Community Informatics & I:
Identity, Intersections, Growth, and More

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Abstract

In this essay, inspired by the timeliness of our chronologically shared symbolic birth (the journal's inaugural issue and my professional career as a faculty member) I briefly discuss and critically analyze the influence of community informatics upon my professional journey, in our mutual symbiotic growth, connections, and divergences. I also share my insights and reflections of the process that might influence readers' own thinking about the past, present, and future of community informatics and its identity, intersections, growth, and more. This opportune moment allows me to draw upon ties to my current work in social justice and inclusion advocacy and trace my privileged positionality to the "nurturing intellectual embrace" of community informatics that opened many proverbial doors and areas of impact over the years. In the process, I use evidence chronicled in my current curriculum vita that serves as a roadmap providing documentation "on the record" of milestones and activities referenced along the journey as I also develop ponderings about the various phases in the emergence and growth of community informatics. In tracing key directions of growth through my own lens of experience and reality with community informatics shows how broader aspects in the larger society, academic world, and information field have strongly curtailed its emergence and adoption. Considering such factors directly might be helpful to shape its positive placement and positionality moving into the future.

Keywords: community informatics; identity; intersections; professional growth.

Introduction

I was delighted to recently receive an email invitation from Dr. Colin Rhinesmith, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Community Informatics*, to contribute a short reflection piece for the journal's 20th Anniversary Issue. I found the timely opportunity more than a coincidence in its personal connection to the growth of my professional career in library and information sciences (LIS), as an interdisciplinary educator and activist/advocate integrating various dimensions of community informatics in my social justice scholarship over the past twenty-five years. My work draws upon intersections in research-teaching-service, the three pillars of the American academy, and applies information and communication technologies (ICTs) embedded in community context to enable and empower minority and underserved populations to meet their needs and expectations. This eclectic interpretation of the term "community informatics" might be outside predominant mainstream definitions, owing to factors like its strong technology-oriented roots in community networks, purist research models, disconnects between traditionally separate academic pillars, and more. Yet, I was pleasantly reminded of the journal's inaugural issue and its coincided birth during the same month of October twenty years back when

I defended my doctoral dissertation in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS: now named the School of Information Sciences) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) (Mehra, 2004). This privileged invitation was also timely as I had my first heart attack and two stents inserted to unplug blocked arteries in the midst of writing this essay. The scary moment of almost facing death provided me long moments of pause, in looking back and looking forward, while tracing some dots in my past, present, and future of engaging with the community informatics construct. The following narrative emerged as part of the recovery process, and I hope readers will overlook any of my lapses as they take insights that are meaningful to them.

I was also struck by the power of time with its ambiguous ambivalence, on the one hand, in how fast it seemed to have flown since my doctoral defense as witnessed in the rapid advancements of immersive and assistive technologies, ubiquitous power of social media in our everyday lives, and its democratization and inclusion of past silenced voices, to name a few topical areas of impact (Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). Yet today the same moment also captures a slowness in the information field's limitations to challenge the hegemonic political dysfunctions of the day, break its umbilical roots in sole neoliberalism, or advance its poorly perceived placement and influence in society (Mehra, 2023a; 2021a). In my assessment, today's time has been slow over the past decades also in how less we have traversed in LIS to dismantle its white-entrenched power mechanisms that keep its infrastructures so firmly in place (e.g., privileged cultural inheritance of Anglo/Eurocentricity, highest situatedness of positivist/postpositivist paradigms, predominant "theory-building" without information actions, lip-service, tokenism, etc.) (Mehra, 2024).

These liberating and limiting forces have been closely tied "for better or for worse" as shackles preventing the fullest advancement and growth of community informatics in LIS and beyond (Mehra, Rioux, & Albright, 2017). The phrase (or some modification thereof) has been historically proclaimed in marriage rituals (or vows) of a sordid past and/or in contemporary practice entrenched by the dictum of several religions, globally dispersed, to prevent the parties (especially women) involved from breaking the symbolic and real contract of unconditional commitment to each other (within a patriarchal structure). Similarly, the characteristics of ambiguous time in its liberating and limiting dimensions represents an intertwined sharpness of a double-edged sword that situates the current placement and impact of "community informatics" while it sits across several disciplinary boundaries, inspires a range of community activists, educators, policymakers, and others, and attempts to further community-embedded realities, processes, and outcomes via the use of ICTs, through "research and praxis—to investigate and contemplate the social, political, economic, and community contexts" that shape the form, function, nature, impact, and effectiveness of the embedded technologies (Rhinesmith, 2023, p. 2). Identifying key directions of growth through my own lens of experience and reality with community informatics shows how broader aspects in a larger society, academic world, and information field have strongly curtailed its emergence and adoption. Considering such factors directly might be helpful to further promote a positive placement and positionality of community informatics moving into the future.

