: Implementing Social Justice in the LIS Classroom* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2017); Bharat Mehra and Kevin Rioux, *Progressive Community Action: Critical Theory and Social Justice in Library and Information Science* (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Bharat Mehra, Bradley W. Bishop, and Robert P. Partee II, "Information Science Professionals as Community Action Researchers to Further the Role of Rural Public Libraries in Small Business Economic Development: A Case Study of Tennessee," *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 40, no. 4 (December 2016): 289-299.

environments of the various groups that became focus of their academic scrutiny.<sup>52</sup> The metaphor of a “double-edged” sword comes to mind in developing the narrative.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, the inclusion of the socioeconomic populations in information research was novel and went against the existing norms. Chatman’s use of new forms of qualitative research methods and systematic and clearly articulated documentation extended the hegemonic quantitative approaches that were privileged at the time, especially since many originated from white men.<sup>54</sup> For example, Chatman’s use of ethnography, field research, interviews, and observations in data collection uncovered the realities of understudied populations. Her detailed accounts using these methodological approaches went beyond the widespread methods of the time that were steeped in positivist and postpositivist paradigms, seeking solely quantifiable measures and statistical generalizability.<sup>55</sup> However, there were also lapses and limitations of the theoretical work that emerged in Chatman’s analysis, not to mention some of her paternalistic, condescending, and stereotypical characterizations of (and about) the populations she studied. This article identifies a few of these in her contributions while recognizing the value of her efforts to expand the scope, content, and relevance of LIS scholarship.

As director of the library extension program at the Reuben MacMillan Free Library in Youngtown, Ohio (1972-1977), Chatman’s role in offering programming to serve the poor provided her daily contact with people in everyday situations, particularly marginalized groups. She subsequently defined a marginalized individual as someone that “lives in two small worlds of culture, which are very different from each other. Problems can arise when marginalized populations seek a more central place in the dominant society. A critical limitation to their quest is a failure to understand the cultural,

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<sup>52</sup> Victoria E. M. Pendleton and Elfreda A. Chatman, “Small World Lives: Implications for the Public Library,” *Library Trends* 46, no. 4 (1998): 749.

<sup>53</sup> Justine Mercer, “The Challenges of Insider Research in Educational Institutions: Wielding a Double-Edged Sword and Resolving Delicate Dilemmas,” *Oxford Review of Education* 33, no. 1: 1-17; Robbie M. Sutton and Karen M. Douglas, “Justice for All, or Just for Me? More Evidence of the Importance of the Self-Other Distinction in Just-World Beliefs,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 39, no. 3: 637-645.

<sup>54</sup> Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS;” Lorna Peterson, “The Definition of Diversity: Two Views. A More Specific Definition,” *Journal of Library Administration* 27, no. 1-2 (1999): 17-26; Christine Pawley, “Gorman’s Gauntlet: Gender and Crying Wolf,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 46, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 304-311.

<sup>55</sup> Rosaline Barbour, *Introducing Qualitative Research* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2008); Donald O. Case, *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior* (London, UK: Academic Press, 2007); Fulton, “An Ordinary Life in the Round.”

educational, and social norms that are fundamental to the greater social world.”<sup>56</sup> Maybe it was a poor choice of words, but in her assessment of only “their failure” to understand the sociocultural order that they were in can be perceived as Chatman’s “problem” of labeling the “marginalized” as the problem. In calling on their failure, Chatman does not adequately assign responsibility to the environment, which creates the imbalanced power dynamics in the first place. That environment and its distributions of power were the result of the excessively demanding behaviors of the powerful social agencies and its privileged individuals that controlled and disenfranchised the lives of those she researched.

Chatman’s doctoral research on the work of opinion leaders in an impoverished environment of socially and economically marginalized people had a unique contribution in helping us understand their information worlds.<sup>57</sup> Important in Chatman’s work was how people experiencing difficult life conditions could assist the academic theoretician understand uses of information better, not how the information could change the situation and their role in it. Since a great deal was not known about an impoverished information world, Chatman filled a gap.

