

Scaffolding Your Instruction with Epistemology

CLPS 2020 Virtual Conference

Kirsten Dean, she/her

kirstend@vt.edu

Slides: tinyurl.com/clpsdean



UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
VIRGINIA TECH.



Kirsten Dean, she/her (M.A., M.L.I.S.)

High-Impact Practices Librarian

University Libraries at Virginia Tech

In this video:

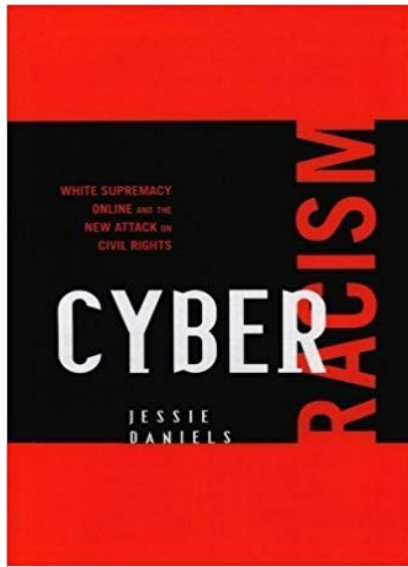
- Why focus on epistemology?
- What does this focus mean for library instruction, from individual lessons/learning objects to programs/curricula?



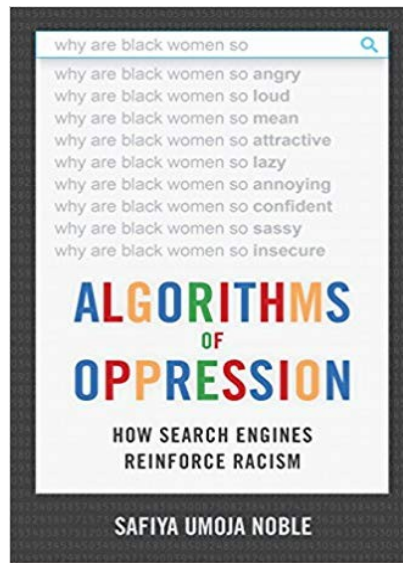


What keeps you grounded when the bottom falls out?

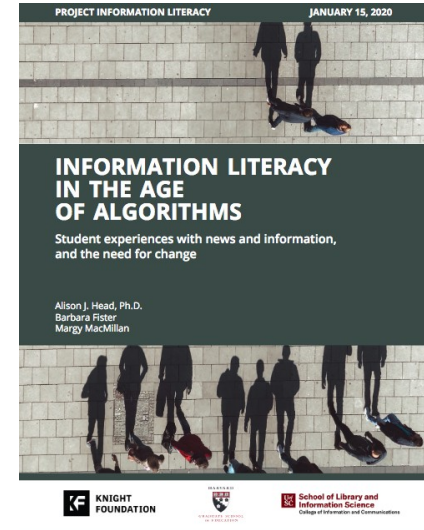




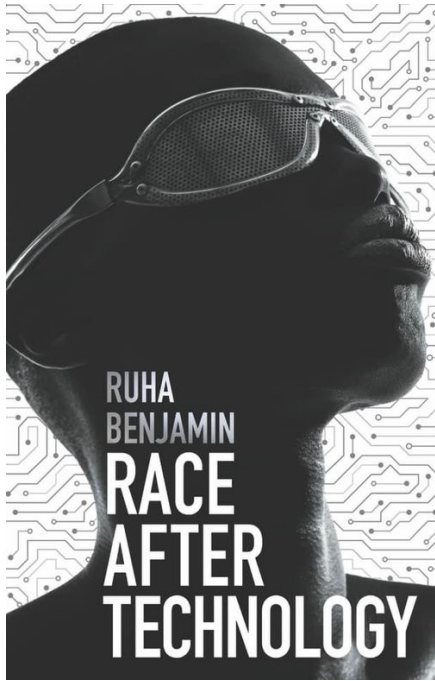
“the Internet offers a new terrain for those who seek and produce stigmatized knowledge, blurring the lines between history and propaganda” (Daniels, 2009, p. 131)