In this essay, inspired by the timeliness of our chronological shared symbolic birth (the journal's inaugural issue and my professional career as a faculty member) I briefly discuss and critically analyze the influence of community informatics upon my professional journey, in our mutual symbiotic growth, connections, and divergences. I also share my insights and reflections of the process that might influence readers' own thinking about the past, present, and future of community informatics and its identity, intersections, growth, and more. This opportune moment allows me to draw upon ties to my current work in social justice and inclusion advocacy and trace my privileged positionality to the "nurturing intellectual embrace" of community informatics that opened many proverbial doors and areas of impact over the years.

In this brief journey of reminiscence, I use evidence chronicled in my current curriculum vita[1] that serves as a roadmap providing documentation "on the record" of milestones and activities referenced along the journey as I also develop ponderings of the various phases in the emergence and growth of community informatics (Cooke & Sanchez, 2019). As we witnessed waves of internet spread and widespread use over the past two decades, the narrative allows me to explore the coming of age of "community informatics", and its limited adoption along the "double-edged sword" metaphor, that might be reflected even in my own journey from humble origins as a poor international graduate student to its current privileged position of an endowed chair in social justice. I draw some parallels in this storytelling process as a tool in discursive narratology (i.e., "formulating a narrative") of congruence in the shaping of my own experiences and professional career growth opportunities and limitations in the adoption of community informatics (Fairclough, 2001; Fehn, Hoesterey, & Tatar, 2014; Mehra, 2021b).

Gently (and very briefly) I structure the narrative chronologically (and thematically) in providing glimpses of the why, when, and "how's" of the topic of community informatics as I experienced it in the following phases: pre-2004 years (as a graduate student in the United States prior to the completion of my doctoral degree); 2005-2011 period (my pre-tenure years as a junior faculty in a mid-southern second-tiered LIS school, according to the U.S. News and World Report rankings of the time); 2012-2018 (tenured faculty member at the same institution); and the current 2019-2024+ (tenured and endowed chair professor in a deep southern third-tiered LIS school, according to current U.S. News and World Report rankings). The limitation of the narrative developed here is its focus on only one person's academic career and adoption and integration of the community informatics construct. Even though it is only one "voice" in the many ways that others have integrated community informatics in their own work, I hope my thematic threads and chronological insights inform readers of ties, connections, and variables that they might have overlooked in their own career paths (World Health Organization, 2021).

My Current Positionality: "Prologue-Of-Sorts"

From January 2019, I joined the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama as Professor and EBSCO Endowed Chair in Social Justice. My scholarship focuses on diversity and social justice in LIS and community informatics or the use of ICTs to empower

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[1] https://bmehra.people.ua.edu/curriculum-vita.html