Chatman is credited with the development of a few middle-range theories based on her research on various historically disenfranchised populations that helped better understand their everyday information problems.<sup>58</sup> She adopted a common conceptualization process and the same structural and representational approach in articulating at least three (if not more) middle-range theories—her theory of information poverty, theory of life in the round, and theory of normative behavior—that are believed to be some of her most significant contributions.<sup>59</sup> Chatman selected key (yet narrowly considered) concepts, outlined the specific framework in terms of narrowly defined propositions, and proposed her reductionist explanation of the propositions in terms of

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<sup>56</sup> In Fulton, “An Ordinary Life in the Round”: Elfreda A. Chatman, “An Insider/Outsider Approach to Libraries, Change, and Marginalized Populations,” (keynote address presented at the national conference Alteration of Generations, Borås, Sweden, April 23–25, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, *The Diffusion of Information Among the Working Poor* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984).

<sup>58</sup> Chatman, “Diffusion of Information”; Elfreda A. Chatman, “*The Information World of Low-Skilled Workers*,” *Library and Information Science Research* 9, no. 4 (1987): 265-283; Elfreda A. Chatman, “Life in a Small World: Applicability of Gratification Theory to Information-Seeking Behavior,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42, no. 6 (1991): 438-449; Elfreda A. Chatman, *The Information World of Retired Women* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> Fulton, “An Ordinary Life in the Round.”

her chosen concepts.<sup>60</sup> For example, in the theory of information poverty, Chatman selected four concepts—secrecy, deception, risk taking, and situational relevance—to define an impoverished lifeworld.<sup>61</sup> The theory has been criticized owing to its simplistic explanation of a complex reality; ignoring materiality, linguistics, and economic factors in her sociological analysis; and closedness to cross-cultural experiences.<sup>62</sup>

In her theory of life in the round, based on research about the social world of women prisoners, Chatman demonstrated the significance of context in shaping the information-seeking behaviors within a social (and public) life as lived in the round.<sup>63</sup> She conceptualized their lived experiences in terms of *her* four selected, yet constrained, concepts of small worlds, social norms, social types, and worldview.<sup>64</sup> These were summarized, again, through a structural representation and process in terms of six narrow propositions that generalized, simplified, and minimized a reality that informed their origins. This is not surprising, given the epistemological, theoretical, methodological, and structural inspiration of Chatman's qualitative research in the Anglo/Euro-centric social sciences.<sup>65</sup> The social sciences had their own limitations, replicating positivist/postpositivist research such as a simplification of complex realities into mere propositions (abstracted, quantified or not), connected to each other through the researcher's selective lens of preconceived concepts or constructs.<sup>66</sup> This epistemological inheritance is unquestionably integrated throughout Chatman's theory development. It reflected a biased strategy, in presenting only what the researcher wanted to see or state

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<sup>60</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, "The Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 47, no. 3 (1996): 193-206; Elfreda Chatman, "A Theory of Life in the Round: A Study of Information Poverty in a Women's Maximum-Security Prison," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 50, no. 3 (1999): 207-217; Gary Burnett, Michele Besant, and Elfreda A. Chatman, "Small Worlds: Normative Behavior in Virtual Communities and Feminist Bookselling," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 52, no. 7 (2001): 536-547.

<sup>61</sup> Chatman, "Impoverished Life-World."

<sup>62</sup> Chatman, "Impoverished Life-World"; Julia Hersberger, "Chatman's Information Poverty," in *Theories of Information Behavior*, eds. Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez, and E. F. (Lynne) McKechnie (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2005), 79-82.

<sup>63</sup> Chatman, "Life in the Round."

<sup>64</sup> Paul Solomon, "Information Mosaics: Patterns of Action That Structure," in *Exploring the Contexts of Information Behavior*, eds. Tom D. Wilson and David K. Allen (London, UK: Taylor Graham Publishing, 1999), 150-175.

<sup>65</sup> Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001); Mehra and Gray, "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS."

<sup>66</sup> Ruth S. Hanft, "Use of Social Science Data for Policy Analysis and Policymaking," in *Ethics, The Social Sciences, and Policy Analysis*, eds. Daniel Callahan and Bruce Jennings (Boston, MA: Springer, 1983), 249-270; Marten Shipman, *The Limitations of Social Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 1997).



about the lived experiences of her participants, “research on them” instead of *with* them.<sup>67</sup> For example, Chatman discussed the role of social norms in the world of her inmates in the women’s prisons, defined as their accepted behaviors “played out on a small stage, in which things are implicitly understood.”<sup>68</sup> She proposes, “...Social norms force private behavior to undergo public scrutiny. It is this public arena that deems behavior—including information-seeking behavior—appropriate or not.”<sup>69</sup> This simplification, as if information-seeking behaviors, especially of people lacking power (i.e., on social “fringes”), is only determined by social norms in relation to the researcher’s constructed terminologies (e.g., small worlds, social types, and worldview). It presented a narrow assessment of their lives. Further, without involving them in the construction of their realities was a second-hand interpretation that led to an inauthentic or partial representation.

