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Evaluation's ultimate goal is to provide credible evidence that fosters greater understanding and improves decision making, all aimed at improving social conditions and promoting healthy, just, and equitable communities.

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Evaluations of Future

Inclusive, Equity-Focused, Useful, and Used

Over the past 20 years, there has been a large increase in the number of evaluations conducted and utilized. During the same time period, there has been an emphasis on the professionalization of evaluation and evaluators and on the skills and knowledge evaluators need to be effective. In today's world, along with having more traditional evaluation skills and knowledge, evaluators need to understand how to implement high-quality evaluations within different cultural contexts in a world that is increasingly distrustful of data and facts. The goal of this book is to provide readers with this knowledge and those skills.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the book, its goals, and its underlying philosophy. It includes an introduction to the content, the major cross-chapter themes, and the framework of the book. In addition, it introduces the concept of **cultural competence**, which is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures (Make It Our Business, 2017), and **cultural responsiveness**, which is the application of the abilities described in the definition of cultural competence. Along with covering issues of objectivity and bias, the chapter discusses the declining trust in science and data, the rise of fake news and alternative facts, and how this can impact evaluators and evaluation. **Fake news** has been defined as “false new[s] stories, often spread as propaganda on social media. It can also characterize any information that one finds critical about [oneself]” (Dictionary.com, 2020b, para. 1) while **alternative facts** are the “opposite of reality (which is delusion), or the opposite of truth (which is untruth)” (Dictionary.com, 2020a, para. 1).

It is expected that after completing this chapter and the activities, the reader will have an overview of the content covered in the book and know its goals and the general

After reading this chapter and participating in the activities, readers will be able to meet the following learning objectives:

- Describe the book's goals and the authors' philosophy underlying the book
- Have a general knowledge of the content to be covered in the book
- Describe what a racialized and social justice perspective is
- Explain the meaning and importance of cultural competence and responsiveness in terms of evaluation
- Explain ways that bias and perceptions of objectivity can skew evaluations
- List some challenges of doing evaluation in today's world

themes that cut across chapters, including the influence of a racialized and social justice perspective on the book. Having a **racialized perspective** “means paying attention, even when uncomfortable, to the ways in which race shapes problem definition and solution as well as particular group’s access to opportunity” (Thomas, Madison, Rockcliffe, DeLaine, & Lowe, 2018, p. 521).

An Overview of the Book

The focus of this book is to help students and other readers understand both the art and the science of evaluation. It covers theoretical and practical issues related to evaluation of programs, particularly social programs and projects, with an emphasis on viewing evaluation topics through a social justice, diversity, and inclusive perspective. The book provides an approach for evaluators to aim toward being reflective practitioners and culturally competent professionals.

Structure of the Book

Each chapter begins with a series of **learning objectives**, or “brief statements that describe what students will be expected to learn” (Great Schools Partnership, 2014, para. 1 []), and ends with a summary of the chapter. Numerous examples and activities are included for the purpose of illustrating how the information in the book can be applied in actual settings. Within each chapter is commentary from practicing evaluators and evaluation users, called Voices From the Field. Also included is an annotated list of supplemental resources and/or tools for those who would like to delve more deeply into the areas covered. As can be seen in this chapter, evaluation-related terms are bolded the first time they are defined, and at the end of the book is a glossary of the bolded terms. The book as a whole and the individual chapters cover how race and social justice issues affect different aspects of evaluation and how readers can use that knowledge to improve evaluation quality and usefulness.

Chapter Content

The book is composed of 16 chapters. This, the first chapter, provides an overview of the book and its underlying premises. Chapter 2, “Evaluation Ethics and Quality Standards,” covers ethical and quality standards for the profession. Building on the American Evaluation Association’s (AEA) *Evaluators’ Ethical Guiding Principles*, the chapter covers various types of potential ethical dilemmas, including the ethical dimensions of bias. It challenges readers to provide their own solutions to these dilemmas, along with a rationale, and helps readers understand what is and isn’t an ethical and quality evaluation, taking into consideration not only culture and context but also the AEA’s *Evaluators’ Ethical Guiding Principles* and the *Program Evaluation Standards* compiled by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation.

Chapter 3, “Historical Evolution of Program Evaluation Through a Social Justice Lens,” covers key events and developments in evaluation practice including

the professionalization of evaluation, fundamental and recurring issues in the field, and technological advances. It goes on to discuss emerging trends and key scholars—particularly those little-known or “hidden” figures who contributed to the growth of the field. Chapter 4, “Evaluation Paradigms, Theories, and Models,” introduces the reader to the range of evaluation frameworks, models, and theories that make up evaluation while Chapter 5, “Social Justice and Evaluation: Theories, Challenges, Frameworks, and Paradigms,” provides an overview of social justice issues and theories. Chapter 5 also builds on the content of Chapter 4 to show how social justice frameworks and paradigms modify and advance more traditional models and theories. Chapter 6, “Evaluation Types With a Cultural and Racial Equity Lens,” examines the major categories and types of evaluation, when they typically occur, their purpose or major strengths, and their primary audiences.

Chapter 7, “Social Programming, Social Justice, and Evaluation,” moves from the theory, models, and history of evaluation into looking at what will be evaluated. Along with describing social programming and graphically illustrating its components through various types of logic models, the chapter explores the issues, challenges, and complexities of implementing and evaluating social programs in a diverse society.

Chapters 8 through 14 cover the “how to” or practical aspects of doing an evaluation. Chapter 8, “Responsive Stakeholder Engagement and Democratization of the Evaluation Process,” discusses the importance of stakeholder engagement and provides a variety of ways to improve the quality and quantity of stakeholder engagement, as well as ways that greater stakeholder engagement can positively influence the evaluation process. Chapter 9, “Planning the Evaluation,” and Chapter 10, “Evaluation Questions That Matter,” focus on the information that needs to be collected or developed before the evaluation can be designed and implemented. Chapter 9 covers the information and knowledge needed to plan a responsive evaluation and introduces tools that are used in project planning and can be customized for use in evaluation planning. The chapter includes the steps needed to identify project goals and define success including ways of identifying and involving stakeholders. From project goals and definitions of success, the chapter goes on to show readers how to define goals for the evaluation and identify different types of **indicators**, which are “variables that provide evidence that a certain condition exists or certain results have, or have not, been achieved” (Campbell, Thomas, & Stoll, 2009, p. 54). Chapter 10 moves the reader from the goals for an evaluation to the development of the questions the evaluation will answer. Covered in this chapter are ways to develop evaluation questions that matter, including the characteristics and sources of good evaluation questions, and ways of prioritizing those evaluation questions for diverse audiences.

