

*Perspective*

# “(Information) Poor, Huddled Masses”? Chatman’s Contribution to Understanding Contemporary Immigrant Settlement Experiences

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## ABSTRACT

This article revisits Chatman’s information poverty theory in light of the settlement experiences of Black immigrants. We critically examine the factors that both shaped and limited Chatman’s theory, as well as how Chatman’s work both catalyzes and impedes our work as emerging scholars who study the interplay of information access and social inclusion among a marginalized immigrant population.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this perspective essay, we explore how Elfreda Chatman's legacy both catalyzes and impedes our work as new researchers who examine the role of libraries and information in the lives of Black diasporic immigrants. Through self-reflection and critical analysis, we examine the tensions within Chatman's body of work. On the one hand, Chatman granted permission to study those who are often rendered invisible or alien. She raised the profile of Black women scholars in library and information science (LIS) field and challenged conventions of the people, settings, and constructs which merit attention. In so doing, she eschewed respectability politics. These are the qualities of Chatman's scholarship that animate us. She made room for work like ours, wherein we look at information from the points of view of African, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin immigrants.

However, we also discuss our belief that Chatman, perhaps unwittingly, reinforced prejudiced assumptions about underprivileged groups. Chatman's work ignored the macro, systemic limitations that prompt self-protective behaviors and information inequality, even as her philosophies progressed. In our current work, we confront these same narrow approaches toward immigrants who are often presumed incompetent, informationally impoverished, and digitally divided. We also recognize the epistemic and sociopolitical realities that perhaps hushed Chatman's more radical impressions or hindered opportunities for her to present counternarratives. We therefore take a postmodern, speculative look at Chatman in the final section of this essay. By revisiting Chatman's work, we hope to broaden understandings of immigrant information behavior and social inclusion.

## CHATMAN AS A MODEL: BUILDING THE THEORY OF INFORMATION POVERTY

To describe Chatman's impact, we must begin with a discussion on the LIS domain. Between the 1970s and 1990s, much of information behavior research centered on information-saturated environments, such as workplaces and libraries. Studies predominantly involved White, middle-class participants.<sup>1</sup> Chatman was one of the first to break this mold by spotlighting taken-for-granted or traditionally ignored communities. Women, janitors, those in detention or retirement facilities, African Americans, and the elderly were among her study participants. Further still, as an African American scholar in a discipline that had been comprised of roughly 90 percent White faculty by the mid-

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Owen Case and Lisa M. Given. *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2016).

1990s,<sup>2</sup> Chatman represented a different type of scholar. Given this, it is important to recognize the historical aspects of U.S. higher education and particularly library and information science whereby, until relatively recently, theory development was a privilege left to White, male academics,<sup>3</sup> with Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* serving as the guideline on scientific progress. Academia—perhaps with the exception of minority-serving institutions such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the US—have inherited “a white, heteronormative and male template”<sup>4</sup> that limits knowledge.

LIS, too, has adhered to institutional standards that impede pathways for women of color in the professoriate. Chatman defied these structures of higher education and, particularly, the LIS field. Her work was thus “tradition-shattering,” as Kuhn's describes,<sup>5</sup> during a critical time when there were calls for greater theory development in what some considered an atheoretical quasi-field.<sup>6</sup> Robert Grover, Jack Glazier, and Birger Hjørland (themselves White males) among others petitioned for the strengthening of theory development. A consummate theorist, Chatman raised the standard for not only future Black women scholars in LIS like us as the authors of this essay, but the domain at large. Chatman's scholarship reminds us of Zora Neale Hurston's assertion that “research is

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<sup>2</sup> According to ALISE data, 1996 measures of faculty of color comprise only 9 percent of the ALA-accredited LIS programs. The majority of African American faculty in the 1990s were concentrated in three programs: The University of Pittsburgh, North Carolina Central University, and Clark Atlanta University. Chatman's career was spent at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and later, Florida State University.

