

Chatman Revisited: Re-examining and Resituating Social Theories of Identity, Access, and Marginalization in LIS

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ABSTRACT

Elfreda Chatman's work was among the first in information science to thoroughly and explicitly address information access and marginalization as social processes. In defining her theories of Information Poverty, Life in the Round, and Normative Behavior, Chatman introduced a number of important concepts to the discussion around information poverty and access, including *social norms*, *small worlds*, and *defensive information behaviors*. While Chatman's work began to describe the form and implications of power and social influence for information seeking and access, it was limited by many of the same commitments to colorblindness and the assumption of neutrality as other contemporaneous works of the time. Often sidestepping examination of race, sexuality, and gender identity, it more commonly cited other factors, such as stigma, income, and specific social norms and values as contributing to information access and poverty. This perspective made sense in light of the epistemic LIS culture that emphasized colorblindness and individuality and demonstrated a tenuous relationship with race, or "demographic" categories and concerns. Issue contributors are exploring the question, "How do identity and social structures (such as power, privilege, and policy) combine to enact systems of information access and marginalization?"

Panelists and contributors to this special issue are LIS faculty from around the United States, with an abundance of teaching, research, and service contributions. Among their commonalities is their gravitation to the work of Dr. Elfreda Chatman. Some knew Chatman as graduate students, others have been drawn to her work because they saw themselves represented in the groups Chatman chose to study. Whether they agree or disagree with Chatman, there is no question that they have been inspired and/or influenced in some way by her work.

TOPICS

specific populations; critical librarianship; research methods; information needs