minority and underserved populations to make meaningful changes in their everyday lives. I have applied action research to further engaged scholarship and community engagement while collaborating with racial/ethnic groups, international diaspora, sexual minorities, rural communities, low-income families, small businesses, and others, to represent their experiences and perspectives in the design of community-based information systems and services. From January 2005 – December 2018 I was a faculty member in the School of Information Sciences, College of Communication and Information, at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville (UTK). I completed my doctoral program in December 2004 from the GSLIS at the UIUC.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to integrate my personal and professional streams of life experience and develop a distinguished national and international reputation as a scholar and advocate for underserved populations in librarianship and information science. As a critical and activist scholar my work aspires toward a more inclusive and just society. I am deeply inspired and apply community informatics (and related/associated concepts) to represent and connect various dimensions and threads across my scholarship. These have been currently disseminated in more than 180 peer-reviewed authored/co-authored publications on equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and international (EDIA+I) social justice content since 1999 (including > 70 in referred journals and nine edited/co-edited books). Even in my role as the current book Series Editor of *Advances in Librarianship* (Emerald Group Publishing), my decolonizing manifesto adopts various philosophies and practices underlying effective community-embedded partnerships. This is manifested in recent calls for single or multi-authored book-length explorations and edited collections with shifting focus on: understudied spaces, invisible populations from the margins, knowledge domains under-researched or under-published, and reflective critical assessments of actions to change entrenched behaviors and systemic imbalanced inequities in different LIS communities of practice. Community informatics is a major criterion in my assessment work as a current Editorial Board Member of reputed peer-reviewed journals, like the *International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion (IJID&I)*; *Journal of Community Informatics*; *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science (JELIS)*; *Library Quarterly*; *Pakistan Journal of Library & Information Science*; and the *Public Library Quarterly*. As editor/co-editor of various journal's special issues on EDIA+I content (e.g., *Journal of the Association of Information Science and Technology*, *Library Trends*, *JELIS, IJID&I,* and the *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries Journal*) I have focused on topics and matters of concern related to integrating community informatics in LIS and other disciplines. Mehra (2023b) explicates select historical instances of "community networking" and digital divides, information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D), and social justice intersections via an impact-driven framework, whose significance is demonstrated via my select information-related social justice research that was conducted in the United States[2].

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[2] https://tinyurl.com/mehra-jasist2022

Pre-2004 Years (Privileged Exposure to "Community Informatics")

As they say, being at the right place at the right time makes the world of a difference in a provision to life-changing opportunities and challenges (Burton et al., 2012). So, it was for me that an admission to the GSLIS @ UIUC as a doctoral student opened many proverbial doors related to community informatics that invariably shaped my career path and job prospects. First, an introduction to the construct of community informatics gave me an opportunity to integrate advocacy during my past graduate education over two master's programs in landscape architecture (1997) and South Asian and Middle Eastern studies (1999) bridging into the LIS world via a social justice agenda collaborating with underserved populations foregrounded in community building and community development initiatives via ICT use (broadly conceived) (Mehra, 2015). Some community informatics-inspired projects collaborating with underserved populations and others during this time included (Mehra, 2006):

- Use of mixed methods and critical research of "glocal" internet use by international teaching assistants at the UIUC to navigate culturally alien information environments [1999-2002] (Mehra & Papajohn, 2007).
- Participatory action research to evaluate health information support services and role of public libraries in development of community information collaborating with African American women members of SisterNet, a group of activist Black women in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois [1999-2002] (Mehra, Bishop, Bazzell, & Smith, 2002).
- Complementary user-centered methodologies and situated evaluation of citizen scientists' use of biological information browsing environments with flora and fauna image collections [2001-2002] (Heidorn, Mehra, & Lokhaiser, 2002).
- Educational collaboratories as socio-technical systems integrating visualization tools in the K-12 STEM curriculum (Mehra, Bruce, Harnisch, & Comstock, 2002).
- Technology training, development of culturally relevant online content, action research with low-income individuals and small business owners, via the auspices of the Prairienet Community Network in East Central Illinois and Community Collaboration for Economic Development (initiative) [2001] (Mehra, 2005).
- Application of socially grounded methods and content analysis of electronic interactions via computer-mediated communication as a form of political empowerment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois [2001] (Mehra & Srinivasan, 2007).
- Building of geographic information systems to map the cultural and physical information resources, use of ICTs in community technology centers, participatory design, service learning, and   action research with minority residents in East St. Louis, Illinois, via the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) [fall 1995-fall 1996] (Mehra, Bishop, & Bazzell, 2000).

Second, in the closing years of the 20th century under the shadows of "social informatics" (i.e., "body of research that examines the social aspects of computerization", especially in organizational contexts), community informatics was beginning to establish its own identity (Gurstein, 2000; Kling, 2007, p. 205). I was introduced to several related constructs during my doctoral program via readings in

classes and participation in scholarly discourse; these shaped my conceptualization and implementation linking to various social justice projects during the time, such as design of telecommunication infrastructure and computer networks, social capital and social networks, digital divide, and more. My awareness was strengthened by proposal development and accepted invitations to specialized professional gatherings where I had the opportunity to engage with experts (researchers, policymakers, practitioners, students) on cutting-edge aspects of community informatics and related topics. These included: Mini-symposium on Critical Cyberculture Studies (2003), Association of Internet Researchers (2000, 2001), Mini-Conference on Community Informatics/Community Networking Research (2002), and the Digital Divide Doctoral Student Workshop (2001), to name a few.