<sup>3</sup> This conclusion is supported by the extensive work of Pettigrew and McKechnie on theory in LIS. See Karen E. Pettigrew and Lynne McKechnie, “The Use of Theory in Information Science Research,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 62-73; Lynne McKechnie and Karen E. Pettigrew, “Surveying the Use of Theory in Library and Information Science Research: A Disciplinary Perspective,” *Library Trends* 50, no. 3 (2002); Lynne McKechnie, Karen E. Pettigrew, and Steven L. Joyce, “The Origins and Contextual Use of Theory in Human Information Behaviour Research,” *The New Review of Information Behaviour Research* 2 (November 2001): 47-63; Karen E. Fisher, Sanda Erdelez, and Lynne McKechnie (eds.), *Theories of Information Behavior* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca A. Reid and Todd A. Curry, “The White Man Template and Academic Bias,” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 12, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2019/04/12/how-white-male-template-produces-barriers-minority-scholars-throughout-their>.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Pettigrew and McKechnie, “The Use of Theory in Information Science Research.”

formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”<sup>7</sup> In some ways, Chatman was to LIS what Hurston was to African American humanities: a pioneering ethnographer.

We consider Chatman’s work with Michele Besant and Gary Burnett on the philosophy of normative behavior—that is, the idea that information exchanges are extensions of people’s everyday lived experiences within communal, cultural spaces<sup>8</sup>—to be her most influential work. Theoretically, normative behavior involves social norms, worldviews, social types, and information behavior which determine standards of information appropriateness and value. These constructs, in turn, shape the flow of information. Normative behavior depends upon belief systems and social compliance. Burnett, Besant and Chatman, like Reijo Savolainen, who introduced the concept of “Everyday Life Information Seeking,”<sup>9</sup> oriented information behavior research toward acknowledging contextualized, socially bound phenomena. Chatman died just one year after this final publication on normative information behavior. Notwithstanding, her broader guidelines for framing social life in theory and research shaped a long line of influential scholarship, namely Paul Jaeger and Gary Burnett’s “information worlds,” Jenna Hartel’s “information squares,”<sup>10</sup> Karen Fisher’s “information grounds,” and more. Roughly sixteen years after her death, Chatman’s work in this area continued to garner awards.<sup>11</sup>

Her most renowned theory (and the one which most impacts our research agendas), “information poverty,” depicts situations where individuals lack information required to live a meaningful life. She defined the information poor as those who “perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them.”<sup>12</sup> The theory

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<sup>7</sup> Zora N. Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road* (New York: Lippincott, 1942), 127.

<sup>8</sup> 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 and Technology* 52, no. 7 (2001): 536-547.

<sup>9</sup> 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>10</sup> Jenna Hartel, “Information Behaviour Illustrated,” in *Proceedings of ISCI, the Information Behavior Conference, Leeds, UK, September 2-5, 2014: Part I*, <http://InformationR.net/ir/19-4/isic/isic11.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Chatman’s 2001 paper with Besant and Burnett tied for Best JASIST paper of the decades (2000s). See Steven Addo, “Best JASIST Paper of the Decades,” *Association for Information Science and Technology*, November 7, 2021, <https://www.asist.org/news/best-jasist-paper-of-the-decades-results/>.

<sup>12</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, “The Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 47, no. 3 (1996): 197.

emanated from her numerous works<sup>13</sup> focused on economically poor populations with the overarching aim of finding ways to better understand how poor people perceive, use, share, or abstain from information. From these studies, Chatman found inconsistencies that contradicted her expectations. She referred to these as “anomalies,” the result of which are four concepts of secrecy, deception, risk taking, and situational relevance from which she further developed the six propositions of the information poverty theory.<sup>14</sup> Here, again, Chatman raised awareness to breakdowns in information flows; whereas her predecessors described information poor communities, she designed a system by which to comprehend them. Her work came at the advent of the internet and, as such, facilitated a production of knowledge among scholars whose goal it was and is to understand barriers to participation.

“Information poverty” as a concept continues to be empirically tested and extended, particularly in digital divide research focusing on the disparity of access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Among those who have applied the propositions of Chatman’s information poverty theory, some have sought objective ways to measure information poverty rather than categorizing people as “information poor” based on predetermined characteristics. Liangzhi Yu points out the need to understand information inequality in greater detail with regards to information, before linking it to other variables such as economic and social factors.<sup>15</sup> Yu embarked on research to identify constructs for defining “information inequality”<sup>16</sup> and operationalize people’s “information statuses” as understood through Chatman’s work. This work culminated in the development of an instrument for measuring “information richness” and “information poverty,” where “information status” is an individual metric on the information poverty-overload spectrum. The design of this tool is a significant step

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<sup>13</sup> Elfreda A. Chatman, “Information, Mass Media Use, and the Working Poor,” *Library and Information Science Research* 7, no. 2 (1985): 97-113; Elfreda A. Chatman, “The Information World of Low-Skilled Workers,” *Library and Information Science Research* 9, no. 4 (1987): 265-w83. For a more detailed description of these four concepts and the six propositions of information poverty theory, see Elfreda A. Chatman, “The Impoverished Life-World of Outsiders,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 47, no. 3 (1996): 193-206.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Hersberger, “Are the Economically Poor Information Poor? Does the Digital Divide Affect the Homeless and Access to Information?” *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 27, no. 3 (2003): 45.