Such instances are many in Chatman’s theory of life in the round and other theoretical conceptualizations. Inspiration by outdated work in the social sciences published in the 1950s onwards of Anglo/Euro-centric sociologists, economists, and philosophers might have also influenced a constricted viewpoint and approach.<sup>70</sup> For instance, Chatman’s social norms were grounded in Jack D. Douglass’ understanding of everyday life, critiqued partly for a “stridently sectarian” ethnomethodological representation in his rebuilding of 1970s sociology and sociological knowledge and its “compensatory aggressiveness of converts to the true faith.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, her simplification of social norms, role in maintaining order in a small world, and their relationship to other external constructs imposed by the researcher, is more easily understood when we trace her readings to Ferdinand Tönnies’ sociological theory that distinguished between the two types of “boxed” social groups, the *Gemeinschaft* and

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<sup>67</sup> Moshoula Capous Desyllas, “Visions and Voices: An Arts-Based Qualitative Study Using Photovoice to Understand the Needs and Aspirations of Diverse Women Working in the Sex Industry,” PhD. diss., (Portland State University, 2010); Robert B. Powell and Wade M. Vagias, “The Benefits of Stakeholder Involvement in the Development of Social Science Research,” *Park Science* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 46-49.

<sup>68</sup> Chatman, “Theory of Life in the Round,” 212.

<sup>69</sup> Chatman, “Theory of Life in the Round”; Elfreda A. Chatman, “Framing Social Life in Theory and Research,” *New Review of Information Behavior Research* 1 (2000): 3-17.

<sup>70</sup> For example: Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*), trans. and ed. C. P. Loomis (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1957); J.D. Douglas, *Understanding Everyday Life: Toward the Reconstruction of Sociological Knowledge* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970); W. F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Luchmann, “Book Reviews: Understanding Everyday Life: Toward the Reconstruction of Sociological Knowledge, edited by Jack D. Douglass” *Contemporary Sociology* 1, no. 1 (January 1972): 30.

*Gesellschaft* (i.e., community and society), first published in 1887.<sup>72</sup> Representing stark distinctions between tradition and modernity, these have been criticized for their over-generalization and modeling with evolutionary tendencies while building solely on Greco-Roman (Anglo/Euro-centric) philosophies and points of view.<sup>73</sup> It might have translated into her attachment to an insider-outsider discourse and resulting distinctions drawn of a “marginalized” world by a privileged theorist and academic researcher. Such an approach led to other related broad generalizations, such as in the claim that “small world insiders consider accepted behavioral patterns to be normative and part of shared social meaning,” and that information is “sought because an individual shares a common need with his or her homogenous social group.”<sup>74</sup> These simplistic statements tend to gloss over the richness of the lives of her research participants in developing a confined and forced picture of their experiences. Creating propositions and finding evidence to illustrate those in the lived experiences of her research participants seems artificial.<sup>75</sup> Allowing the propositions to emerge from the “data” (i.e., experiences of the participants) “grounded up,” so to speak, might have been a better alternate.<sup>76</sup>

In the theory of normative behavior, Burnett, Besant, and Chatman considered “normal” behavior as that which was expected, routine behavior in a given context, and “normative” in terms of adhering to socially accepted behaviors.<sup>77</sup> Using the same concepts of social norms, worldview, social types, and information behavior, Chatman tested these in the “information-rich” virtual worlds and feminist booksellers in her five propositional statements.<sup>78</sup> Again, this theory implies that anything outside of the constructed realm of the “normative” was then “not normal” or “abnormal,” reflecting the researcher’s own biases and value judgement. Further, this was another example of simplification of realities leading to their minimalization, based on solely information-

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<sup>72</sup> Tönnies, *Community and Society*.

<sup>73</sup> Werner J. Cahnman and Joseph B. Maier, *Weber and Tönnies: Comparative Sociology in Historical Perspective* (London, UK: Routledge, 1995); Paul A. Palmer, “Ferdinand Tönnies’s Theory of Public Opinion,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (October 1938): 584-595; Grazyna Skapska, Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, and Krzysztof Kowalski, *The Moral Fabric in Contemporary Societies* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Pendleton and Chatman, “Small World Lives.”