Lastly (though not least), was the inspiring education integrating social justice, everyday community inquiry, and community action from the likes of luminaries, such as Drs. Ann Peterson Bishop, Linda Smith, Bertram (Chip) Bruce, Martin Wolske, P. Bryan Heidorn, Caroline Haythorthwaite, and others that opened potential intellectual and practical directions for the adoption and integration of community informatics in my future scholarship.

The 2005-2011 Period (My Pre-tenure Years as a Junior Faculty)

See Mehra (2021b) for a full description of the initial resistance that I encountered as a junior faculty member to the widespread acceptance of my community informatics and social justice work in the LIS tenure and promotion process within an entrenched American academy. Interrelated challenges included barriers emerging from white elitism shaping tenure and promotion policies at the broader level of an exclusive academia. Opposition to diversity, inclusion, and community informatics (or social justice research) also emerged within narrow and biased trends in historical LIS education shaping contemporary practice. In addition, a related hurdle included unhealthy forces representing "dirty economics" in the scholarly publishing business, with its murky relationship and conflict of interests between the vendors/publishers and academic institutions, their administrators, and faculty that controlled tenure and promotion processes and created biases against non-traditional research within a neoliberal and corporatized intellectual enterprise (Mehra, Bishop, & Partee II, 2018).

Further, Mehra and Gray (2020) coined the term "White-IST (white + elitist)" to critique a biased culturally inherited preference and privilege bestowed on only positivist/postpositivist paradigms and quantitative approaches (e.g., experimental design) in LIS. The authors also question the Anglo/Eurocentric practice in LIS of deriving authoritative inspirations solely from poorly constructed qualitative approaches from the social sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.) that themselves internalized positivist/postpositivist practices. The resulting implications have been years of perpetuated biases in LIS against interpretive, constructivist, and humanist approaches, mixed methods, community-based participatory action research, semi-autoethnographic methods, and social justice advocacy. Mehra (2024) calls for using critical race theory to deconstruct some of these biases "one brick at a time" and dismantle the white-centered power structures within the entrenched citadel of the LIS academy, including: decolonize a privileged cultural inheritance of Anglo/Eurocentricity [brick 1]; dethrone highest

situatedness of positivist/postpositivist paradigms [brick 2]; and, destabilize predominant "theory-building" without information actions [brick 3] (Dick, 1995; Lankes, 2016).

In addition, the administrative placement of my LIS department was within a "communication and information" college (at my prior and current institution) that seemed to have become a trend amongst second-and-third tiered LIS schools (according to the U. S. News and World Reports) blindly replicating the "Rutgers model" during the times (Ngulube & Mhlongo, 2015). In my experience, this seemed partially misplaced and counter to the growth and effective inclusion of community informatics in LIS. When traditional academics and positivist/postpositivist faculty belonging to these "related" disciplines (e.g., advertising and public relations, communication studies, journalism and electronic media) with widely varying value systems and entrenched priorities, refused to recognize my community informatics scholarship as "legit research" in comparing to their positivist/postpositivist parameters, they thus stayed closed to truly embracing interdisciplinarity that community-embedded synergies represented (Arnold & Stillman, 2013; Graff, 2016; Hukill & Lassner, 1989; Palmer, 2010). This was discordant since it was despite how hard college administrators and upper-level university officials succumbing to the pressures of the marketplace tried to impose "top-down" and force the faculty to espouse some dimensions of interdisciplinary characteristics while the resistance at the ground-zero continued to stay unpalatable (Ruben, 1992). My counter-narrative strategies during this time included developing and adopting community engagement in praxis as a model to shape my teaching practices that provided LIS students in the virtual and on-campus classroom opportunities to develop community-embedded projects that partnered them with self-selected external community-based agencies to deliver tangible information-related products with/for them (Gibson & Hughes-Hassell, 2017; Mehra & Robinson, 2009). The value of the work was difficult to not recognize, even by entrenched detractors and postpositivist advertising scholars, when the student-agency collaboration provided concrete information-related evidence of community impact to directly justify local and regional tax-payer's support of land-grant universities (such as the UTK) (Edwards, Robinson, & Unger, 2013; Mehra & Elder, 2018).

