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The racial landscape in the United States is intricate and deeply entwined with historical legacies of systemic inequalities, particularly impacting African American communities. This study researches the evaluation practices within programs specifically designed for African American communities, employing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) frameworks. The study focuses on the backgrounds, experiences, and identities of program evaluators engaged in these communities, seeking to understand how race influences their practices.

Using a generic qualitative research design, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted to elucidate evaluators' perspectives on issues such as race, culture, equity, and inclusion throughout the evaluation process. The findings highlighted the crucial role of identity in evaluation practice, discussing challenges and effective strategies for managing identity dynamics. The analysis also provided insight into various aspects of evaluation practices within Black and/or African American communities, including cultural context, diverse evaluation methodologies, integration of social justice principles, and strategies for enhancing evaluation.

This research paves the way for future studies exploring evaluators' operations within Black ecosystems, suggesting potential areas for inquiry like purposive sampling and focus groups to capture diverse perspectives and roles. Future studies could explore evaluator competencies and roles, refining evaluation practices within Black communities.

UNVEILING INSIGHTS: PROGRAM EVALUATION IN BLACK AND/OR

AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

by

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Approved by

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DEDICATION

Danté Eugene,

      I want to dedicate this dissertation to you because you've been my biggest support every step of the way. Your encouragement and love have kept me going through all the ups and downs of this journey. Thank you for always believing in me. Love, always.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Brianna T. Hooks Singletary has been approved by the

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The racial climate in the United States is intricate and layered, reflecting a history deeply rooted in systemic inequalities stemming from the legacy of slavery. Hamilton's (1987) historical analysis examined how social policies and welfare initiatives impacted the Black American community from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. During this period, "self-help associations" in the 1880s and 1890s, based in black churches, provided essential community services to address disparities. During the Civil Rights era, there was a shift towards court-ordered remedies and resource allocation, with policies like Affirmative Action addressing employment challenges and a surge in social programs. These efforts translated in little progress for the growth of Black Americans in society. In the 21st century, efforts persist to address the civil rights of Black Americans and other marginalized groups through various programs and initiatives. As the nation grapples with these challenges, there is an increasing need to gain a deeper understanding of practices within these communities. This understanding is essential to foster inclusivity, promote diversity, and actively confront systemic racism, to create a more equitable and just society.

Scholarly discourse on the role of race in program evaluation highlights its complexity and significance within diverse communities. While acknowledging race as a variable, social scientists caution against reinforcing stereotypes and suggest rethinking its role in theory and research due to its socially constructed nature (Hall, 2018). Despite efforts to minimize its influence, race continues to impact perceptions and behaviors, necessitating acknowledgment and consideration by evaluators. Hopson (1999), underscores the challenges in evaluating minority issues, advocating for inclusive and collaborative evaluation models to address inequities. He emphasizes the importance of evaluators of color in enhancing conditions for

marginalized groups. Ladson-Billings (2023) emphasizes the pervasive impact of race in the education system, noting its influence on curriculum and policies. She calls for precise language and encourages researchers to critically examine how race shapes one's research, recognizing the unique perspectives of researchers of color. Despite these insights, there is limited empirical research investigating how the race of the community served influences the evaluative processes and decisions emphasizing the need for further exploration and understanding in this area.

Research on evaluation practice underscores the importance of equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture. Literature reveals how approaches such as the values-engaged educative (VEE) approach address culture, diversity, and equity within organizational culture (Boyce, 2017). Additionally, studies on Black evaluators highlight their multifaceted and responsive approach, emphasizing their adaptability and effectiveness in meeting community needs (Boyce et al., 2022). Gates et al. (2022) explore equity-oriented evaluation in New England, revealing a lack of formal training in equity-oriented approaches among evaluators and emphasizing the role of stakeholder relationships in shaping evaluations. Despite increased attention, research on equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture in evaluation practice remains limited (Gates et al., 2022). Moreover, there is insufficient research investigating the manifestations of equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture within evaluation practice specifically in Black and/or African American communities. It is essential to thoroughly investigate the identities of evaluators and the methodologies employed in program evaluation within programs serving Black and/or African American communities. Such an examination will yield valuable insights into the intricacies of responsive evaluation practices within these communities and contribute to a broader understanding of program evaluation.

