Jenna Hartel
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Bharat Mehra
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA

Brian Griffin
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Jenaya Webb
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Rebecca Noone
University College London, London, England

Hugh Samson
University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada

Danielle Cooper
Ithaka S+R, New York, New York, USA

ETHNOGRAPHY KALEIDOSCOPE IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

Abstract

Ethnography has become a popular research design in LIS, with many creative implementations as well as concomitant problems. The seven panelists have expert perspectives to share about ethnography's evolution and impact within our field. The panel begins with a succinct overall history of the method in LIS and a critical analysis of Chatman's methodological innovations. Then, six inventive extensions are reported: *sensory ethnography*; *visual ethnography*; *ethnography within an arts-informed paradigm*; *ethnography within a contemplative paradigm*; *critically-oriented participatory narratology and autoethnography intersections*; and *ethnography applied within information institutions*. The presentations will systematically display ethnography's wide-ranging colors and flavors, followed by in-depth discussion of its merits, complications, and future trajectories in LIS.

1. The Topic

A *kaleidoscope* is an optical instrument made of mirrors and colored glass that when turned produces a psychedelic and shifting display. As an adjective, *kaleidoscopic* refers to a succession of changing phases and actions, or, a diverse collection. Both terms are apt metaphors for the methodology of ethnography and its evolving, polychrome existence in Library and Information Science (LIS). This panel of avid ethnographers aims to engage CAIS attendees in an illuminating

retrospective and deep conversation about this particularly dynamic and complex methodology, with an eye to its future.

Given the conference theme of history, we note that in the 19th century, ethnography coalesced in Anthropology as a research method that relied heavily on participant observation and a holistic perspective, among other humanistic tenets (Fetterman, 1998). In the mid-20th century it was taken up in Sociology and often applied to studies of urban settings. Through the subsequent decades other social sciences adopted and adapted ethnography to their particular research questions and problems, reflecting ethnography's range and flexibility for inquiry and discovery across myriad contexts.

Ethnography eventually made its way into LIS in the 1990s, thanks to Elfreda Annmary Chatman. Trained as a Sociologist, Chatman took an ethnographic approach to information behaviour research within marginalized populations (Chatman, 1996, Mehra, 2021a). Her uniquely textured reports contrasted favorably with the predominant experimental research designs of the then-dominant cognitive paradigm. In the subsequent decade, numerous researchers in LIS followed Chatman's lead, enacting ethnographic studies of everyday life, (Pettigrew, 1999), academic libraries (Foster & Gibbons, 2007), information systems (Crabtree, et al., 2000), and leisure (Hartel, 2007), to name a few domains. Some scholars are now beginning to problematize Chatman's legacy in LIS owing to its "limited contemporary relevance" in the 21st century when subjected to an epistemological assessment from critical theory and social justice imperatives (Mehra, 2021a, p. 1; Cooke & Gibson, 2020).

As ethnography spread across Library and Information Science, creative extensions proliferated, since ethnography's original toolkit (Pelto et al., 1986) is not perfectly suited to the study of information phenomena. It may also be that the lack of a long tradition of ethnography in LIS granted LIS researchers the freedom to tinker. Our panel showcases six of these second-generation ethnographic methodologies, namely: *sensory ethnography* (Pink, 2009); *visual ethnography* (Bedi & Webb, 2020); *ethnography within an arts-informed paradigm* (Loveless, 2019; Leavy, 2015, 2018); *ethnography within a contemplative paradigm* (Janesick, 2015); *critically-oriented participatory narratology and autoethnography intersections* (Bal, 2017; Boylorn & Orbe, 2020); and *ethnography applied within information institutions* (Foster & Gibbons, 2007). The panelists' presentations offer critical observations and insights as well, taken from first-hand experiences and a lively critical literature within LIS and beyond (Sandstrom & Sandstrom, 1995; Lanclos & Asher, 2016; Seale, et al., 2022). At the end of the session, our *kaleidoscopic* perspective will turn *telescopic*, as we gaze towards ethnography's future in LIS.