Chapters 11 through 14 target the technical aspects of evaluation including design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Chapter 11, “Selecting Appropriate Evaluation Designs,” describes a variety of experimental, quasi-experimental, and descriptive designs; their strengths and weaknesses; and their appropriateness for different evaluation questions. It also covers issues of rigor, comparison and control groups, and longitudinal data including ethical issues tied to their use with different populations. Chapter 12, “Defining, Collecting, and Managing Data,” looks at the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative data, including ways

of ensuring data quality including issues of validity and reliability. Also covered are sources of data to be used in evaluations, ways of collecting these data, measures, and ways of managing the data that are collected. Chapter 13, “The Best Analysis for the Data,” begins with a discussion of the types of reasoning that underlie analytic decisions and provides an introduction to different types of data analysis. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 14, “Reporting, Disseminating, and Utilizing Evaluation Results,” focuses on how to present information visually and textually to different groups in valid and culturally appropriate ways. It also covers different modes for communicating and disseminating results including ways to make evaluation results accessible to people with disabilities as well as ways to make the results more usable.

Chapter 15, “Evaluation as a Business,” goes in a very different direction, providing readers who are planning to do evaluations as a consultant or as a part- or full-time business with an overview of the business aspects of evaluation and the knowledge and skills needed to do evaluation as a business. Areas covered in this chapter include evaluation proposal writing, budgeting, interacting with clients, marketing, contracts, and business plans. In the final chapter, Chapter 16, “Interconnections and Practical Implications,” we go back to bias and cultural competence and take another look at how bias and a lack of cultural competence can impact evaluation decision making. Also covered are ways that readers can reduce their own biases and increase their cultural competence and how that can lead to evaluators becoming more culturally responsive. Reflecting on what we covered in earlier chapters, we explore some of the impacts of cultural responsiveness on decision making.

An Overview of Evaluation

The Oxford University Press defines **evaluation** as “the making of a judgment about the amount, number, or value of something” (Lexico.com, 2020, para. 1). As the definition implies, evaluation is an everyday activity. All of us, either consciously or unconsciously, at some point in time consider the value of a thing; take account of the actions we, or others, have taken; and examine the progress (or lack thereof) we have made on the path we are traveling. Individuals evaluate products and prices at a store to determine whether they will buy a product or even continue to patronize that business. People evaluate their relationships, finances, goals, and health to determine where they are and how they can get better in these areas. By engaging in some form of evaluation, individuals try to assess what is good or bad, what option is better or worse, and what conditions are best to nurture and produce the desired outcomes.

Although people make evaluation decisions, this doesn’t necessarily make them evaluators. Evaluators are professionals who ask and answer questions regarding projects, policies, and programs through the collection and analysis of data. Evaluators seek to provide information that improves decision making at a variety of levels— funders, policymakers, staff, and actual as well as potential participants. Table 1.1 provides a broad overview of the evaluation process from planning to implementation to reporting and use of results.

Table 1.1 Phases of the Evaluation Process

Planning→	Implementation→	Reporting/Use of Results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze project culture and context Clarify objectives Identify questions and indicators Select measures and an evaluation design Develop management procedures including a budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct pretest or pilot testing as necessary Gather credible evidence (data collection) Conduct data analysis, interpretation, and synthesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report findings Disseminate findings and share lessons learned Encourage use of results Determine next steps, if any
↑	↑	↑
Involve and Engage Diverse Stakeholders		

Definitions of Evaluation

While for the general public there is a fairly consistent definition of evaluation, that is not the case for evaluators. As Mark, Greene, and Shaw (2006, p. 6) point out, “If you ask 10 evaluators to define evaluation, you’ll probably end up with 23 different definitions. Given that evaluation is diverse, with multiple countenances, it should not be surprising that varying definitions exist.”

Definitions of evaluation from leaders in the field, from the 1980s and 1990s, focused on evaluation as a way of determining value. For example, Michael Scriven, in 1991, defined evaluation as “the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something, or the product of that process” (p. 139). Several years earlier, Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (1985) defined evaluation as “disciplined inquiry” with a goal of determining value for program improvement or refinement. Their definition also made a distinction between formative evaluation (to determine the value of a project, program, or product in order to improve or refine it) and summative evaluation (to determine the worth, value, and/or success of a project, program, or product), both of which are discussed in further detail in Chapter 6. In 1997, Michael Quinn Patton went a step further in his definition, adding that the information collected in evaluation could be used to inform decisions about future programming as well as “to make judgments about the program [and] improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (p. 23). Trochim’s (1998) definition includes providing evidence in decision making and contexts as well. It also describes those contexts as “inherently political” and as involving “multiple and often conflicting stakeholders, where resources are seldom sufficient and where time pressures are salient” (p. 248).

More recent definitions (e.g., Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015; Rossi, Lipsey, & Henry, 2019) refer explicitly to social science methods, with Rossi et al. (2019) including in their definition a reference to context and an explicit goal to “inform social action to improve social conditions” (p. 6). While myriad descriptions of evaluation are found in the literature, consistent across them is the idea that evaluation is a systematic, applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence (data) and drawing conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of an entity.

The focus on value is key to understanding what evaluation is. Value is the “feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigative journalism, or public polling” (Fournier, 2005, p. 140). Unlike research, evaluations do not simply report outcomes; they draw conclusions about the value or quality of those outcomes within a particular context and for specific groups. **Program evaluation**, in particular, involves the use of research methods to examine a program’s goals, objectives, outcomes, and impact. It can also be used to investigate a program’s structure, characteristics, activities, organization, and political and social environment. Evaluation has the potential to enable society to meaningfully learn about its persistent social problems and how to effectively solve them (Cronbach et al., 1980).

Our definition of evaluation encompasses many of the components in the earlier definitions. It includes systematic inquiry, assessing value and awareness of context, and also ethical, quality, justice, and cultural concerns. We define evaluation as a

disciplined inquiry involving the systematic, contextually responsive, and ethical application of research tools and methods to collect data that assess the effectiveness and operations of programs within the various social, political, and cultural contexts in which they operate. Evaluation’s ultimate goal is to provide **credible evidence** that fosters greater understanding and improves decision making, all aimed at improving social conditions and promoting healthy, just, and equitable communities.