<sup>75</sup> Jin Tan, “Grounded Theory in Practice: Issues and Discussion for New Qualitative Researchers,” *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 1 (2010): 93-112.

<sup>76</sup> Aurora Gonzalez-Teruel and M. Francisca Abad-Garcia, “Grounded Theory for Generating Theory in the Study of Behavior,” *Library & Information Science Research* 34, no. 1 (January 2012): 31-36.

<sup>77</sup> Burnett, Besant, and Chatman, “Small Worlds: Normative Behavior.”

<sup>78</sup> Gary Burnett and Paul T. Jaeger, “Small Worlds, Lifeworlds, and Information: The Ramifications of the Information Behaviour of Social Groups in Public Policy and the Public Sphere,” *Information Research* 13, no. 2 (2008): 346, <http://InformationR.net/ir/13-2/paper346.html>.

related constructs emerging from an egocentric profession. In these and many other examples of Chatman's theories, she extrapolated sociological/anthropological research methods and strategies that might have internalized approaches from the quantitative experimental scholarship privileged during the times. These included developing hypotheses, testing those hypotheses, and drawing correlations and relationships between dependent and independent variables. Translations of these extrapolations became a hallmark of Chatman's commonality framework inspired by her readings from the social sciences. For example, Chatman has herself attributed the relevance of Everett Roger's *Diffusion of Information* to her own research.<sup>79</sup> She drew on works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Robert K. Merton in developing the concept of alienation to understand information processes among janitors.<sup>80</sup> Katz and Foulkes' gratification theory helped her articulate her theory of small world information-seeking behaviors, in addition to the influences of mass communication and sociological theories of Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, and Alfred Schutz, among others.<sup>81</sup>

Even if qualitative research was in its infancy in LIS at the time, blindly mimicking the Anglo/Euro-centric social sciences was a poor choice. It was unfit to draw upon their limited ways in documenting complex social and economic issues (e.g., marginalization, life experiences of disenfranchised populations, information poverty, etc.) in such a simplistic manner. This might have led to Chatman's theories that possibly contributed towards a minimization and poor understanding of her research subjects. Looking at her subjects only in terms of variables in isolation, such as their information access, information searching, or information-related concepts and vocabularies, provided a lip service to their realities. Not recognizing how information could be used to effect changes in their experiences of marginalization was a major blind spot in this perspective of observation; it did not recognize the agency of her subjects in possibly shaping or enacting those changes themselves. It also internalized a "system-centric" approach that had entrenched itself in a constrained LIS sociocultural environment where information systems were the elixir to solve user information problems and people were objects with a limited role in the process. This might have shaped Chatman's own understanding of research and her role as an academic. This was worsened in blindly applying inspirations from the social sciences that internalized quantitative paradigms and approaches. As Pendleton and Chatman wrote: "Unfortunately, qualitative researchers have tended to

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<sup>79</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, "Diffusion Theory: A Review and Test of a Conceptual Model in Information Diffusion," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 37, no. 6 (1986): 377-386; Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

<sup>80</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, "Alienation Theory: Application of a Conceptual Framework to a Study of Information among Janitors," *Reference Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1987b): 355-368.

<sup>81</sup> Case, *Looking for Information*; Chatman, "Life in a Small World"; Elihu Katz and David Foulkes, "On the Use of the Mass Media As 'Escape': Clarification of a Concept," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (1962): 377-388.

be labeled as ‘soft’ researchers who employ a method that is sadly in need of scholarly rigor. In these authors’ opinion, this is not necessarily the case.”<sup>82</sup>

Chatman’s research focused on marginalized individuals (such as female inmates, janitors, etc.) who were embedded in a hierarchical and hegemonic environment, on the lacking side of imbalanced power structures. Through her work, Chatman was influential in centralizing researchers’ gaze on disfranchised populations, their lived situations, and their meaning-making processes. This was unlike any in past information science scholarship. However, first and foremost, Chatman was concerned with information theory development. A change in the status quo conditions of those being researched was of lesser importance in her analysis. Hence, her information-centered theories had limited and indirect impact upon developing policies and practices to help the people she was researching.