<sup>15</sup> Liangzhi Yu, “How Poor Informationally are the Information Poor? Evidence from an Empirical Study of Daily and Regular Information Practices of Individuals,” *Journal of Documentation* 66, no. 6 (2010): 906-933.

<sup>16</sup> Liangzhi Yu, Wenjie Zhou, Binbin Yu, and Hefa Liu, “Towards a Comprehensive Measurement of the Information Rich and Poor: Based on the Conceptualization of Individuals as Information Agents,” *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 4 (2016): 614-635.

towards closing a long-standing gap in the information poverty literature, one Chatman herself did not close.

Similarly, Julie Hersberger utilized the information poverty theory to determine whether economic and digital poverty automatically made people information poor.<sup>11</sup> Although the twenty-five homeless parents who constituted the study participants lacked necessary computer skills and economic power, they did not perceive themselves to be information poor based on any of Chatman's six propositions. The findings therefore contradict the notion that the economically and digitally disadvantaged are also information poor, and call into question the categorization of people as information poor given the nuanced nature of individual lives that makes any direct cause and effect conclusions difficult to draw. Although there may be relationships between digital, economic, and information poverty, it would be overly simplistic or reductive to assume that being disadvantaged on one of these fronts automatically leads to a disadvantage on the others.

Chatman's "information poverty" groundwork challenged information science scholars to not only discuss but also study and quantify information voids. There must be continued application in a wide variety of situations and ongoing measurements of why and to what degree people are underprivileged from an information standpoint. Yet, we recognize the power dynamics involved in codifying and categorizing groups based on prescriptions of information abundance and lack: who are the players in determining people's information statuses? What is the ultimate goal of measuring people's information statuses? How can we move from researching to addressing information poverty?

## LEARNING FROM CHATMAN: TYPECASTS AND GAPS

Despite her pioneering scholarship on non-traditional research groups, Chatman did little to resist fatalistic attitudes toward the mainly women, mostly underprivileged communities that she studied. Her propensity toward highlighting maladaptive information tactics—secrecy, superstition, opinion leadership, situational relevance, and the lack of risk-taking—reified longstanding gender, racial, and class stereotypes. In doing so, Chatman followed a long tradition of upholding "culture of poverty" narratives of marginalized groups. Chatman leaned heavily on the theoretical traditions of those in dominant groups, as alluded to earlier. Necessarily, her work both inherited *and* transmitted Anglo-conformist notions of information use. For example, her information poverty theory formally conceptualized what Thomas Childers and Joyce Post<sup>17</sup> described in their canonized *The Information-Poor in America* as those who "are not predisposed as

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Childers and Joyce A. Post, *The Information-Poor in America* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975): 80.

the general population to alter the undesirable conditions of their lives, or to see information as an instrument in their salvation.”<sup>18</sup> Information poverty, then, was depicted as an extension of sociocultural shortcomings. Much like current hardline immigration rhetoric in the United States, Childers and Post contended that Mexicans in particular were not only “isolated from information that sustains the dominant society,” but are faced with “a number of characteristics magnify their isolation. They are proud of their culture, and especially tenacious in their language...they distrust or dislike Anglo institutions, such as schools, medical clinics, public housing, etc.”<sup>19</sup> Notably, Childers and Post’s work adapted Oscar Lewis’ classic culture of poverty work<sup>20</sup> on Puerto Rican and Mexican communities where he described “four dimensions of the system of poverty: the relationship between the subculture and the larger society; the nature of the slum community; the nature of the family; and the attitudes, values and character structure of the individual.” However, current research supports that immigrants of color, particularly Black diasporic immigrants, continue to be discriminated against based on perceptions of their propensity to assimilate.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, recent studies support the claim that these tensions impact Black immigrants’ information access and acculturative experience.<sup>22</sup>