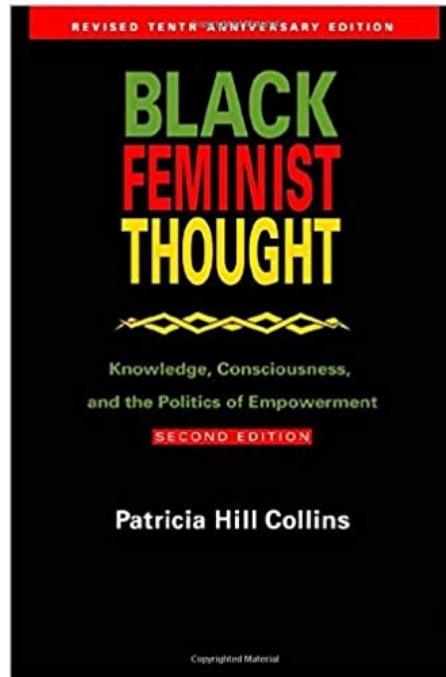
“Search does not merely present pages but structures knowledge... In practice, the higher a web page is ranked, the more it is trusted” (Noble, 2018, p. 148, 155)



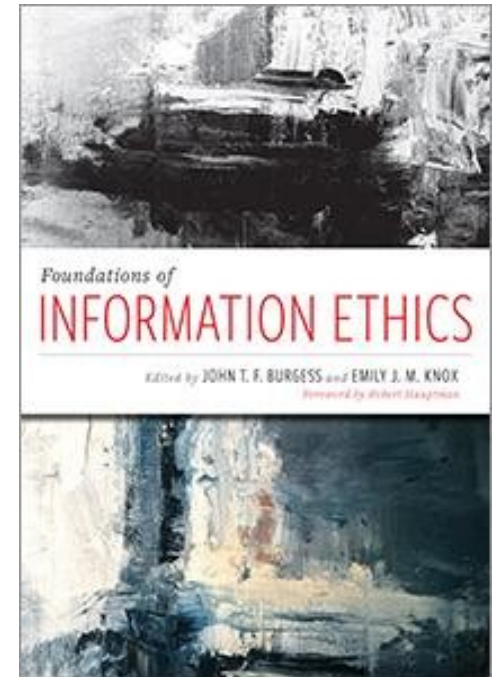
“These findings raise questions about whether the gap between what students learn in school and what they need to know is deepening at a time of an epistemological crisis” (Head et al., 2020,



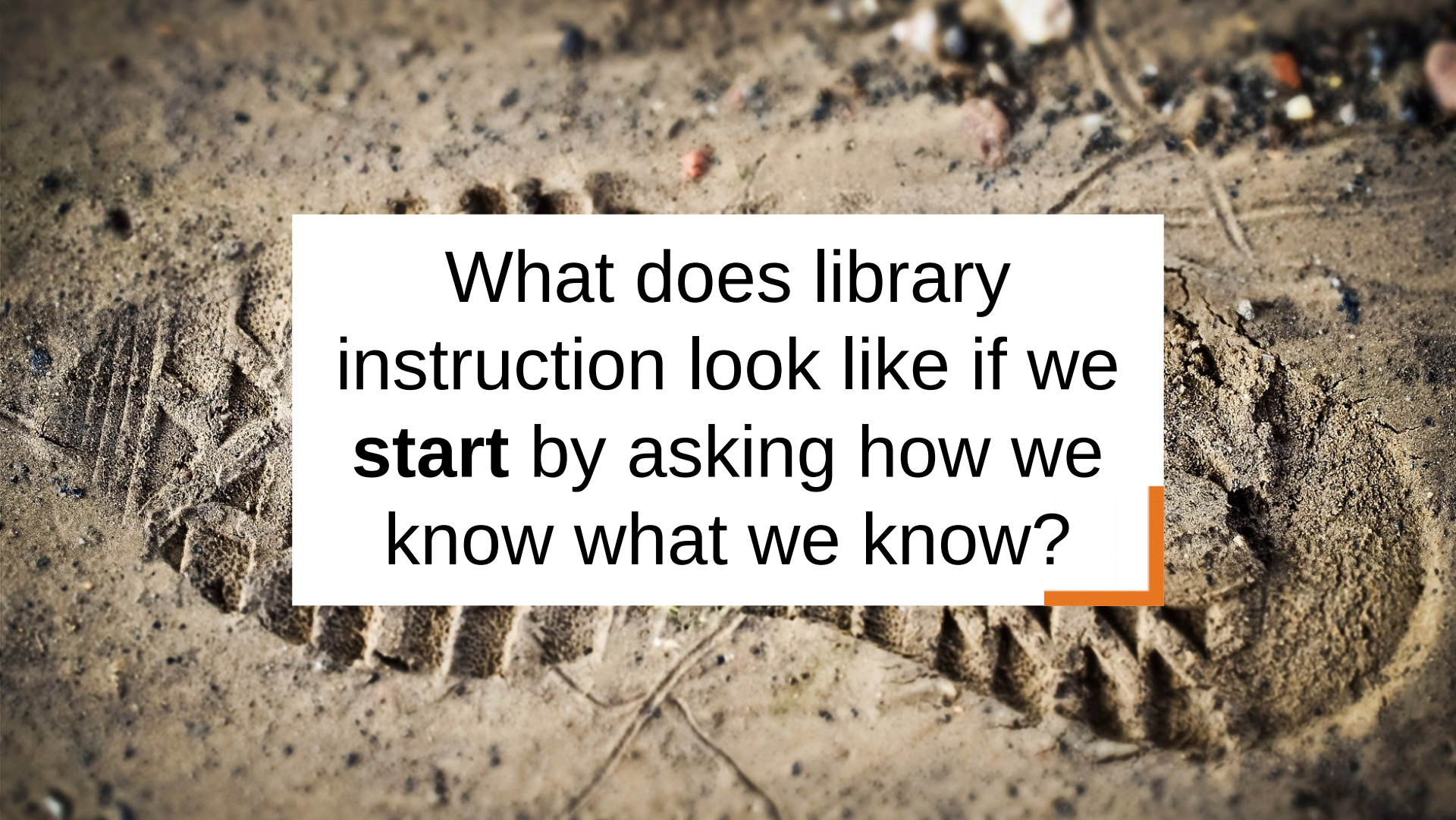
*Race After Technology:
Abolitionist Tools for the
New Jim Code*
by Ruha Benjamin (2019)



