

EDITORS' NOTES

Does feminist evaluation exist? If so, what does it look like? Can anyone do feminist evaluation? What principles might an evaluator use to guide a feminist evaluation? In an attempt to engage a conversation about feminism and evaluation, we and the other authors of this text advance some responses to these questions. We do not claim that they are the definitive answers, nor that all evaluators should be conducting feminist evaluation. Indeed, some evaluators probably should not attempt this model. In spite of a large and diverse body of scholarly literature related to feminist perspectives and principles, feminism and feminist thought is frequently misunderstood and stereotypically represented in the research and evaluation communities (as well as within other communities). It is important to enter into a rich discussion with the evaluation community about what feminism is and what it is not, and about what feminism can and cannot offer in order for evaluation practitioners to benefit from the knowledge and experience of feminist evaluators. Through this volume, we offer an expanded view of how evaluation itself may be thought about and practiced.

We feel that this volume of *New Directions for Evaluation* is an important contribution to those who are interested in promoting a better world for women and men through evaluation. We believe the authors in this text have embarked on paths that are exciting and new, and that the field of evaluation is richer because they have.

The three chapters of the volume present background on feminist theory and philosophy appropriate both for readers unfamiliar with feminist perspectives and for readers who have read feminist theory. Through the chapters included in this section, the volume addresses historical and current feminist theories and philosophies; definitions of feminism(s) (there being more than one type of "feminism"); the intersection of race, gender, and class; and the editors' and other interested evaluators' perspectives on feminist principles. This section provides the background needed to understand the relationship between feminist theory scholarship and evaluation theory, and between evaluation theory/philosophy and feminist evaluation. These chapters provide a framework for understanding that which is unique about feminist evaluation.

The next four chapters (Chapters Four through Seven) present case studies of and methodological discussions surrounding actual program evaluations that have had a feminist evaluation or gender-analysis orientation.

We would like to acknowledge the work of Donna Mertens, Elizabeth Whitmore, and Janet Farley from whom we inherited the idea and spirit of this volume. Their continuing contributions to the field and to Feminist Evaluation theory and practice inspire us, and we are most grateful for their perseverance.

The works presented in these chapters draw from diverse subject areas and use both qualitative and quantitative methods. Readers will have the opportunity to see the application of feminist principles and feminist evaluation within the context of a needs assessment of the sexual health needs of gay and bisexual men, the evaluation of a women's substance abuse service, the evaluation of an adolescent gender violence–prevention program that is “pro-feminist” but “male-centered,” and evaluations that take place within the international development context. Throughout this section and in our concluding chapters (Chapters Eight and Nine), we and other contributing authors attend especially to the quality of methods and their applications and to the quality of conclusions and recommendations.

Because feminist theory is often expressed as being fluid, dynamic, and evolving, feminist theorists avoid claiming that they (or anyone) have the final answer to any problem. Thus, this volume does not offer uniform prescriptions for the application of feminist principles to the theory and practice of evaluation. What we do offer is the following: critical reflections on the questions and issues that feminist perspectives and feminist evaluation raise for all evaluation practitioners; identification of particular tools, strategies, and perspectives that may be used by practitioners interested in implementing a feminist evaluation or working from a feminist perspective; guidelines for the practice of feminist evaluation; a reflection on the unique strengths, challenges, and weaknesses of feminist evaluation as presented in this volume; an examination of the political nature of evaluation practice; and a discussion of questions and themes raised by the contributing authors or by the stakeholders with whom they have worked.

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