Obviously, there might have been a deep-rooted and underlying self-importance attributed to her understanding of her own role as an academic, educator, and researcher that might have shaped such an approach. For example, labeling the environment of the people she studied as an “impoverished information world” assumes that they were completely devoid of any positive attributes. It assumes them to be helpless and needy, lacking the “information” formally defined in a vocabulary that she developed as an information researcher and scholar.<sup>83</sup> In this process, any non-traditional and informal forms of information assets that these individuals obviously had in order to survive in their circumstances were somewhat overlooked. Embedded as such in the privileged positivist/postpositivist academy and information science discipline of the times, it is not difficult to recognize this shortcoming. An overlooked critique is that Chatman’s narrow and superficial ethnographic analysis of the social processes, practices, and activities surrounding information access and marginalization of the underserved failed to significantly change their disenfranchising conditions. The research provided lip service, focusing solely on theory development “about” their circumstances published in journals with high impact factors (e.g., *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*), without significantly changing the imbalanced situations that were written about. The lens of analysis was always “information.” Thus, so was the narrowness of the resulting concepts and constructs that were articulated in Chatman’s emerging theoretical frameworks. For example, scholars have criticized Chatman’s analysis of small worlds for how it overlooks their interactions with the worlds outside their boundaries.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pendleton and Chatman, “Small World Lives,” 743.

<sup>83</sup> Pollock, “Conceptualising the Information Poor.”

<sup>84</sup> Burnett and Jaeger, “Small Worlds.”

## SYMPTOMATIC OF THE PROBLEMS IN LIS

Of course, Chatman is not exclusively responsible for many identified shortcomings since her work was constrained, located as it was also in an egocentric and predominantly white epistemic LIS culture. This author situates the term “egocentric” after careful thought to represent the context of a self-absorbed and inward-looking culture in both information science and librarianship.<sup>85</sup> A logical question is how was it more so than other disciplines? The problem is about the context of LIS (as compared to others) that took pride in its definitional scope and information-focused purpose, as well as its evolutionary shift towards human information behavior and a user-centered paradigm.<sup>86</sup> These seem somewhat misleading or solely internally significant when they failed to centralize impact-driven, outcome-generated, and community-embedded realities of their users, patrons, customers, or clients (variously defined). Also, minimization of their user-constituencies without a recognition of their capacities and capabilities (instead of an “information-centric” deficit framework) makes LIS come across as self-absorbed and judgmental.

“Chatman’s work was *less* representative” within an isolationist academia of the past, criticized for its disjunct with communities and a disdain for everyday concerns of real people in its research activities.<sup>87</sup> She was part of an LIS profession that might not have been so different from other disciplines of the times. Hence, she followed the existing expectations in terms of what scholars normatively did when expected to develop their intellectual authority, create their niche in a field, and publish or perish in a White-IST academy. Yet, it is important to note the solely abstracted, information-focused, and theoretical nature of Chatman’s contributions with respect to the deeply complex and troublesome issues such as information poverty, marginalization, and the information needs of disenfranchised populations. This article problematizes her approach in how it minimized systemic and structural realities in society without addressing the social, cultural, political, and economic factors that contributed towards the marginalized

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<sup>85</sup> Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS.”

<sup>86</sup> Michael K. Buckland, “Information as Thing,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42, no. 5 (June 1991): 351-360; Michael K. Buckland, “What Kind of Science Can Information Science Be?” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 63, no. 1 (January 2012): 1-7; Michael Buckland and Ziming Liu, “History of Information Science,” in *Historical Studies in Information Science*, eds. Trudi Bellardo Hahn and Michael Buckland (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 1998), 272-295; Brenda Dervin and Michael Nilan, “Information Needs and Uses,” in *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 21 (1986): 3-33; Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez, and Lynne McKenchnie, *Theories of Information Behavior* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2005); Karen E. Pettigrew, Raya Fidel, and Harry Bruce, “Conceptual Frameworks in Information Behavior,” in *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 35 (2001): 43-76.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymous reviewer.

conditions they generated, and for not extending her analysis of using information to help change the circumstances with/for those she was researching. Chatman's legacy of studying everyday life experiences of the "ordinary" on the social margins from the 1980s onwards spotlights the narrowness of this information-based lens. It was symptomatic of the problematics associated with the development of LIS, particularly information science research, by and from that time. Some place her contributions in the larger context of a limited profession that influenced her work and the climate in which she was embedded.