Evaluation Characteristics

Evaluation is not simply a scientific endeavor in search of “truth” and “solutions.” Evaluation, while complex, is often less concerned with general truths and generalizations because it focuses on specific programs and practices taking place within a specific context. This makes evaluation much more an idiosyncratic activity that must be tailored to the particular circumstances under consideration. “Evaluation is not an examination into the inert, static, and external realities of programs but instead, into the fluid subjective world of people’s lives as experienced, interpreted, recalled, and mediated by them and the, oftentimes, racialized contexts of the systems that programs, communities, and individuals are embedded” (Thomas et al., 2018, p. 156). The complexity of social programs makes it critical that anyone who is tasked with evaluating such programs understand the context of the program and the evaluation. Chapter 9 covers this aspect in greater detail.

Evaluation is very much a social enterprise that is best understood by taking into consideration the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts surrounding the program under consideration. Attention to public interest and public good is a critical aspect of the evaluation process. Evaluators cannot ignore the reality that they become a part of the never-ending struggle to make judgment calls about social activities that create the conditions or obstacles for social mobility (Waters, 1998). In 1980, Cronbach et al. pointed out that program evaluation was a process by which society learns about itself. Melvin Hall (2018a) used that point to underscore the need for evaluators to take up more space in the public sphere where institutionalized sources of potential racism and classism should be identified and interrogated. His call was for evaluative thinking, as discussed in the next section, to become more prominent in public debate and policy reviews—an appeal to evaluators to identify and engage the important societal issues embedded in the work we do. Hall’s charge is an integral part of the underlying thinking of this book. The social justice focus of this book is not just limited to race and class but includes other social justice issues such as disability, sex or gender,

sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. In the activity that follows, readers begin to develop their own definitions of evaluation.

Activity

Defining Evaluation

In small groups, discuss the characteristics you think should be included in a definition of evaluation.

Evaluative Thinking

The concept of **evaluative thinking** is an increasingly important topic in evaluation and a key component of evaluation capacity and practice (e.g., Baker & Bruner, 2012; Patton, 2008). However as Buckley, Archibald, Hargraves, and Trochim (2015) point out, definitions of evaluative thinking are varied and sometimes ambiguous. They hold that evaluative thinking is, “in essence, critical thinking applied to contexts of evaluation” (p. 376). Other definitions of evaluative thinking describe it as a type of **reflective practice**, which is “a way of studying your own experiences to improve the way you work” (Brightside, 2020, para. 1). Baker and Bruner (2012, p. 1) see evaluative thinking as a reflective practice that “fully integrates systematic questioning, data, and action into an organization’s work practices” while Michael Quinn Patton (quoted in Waldick, 2011, para. 13) describes it as “an analytical way of thinking that infuses everything that goes on.” After extensive review of the evaluation thinking literature, Buckley et al. (2015, p. 378) proposed the following definition: “Evaluative thinking is critical thinking applied in the context of evaluation, motivated by an attitude of inquisitiveness and a belief in the value of evidence, that involves identifying assumptions, posing thoughtful questions, pursuing deeper understanding through reflection and perspective taking, and informing decisions in preparation for action.”

Reflective practice can be an important component of evaluative thinking. Reflection and reflective practice can catalyze evaluators to

- collect information before making up one’s mind;
- seek various points of view before coming to a conclusion;
- think extensively about a problem before responding;
- calibrate the degree of strength of one’s opinion to the degrees of evidence available;
- think about future consequences before taking action;
- explicitly weigh pluses and minuses of situations before making a decision; [and]
- seek nuance and avoid absolutism. (Stanovich, 2010, p. 36)

Evaluative thinking can start by simply asking some questions and investing in the process of answering them. Sometimes, the reflection and discussion themselves are as important as any answer you might come up with (IllumiLab, 2018a). The following activity provides some questions that readers can ask to help promote reflection and evaluative thinking.

Activity

Applying Evaluative Thinking

Here are three areas and related questions that readers can ask themselves as part of an evaluative thinking process:

Identify and Challenge Assumptions & Assertions

“What are we assuming? Do we actually know that?”

“How do we know that?”

“What makes you say that?”

Seek Out Blind Spots

“What are we missing?”

“Whose perspective isn't represented?”

“What other explanations could there be?”

Capture Musings & Learning Questions

“I wonder if . . .”

“I bet if we . . .”

“If I knew _____, I could _____.” (IllumiLab, 2018b, “Asking Questions”)

Read the following text about money.

Money can mean so many things to so many people. In evaluation, money can be an outcome, a confounding variable, or even a risk factor. Money is tied to access to resources and power. It is a key component that needs to be considered in evaluations.

Money as defined as annual family income, along with adult educational attainment are the conventional measures of socioeconomic status (SES) or class, although they are not the only ones. Indeed there is no consensus definition of class. . . .

Making assumptions about income based on race, ethnicity or family education is dangerous and should be avoided. While there is a correlation between income and race and ethnicity, as well as between income and educational level in the United States, lower income and higher income families come in all colors and from all educational levels. Race, ethnicity and educational level are not proxy indicators of income or SES and should not be used as such. Indeed, evaluators should consider in their analysis disaggregating by race, ethnicity and educational level to tease out interactions.

Asking about income can be sensitive. Many people don't feel comfortable discussing their income and often students don't know their family income. Many evaluators use ranges the participant can choose such as \$0–\$25,000 or \$25,001–\$50,000 rather than asking for exact or even approximate numbers.

When working with lower income participants, particularly if they are in programs that provide them with financial support, evaluators should be sensitive to participant fears that if they don't participate in the evaluation or if they raise concerns, that could impact their continued support from the program. This could impact whether their participation in the evaluation is truly voluntary and if their responses are free from pressure. (Campbell & Jolly, n.d.h, paras. 1–5)

Now, organize in small groups and apply evaluative thinking by asking some of the preceding questions about the text you just read. Discuss your answers with others.

Courtesy of Campbell-Kibler Associates. Inc.

Race, Racism, Social Justice, and a Racialized Perspective

As will be explored more deeply in Chapter 5, race and racism are deeply embedded in the fabric of the United States and have had a complex and destructive influence on the lives of people of color. This influence extends to people's participation in programs and even the very design of the programs being evaluated. It is critical that evaluators work toward unpacking how bias, in general, but racism, in particular, is a complex and destructive force including in evaluations. Thomas et al. (2018) point out that evaluators have both an opportunity and a responsibility to illuminate the potential impact of race and racism on the programs that they evaluate and the environments that they engage. They urge readers "to gain a deeper understanding of racism as a complex interplay of individual attitudes, social values, and institutional policies and practices and to bring these understandings to the work they do" (p. 515).