Chatman uncritically accepted frameworks which hold that (information) poor communities are solely responsible for their perceptions and circumstances. In her early work on opinion leadership and “small worlds,” Chatman borrowed Charles Cooley’s assertion that poor people are “limited in their view of the larger social world.”<sup>23</sup> She also relied on Robert K. Merton’s<sup>24</sup> work on social deviance, particularly his theory of alienation, in which he proposed that “cultural goals” are the ideas and aspirations people reach for and “institutional means” are the steps and actions they take to achieve those aspirations. Alienation theory suggests that self-alienation occurs when people do not acclimate to cultural goals. Chatman’s works, too, present the notion of a hegemonic monoculture by which information behavior must be measured. She thus theorized the

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<sup>18</sup> Childers and Post, *The Information-Poor in America*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> John Foster Carr, “The Library and the Immigrant,” *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 8, no. 4 (1914): 142.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959).

<sup>21</sup> Jemima Pierre, “Black Immigrants in the United States and the ‘Cultural Narratives’ of Ethnicity,” *Identities: Global studies in Culture and Power* 11, no. 2 (2004): 141-170.

<sup>22</sup> Ana Ndumu, “Linkages Between Information Overload and Acculturative Stress: The Case of Black Diasporic Immigrants in the US,” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (July 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000619857115>.

<sup>23</sup> Burnett, Besant, and Chatman, “Small Worlds,” 536.

<sup>24</sup> Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), as cited in Elfreda A. Chatman, “Alienation Theory: Application of a Conceptual Framework to a Study of Information Among Janitors,” *Research Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (1990): 355-368.

information poor as a segment of the population whose “subpar” lifestyles result in less-than-ideal circumstances.

We confront these same narrow approaches in our current work on immigrants who are often presumed incompetent, information impoverished and digitally divided. Terms such as “digital immigrants” are products of this type of equivocation, which greatly concerns us. The discursive construction of immigrants as “uninformed” is hardly new. At the start of the 20th-century when Canadian and US library practices were in their formative years and, simultaneously, when European migration to North America increased, there was great concern with how those emigrating would graft into North American societies. The result in the US specifically was an ideal of Americanization, suggesting:

...If the immigrant is to think alike with us, if he is to be a good American, we must give him some sufficient reason for respecting and loving our land. And how better than through the library can this country of ours be made alluring, accepting in love? Alluring certainly is the library’s invitation to personal progress and self-betterment, and in its friendly room are an American environment and the atmosphere of our spoken English.<sup>25</sup>

As the library profession evolved, so did its essentialist underpinnings. The field’s epistemological shift toward the social sciences<sup>26</sup> fortified perceptions of immigrant culture of poverty—that is, poverty-perpetuating value systems. Chatman’s works align with this argument.

By the time the internet and computing devices entered households in the 1990s, remediation narratives were firmly entrenched within LIS discourse. Library best practices and scholarship continue to suggest a monolithic experience wherein immigrants are seen as objects rather than agents of the information society. Jutta Haider and David Bawden’s discourse analysis of information poverty established that historicizing the “information poor” and the library profession’s moral obligation and responsibility are among the four especially productive discursive procedures in the research milieu.<sup>27</sup>

A tangential discursive tool is that of the “digital native” versus “digital immigrant” metaphor that conflates non-US or Canadian origins with technological

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<sup>25</sup> Carr, “The Library and the Immigrant,” 142.

<sup>26</sup> See John M. Budd, “An Epistemological Foundation for Library and Information Science,” *Library Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1995): 295-318, and Birger Hjørland, “Epistemology and the Socio-Cognitive Perspective in Information Science,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 53, no. 4 (2002): 257-270.

<sup>27</sup> Jutta Haider and David Bawden, “Conceptions of ‘Information Poverty’ in LIS: A Discourse Analysis,” *Journal of Documentation* 63, no. 4 (2007): 534-557.



determinism. Coined by Marc Prensky,<sup>28</sup> it attempts to distinguish those who were born prior to the digital age versus those who were born into it. Many<sup>29</sup> decry the colonialist roots of this dichotomy—indeed, Prensky caricatures internet adopters as “heavily accented, unintelligible foreigners” or “not-so-smart (or not-so-flexible) immigrants” who “spend most of their time grouching about how good things were in the old country.” On the other hand, others embrace and even expound upon the metaphor, as demonstrated by quizzically titled works such as *Digital Culture: Immigrants and Tourists Responding to the Natives’ Drumbeat* where the author suggests that the construct of the “digital tourist” lends explanatory power.<sup>30</sup> This fatalistic trope of immigrants’ information realities persists among some LIS professionals,<sup>31</sup> even as others substantiate that the reductionist, “have” versus “have not” binary of the digital divide ignores the nuanced nature of information behavior.<sup>32</sup>