2. Overview of the Structure of the Panel

The panel begins with a succinct overall history of the method in LIS and a critical analysis of Chatman's methodological innovations. Then, six creative extensions are reported: *sensory ethnography*; *visual ethnography*; *ethnography within an arts-informed paradigm*; *ethnography within a contemplative paradigm*; *critically-oriented participatory narratology and autoethnography intersections*; and *ethnography applied within information institutions*. Each presentation will be short (5-minutes) and stimulating, in order to systematically expose the audience to ethnography's wide-ranging colors and flavors. By design, the swift pace will leave

ample time for in-depth discussion of the merits, complications, and future trajectories of ethnography in LIS.

3. Relevant Qualifications and Contributions of Each Panelist

- **JENNA HARTEL** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. She studied ethnography in the Sociology Department at UCLA, under Melvin Pollner and Jack Katz. Her ethnographic dissertation (Hartel, 2007) documented information in the hobby of gourmet cooking and was a ground-breaking application of visual ethnographic techniques (Hartel & Thomson, 2011; Hartel, 2013) to an information environment. She will serve as host for the panel and deliver an expedited historical sketch of its use in Library and Information Science. Following the panelist's presentations, Dr. Hartel will also moderate a discussion.

- **BHARAT MEHRA** is EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice and Professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama. His research explores diversity and social justice in Library and Information Science (LIS) and community informatics or the use of information and communication technologies to empower minority and underserved populations to make meaningful changes in their everyday lives. He has used ethnographic approaches (broadly construed) to complement constructivist, humanistic, and critical research in LIS (e.g., participatory action, narratology or storytelling, scenario-building, etc.) to expand its traditional definition, scope, extent, representation, and relevance while integrating marginalized experiences and perspectives in the design of community-based information systems and services. In this panel, Mehra will deliver a two-part presentation entitled "Critical Ethnography and Social Justice Intersections in LIS: Then & Now." First, he will provide a critical commentary on the contribution of Elfreda Annmary Chatman, the first ethnographer in LIS, and her methodological legacy, historically contextualized within a narrow trajectory of information science research of the times (Mehra 2021a). Second, he will share select glimpses of recent creative, nontraditional autoethnographic applications to further minority representation of "voice" in LIS and promote antiracist discourse and practices in the 21[st]century (Mehra 2021b, 2019; Gray and Mehra, 2021; Black and Mehra, under preparation).

- **BRIAN GRIFFIN** is a scholar and educator working in Toronto. His current research focuses on music production and performance technologies that enhance sensations associated with flow, and that promote peer communication within music communities. Brian's dissertation was an ethnographic study of amateur classical musicians' information practices, paying special attention to the communication of practical knowledge, and unspoken understanding between musicians. Brian's presentation, "Ethnographic methods for studying embodied knowledge" will discuss the value of using research techniques associated with embodied ethnography (Ribeiro 2017; Wacquant 2004) and sensory ethnography (Pink 2009) including observation and first-hand experience, as a means of understanding community skills and attitudes.

- **JENAYA WEBB** is the Public Services and Research Librarian and the Head of Research and Reference Services at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Library, University of Toronto. She earned her MA in cultural anthropology at the University of Alberta and her MLIS at the University of Toronto. She recently co-edited a book titled *Visual research methods: An introduction for library and information studies*, which provides an overview of the use of visual methods such as photo-elicitation, photo diary, and draw-and-write techniques, in LIS. The book is a primer for students, educators, researchers and practitioners in the field and showcases the insights, inspirations, and experiences of LIS researchers and practitioners working with visual methods. In her presentation, "Visual ethnography in Library and Information Science (LIS)*"*, Jenaya will discuss developments in visual methods in the field. She will reflect on her current research, which uses photo-elicitation to explore how library workers at the University of Toronto are creating workplaces at home during the pandemic, and discuss the unique insights that visual ethnography can provide in the remote situations in which many of us are currently living, working, studying, and researching.