Race has been defined as "socially constructed differences among people based on characteristics such as accent or manner of speech, name, clothing, diet, beliefs and practices, leisure preferences, places of origin and so forth" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d., para. 3). The process of social construction of race is called **racialization**: "the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d., para. 3). There is no fixed definition of **racial discrimination**. However, it has been described as "any distinction, conduct or action, whether intentional or not, but based on a person's race, which has the effect of imposing burdens on an individual or group, not imposed upon others or which withholds or limits access to benefits available to other members of society" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d., para. 2).

"Racism is a wider phenomenon than racial discrimination. . . . Racism is an ideology that either directly or indirectly asserts that one group is inherently superior to others. It can be openly displayed in racial jokes and slurs or hate crimes but it can be more deeply rooted in attitudes, values and stereotypical beliefs. In some cases, these are unconsciously held and have become deeply embedded in systems and institutions that have evolved over time" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d., paras. 5–6). Racism is pervasive. As entertainer Beyoncé commented, "It's been said that racism is so American, that when we protest racism, some assume we are protesting America" (Nyren, 2017, para. 4).

Racism operates at a number of levels—in particular, individual, systemic, and societal. It is important to note that "stating that racism privileges [W]hites does not

mean that individual [W]hite people do not struggle or face barriers. It does mean that [they] do not face the particular barriers of racism” (Akintunde, 1999, p. 24).

A racialized perspective is one that explicitly foregrounds the impacts of society’s construction of races in ways that are unequal. This can be a difficult thing to do for members of the **dominant culture**, the group whose members are in the majority or who wield more power than other groups (SparkNotes, 2020). Members of the dominant culture, which in the United States are whites and other people of European origin, can be and often are influenced by the values, or system of thought, in a society that are most standard and widely held at a given time. This is referred to as the **dominant paradigm**. Being a member of the dominant culture with its standard and widely held values can impact one’s ability to recognize other, different systems of thought and values (Thomas & Campbell, 2017).

In 2018, Thomas et al. (p. 516) put forth five principled beliefs that explicitly guided their thinking about racism. These principles address concerns about dominant cultures and paradigms and guide the thinking of this text related to social programs, social justice, and evaluation of social programs. The principles are as follows:

1. Race is not a biologically determined reality but instead is a socially constructed phenomenon that continues to differentially shape the allocation of power and distribution of benefits and burden among groups within this country.
2. Racism is real, pervasive, and systematic. Race and racism are timeless, endemic, and permanently entwined within the social fabric of American society (e.g., D. Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Feagin, 2013; C. Lawrence, 1995; Solórzano, 1997). As such, racism is not an aberrant but, instead, the natural order of American life, the usual way business is conducted in this society, and a common everyday experience for most people of color. Short-lived victories for persons of color slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance (D. Bell, 1992).
3. Individual racists need not exist for institutional racism to persist in the dominant culture (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).
4. Racism is not fluid, meaning that it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. Instead, the direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society (DeAngelo, 2011).
5. Race and racism continue to have tremendous consequences for the work of social and behavioral science researchers, and as such, evaluators are certainly not detached from these socially constructed phenomena.

Other Social Justice Issues

This book has an underlying focus on race and examines evaluation from a racialized perspective, as is covered in detail in Chapter 5. It also focuses on other social justice issues, including those tied to sex and gender where, over time, there has been great change in the ways people are identified and categorized. Traditionally, one identified

or was identified as either female or male. When the concept of gender was introduced, it was often used interchangeably with sex, although gender, like race, is a socially constructed phenomenon. It includes how individuals see themselves, how others perceive them and expect them to behave, and the interactions that they have with others (Conger, 2017, para. 21). In terms of both gender and sex, there can be fluidity and change. “Most people—including most transgender people—are either male or female. But some people don’t neatly fit into the categories of ‘man’ or ‘woman,’ or ‘male’ or ‘female.’ For example, some people have a gender that blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female. Some people don’t identify with any gender. Some people’s gender changes over time. People whose gender is not male or female use many different terms to describe themselves, with **non-binary** being one of the most common” (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2018, paras. 1–2).

In the case of race or sex or other areas including disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, there are those with more or less privilege. Those with less privilege are more apt to be discriminated against. **Privilege** has been defined as “unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups. Privilege is often invisible to those who have it” (National Conference for Community and Justice, n.d., para. 7). **Discrimination** can be defined as “the unequal allocation of goods, resources, and services, and the limitation of access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group; reinforced by law, policy, and cultural norms that allow for differential treatment on the basis of identity” (National Conference for Community and Justice, n.d., para. 4). Table 1.2 defines some common belief systems that negatively affect marginalized groups and lead to privilege for dominant groups.

Table 1.2 Belief Systems Behind Oppression

Ableism	The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress people who have mental, emotional[,] and physical disabilities.
Ageism	The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress young and elderly people.
Classism	The institutional, cultural, and individual set of beliefs and discrimination that assigns differential value to people according to their socio-economic class; and an economic system which creates excessive inequality and causes basic human needs to go unmet.
Heterosexism	The belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and acceptable sexual orientation. Now encompasses the individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, [and] queer (LGBTQ) people [including] homophobia: An irrational fear of or aversion to homosexuality or LGBTQ people.
Racism	The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress people of color (Blacks, Latino/as, [Indigenous People], and Asians).
Sexism	The individual, cultural, and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppress women.

Source: National Conference for Community and Justice, n.d., paras. 12–13, 15–18.

In many of these areas including sex, race/national origin, and sexual orientation there has been **de jura discrimination**—that is, legal discrimination. For example, until the 1967 Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia*, in some states, Blacks and whites were not allowed to marry (National Constitutional Center, 2019). It wasn't until 2015 and the decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex couples were able to marry anywhere in the United States (Liptak, 2015). Straight women were legally banned from many jobs in the armed services (Pruitt, 2018), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals were not permitted to serve at all (Human Rights Campaign, 2020). In 2019, a ban on transgender individuals serving in the military was enacted (D. Phillips, 2019).

Because of the relentless efforts of many people over time, there have been a number of successful efforts to limit or eliminate de jura discrimination. However, another form of discrimination has been much more difficult to dismantle and is much more apt to impact evaluators and evaluations. That is **de facto discrimination**, or discrimination that is not sanctified by law but happens in fact. For example, racial segregation in schools was allowed by law, but the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* determined that segregation in schools was unconstitutional. Today, however, many public schools remain segregated not by law but in fact (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). The situation is the same in terms of housing. In 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed to protect people from discrimination when they are renting or buying a house, but today there is still great segregation in housing (Schuetz, 2017). Discrimination has real consequences for real people in real programs. For example, being in environments that are racially segregated can impact the context in which programs are implemented and the responses of participants to programs. This needs to be a concern to those evaluating programs.