As such, Chatman’s theory of information poverty is limited in its applicability specifically to immigrants. Equally limited is the theory’s application by scholars who study immigrants. The geographic focus of information poverty research has been disproportionate, with the vast majority of such studies focusing on the Global West and/or North, and very few coming from other locations. Developing nations<sup>33</sup> are still largely underrepresented in this domain, with the risk of their information behaviors being inadequately understood. Moreover, all or most of the studies that culminated in the theory of information poverty were based on research with poor and marginalized

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<sup>28</sup> Marc Prensky, “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part 1,” *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1-6.

<sup>29</sup> Critiques include Pasqualina Sorrentino, “The Mystery of the Digital Natives’ Existence: Questioning the Validity of the Prenskian Metaphor,” *First Monday* 23, no. 10 (2018), <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9434/7598>, and Siân Bayne and Jen Ross, “The ‘Digital Native’ and ‘Digital Immigrant’: A Dangerous Opposition” (presentation, (Annual Conference of the Society for Research into Higher Education, December 11-13, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Cheri A. Toledo, “Digital Culture: Immigrants and Tourists Responding to the Natives’ Drumbeat,” *International Journal of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education* 19, no. 1 (2007): 84-92.

<sup>31</sup> Lan Shen, “Out of Information Poverty: Library Services for Urban Marginalized Immigrants,” *Urban Library Journal* 19, no. 1 (2013): 4.

<sup>32</sup> For a systematic literature review of digital divide casuals and determinants, see Biyang Yu, Ana Ndumu, Lorri M. Mon, and Zhenjia Fan, “E-inclusion or Digital Divide: An Integrated Model of Digital Inequality,” *Journal of Documentation* 74, no. 3 (2018): 552-574.

<sup>33</sup> Developing countries are countries characterized by low-income and structural barriers to sustainable development, according to the United Nations criteria and indicators for identifying Least Developed Countries (LDCs). See “LDC Identification Criteria & Indicators,” Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Economic Analysis, United Nations, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category/ldc-criteria.html>.

populations. Studies built on the theory have also involved work with low-income populations,<sup>34</sup> despite some scholars pointing out that “information poverty” is not understood or explored among the socioeconomically affluent.<sup>35</sup> Though depictions of immigrants as poverty-stricken and desperate have captured the popular cultural imaginary—as Emma Lazarus famously suggested in her description of “poor, huddled masses”<sup>36</sup>—not all immigrants are poor or destitute. In fact, we see a vast range in migration motivations, or “push/pull factors,” among those we study; Black immigrants to the US and Canada might be forcefully displaced (e.g., asylees or refugees) or well-resourced (e.g., employment-based, educational, or entrepreneurial) migrants. Because of the largely visa-based and hence meritocratic nature of Black migration, Black diasporic immigrants as a whole are likely to be educated and display English language fluency as well as possess prior vocational experience.<sup>37</sup> Chatman’s information poverty theory is thus limited in explaining information poverty among those considered to have substantial social capital such as wealthy or highly skilled immigrants.

Despite the substantial and growing migration or population research<sup>38</sup> on how immigrants use the internet and ICTs in marvelous and creative ways, LIS upholds a perspective of destitution. One might argue that information poverty has morphed into an LIS paradigm or metatheory,<sup>39</sup> such that researchers and practitioners begin and end

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<sup>34</sup> Laura Hasler, Ian Ruthven, and Steven Buchanan, “Using Internet Groups in Situations of Information Poverty: Topics and Information Needs,” *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 65, no. 1 (2014): 25-36.

<sup>35</sup> Liangzhi Yu, “Towards a Comprehensive Measurement of the Information Rich and Poor: Based on the Conceptualization of Individuals as Information Agents,” *Journal of Documentation* 72, no. 4 (2016): 614-635.

<sup>36</sup> Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” in *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings*, eds. Emma Lazarus and Gregory Eiselein (Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2002), 201.