- **REBECCA NOONE** is an artist and SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Information Studies, University College London. Situated in the areas of critical information studies and feminist media studies, her research focuses on the politics, discourses, and practices of "location awareness" as oriented within digital mapping platforms. Her dissertation *From Here To: Everyday Wayfinding in the Age of Digital Maps* (University of Toronto, 2020) brings together research creation/arts-based research and grounded discourse analysis to examine situated practices of urban wayfinding. Noone studied ethnography under Dr. Jenna Hartel, and now carries some of its principles to her arts-based research practice. In her presentation "Art Can be a Way in but Not a Way Out: The Arts-Based Paradigm in LIS Research" Noone argues that art-based research can be a means to critically and creatively study digital information practices and cultures but it must also be accountable to ethical questions of what does it mean to participate in, engage with, and/or refuse processes of meaning-making? Noone considers how to apply reflexive frameworks developed by arts-based researchers in fields such as education, environmental studies, and health to emerging arts-based ethnographic research in LIS.

- **HUGH SAMSON** is a first-year PhD student in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario. His research explores the integration of contemplative initiatives, programs, services, spaces, and technologies - or contemplative infrastructure - within information environments (Samson, 2021a). His Master's thesis, *Contemplating Infrastructure: An Ethnographic Study of the University of Toronto Faculty of Information Inforum's iRelax Mindfulness Resource Area*, is noteworthy for methodologically synthesizing ethnography and contemplative inquiry (Samson, 2021b), an innovative, introspective methodology that values first-person perspectives and alternative ways of knowing (Zajonc, 2009; Palmer et al., 2010; Janesick, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2018, 2019, 2020). His presentation, entitled "Enriching Ethnography with Contemplative Insight," will highlight the complementarity of ethnography and contemplative inquiry and suggest that the fusion thereof leads to an enriched research methodology that embraces 'an enlarged view, one that has room in it for the exploration of meaning, purpose, and values and how to serve our common human future' (Zajonc, 2008, as cited in Barbezat & Bergman 2014, p. vii).

- **DANIELLE COOPER** (MLIS, PhD) is the associate director for libraries, scholarly communication, and museums at Ithaka S+R, where she oversees a team of applied social science researchers who study how information practices are evolving in higher education and cultural organizations. Her team specializes in large-scale qualitative projects that are fielded in collaboration with academic libraries towards developing innovative service models. Through these projects her team has worked with over 400 hundred librarians at 134 universities to-date. Danielle's presentation, "From Assessment to UX: Ethnography Applied" will detail how ethnography is adapted to LIS professional contexts, including Ithaka S+R's approaches to collaboration with libraries. As the presentation will demonstrate, far from representing one among many methodologies in the information professional's toolkit, the variations in ethnography's application and the debates about its use, reflect deeper tensions about the relationship between libraries, capitalism, and critical theory.

References

Barbezat, D. P., & Bergman, C. J. (2014). Introduction to the first issue. *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry, 1*(1), vii-viii.

Bal, M. (2017). *Narratology: introduction to the theory of narrative* (Fourth edition). Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

Bedi, & Webb, J. (2020). *Visual research methods : an introduction for library and information studies*. Facet Publishing.

Bernard, H. R., Pelto, P. J., Werner, O., Boster, J., Romney, A. K., Johnson, et al., (1986). The construction of primary data in cultural anthropology. *Current Anthropology, 27*(4), 382-396.

Bhattacharya, K. (2018). Contemplation, imagination, and post-oppositional approaches carving the path of qualitative inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 11*(3), 271-285.

Bhattacharya, K. (2019). Theorizing from the streets: De/colonizing, contemplative, and creative approaches and consideration of quality in arts-based qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & M. K. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry at a crossroads: Political, performative, and methodological reflection* (pp. 109-125). New York: Routledge.

Bhattacharya, K. (2020). Understanding entangled relationships between un/interrogated privileges: Tracing research pathways with contemplative art-making, duoethnography, and pecha kucha. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 20*(1) 75-85.

Black, K., and Mehra, B. (under preparation). *Antiracist Library and Information Science: Racial Justice and Community.* Advances in Librarianship, Volume 51). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing.

Boylorn, R. M., and Orbe, M. P. (2020). *Critical autoethnography: intersecting cultural identities in everyday life* (Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives) (2nd Edition). New York: Routledge.

Chatman, Elfreda A. (1996). The impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 47*(3): 193–206.

