

Toward a Critical Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice

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Evidence-based library and information practice (EBLIP) ostensibly aims to be the result of the best available “evidence” and recent work has aimed to better, and more inclusively, define what counts as this kind of evidence. This is a welcome change, and, I would offer in this paper, a useful starting point to continue to explore the rhetorical and practical implications of the term Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice. I argue that EBLIP should consciously interrogate the rhetorical situation around its reproduction, and purposefully advocate for the inclusion of kinds of evidence that are often de-emphasized in a neoliberal higher education landscape. This understanding of EBLIP is decidedly critical. As much as I hesitate to amend every term relating to information studies and librarianship with the signifier ‘critical’, it feels necessary in a research and educational industry that has a vested interest in the continued obfuscation of terminology and the ideologies it reifies by language.

The Critical Evidence-Based Library and Information Practice(CEBLIP) I propose in this paper departs from the current understanding of EBLIP in using the theoretical framework of Standpoint Epistemology to insist that the best evidence to inform our practice is found in the work of women, women of color and other POC. This paper will pull from the work of critical theorists Sandra Harding and Patricia Hill Collins especially to explore how the concepts of strong objectivity and Black Feminist Epistemology can shape our discussions about evidence in LIS practice and research. I will also apply Sara Ahmed’s work to discuss how CEBLIP may bring into relief the rhetorical and phenomenological relationship between whiteness and ‘evidence.’

Working within critical evidence-based paradigm, our teaching and research focuses on examining researcher positionality and pushes us to ask different questions about the design of research projects, including critiquing research questions and chosen methods. Instead of asking, “What might this research tell us about the population or issue being studied?” we might ask, “What does this research tell us about the researcher?” Instead of asking “What did the researcher conclude based off their data?” we might ask “Is this the best way to learn about this particular population or issue?”; “If we start thought from marginalized lives, how might this project be different?”