Thus, my community informatics-inspired efforts were initially marginally recognized, relatively in the school/college/university until the closing years of this time-period, when the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) decided to fund a teaching grant (followed by a second) where I served as principal investigator to operationalize an online curriculum for rural library paraprofessionals that integrated information technology (IT) and management competences in the project design[3] (October 2009 – September 2013). Even though "research" about graduate teaching was not directly associated with community informatics in predominant networks of the time, it was related and through my collaborative publications on the projects, I was able to create an initially weak recognition that was strengthened through associated vocabularies like "change agents" and "community anchors" within an emerging "community engagement" construct (Mehra, Black, Singh, & Nolt, 2011a; 2011b).

Some additional community informatics-inspired projects collaborating with underserved populations and others during the time included:

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[3] https://imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-01-09-0031-09

- Participatory action research to further LGBTQ+ advocacy and social justice activism to develop culturally supportive community information services via LGBTQ+ policy development (e.g., domestic partnership benefits policy formulation); LGBTQ+ curriculum development; library diversity services, practices, and resources design; youth information-seeking behaviors, etc. with the LGBTQ+ community in Tennessee [2005-2017] (Mehra & Braquet, 2007; 2006).
- Critical research of community health information support services for people living with HIV/AIDS in Tennessee's public libraries [2008] and academic libraries [2006] (Mehra & Albright, 2006; Mehra & Dessel, 2011).
- Critical evaluation research of minority students at the UTK: a) Cross-cultural information needs, information seeking behaviors, and ICT use of international Asian graduate students [2006] (Mehra & Bilal, 2007); b) Critical priority needs of African American women students and culturally relevant information support services [2006] (Mehra & Lambert, 2008).

The 2012-2018 Period (Tenured Faculty Member @ Second-Tiered LIS Program in the Mid-South)

I served as Chair of the College's Community Engagement and Outreach Committee at the UTK over several prior years, yet with inadequate acknowledgement or interest amongst majority of faculty across the units in establishing value of their scholarship along principles of community informatics and with nearly no support at the university and college levels (Klaw, Tully, and Ikeda, 2023. However, in 2012-2015 I served as a member of the Carnegie Application Advisory Committee that helped the University get recognized as an "community engaged" institution and resulted in a formal designation by the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2015 (UT System News, 2015). Following the award, as a member of the UTK Academic Outreach and Engagement Council (2016-2018) I assisted to further faculty roles in promoting engagement and academic outreach in the university (e.g., integrating elements in the tenure and promotion guidelines as a member of its Promotion and Tenure Implementation Committee).

During this time, I served as a principal investigator on a second teaching grant awarded by the IMLS[4] to address information poverty in the Southern and Central Appalachian rural libraries and communities (October 2012 – September 2016). The "Information Technology for Rural Librarians' Master's Scholarship Program" (ITRL 2) integrated online classes on IT and rural management to train 13 library paraprofessionals develop tangible skills and information products situated in rural contexts that furthered understanding of community informatics in terms of engagement through online teaching (Mehra, Singh, Hollenbach, & Partee, 2017; Mehra & Singh, 2017). Additional IMLS grants, one focused directly on assessment and planning of community engagement initiatives in the SCA rural libraries (July 2017 – June 2019)[5], and a second on implementation of community engagement in the specific context of Tennessee's rural

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[4] https://imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-71-12-0014-12
[5] https://imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-97-17-0039-17

public libraries and small businesses (October 2014 – September 2016)[6] helped better draw connections between community informatics and community engagement (Mehra, Sikes, & Singh, 2020). Some additional community informatics-inspired projects collaborating with underserved populations and others during the time included:

- Selection in two of the U. S. Department of State's Diplomacy Lab Programs (Fall 2015 and Spring 2016) to facilitate student advocacy and engagement in foreign policy formulation in support of LGTBQ+ people in Africa and Lain America via representation of culturally relevant information in geographic information systems (Mehra et al, 2018).
- Digital media news representation in India on LGBT+ news coverage and possible role of urban and rural libraries to further human rights protection and political advocacy (Mehra & Hernandez, 2017; 2016).