Cooke, N. A., and Gibson, A. N. (2020). Vol. 3: Chatman Revisited: Re-examining and Resituating Social Theories of Identity, Access, and Marginalization in LIS (Pre-Prints). *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies. https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/issue/view/11.*

Cooper, D. (2019). On the limits of UX research in academic libraries: notes from the Indigenous Studies Project. *UX in Libraries Yearbook 2018*, 54-63.

Crabtree, A., Nichols, D., O'Brien, J.Rouncefield, M., & Twidale, M. (2000). Ethnomethodologically informed ethnography and information system design. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 51*, 666 - 682.

Fetterman, D. M. (1998). Walking in rhythm: Anthropological concepts. In *Ethnography: Step by step* (2nd ed.), (pp. 26–40). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Foster, N. & Gibbons, S. (2007). *Studying Students: The Undergraduate Research Project at the University of Rochester.* Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries.

Gray, L., & Mehra, B. (2021). Going against the current of hegemonic "White-IST" discourse: A Doctoral program journey from critical student + guide perspectives. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science 62*(2), 182-200.

Hartel, J. & Thomson, L. (2011). Visual approaches and photography for the study of immediate information space. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology, 62*(11), 2214-2224.

Hartel, J. (2007). *Information activities, resources, and spaces in the hobby of gourmet cooking* (doctoral dissertation). University of California, Los Angeles. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Committee: Gregory Leazer (chair), Leah Lievrouw, Mary Niles Maack & Megan Franke.

Hartel, J. (2013). *Ethnography and ethnographic methods*. Paper presented at the *UX bootcamp* workshop at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference 2013 (Toronto, ON, January 30- February 2, 2013).

Janesick, V. J. (2015). *Contemplative qualitative inquiry: Practicing the Zen of research*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

Lanclos, D. & Asher, A., (2016) 'Ethnographish': The state of ethnography in libraries. *Weave: Journal of Library User Experience*, *1*(5).

Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2018). *Handbook of arts-based research*. The Guilford Press.

Loveless, N. (2019). *How to make art at the end of the world: A manifesto for research-creation*. Duke University Press.

Mehra, B. (2019). The Non-white man's burden in LIS education: Critical constructive nudges. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* (Special Issue, A Critical Dialogue: Faculty of Color in Library and Information Science. Edited by Jose Sanchez and Nicole A. Cooke), *60*(3) (July 2019), 198-207.

Mehra, B. (2021a). Elfreda Annmary Chatman in the 21st century: At the intersection of critical theory and social justice imperatives. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* (Vol. 3) (Special Issue theme—Chatman Revisited: Re-examining and Resituating Social Theories of Identity, Access, and Marginalization in LIS. Edited by N. A. Cooke and A. N. Gibson).

Mehra, B. (2021b). Enough Crocodile Tears! Libraries Moving Beyond Performative Antiracist Politics. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy 91* (2): 137-149.

Palmer, P., Zajonc, A., & Scribner, M. (2010). *The heart of higher education: A call to renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pettigrew. (1999). Waiting for chiropody: contextual results from an ethnographic study of the information behaviour among attendees at community clinics. *Information Processing & Management*, *35*(6), 801–817.

Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Ribeiro, N. (2017). Boxing culture and serious leisure among North-American youth: An embodied ethnography. *The Qualitative Report, 22*(6), 1622–1636.

Samson, H. K. (2021a). *Contemplating infrastructure: An ethnographic study of the University of Toronto Faculty of Information Inforum's iRelax mindfulness resource area*. (Master's thesis, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada).

Samson, H. K. (2021b). Contemplative inquiry: A novel research methodology for information science. *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Information Science* (pp. 1-4).

Sandstrom, & Sandstrom, P. E. (1995). The Use and misuse of anthropological methods in library and information science research. *The Library Quarterly, 65*(2), 161–199.

Seale, Hicks, A., & Nicholson, K. (2022). Toward a critical turn in library UX. *College & Research Libraries*, *83*(1).

Priestner, & Borg, M. (2016). *User experience in libraries : applying ethnography and human-centred design*. Routledge.

Wacquant, L. (2004). *Body & soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer.* Oxford University Press.

Zajonc, A. (2009). *When knowing becomes love: Meditation as contemplative inquiry*. Massachusetts: Lindisfarne Books.