Black Feminist Thought by
Patricia Hill Collins (1990)



*Foundations of
Information Ethics* edited
by John T.F. Burgess &
Emily J.M. Knox (2019)



What does library
instruction look like if we
start by asking how we
know what we know?



Define Your Terms

Epistemology = broadly, the study of knowledge: what it is, how it is acquired, how it is justified or validated, etc.

Personal epistemology = your beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowing

Ethics & Epistemology: “Epistemology and ethics are both concerned with evaluations: ethics with evaluations of conduct, epistemology with evaluations of beliefs and other cognitive acts. Of considerable interest to philosophers are the ways in which the two kinds of evaluations relate to one another” (Feldman, 1998).

See also: [Moral epistemology](#), [Social epistemology](#), [Virtue epistemology](#)



Mike Caulfield
@holden

Our current crisis is bred from teaching and romanticizing an individualistic epistemology in a world that can only run on a strong understanding of social epistemology.

4:02 PM · Aug 14, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

6 Retweets and comments 41 Likes

“Our current crisis is bred from teaching and romanticizing an individualistic epistemology in a world that can only run on a strong understanding of social epistemology”
(Caulfield, Aug. 14, 2020)



Mike Caulfield @holden · Aug 11

What if the real problem is that the conspiracy adopters hold *very* Enlightenment ideas about science as individual self-verification of truth, rather than social epistemologies? And what if that individualistic epistemology is toxic when applied to the complexities of our time?

2 5 9



Mike Caulfield @holden · Aug 11

It ties so much of what people get wrong together -- the focus on individual scientists rather than processes, individual results rather than the knowledge base of a field, individual experiments vs. the wealth of other activities that makes science work.

1 1 5

“What if the real problem is that the conspiracy adopters hold *very* Enlightenment ideas about science as individual self-verification of truth, rather than social epistemologies?”
(Caulfield, Aug. 11, 2020)

Implicit
Personal
Transformative

Generational
Indigenous

Cultural

Embodied
Decolonized

Communal
Queer



<https://whoseknowledge.org>

What beliefs about knowledge am I un/intentionally endorsing through my library instruction - from individual lesson plans to programmatic/curricular goals?