The 2019-2024+ (current) Period (Tenured + Endowed Chair @ Third-Tiered LIS Program in the Deep South)

Thanks to the privileged opportunity of an endowed chair professorship, I have been able to integrate social justice and inclusion advocacy as a deliberate, systematic, action-oriented, community-engaged strategy in extending the information-communication curriculum for doctoral and master's students (Mehra, 2021c). In the process, the relationship with community engagement (and thereby community informatics) has also been strengthened. ICTs are involved in every aspect of information (or communication)-related work. Convincing colleagues in an entrenched college has been a challenge since most faculty comparatively overvalue solely theoretical jargon in communication studies and/or undervalue community impacts and information actions compared to traditional positivist/postpositivist advertising research (Dayley, 2020). A recent conversation I had with a college-level white male dean during an interview for an administrative position illustrates the challenge: While complementing me on my community-engaged research agenda and application materials, he asked me to not second-guess or change anything from my interview even as he shared his decision of selecting a white female positivist/postpositivist computational analytics scholar for the position. I am sure there were many factors to consider. Yet, we will continue to face hurdles undervaluing community informatics in LIS (or social justice and inclusion advocacy) as reflected in such biased decisions that seemed to emerge from the discipline's misplaced structuring in an administrative college that is heavily tilted toward positivist/postpositivist research (Bonnici, Subramaniam, & Burnett, 2009). This dysfunctional positionality seems to be connected to a poor representative lingering effect of aping the biased social sciences (that privileged solely positivist/postpositivist paradigms) and provided limited academic value to community-engaged scholarship (Mehra & Gray, 2020; Winberry, 2021).

One meaningful community informatics-applied strategy I have adopted focuses on the local environment of the 230 public libraries in Alabama [2019-2024]. Conducting web assessment and content analysis of their websites has provided evidence to develop information support services and further data curation and strategic planning directions in critical resistance

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[6] https://imls.gov/grants/awarded/lg-52-14-0093-14

to the conservative politics of the region and support marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ populations, people who are differently abled, and disadvantaged women (Mehra & Jaber, 2023a; 2023b; 2020). The work also resulted in extending the role of Alabama's public libraries as social justice advocates in the health domain, proposing strategic actions to support digital information access and service delivery in support of people impacted by the Opioid crises in a region that is one of the worst affected in the country (Mehra & Jaber, 2021).

Additionally, three ongoing IMLS grant projects involving my participation as principal investigator (or co-principal investigator) draw on research-teaching-service intersections in a community-engaged model to further social justice and social equity agendas to meet the needs and expectations of minority and underserved populations [2022 onwards]. They include community collaborations across institutions and organizations, related to civic engagement and racial justice[7], social justice and archival studies intersections[8], and inclusion of diverse families in online STEM resource development[9] (Mehra et al., 2024; Mehra, Riter, & Harris, 2024).

Conclusion

How do glimpses of my professional trajectory briefly narrated here connect more strongly to, and/or support the history of *The Journal of Community Informatics,* and any broader trends in community informatics and general drifts in LIS over the years? I note a few thoughts in this regard. For one, continuing to legitimize ICT use, whether it is in research-teaching-service intersections or bridging education (theory)-practice (work force praxis), as integral within the scope of "community informatics" is important (Hoy & Johnson, 2015). It will promote inclusion and expand the horizons of community informatics beyond isolated categorizations of narrow-minded academics, practitioners, or others (Wolske, Rhinesmith, & Kumar, 2014). Taking this further, there is a strong need in community informatics to recognize and integrate within its boundaries, tangible impacts on local and regional communities (variously defined and measured), that is, those initiatives that make a direct difference in everyday lives (beyond privileged academic settings, corporate organizations, etc.) (Carroll, 2012). This would help justify tax-payer's support of universities and colleges (especially land-grant institutions) and establish greater relevance to diverse knowledge domains in the practice of community informatics (Clement et al., 2012). Requiring narratives of social justice actions as mandatory, and not an optional expectation, in any forthcoming work published in the journal will "nudge" pedantic researchers, scholars, and others who have traditionally stayed entrenched in their solely theory formulations provide greater value to their disconnected and abstracted work (Allen & Foth, 2011; Eubanks, 2007). Steering beyond postpositivist approaches to expand and integrate constructivist, humanist, and critical paradigms (amongst others) is also key to the growth and resilience of community informatics (and the journal) (Johnson, 2015). Relying solely on Anglo/Eurocentric authoritative sources and scholarship is another "no-no" (Demarco, 2023). My

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[7] https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/lg-252354-ols-22
[8] https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-252356-ols-22
[9] https://www.imls.gov/grants/awarded/re-252310-ols-22

ongoing and future activities as an advocate, scholar, and educator in LIS will continue pushing "community informatics" in these directions.