The system-centric emergence of information science of the time clearly highlighted the novelty of Chatman's use of qualitative tools such as ethnography and field research, and her drawing on theories and methodological approaches from the social sciences (e.g., anthropology, sociology, etc.)<sup>88</sup>. As Donald Case summarized his critique of her research surrounding janitors: "But most of Chatman's evidence is in the form of verbatim comments, recorded in her field notes, a type of data that are difficult to quantify."<sup>89</sup> This reflects the limited scope of information science research of the time, and helps us recognize her interest in theory development in LIS and the extent to which it shaped her emergence as a scholar. In Chatman's words, "We have no central theory or body of interrelated theories we can view as 'middle range'."<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, Chatman's inability or unwillingness to challenge the racism and sexism inherent in the LIS professions, or even acknowledge the racialized and sexist dimensions in her analysis of marginalization and related subjects, was the real problem at heart. Chatman did not question the internalized narrow notion of self-importance predominant in the information sciences. Nor did her work question the entrenched whiteness within its ranks that shaped what was considered of value in LIS academic scholarship and privileged circles, which still remains.<sup>91</sup> It was especially unfortunate in the context of her areas of study, such as information poverty, marginalization, and information behaviors of disadvantaged groups, with its predominant focus on disadvantaged women. The LIS professions over the years acknowledge Chatman as a reputed scholar in these research areas and domains of knowledge. Is it a poor reflection on the professions to attribute such recognition when her scholarship overlooked or refrained from any deconstruction of race and/or gender, or their impact on the experiences of the women belonging to lower social classes while working in the marginalized roles that were being studied?

Chatman's colorblindness, then, also informed her own understanding (and assessment) of her role as an "academic" (or educator and researcher) in the discipline.

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<sup>88</sup> Fulton, "An Ordinary Life in the Round."

<sup>89</sup> Case, *Looking for Information*, 215.

<sup>90</sup> Chatman, "Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders," 193.

<sup>91</sup> Cooke and Sanchez, "Getting it on the Record"; Mehra and Gray, "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS."

These blinders prevented her from furthering her flawed “information-centered” theories to make a tangible and direct difference in the lives of the marginalized “others” who she was investigating. The development of an information theory “imposed from outside” as an end-all to understand and document an experienced reality of marginalization in her research activities was limited. A possibility of any information-shaped actions that might have emerged from her studies to change the problematic “small worlds” she encountered was ignored or overlooked. The role of information to equate the imbalanced power dynamics between various stakeholders embedded in marginalized environments became less important in her quest towards development of an information theory to understand that reality. The scholar’s prestigious attribution to such work is a prime example of a narrow academic LIS ideology of the times.

Chatman was probably unaware in academic practice of a possible strategy to develop an information theory “grounded” in the disenfranchised experiences under study.<sup>92</sup> Instead, she “imposed” theories as an academic scholar, an outsider to the marginalized environments she researched. Such information-centered research initiatives were also problematic since they perpetuated a tokenism, as highlighted in Chatman’s status in the canons and cultural record of information science history. “Tokenism” in this instance refers to how the profession was extending itself by inclusion of its “others” as subjects of research, without changing their conditions of marginalization. A feeble gesture, “a pat on the back” is what emerged since there was not much change in the institutionalized structures of power imbalances that created the conditions of information poverty, nor was there any empowerment of the disadvantaged users as they sought to change the status quo conditions.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago, IL: Aldine, 1967).

<sup>93</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); La Loria Konata and Tim Zou, “Connecting Diversity to Management: Further Insights,” *University Library Faculty Publications*, Paper 1 (2007), [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/univ\\_lib\\_facpub/1/](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/univ_lib_facpub/1/); Maha Kumaran, “Succession Planning Process That Includes Visible Minority Librarians,” *Library Management* 36, no. 6-7 (2005): 434-447; Judith Long Laws, “The Psychology of Tokenism: An Analysis,” *Sex Roles* 1, no. 1 (1975): 51-67; Bharat Mehra, “An Action Research (AR) Manifesto for Cyberculture Power to ‘Marginalized’ Cultures of Difference,” in *Critical Cyber-Culture Studies*, eds. David Silver and Adrienne Massanari (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 205-215; Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS”; Teresa Y. Neely, “Assessing Diversity Initiatives: The ARL Leadership and Career Development Program,” *Journal of Library Administration* 49, no. 8 (2009): 811-835; Yolanda Flores Niemann, “Tokenism,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, eds. Nancy Naples, Renee C. Hoogland, Maithree Wickramasinghe, Wai Ching, and Angela Wong (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); Carlotta Joyner Young, Doris Layton MacKenzie, and Carolyn Wood Sherif, “In Search of Token Women in Academia.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1980): 508-525.