Positionality Statement

I am a 34-year-old, African American, woman from Columbia, Maryland. At a young age, I was diagnosed with congenital heart disease. The disease not only physically affected me but also impacted my perspective on life. As a young, black, female child with heart issues, I was always aware that I was different and often felt ostracized and self-conscious of my differences. Due to these differences that I lived with, I felt compelled to help others who may not be in a situation where they are able to advocate for themselves. Additionally, as a person with a congenital disease, I was made constantly aware of the benefits of physical activity on your overall health. This led me to actively participate in physical activity at a young age to improve and help maintain my overall cardiovascular health.

My interests in helping others and physical activity led me to pursue an undergraduate degree in physical education at Winston Salem State University (WSSU), a historically black university. During my time at WSSU, I received a comprehensive education on the narratives of Black individuals, both domestically and globally. This knowledge broadened my awareness of the adversities faced by Black Americans and their profound impact on the nation. It also fostered a profound appreciation for the remarkable contributions made by Black individuals across various fields such as academia, the arts, sciences, and politics. Additionally, as a Black woman, I gained critical insights into the complex interplay of racial identity and societal expectations, thereby deepening my understanding of the multifaceted challenges inherent in navigating the intersections of race and gender within American society.

While at Winston Salem State University, I was able to participate in community-based physical activity interventions that aimed to reduce health disparities in the African American community. Through my experience with African American community-based health and

physical activity research, I have become more aware of the systematic issues and health

inequities that negatively impact this community. My identity as an African American woman

has allowed me to connect with the African American community. From my experiences, in

community health research I have developed a passion for centering injustices and leveraging

change within African American communities. For me, it is important to expose issues related to

power and advocate for change to improve society. A program evaluation degree provides me

the chance to critically examine social programs and their value to society.

At the University of North Carolina Greensboro, I was attracted to their program in

educational research methods because of its emphasis on social justice. Additionally, it provided

an emphasis on program evaluation which allowed me to better understand the various factors

that shape decisions and outcomes associated with programs. Acknowledging my positionality

helps to understand how my background and biases influence my research and perceptions of the

world.

Problem Statement

There is growing need for evaluators to reflect critically on the impact of race and racism,

particularly in the United States. Issues such as police brutality, racial profiling, economic

inequality, and disparities in education and healthcare continue to shape the experiences of

African American and Black communities. Despite notable progress in civil rights and

dismantling discriminatory practices, racial disparities persist (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and

shape perceptions of race and social policy (Hamilton, 1986). Ongoing discussions about racial

injustice emphasize the urgent need for systemic change and a collective commitment to

dismantle entrenched structures of racism.

Bryan & Lewis (2019) underscored the need for evaluators to critically reflect on the impact of race and racism, particularly in the United States. Hall (2018) further underscores the necessity for investigation into the experiences of African American populations. Moreover, there have been repeated calls for the evaluation community to systematically examine assumptions, attitudes, and methods that may contribute to inequity and institutionalized racism. The absence of research on evaluations of Black and/or African American communities in the field of evaluation presents a substantial challenge in addressing these issues, emphasizing the need for targeted exploration, and understanding of evaluation practices within African American and/or Black communities.

There is limited understanding of evaluation practices within African American communities. Program evaluation aims to gauge the merit, worth, or value of a program or intervention, providing valuable insights for funders (Scriven, 1998). In the realm of program evaluation, race emerges as a crucial factor intertwined with broader social justice issues. Evaluators must thoughtfully consider how race influences participant experiences, outcomes, and the effectiveness of interventions in diverse communities (Hall, 2018). Overlooking racial dynamics can perpetuate systemic inequalities, impeding accurate evaluations of program merit, worth, or value. Essential to this process are culturally responsive evaluation practices that acknowledge diverse perspectives, ensuring a nuanced understanding of different racial experiences (Hood et al., 2015). Recognizing how evaluators respond to the nuanced communities, particularly Black and/or African American communities, presents an opportunity to contribute to more equitable and effective evaluation practices tailored to their specific needs and contexts.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to investigate the evaluation practices of individuals who evaluate programs designed for African American communities. The primary focus was to explore the backgrounds and identities of evaluators actively engaged in programs serving Black and/or African American communities. The research specifically aimed to uncover the values and concerns that these evaluators prioritized in their work, with the overarching objective of gaining a deeper understanding of evaluation practices within Black ecosystems. Participants in this research were required to have experience evaluating at least one program explicitly targeting Black and/or African American communities.

A generic qualitative research design was employed to gain insights into participants' perspectives and experiences (Kahlke, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to illuminate evaluators' preparation for conducting program evaluations and the extent to which they considered issues and values such as race, culture, equity, and diversity throughout the evaluation process.