While de jura job segregation by sex no longer exists, de facto segregation does, with men predominating in the more prestigious and more highly paid careers. This has implications for evaluations done in the workplace in terms of the culture and acceptance of women in fields such as engineering and construction where men predominate and in fields like elementary school teaching and nursing where women predominate.

Much of this de facto segregation is based on **stereotypes**, or “preconceived notion[s], especially about a group of people” (Vocabulary.com, n.d., para. 1), and assumptions that people have about others because of their race, sex/gender, disability, and other areas. As will be explained in more detail in Chapter 5, everyone fits into more than one demographic group, some of which are marginalized such as being poor, female, a person of color, and a person with disabilities. Crenshaw (2017, para. 4) calls this **intersectionality**, “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or L[GB]TQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.” Throughout this book are examples of how stereotypes and perceptions about individuals because of their race, sex/gender, disability, and other characteristics can sometimes negatively influence the views of evaluators as well as those of program staff and funders, thus impacting the conceptualization, implementation, and outcomes of evaluations. However, throughout the book we offer some tangible strategies for how this impact can be counteracted.

Objectivity and Bias

Objectivity

For hundreds of years, philosophers of science have commented on the difficulty of attaining scientific objectivity. In 1821, Isaac Watts described the near impossibility of being unbiased: “The eyes of a man in the jaundice make yellow observations on everything; and the soul tinctured with any passion diffuses a false color over the appearance of things” (AZ Quotes, n.d., para. 1). More recently, Nage (1961) wrote about the difficulty of preventing our likes, aversions, hopes, and fears from coloring our conclusions. Looking at the issues of objectivity from a different perspective, Martin, Lee, and Bang (2014, para. 10) suggested that “it is commonly said that scientists should have a professional distance from what they study. But the metaphor of distance is misleading. Science, like a painting, necessarily has a perspective. And that perspective is at least partially shaped by variables such as race, gender and class.” When we move past the concept that scientists and evaluators are objective, we are able to look more clearly at biases, including our own.

Bias

Explicit Bias

We all have biases, and we need to pay attention to the biases people have as individuals and as evaluators. **Bias** has been defined as a particular tendency or inclination, especially one that prevents reasonable, knowledgeable, thoughtful consideration of a question (Harmon, 1973). While bias can be intentional, it often is not. Bias can grow out of one’s assumptions—the things one accepts as true without questioning. It can be based on the ways the evaluator thinks things are (or should be). Biases can be **explicit**—that is, one knows one has a particular bias. For example, we might be biased in favor of people who like Ben & Jerry’s ice cream and biased against those who like Häagen-Dazs ice cream. When a bias is explicit, one can accept it or try to counteract it.

Evaluators can, and most often do, have explicit biases. Our biases may be related to methods—for example, being biased against use of online surveys or biased in favor of programs that include a component for participant reflection. Evaluators may also be biased in terms of what they think participants in a program need to be successful. If evaluators have explicit biases that can impact their work, they need to let others know their biases exist and to have others check to see if those biases are impacting the work. It is important for evaluators to remember that, as Hannum (2018, para. 4) points out,

there is bias and error in all information. Understanding how information can be biased is helpful. Equally helpful is understanding the roots of bias within ourselves. We often think of other people deceiving us, but the best place to begin to whittle away nonsense is within ourselves. The more we know about how to gather, interpret, and use information, the less likely we are to get caught up in assumptions, bias, and outright deception.

The following activity provides an opportunity for readers to reflect on and discuss their own explicit biases.

Reflect and Discuss

My Biases

In small groups, discuss some of the fairly superficial preferences and biases you might have. Then, either speaking in general or personally, discuss preferences that might impact how someone approaches a project.

Implicit Bias

While some biases are explicit, others are implicit. According to the Kirwan Institute at The Ohio State University (Staats, Capatosto, Tenney, & Mamo, 2017, p. 10), **implicit bias** refers to “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.” Like explicit biases, they can impact assessments and judgments, both favorably and unfavorably. But unlike explicit biases, implicit biases are “activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control” (Staats et al., 2017, p. 10). The following are some key characteristics of implicit biases (Staats et al., 2017).

- Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality, such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They are not mutually exclusive and may even reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our own in-group, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our in-group.
- Implicit biases are malleable. Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations that we have formed can be gradually unlearned through a variety of de-biasing techniques.

It is difficult to understate the importance of considering the role of implicit bias when analyzing societal inequities. Implicit biases, explicit biases, and structural forces are often mutually reinforcing. Research on implicit bias suggests that many of our decisions regarding racial stereotypes are made at unconscious level (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Staats, 2017). For example, Harvard University’s Project Implicit (2011b) has found most Americans have an automatic preference for white people over Black people, and often have automatic preferences for straight people over gay people and for young people over old people. In addition, the Project Implicit researchers have found stronger links between females and family and between males and careers. Similarly, they have found stronger links between females and the liberal arts and between males and science. This does not mean that people are racist or homophobic or believe that a woman’s role is in the kitchen, but it does mean that people are influenced, consciously and unconsciously, by the environment around them.

Referring to race, Project Implicit (2011b, para. 17) explains that “implicit preferences for majority groups (e.g., white people) are likely common because of strong negative associations with Black people in American society. There is a long history of racial discrimination in the United States, and Black people are often portrayed negatively in culture and mass media.” There are also **implicit stereotypes**, or those that are “relatively inaccessible to conscious awareness and/or control. Even if you say that men and women are equally good at math, it is possible that you associate math more strongly with men without being actively aware of it. In this case we would say that you have an implicit math + men stereotype” (Project Implicit, 2011b, para. 2). One way to explore implicit biases is, as described in the following activity, to take the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Activity

Take the Implicit Association Test (Optional)

The IAT takes about 10–15 minutes to complete. It measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report and “measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., [B]lack people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)” (Project Implicit, 2011a, para. 1). The results will be immediately reported to you and will mention possible interpretations that have a basis in research. If you are unprepared to encounter interpretations that you might find objectionable, please do not take the test. You may want to go to <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/iatdetails.html> for more information about the test.

To take the test, visit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>.