Balancing Challenges in Library Instruction

Disinformation

“One-shot” sessions

Viral propaganda

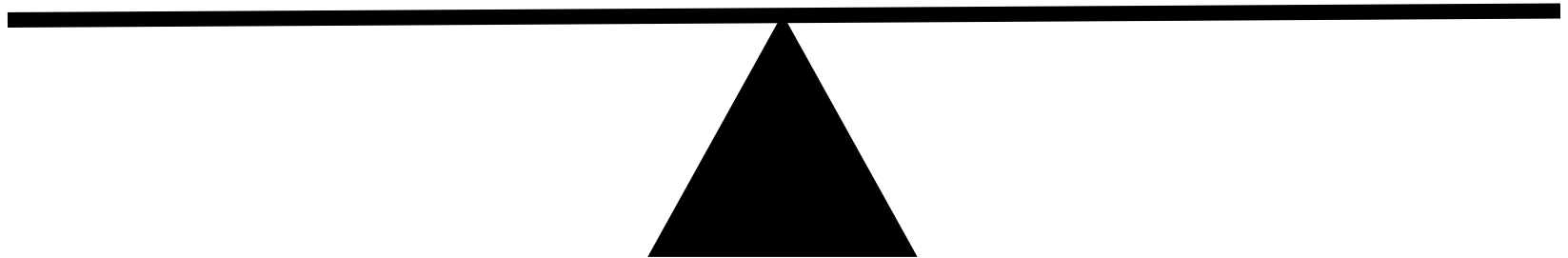
Instructor expectations

Racism

Areas of expertise

Algorithmic bias

Assignment-focused skills



In Defense of “Skills”?

“It’s difficult to both help students grasp the basics (e.g. how to work through the call number to find a specific book) and branch out into a more critical approach to research. It’s helpful to know the rules before breaking them...I worry sometimes the critical approach may actually do a disservice to our first-gen students, if emphasizing the critical side displaces opportunities to practice the basics” (p. 23)

- anonymous research participant, as quoted by E. Tewell (2018)



In Practice

Instructor Request: “For their upcoming assignment, students need to find and cite three peer-reviewed articles on their chosen topic. I’d like to request a library class on how to identify scholarly sources and use library databases to find them.”

- What epistemological questions does this raise?
- Does a focus on knowledge influence your lesson plan?



Scaffolding: Reinforcement over Repetition



Lesson: Fact-Checking

1. “Circle of Trust”: Where do you get info? Who are your trusted experts?
2. Practice SIFT skills

Curriculum: Academic Research

3. “Critical Concepts” in FYE - what is “knowledge”? what is “research”?
4. Research assignments in FYW - what kinds of knowledge are valued in academic systems?

Starting with “Knowledge” vs. “Information”

“Knowledge” as:

- **Transformation** of individual and social information processing into beliefs about our reality
- **Touchstone** to balance competing priorities
- **Thread** throughout multiple learning experiences
- **Unlearning** as much as learning



Don't underestimate students.
Start with the "big ideas."

Step One: Interrogating Ourselves

“Before addressing how students can gain philosophical insight through epistemology, it is important to view epistemology from another angle: the instructor’s personal epistemic approach, which ultimately manifests itself through classroom methodology” (Fox, 2014, p. 244)

- How much/how often have you reflected on your own beliefs about knowledge?
- Do any of your beliefs about knowledge change depending on context (e.g., in different academic disciplines)?
- How does your personal epistemology affect your teaching?





Next Up: Discussion!

Please join on

Wednesday, Sept. 16 at 1:30 MST / 4:30 EDT

Register here: <https://clps.arizona.edu/registration-schedule>

References

Daniels, J. (2009). *Cyber racism: White supremacy online and the new attack on civil rights*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Feldman, R. (1998). Epistemology and ethics. In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Taylor and Francis. Retrieved 19 Aug. 2020, from <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/epistemology-and-ethics/v-1>. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-P017-1

Fox, M. J. (2014). Enabling gender-inclusivity in LIS education through epistemology, ethics, and essential questions. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 55(3), 241-250.

Head, A. J., Fister, B., & MacMillan, M. (2020). Information literacy in the age of algorithms: Student experiences with news and information, and the need for change. *Project Information Literacy*. <https://www.projectinfolit.org/uploads/2/7/5/4/27541717/algoreport.pdf>

Noble, S.U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York: NYU Press.

Tewell, E. (2018). The practice and promise of critical information literacy: Academic librarians' involvement in critical library instruction. *College & Research Libraries*, 79(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.79.1.10>