The marriage between the field of information (including archival science, information science, library studies, museum studies, etc.) and "communication-related" disciplines might sound like a good "bridging" approach, however, in my experience this has been only effective philosophically to a large extent (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). Unfortunately, communication and information intersections have remained merely a theoretical exercise in predominant networks as far as building synergies of meaning, complementariness, and mutual understanding and respect of diverse knowledge domains and research/impact areas in LIS (Nothaft et al., 2020; Zorn, 2002). Administrators in higher education propounded the value of such "bridging" for all their worth, from a management and organizational perspective, to validate their decisions around streamlining, job-cuts, and efficient use of resources (Waisbord, 2019). Realistically however, there has been much resistance from faculty in disciplines like advertising, business communication, journalism, mass communication, public relations, speech communication, etc. toward a fuller integration of LIS (in its diversities of sub-disciplinary forms, scope, and content) (Dong et al., 2018). This has also been related to a privilege bestowed on solely positivist/postpositivist scholarship in some of the "communication-related" disciplines (Sulistijanto et al., 2023). It is tied therein to poor perceptions toward scholarship around community informatics in LIS as not "true research" (Bergman, Kirtiklis, & Siebers, 2020).

Embedded within a dysfunctional and imbalanced capitalist society that is heavily tilted toward corporatization and neoliberal realities in higher education, these "communication-related" disciplines intrinsically have quite a divergent positionality compared to traditional LIS and its trajectory and growth related to value systems, priorities, ideologies, and more (Baruchson-Arbib, 2002; Hjørland, 2002). This conflicting mode of existence has not found a satisfactory resolution in many contexts so far (Pasadeos, 2000). A lack (or limited) acknowledgement toward community informatics is unfortunately tied to this reality, and until the former aspect stays unresolved in majority perspectives, the placement and existence of community informatics (in LIS and beyond) might remain questionable (Sweeney & Rhinesmith, 2017).

Who should be charged with this task in community informatics to address the challenge and who should lead it moving into the future? In my opinion, so far in the past unfortunately, the burden has fallen on people like me and others, who have developed LIS scholarship as bridge-builders in integrating knowledge canons from interdisciplinary (multi-or-transdisciplinary) threads across the communication and information disciplines within and connected through the community informatics construct (Percell, Sarin, Jaeger, & Bertot, 2018). We have seen some successful "bridge-building" in LIS and community informatics, for example, selectively across with computer science, business/organizational management, or health informatics, regarding the use of ICTs, digital media and digital humanities, or telecommunications (Chimah & Ezenwuzor, 2023; Martin, Weinfurter, Alpi, & Sittig, 2022; Virkus & Garoufallou, 2019). However, across the field of information and "communication-related" disciplines such synergies have been limited or totally conspicuous by their absence in most contexts (Alajmi & Alshammari, 2020). It is thus, up to scholars, educators, technocrats, journalists, students, and others from the new generations who work across these disciplinary

spheres of scholarship to build such connections via illustrative evidence of their scholarship integrated through community informatics.

As we glimpsed in this short narrative, what impact human beings can make at an individual level is an interactive response to their external environment and its sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socioeconomic circumstances (or shortcomings) (Stern, 2000). These intertwined elements can then serve as limiting or liberating factors that determine the success or failure of a particular action, whether related to education, health, economic wellbeing, political resistance, or any other facet of existence (Rimer, Viswanath, & Glanz, 2015). In laying out the trajectory of my career path and nuances surrounding the adoption of community informatics, I have identified some conditions of the external environment (e.g., institutional placement in the American South, ranking of the LIS program at the time, positionality of the program in the administrative structuring of the college, etc.) to trace select qualitative correlations that shaped the effectiveness of the community informatics construct in my social justice and inclusion advocacy scholarship. My hope is that readers can map parallels in their own professional journeys to identify challenges and opportunities as they pursue initiatives to help support the growth of community informatics into their future. Such efforts might also help facilitate the resilience of community informatics (and this journal) for another twenty years, and more.

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