Significance of the Study

This study's findings significantly enrich the empirical literature on evaluation practices by providing specific insights and recommendations for evaluators who evaluate programs serving African American communities. This research underscores the essential responsibility of evaluators to engage in critical reflection on how race and racism impact their practice, particularly within the complex landscape of the United States marked by deep-seated issues of racial and structural inequities. By examining program evaluation within Black ecosystems, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how evaluators navigate cultural contexts when working with programs serving African American communities. Notably, the interviews with program

evaluators contributes profound insights currently lacking in the existing literature, thereby filling a crucial gap. The study's findings are poised to play a pivotal role in informing and promoting culturally responsive practices within the domain of program evaluation, fostering a more inclusive and effective approach in evaluating programs that serve African American communities.

Research Questions

This study examined the following research questions:

1. How do the identities of program evaluators serving African American communities influence their evaluation practices?

2. Which values and issues (i.e. culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, diversity) do program evaluators serving African American communities attend in their evaluation practice?

    a. How do they respond to these values and issues in their evaluation practice?

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will present an overview of the theoretical frameworks that guided this research. A theoretical framework is a grounding base or structure that helps to provide a rationale for a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). For this study, critical race theory (CRT) and culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) were utilized as guiding frameworks. CRT is a theoretical lens that explicitly addresses race-related issues (Delgado et al., 2017). In this study, I will specifically focus on the tenets: race is ordinary, interest convergence, and counter storytelling. Additionally, CRE is an evaluation framework and theory which integrates cultural

values and beliefs into evaluations (Hood et al., 2015). The following sections provide a brief explanation of CRT and CRE and their relevance to the study's content.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was established following the Civil Rights period as a response to the lack of advancements as it related to racial progress despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). With a focus on social justice, liberation, and economic empowerment, CRT asks people to "challenge prevailing racial injustices while committing themselves to interrogating racism's continued presence in U.S. jurisprudence" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 3). Through CRT, scholars aim to disrupt systems of structural inequality (i.e., housing, education, revenue, healthcare, etc.) and further "understand how White supremacy and its oppression of People of Color had been established and perpetuated" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015, p. 5). Similarly, CRT provides a lens that provides explicit and critical attention to race (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT is used as a tool to confront the racist outcomes produced in purportedly 'race-neutral' policies and practices and acknowledge the value of 'the black voice' that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy, and practice" (Hylton, 2010, p. 337). Tenets are used to describe the principles of CRT (Delgado et al., 2017). As CRT has been used to guide research in a multitude of disciplines (i.e., nursing, education, law, etc.) these tenets have continued to develop and grow. As this study is focused on the practice of evaluation of programs in African American communities, and how race and culture are responded to throughout one's evaluation practice, the following tenets will be used to guide this research; 1) racism is ordinary, 2) interest convergence, and 3) counter storytelling (Delgado et al., 2017).

To begin, the tenet "racism is ordinary" emphasizes the normality of race and racism in our everyday lives. Race and racism are often not explicit, therefore making them hard to address. As we live in a majority culture climate this often leads to beliefs of "color-blindness" and "meritocracy" (Delgado et al., 2017). "Color-blind" is an idea of equality that consists of the same treatment for everyone. Hartlep (2009) explains, "Racism and white supremacy are not aberrant, insofar as the oppressors—the status quo—exploit the "others" (the oppressed) in order to maintain their elitist control" (p. 7). In doing so, the "status quo" often asserts that they are neutral, yet this assertion is rejected after close examination. As Eurocentric worldview values consistently permeate the field of evaluation, evaluators have constantly questioned the role of white supremacy within the field (Caldwell & Bledsoe, 2019). Caldwell & Bledsoe (2019) explain, "the field is neither race nor culture neutral... The reliance on a singular cultural worldview positions the field and its products to ignore culturally diverse questions, definitions of data, and interpretations of findings thereby compromising validity and credibility of the evaluations conducted" (p. 8). Some evaluation scholars argue that evaluation is a tool of the government, therefore, "the public trust must examine its role with respect to these alarming trends and potential vulnerability" as it relates to growing inequity in the US (Hall, 2018, p. 569).