## MOVING FORWARD FROM THE LIMITATIONS OF CHATMAN'S LEGACY

The purpose in this article is *not* to present an unfair assessment about Chatman's legacy; far from it. Her contributions are highly significant, especially in the context of her life and positionality as a Black female scholar with a working-class background, in the midst of a White-IST profession in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>94</sup> However, the reality is also that some of the inadequacies in her contributions (within a narrow LIS embedded in a White-IST academy at large) provided a skewed development of information science research over many years. These are only recently drawing attention and getting probed and challenged in their limitations within a White-IST context, and more.<sup>95</sup> As a result of the delays, we have encountered some distracting and problematic dimensions in the growth and evolution of the LIS professions. An inadequate (and insufficient) spanning of the theory-practice divide, with few instances representing action-driven, impact-oriented research in mainstream canons of LIS, is one example. The understanding of what is "research" in information science was (and is) shaped by privileged quantitative statistical work with its Anglo/Euro-centric origins. This is exemplified in Donald Case's summarized criticism of Chatman's research of her drawing upon sociological and anthropological sources, theories, and methods (e.g., ethnography) inherent of their own predispositions and weaknesses.<sup>96</sup> A subsequent example as a result of the limited understanding of "theory" has contributed towards its perceived distinction from practice. When Chatman and other's work created information science theory purely in its "bookish" academic sense owing to its sociological/anthropological roots, it was ignoring the praxis-based origins and actuality in the practice of the professions. This contributed to a split between the researcher's information science and the practitioner's library science, when the reality is that whichever way we define information, it is rooted in all dimensions of the librarian's activities. The incapacity of the information science researcher to develop direct relevance of their theories to the world of library practice (beyond study of OPACs in their laboratories) has led to poor misperceptions of separation between the two. The current challenges of territorial turf battles with computer science and business management, the limited placement in today's society, and the ongoing threats of administrative restructuring in a neoliberal academy might be as a result of this dysfunctional inheritance.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Fulton, "An Ordinary Life in the Round."

<sup>95</sup> Mehra and Gray, "An 'Owning Up' of White-IST Trends in LIS to Further Real Transformations."

<sup>96</sup> Case, *Looking for Information*.

<sup>97</sup> Tanya E. Clement and Daniel Carter, "Connecting Theory and Practice in Digital Humanities Information Work," *Journal of the Association of Information Science & Technology* 68, no. 6 (June 2017): 1385-1396; Blaise Cronin and Lohman I. Meho, "The Shifting Balance of Intellectual Trade in Information Studies," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology* 59, no. 4 (February 2008): 551-564.



Information science rarely aims to go beyond the favored symbolic citadels of the academy and privileged institutions to tangibly shape the daily lives of underserved stakeholders. It often fails to critically examine its own roles in generating economic, social, political, and cultural outcomes. Some of the consequences of the lack of critical self-reflexivity in information science includes limited community-based research engagement and outcomes, insufficient participatory designs and methods, and a pervasive constraining of minority voices and perspectives, to name a few.<sup>98</sup> And yet, the actualities and potentialities of (participatory) action research within human information behavior studies and the broader LIS are tremendous. In his academic career (over twenty years since his doctoral program), this author has applied the varied forms of action research in collaborating with African American women, low-income families, LGBTQ+ populations, rural libraries, small businesses, and others.<sup>99</sup> Action research strategies seek to address practical, community-relevant concerns via information-related work, while generating tangible products that can directly impact people's everyday lives.<sup>100</sup> With community in focus, action research methods prioritize cooperativeness in execution via local partnerships and collaborations, decentralization, deregulation, outcome-based results, and transformations in local practice.<sup>101</sup> However, hurdles in the context of its adoption in mainstream LIS canons of privilege persist. Resistance regarding its application and implementation in information science research and library practice is not surprising; an historically Anglo/Euro-centric profession with its magnitude of inequities and neoliberal biases have prevented its leaders from "owning up" to White-

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<sup>98</sup> Bharat Mehra, Everette S. Sikes, and Vandana Singh, "Scenarios of Technology Use to Promote Community Engagement: Overcoming Marginalization and Bridging Digital Divides in the Southern and Central Appalachian Rural Libraries," in "Marginalized Communities, Emerging Technologies, and Social Innovation in the Digital Age," eds. Jia Tina Du, Iris Xie, and Jenny Waycott, special issue, *Information Processing & Management* 57, no. 3 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.102129>.