In his 2019 Voices From the Field interview, as follows, Melvin E. Hall discusses objectivity, bias, and why he became an evaluator.

Voices From the Field

Melvin E. Hall: Objectivity, Bias, and Being an Evaluator

I came into evaluation in part because I was aware of the myth of evaluator objectivity. People have built-in biases; we all do. Once you recognize that people have built-in structural biases, you have two choices—you can call them out on their biases, or you can find ways to have those biases balanced with other perspectives. I made the second choice.

The value I bring to evaluation is another worldview, one which will help other people understand their own biases as well as mine. Inherent bias is not only not

unavoidable, but you don't even want to try to avoid it—I believe that any knowledge you have biases you. For example, if I know the world is round, it biases me about believing anything contingent to the world being flat. That's a positive bias. I don't see bias as a negative thing. I see it as a necessary thing. The one caveat is not when bias is in the performance of the craft, but when bias is in the assumptions underlying the craft. Bias can be thorny to observe and thorny to deal with when melded into underlying assumptions.

(Continued)

(Continued)

There are little-*b* biases and big-*B* biases. Little-*b* biases impact how you communicate, how you collect data, and how you interpret experiences; it is the little day-to-day stuff. We have to recognize it will be there and be alert to it. I like to think that big-*b* bias is something I will be upfront about and take steps to mitigate. For example, I had a project that I had a positive bias toward. I know I am pro HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities]. I asked several colleagues to be my sound-board. I would send research briefs to them for their reaction. The process of writing it and thinking about

it was one of the best things I could do to be aware of my biases.

Melvin Hall is a Professor of Educational Psychology at Northern Arizona University, Distinguished Scholar in the Marie Fielder Institute of Fielding Graduate University, and AAC&U Senior Scholar, Office of Undergraduate STEM Education, AAC&U He is also a founding affiliate faculty member of the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment at the University of Illinois, Urbana. He was interviewed by co-author Patricia Campbell, in fall, 2019.

Reducing Bias

There are some ways to reduce explicit bias and to not give implicit bias the chance to operate. One strategy is for evaluators to “blind” themselves from learning a person’s gender, race, and other such characteristics when analysis is being done or decisions are being made. It is well known that observers rate the same behaviors differently based on the perceived characteristics of the subjects. For example, observers describe and rate behaviors differently based on a child’s race (i.e., Gerwitz & Dodge, 1975; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitt, & Shie, 2016) and on whether they think the child is a girl or a boy. Female musicians are more likely to be hired when a “blind” audition process is used, which means the hiring committee is not aware of the sex of the auditioning musicians. Accents too can make a difference. People view speakers with accents like theirs as more knowledgeable than different-accent speakers, even when the different-accent speaker is actually more knowledgeable. In 1989, Michael J. Zieky concluded that “the potential for bias in the scoring of performance tests is clear. Scorers are human and fallible. Biases both for and against members of certain groups, may be blatant or subtle but they are likely to be present” (quoted in American Association of University Women, 1995, p. 97). His point still holds.

Along with “blind” ratings, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 12, a variety of strategies have been tested to reduce bias. In an analysis of 30 studies of interventions designed to reduce implicit bias, FitzGerald, Martin, Berner, and Hurst (2019) found the most effective categories were intentional strategies to overcome biases, exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars, identifying the self with the out-group, evaluative conditioning, and inducing emotion. Half of the studies testing appeals to egalitarian values found them to be effective while the other half didn’t. The largest number of studies tested an intervention focused on engaging with others’ perspectives, but fewer than a third of the studies found it to be an effective intervention. Training may help to reduce bias as well. Morewedge and colleagues (2015) found that research participants exposed to one-shot training interventions, such as educational videos and de-biasing games that taught mitigating strategies, exhibited significant reductions in their biases immediately and up to three months later.

The following are some implicit bias training resources.

The Kirwan Institute has a series of four short, free modules on implicit bias. The modules are Understanding Implicit Bias, Real-World Implications,

Understanding Your Own Biases, and Mitigating Unwanted Biases. See <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/special-announcement-implicit-bias-training-available/>.

Duke University has an online teachers' workshop on overcoming implicit bias. See <https://blogs.tip.duke.edu/teachersworkshop/overcoming-implicit-bias/>.

The Institute for Healthcare Improvement also provides information and resources on how to reduce implicit bias in health care. See <http://www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/how-to-reduce-implicit-bias>.

There are ways to reduce our own biases and those of others, but implementing them can be a challenge. As Tenney (2017, p. 54) explains, "Most white people indicate that they have no racial bias, that they treat everyone equally, that they 'don't see race,' and even that they are better than average at not being racially biased." She asks what it will take for a critical mass of white people to move from being passively not racist to being actively antiracist. In the following activity, readers will hear what three people, two white and one Black, who work to reduce bias and racism say about the challenges tied to working with white people on antiracism, reflect on their response to readings, and if they choose share their responses with others.

Activity

Reflections on Working With White People and Antiracism

Read the following three statements and write a short paragraph about your response to them and any impact they may have on your response to race and racism.

To continue reproducing racial inequality, the system only needs [W]hite people to be really nice and carry on, smile at people of color. Be friendly and go to lunch together on occasion. . . . Niceness will not get racism on the table and will not keep it on the table when everyone wants it off. . . . Where do we go from here? I offer that we must never consider ourselves finished with our learning. Even if challenging all the racism and superiority we have internalized was quick and easy to do, our racism would be reinforced all over again just by virtue of living in the culture. (DiAngelo, 2018, pp. 153–154)

When we shift our focus away from determining whether the intentions of individual white people are "good" or "bad" to instead focusing on the negative effects of white supremacy, we can focus on what matters most in the fight against racism. (Tenney, 2017, p. 55)

Every time I stand in front of an audience to address racial oppression in America, I know that I am facing a lot of [W]hite people who are in the room to feel less bad about racial discrimination and violence in the news, to score points, to let everyone know that they are not like the others, to make [B]lack friends. I know that I am speaking to a lot of [W]hite people who are certain they are not the problem because they are there. Just once I want to speak to a room of [W]hite people who know they are there because they are the problem. Who know they are there to begin the work of seeing where they have been complicit and harmful so that they can start doing better. (Oluo, 2019, para. 16)

If you feel comfortable doing so, share and discuss your responses with others.

Culture, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Responsiveness

Throughout the book, there are many references to culture and the importance of cultural competence.