<sup>37</sup> Monica Anderson and Gustavo Lopez, “Key Facts about Black Immigrants in the US,” (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center 2015); Kevin J.A. Thomas, “A Demographic Profile of Black Caribbean Immigrants in the US” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, April 2012), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/CBI-demographic-profile-black-caribbean-immigrants>; Randy Capps, Kristen McCabe, and Michael Fix, “New Streams: Black African Migration to the US” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Examples include Leopoldina Fortunati, Raul Perterra, and Jane Vincent, eds. *Migration, Diaspora and Information Technology in Global Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Mihaela Nedelcu, “Migrants’ New Transnational Habitus: Rethinking Migration through a Cosmopolitan Lens in the Digital Age,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 9 (2012): 1339-1356.

<sup>39</sup> Marcia J. Bates, “An Introduction to Metatheories, Theories, and Models,” in *Theories of Information Behavior*, eds. Karen E. Fisher, Sandra Erdelez, and Lynne McKechnie (Medford, NJ: American Society for Information Science and Technology, 2005), 1-24.

with deficiency in mind. In this regard, it has become a *position* rather than simply a set of propositions. The outcome has been prescriptive or blanket views of immigrants who are presumed to be information poor. Recent calls for work involving ICT-mediated diasporic<sup>40</sup> studies in LIS have not yet resulted in a significant change in scope, and we hope that our research addresses this void.

When utilized appropriately, Chatman's information poverty theory can serve as a gateway for providing more targeted information services and research. For example, Chatman's theory of information poverty motivated Ndumu's studies<sup>41</sup> on information overload among Black diasporic immigrant groups. Specifically, the aim of the study was to probe and possibly disrupt the presumption of deficiency by shedding light on an overlooked aspect of the immigrant experience: the abundance of choice or information overload.<sup>42</sup> This line of inquiry is now being expanded to investigate how immigrants cope when overwhelmed by information, possible relationships to acculturative stress, and whether there is a connection to libraries.

In addition to research at the intersection of information access, national origins, race, and social inclusion such as ours involving Black diasporic immigrants, there is a need for studies that depart from the preoccupation with personal dispositions toward poverty. Perhaps "information marginalization,"<sup>43</sup> as posited by Amelia Gibson and John Martin, is a better approach to elucidate immigrants' information situations; it instead accounts for systemic factors that sustain information inequality. While this angle represents a critical and important shift, the role of the individual cannot be erased. Ultimately, it is crucial to acknowledge the inequality in information access consequent to intrinsic and extrinsic determinants. However, the role of the individual needs to be approached from a position of adequacy and agency rather than one of deficiency. This paradigm shift will pave the way toward holistic comprehension of the factors that determine immigrants' information experiences, as well as help in the development of measures that can promote belonging.

While Chatman's information poverty theory has utility, it is limited when applied to inquiries on the settlement experiences of immigrants. The theory does not, for

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<sup>40</sup> Ajit Pyati, Clara Chu, Karen Fisher, Ramesh Srinivasan, Nadia Caidi, Danielle Allard, and Diane Dechief, "ICT-Mediated Diaspora Studies: New Directions in Immigrant Information Behavior Research," *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 45, no. 1 (2008): 1-5; Ramesh Srinivasan and Ajit Pyati, "Diasporic Information Environments: Reframing Immigrant-Focused Information Research," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 12 (2007): 1734-1744.

<sup>41</sup> Ndumu, "Linkages Between Information Overload and Acculturative Stress."

<sup>42</sup> Ndumu, "Linkages Between Information Overload and Acculturative Stress."

<sup>43</sup> Amelia N. Gibson and John D. Martin, "Re-situating Information Poverty: Information Marginalization and Parents of Individuals with Disabilities," *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 70, no. 5 (2019): 476-487.

example, specify how poor informationally immigrants are,<sup>14</sup> nor does it provide a way to predict how long immigrants can experience information poverty. Given the demographic, educational, socioeconomic, and cultural variances among immigrant groups in Canada and the US, it may be reasonable to submit that immigrants will experience information poverty differently based on personal narratives and unique settlement contexts, which makes it important to explore the various ways in which information poverty may manifest. Such an angle will help in determining what support is most important throughout immigrants' settlement because a one-size-fits all approach to alleviating information problems has been demonstrably ineffective. Armed with this knowledge, government or settlement agencies, along with information service providers such as libraries, will be better equipped to help immigrants overcome inequality of access.