<sup>99</sup> Mehra, "An Action Research (AR) Manifesto"; Mehra, Bishop, Bazzell, and Smith, "Scenarios in the Afya Project as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) Tool"; Mehra, Bishop, and Partee, "A Case Methodology of Action Research"; Bharat Mehra and Donna Braquet, "Marriage between Participatory Leadership and Action Research to Advocate Benefits Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: An Extended Human Rights Role in Library and Information Science," in *Leadership in Academic Libraries Today: Connecting Theory to Practice*, eds. B. Eden and J. Fagan (Toronto, Canada: Scarecrow Press, 2014), 185-211.

<sup>100</sup> Mehra, Bishop, and Partee, "Information Science Professionals as Community Action Researchers."

<sup>101</sup> Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, *The Action Research Planner* (Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press, 1998); Craig A. Mertler, *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2020); Ernie T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007).

IST tendencies.<sup>102</sup> This is also tied to an “umbrella of resistance” to broader social justice constructions and vocabularies (including action research) within the LIS professions, including information science research. Complex intersecting political, cultural, social, and economic factors play a role. A predominant financial dependency on external tax support and fear of displeasing financial brokers and other controllers of their purse-strings is one. Anxiety over shaping public misperceptions if they discard a neutral stance, concerns in shifting away from the role of passive bystanders, and stress over getting perceived as activists and advocates, are a few others.

Elfreda Chapman was an academic situated in her times. All of us are, and it is important to adopt a balanced perspective and place in context the limitations of every form of research endeavor. Some examples include quantitative researchers articulating the shortcomings of their approaches through the lens of other methodologies, comparable to expectations of scholars in the humanistic and interpretative traditions. Further, situating or positioning one’s own scholarship within the limitations of a White-IST academy, the narrow streams of the profession, and the specific form of privileges that we have, is a responsible and ethical dimension of our work. All of us should internalize and reflect on this in order to provide a fuller and holistic accounting of our specific research activities and scholarship. This applies to individual LIS scholars following any paradigm or approach, and this article was an opportunity to examine Chatman’s remarkable contributions in this manner.

LIS can move forward in addressing its shortcomings and adopt more impact-driven approaches (e.g., action research, participatory design, community engagement) in all aspects of information-related scholarship.<sup>103</sup> A significant step will involve an honest assessment of the damage resulting from the self-imposed historical and contemporary restrictions and closed doors owing to the elitist and entrenched foundations of information science research. These include its various discourse and paradigms, its system-centrism, user-centered shifts, and human information behaviors, to name a few. How can its scope and relevance expand to integrate diversity advocacy, inclusion activism, and community impact through a critical theory-social justice lens of analysis? Paulo Freire’s “informed action” of new relationships, approaches, and opportunities in the praxis of information research and LIS scholarship might provide a starting point for extending Chatman’s legacy and moving in the right direction.<sup>104</sup> A discourse around the creation of the “oppressor-oppressed” in LIS can also provide valuable perspective. For example, *all* information science researchers, library practitioners, and others, including its white majority (and its scholars invested in

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<sup>102</sup> Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS.”

<sup>103</sup> Mehra and Gray, “An ‘Owning Up’ of White-IST Trends in LIS.”

<sup>104</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

positivist/postpositivist approaches), should situate their contributions in their own positionality and privilege in order to dismantle white oppressions via providing racially layered contexts of meaning to their work development and activities. Collaborative responsibilities in mutually symbiotic roles of the researcher and the researched as co-creators of knowledge might also open new directions of opportunity, impact, relevance, engagement, and growth. Contemporary social, cultural, and political traumas in the United States related to the recent racial atrocities by law enforcement agents complicit in the horrendous murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, Walter Wallace, Jr., and other racial/ethnic minorities, calls for urgent acknowledgement, responsibility, and actions to discard white privilege and its culpability in systemically entrenched institutions, including those affiliated with the LIS professions.<sup>105</sup> Progressive times similarly demand discarding elitist and entitled superiority of information science scholars as the self-labeled “experts” compared to the “subjects” or “participants” of their research. Hopefully, the information field will awaken to these new realities from its long slumber and move us forward towards greater community impact, professional accountability, and social responsibility.

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<sup>105</sup> Bharat Mehra, “Enough Crocodile Tears! Libraries Moving Beyond Performative Antiracist Politics,” *The Library Quarterly* (in press).

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