While there are almost as many definitions of culture as there are cultures themselves, this definition, from the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) provides a perspective that may be useful to evaluators. They define culture “as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group” [CARLA, 2019, para. 1]. While we often think of culture groups in terms of ethnicity or nationality, they can be any group with shared patterns of behavior and understandings such as evaluators, scientists, or even Boston Red Sox fans (Campbell & Jolly, n.d.d, para. 1).

Culture is a powerful organizing framework that both filters and shapes perceptions, communications, values, and subsequent behaviors. As Table 1.3 shows, response to superficial areas such as what protein to have for dinner can cause strong visceral reactions.

Table 1.3 Cultural Attitudes Toward Proteins to Have for Dinner

Protein	Country	Attitude	Country	Attitude
Cow	United States	Good	India	Bad
Dog	United States	Bad	Korea	Was good but is changing
Bugs	United States	Bad	Thailand	Good
Pork	United States	Good	Saudi Arabia	Bad
Horse	United States	Bad	Poland	Good

Just as many people in the United States, for example, will have a strong visceral reaction to the idea of eating bugs, many people in India will have the same reaction to eating beef. As part of cultural awareness, it is important to learn more about why those in different cultures make the choices they do. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, evaluators must have a genuine willingness to learn about the cultures with which they engage within the evaluation context and, as appropriate, a willingness to suspend judgments. They also need to cultivate a belief that cultural diversity is a source of strength and enrichment rather than a deficit or obstacle to overcome (Handford, Van Maele, Matous, & Maemura, 2019). Evaluators need to be aware of the major culture groups that may have relevance for different evaluations. For example, the culture of different institutions of higher education (i.e., Ivy League, large public, historically Black) might be pertinent for an evaluation of a higher education program while the culture of correctional faculty (i.e., maximum, medium, or minimum security) might be

pertinent for an evaluation of in-house recidivism programs. Other cultural groups might be important in different evaluations. However, it is important to remember that “accurate predictions of individual behavior based on nationality or other collective-level categories are typically not possible and may even cause offense. We are all members of multiple different groups and these identities become relevant at varying moments of our day” (Handford et al., 2019, p. 45).

As covered further in Chapter 13, how participants in programs and projects being evaluated identify themselves or how they are identified by others is one way to help evaluators understand cultural group memberships that may be salient for the evaluation. Learning about what is currently going on in relevant institutions and the surrounding communities can also help to identify other salient factors. Evaluators need to have ongoing knowledge and understanding of the cultural groups and related factors.

As covered in greater detail in Chapter 5, evaluators need to be culturally competent, and their evaluations need to be culturally responsive. SenGupta, Hopson, and Thompson-Robinson (2004, p. 13) go beyond the relatively simple definition of cultural competence given in the beginning of this chapter to describe cultural competence in evaluation as a “systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the evaluative endeavor; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further use of the findings.” Cultural competence in evaluation takes place through a continuing open-ended series of substantive, ethical, and methodological insertions and adaptations that aligns the inquiry process with the characteristics of the groups/contexts being examined.

It is not enough for evaluators to embrace cultural competence, but as covered in detail in Chapter 5, evaluators must mindfully apply that competence to every aspect of their work from evaluation planning to reporting and use of results. Additionally, cultural competence is important in evaluation scholarship and in evaluation educational and professional development settings.

One of those areas where this was evident for us was in determining the most culturally appropriate terminology to use throughout this book to describe people from different races/ethnicities. There are many different ways to do this, and there is no one right answer. It is particularly difficult because of the practical necessity of using one term to collectively describe diverse subgroups. Our choice has been to acknowledge the complexity and be transparent about the choices we made. Since *Asian American* is the common term for people in the United States of Asian descent, we chose to use that term, knowing that it doesn't acknowledge the great diversity within that group. We were unsure as to whether we should use *American Indian* or *Native American* to collectively identify members of the 562 different tribes in the United States. We asked three people from different tribes who are very active in their tribal communities for advice. While they have used *American Indian* in the past, their preference is for *Indigenous People*, which is the term we are using.

We chose to use the terms *African American* and *Black* fairly interchangeably; however, we tend to use *African American* when we refer to people whose origins are in the African continent but whose history is on the American continent and *Black* when we are speaking more generally. We also chose to use *Hispanic* as a generic collective term because it encompasses people from outside as well as inside Latin America.

The Impact of Politics

In fields like evaluation, where results are used not just for program improvement but for making policy decisions and determining funding, the climate in which the evaluation is done is often challenging and politically driven. In a time when there is increasing distrust of research and evaluation, doing evaluations becomes increasingly difficult. While in recent years the challenges have seemed to be greater, there has always been tension between science, including evaluation, and politics. In 2008, Chelimsky explained that since “our government’s need for evaluation arises from its checks and balances structure, evaluations working within that structure must deal not exceptionally, but routinely and regularly, with political infringement on their independence that result directly from that structure” (p. 400). She went on to point out the irony that “what should surprise us would be the absence of pressure on evaluators to make an agency ‘look good’ or the lack of effort by agency managers to try to manipulate the work of evaluators implementing legislative oversight” (p. 400).

Another way that politics can intertwine with evaluation is the political interest in “quick fixes” and the unwillingness to acknowledge underlying factors. As Thomas et al. (2018, p. 517) point out,

Evaluators are often asked to assess the effectiveness of social programs that are designed to yield a quick “magic bullet” to fix to problems derived from years of racial oppression. Here, race is and is not the problem inasmuch as racism fuels the disparities we witness. However, this reality is virtually absent in the discourse of numerous commentaries and policy makers who are quick to cite Black failure or pathology without examining the historical root causes. As a result, social programs seek to address outcomes, such as the achievement gap and health disparities, rather than the race-based structural inequalities in the social, economic, and political systems that contribute to these outcomes.

As the following case studies indicate, evaluation results can and at times do lose out to politics.

Case Studies

Evaluation Results vs. Politicians

21st Century Community Learning Centers

An extensive evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a federally funded after-school program, found that the program did not affect student outcomes. Those findings were met with much resistance from those who strongly advocated for the program. For example, then California governor

Arnold Schwarzenegger used strong community support and “anecdotal evidence” to justify his support for the program, which continues to exist. Describing the response to the evaluation results, Ron Haskins pointed out “any sentence akin to saying ‘Everybody knows this program works’ is an enemy of evidence-based policy” (J. White, 2017, p. 11).

Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)

Project DARE is one of the most widely used substance abuse prevention programs targeted at school-aged youths. It has been the country's largest single school-based prevention program. Multiple evaluations and meta-analyses have found DARE to be ineffective, yet it continues to be widely used, paid for by federal funds (West & O'Neal, 2004). In 2017, then attorney

general Jeff Sessions supported DARE because he “firmly believed” in its effectiveness, regardless of what the data said. Knowing that the program has been found to be ineffective, some school districts continue to use it for a variety of reasons including their belief that no short-term program can change students' drug-taking behavior and that, if it improves student/police relationships, that is enough to keep it going (Ingraham, 2017).

While some of the reasoning behind these examples is political, there can also be what Tom Kibler (personal communication, first quoted in Campbell, Hoey, & Perlman, 2001, p. 34) described as the “pure of heart model” influencing the decisions. The model is based on the premise that “since my heart is pure and my cause is just and I work really hard at it, the change I am seeking will happen.” The pure of heart model is often held by caring people who are trying to help others who feel strongly what they are doing is right. If the data don't support that, then the data are wrong. As one program leader explained, “We are doing this on faith and if you don't believe in it, **** you” (Campbell et al., 2001, p. 35).

There can be issues with doing things on faith. Even with the best of intentions, the results of those efforts can be neutral or even negative. For example, one evaluation that I, coauthor Campbell, did found that doing hands-on science activities created by teachers or by after-school leaders caused students to become *more* stereotyped and limited in their opinions of who could do science. A second program to encourage women to continue on in their engineering programs reinforced rather than overcame stereotypes, with some women in the program coming to feel that it existed because women weren't as good as men in engineering. As one participant explained: “[Engineering] theory is easier for boys. That is why they put us together [in the special program]” (Campbell & Hoey, 2000, p. 20). No one wants to hear negative outcomes, but problems can't be fixed unless they are found and acknowledged.

The Current Climate

Of great concern is the onset of a so-called post-truth era, complete with alternative facts, disdain for expertise, and a diminishing reliance on facts and analytic thinking in public life (Hamburg, 2019, p. 563). Evaluators and indeed people in general are living and working in a time where terms like *alternative facts*, *post-facts*, and *post-truth* are used regularly. As indicated earlier in the chapter, traditionally alternative facts have been defined as falsehoods or the “opposite of reality.” However, now some are viewing alternative facts as merely a different perspective (Zimmer, 2017). *Post-fact* and *post-truth* both refer to an environment in which objective facts are a thing of the past. In a post-fact society, facts are viewed as irrelevant, and emotional appeals are used to influence public opinion. In 2016, the Oxford University Press named *post-truth* as its

word of the year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (para. 2). The idea that “truth no longer mattered. Facts were not just unimportant, but barriers to be smashed through with rhetoric” (Hollo, 2017, para. 3) is increasingly characteristic of today’s world. Evaluators need to explore how such constructs impact evaluation work. “Citizens are increasingly asserting their values, hopes and opinions without apparent interest in finding a shared understanding of the actual state of things. Without such a shared understanding, those values and hopes cannot rationally be expressed and realized. Observers speak of ‘truth decay,’ dismissal of expertise, and neglect of evidence” (Hoit, 2019, p. 433).

The implication of living in a post-truth culture is that science becomes just another perspective with evidence becoming no more valid than personal opinion. This blurring of the distinction between evidence and opinion has a corrosive and delegitimizing effect on evaluation. Evaluation findings become just another kind of opinion (Gauchat, 2012).

There are some strategies and ways to combat this trend. Chapter 14 covers ways that the language and images used can impact readers’ or viewers’ response to an evaluation and provides strategies to increase the probability that results will be heard. In addition, having everyone, including evaluators, become more critical consumers of information can make a big difference. This can include the application of the aptly named CRAAP Test to help individuals judge the quality and veracity of information. CRAAP stands for

- *currency*—the timeliness of the information, including when it was published and if it requires current information;
- *relevance*—the importance of the information for your needs, including if it answers your question;
- *authority*—the source of the information, including the names and affiliations of authors as well as their qualifications and credentials;
- *accuracy*—the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content, including where it comes from, if it is supported by evidence, and if it has been reviewed or refereed; and
- *purpose*—the reason the information exists, including determining if that purpose is to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade and if there are political, ideological, cultural, religious, institutional, or personal biases (Meriam Library, 2010).

Drawing on the work of Julian Baggini, Eann Patterson (2018b, para. 1) provides some suggestions for ways individuals, can validate “truth”:

We need to trust experts because we are unable to verify everything ourselves as life is too short and there are too many things to think about. However, this approach exposes us to the risk of being misled and Julian Baggini has suggested that this risk is increasing with the growth of psychology, which has allowed more people to master methods of manipulating us, that has led to “a kind of arms race of deception in which truth is the main casualty.” He suggests that when we are presented with new information then we should perform an epistemic triage by asking:

- Is this a domain in which anyone can speak the truth?
- What kind of expert is a trustworthy source of truth in that domain?
- Is a particular expert to be trusted?

In the following activity, readers apply the CRAAP Test and/or Patterson's three questions to news stories.

Activity

Validating "Truth"

Pick a front-page story on the same topic or a similar one from two different newspapers and apply the CRAAP Test to them and/or ask Patterson's three questions with them in mind. Did doing that change your perceptions of the articles? In small groups, discuss your findings.

SUMMARY

The goal of this chapter was to provide readers with an overview of evaluation, evaluative thinking, and the general themes that underlie the book. These include race, racism, social justice, and a racialized perspective. The chapter also introduced issues tied to objectivity and bias including explicit and implicit bias and ways

evaluators can reduce these biases. We also introduced the concepts of culture and cultural competence and the impact of politics and the current political climate on evaluators and evaluation. All of these, and other issues, will be explored, in detail, throughout the remainder of the book.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

Bruner Foundation: Effectiveness Initiatives

www.evaluativethinking.org/index.html

This website provides a series of resources on developing and building evaluation capacity as well as on evaluative thinking including a series of four booklets on applying evaluative thinking to data collection.

Equitable Evaluation Initiative

www.equitableeval.org

This website provides principles, frameworks, and resources on equitable evaluation as well as an overview

of the equitable evaluation projects in which the organization was involved.

Evaluation Resource Hub: Evaluative Thinking

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/evaluation-resource-hub/evaluative-thinking>

This website provides a variety of evaluation resources including the mindset, skill set, and values underpinning evaluative thinking.

**National Parenting Education Network:
Introduction to Evaluation**

<https://npen.org/resources-for-parenting-educators/evaluating-parent-education-programs/introduction-to-evaluation/>

This brief introduction to evaluation includes a definition, standards and guiding principles, logic models, and information about designing an evaluation.

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