## SPECULATING A DIFFERENT DIRECTION

We wonder how Chatman's scholarship would have materialized had she instead borrowed from countercultural theorists of the day. What if, rather than drawing from a White heteronormative intellectual continuum, Chatman gleaned from other Black feminist thinkers, theorists, and cultural producers? Would she have theorized information poverty differently had she examined *lack* outside of orthodox parameters? We argue that information poverty research, specifically, would have followed an altogether different route if Chatman had, for example, engaged with bell hooks' writings on the interplay between race, capitalism, gender, and systems of oppression. Chatman would have perhaps emphasized disempowerment rather than dysfunction had she contextualized information behavior as social stratification, similar to the works of Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw. Her scholarship would have differed, we believe, had she eschewed mainstream paradigms and instead learned from Angela Davis, who argued that

...if the presence of increasing numbers of Black women within the academy is to have a transformative impact both on the academy and on communities beyond the academy, we have to think seriously about linkages between research and activism, about cross-racial and transnational coalitional strategies, and about the importance of linking our work to radical social agendas.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, we recognize that Chatman operated within the sociopolitical and epistemic realities within which LIS was and continues to be bound. As James Scheurich

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<sup>44</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Culture, and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1989), 231.

and Michelle Young famously noted, the “clothes” that dominant research epistemologies wear, whether positivist or postmodernist, implicitly favors White society since they

have arisen from the social history of Whites and “fit” Whites because they themselves, the nature of the university and of legitimated scholarship and knowledge, and the specifications of different research methodologies are all cultural products of White social history[...]scholars of color have had to wear these “White” clothes (be bi-cultural) so that they could succeed in research communities, however sociologically, historically, or culturally ill-fitting those clothes might be, White scholars have virtually never had to think about wearing the epistemological clothes of people of color or even to consider the idea of such “strange” apparel.<sup>45</sup>

We gather that Chatman’s work, while it sheds light on the lives of diverse groups, satisfied a trend of treating difference as deviance, since she had to become accomplished in an intellectual praxis arising out of a social history that has been profoundly hostile to those on the lower echelons of societies and ignores or excludes alternative frameworks. Still, we unequivocally admire her contributions as a scholar of color who succeeded in becoming “epistemologically bi-cultural to survive, a testament to [her] strength, courage, perseverance, and love of scholarship—rather than a testament to the race/culture-free nature of mainstream research epistemologies.”<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Revisiting Chatman’s work has afforded us the opportunity to pinpoint our own responsibilities and privilege as members of research *and* Black immigrant communities. Our area of study is shaped by biased conventions. We cannot help but ask how much is *really* known about Black diasporic immigrants and their information situations since information behavior research involving African, Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin groups is grossly limited. It is safe to assume that Black immigrants’ information landscapes are not well understood because they have not been centered. This segment of the population is subsumed under other disenfranchised communities where their unique situations are buried, and they are served together with more dominant immigrant groups.

Chatman’s information poverty theory is limited in accounting for Black immigrants’ information experiences because it is difficult to squarely fit the “information

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<sup>45</sup> James Joseph Scheurich and Michelle D. Young, “Coloring Epistemologies: Are Our Research Epistemologies Racially Biased?” *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 4 (1997): 9.

<sup>46</sup> Scheurich and Young, “Coloring Epistemologies.”

poor” categorization as per Chatman’s prepositions. It appears to us that information poverty is much more variable than Chatman had originally posited. Yet, we cannot overlook inequality of access. Our research suggests that Black immigrants’ experience of information poverty is not a result of cultural heritage or lifestyles, but rather of racial and social stratification that positions Black and foreign-born groups at the outskirts of societies and thereby at the extremes of information access.<sup>47</sup> As a result of systemic marginalization, some Black immigrants are overloaded and overwhelmed by adjusting to new information environments in receiving countries,<sup>48</sup> or they have limited access due to injustices such as stereotyping and information gatekeeping by governing parties. However, must we gather that all Black immigrants are information poor on these grounds? While we cannot, we also do not have enough evidence to dispel this thought. Thus, we call on researchers to better understand Black immigrants and their information realities. We also call upon scholars to examine information experiences from more robust interpretations of information inequality and marginalization, particularly as experienced among immigrants.

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<sup>47</sup> Ana Ndumu, “Toward a New Understanding of Immigrant Information Behavior: Information Overload Among US Immigrants,” *Journal of Documentation* 76, no. 4 (2020): 869-891.

<sup>48</sup> Ndumu, “Toward a New Understanding of Immigrant Information Behavior”; Anne Goulding, “Information Poverty or Overload?” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* 33, no. 3 (2001): 109-111.

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