The second CRT tenet used to guide this study is interest convergence. Interest convergence notes, "racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 9). When discussing CRT in evaluation practice Ginsberg (2021) explains that interest convergence, "probes us to consider what drives decision-making across and within diverse stakeholder groups, especially as individuals may be part of multiple

stakeholder groups at once" (p. 4). Additionally, Ginsberg (2021) emphasizes the role of race when "determining equity, access, capital, and opportunity in the United States" (p. 4). Doing so allows insight into the converging interests associated with an evaluation. Subsequently, this will impact the types of questions that an evaluator may ask in an effort to better understand decision-making. CRT literature presents the concept of centering the margins. This includes shifting the emphasis from the majority group's perspective to that of the marginalized group (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010). This requires grasping the viewpoints of programs serving minoritized communities. However, discussions on race often stay shallow, failing to explore their effects on program evaluation methods and the incorporation of diverse perspectives in the evaluation process.

Counter storytelling emphasizes the counter reality which minority groups experience as opposed to those of the majority groups who are in power (Delgado et al., 2017). CRT argues the importance of voices of color because they are often excluded. Thus, counter storytelling provides a counter-narrative to the dominant culture magnifying the experiences of marginalized communities. Solorzano & Yosso (2002) identified four functions of counter-stories: fostering community among marginalized groups by humanizing educational theory and practice, challenging mainstream beliefs by offering alternative perspectives, providing new insights into marginalized realities, and demonstrating the potential for creating a richer world by blending narrative elements with current realities (p. 36).

Counter storytelling is present in culturally responsive evaluation practice which aims to highlight the voices of program participants who are often left out of the evaluation practice (Bryan & Lewis, 2019). This aligns with the concepts of counter-storytelling as it aims to open new windows of reality through the voice of the participants. Using CRT as a theoretical

framework, I provide a lens through which we can acquire a deeper understanding of the prevalent issues in the evaluation of programs serving African American communities.

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE)

The term "culturally responsive evaluation" (CRE) was first used by Stafford Hood during his presentation in May 1998 where he explains "responsive evaluation Amistad style" which highlighted the need to be culturally responsive and the importance of shared lived experience between the evaluators and participants (Hood et al. 2015, p. 285). Robert Stake's responsive evaluation provided a foundation for key concepts of CRE. Stake (2004) describes responsive evaluation as a "general perspective in the search for quality and the representation of quality in a program." Responsive evaluation is considered more so an attitude that believes that there is always a need to be more, or less responsive in an evaluation (Stake, 2004). Stake (2004) explains that being responsive means that the evaluator must be present to understand power dynamics and the values that stakeholders represent. Responsive evaluation requires interpersonal skills, and for the evaluator to develop relationships with program stakeholders. This may require evaluation to give additional attention to the needs of the program, program action, program uniqueness, and the cultural plurality of the people (Stake, 2004). Stake's 1967 Countenance of Educational Evaluation "emphasized that a rich description of the program and the context in which it functioned were critical to achieving something more than a superficial understanding of the program" (Hood, 2001, p. 35). Ultimately, this led evaluators to grasp the importance of incorporating qualitative research methods in their approaches.

CRE is a holistic framework that focuses on evaluation and culture by rejecting culture-free evaluation and incorporating the cultural value and beliefs that are foundational to evaluation (Hood et al., 2015). CRE reflects the work of scholars in culturally responsive

pedagogy, culturally responsive assessment, and multicultural validity. CRE utilizes various methods (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) to understand culture and to produce evaluations that capture the spirit of a program and how it is working (Hood, 2001). Mertens & Wilson (2018) explain that CRE incorporates the theoretical lens of critical paradigms such as critical race theory, Latino critical (LatCrit) theory, and Indigenous approaches to evaluation (Bowman-Farrell, 2019; Guajardo et al., 2020). In CRE, Hood makes explicit issues of equity and equality, giving particular attention to marginalized groups to help bring balance to the evaluation process (Hood et al, 2015). CRE is considered a social advocacy approach within evaluation. Similar to other social justice approaches such as democratic evaluation, responsive evaluation, and constructivist, CRE is inherently political as it prioritizes issues of power and privilege (House & Howe, 2000; Stake, 2004; Hopson, 2009; Hood et al., 2015).

Culturally responsive evaluation provides a transformative perspective for examining evaluation methodologies within Black communities. Expanding upon Robert Stake's concept of responsive evaluation, CRE underscores the pivotal significance of cultural responsiveness. Operating within a comprehensive framework that rejects culturally neutral evaluation and integrates cultural values and beliefs, CRE represents a holistic approach grounded in critical perspectives. Central to CRE is the prioritization of equity and equality, with a specific focus on marginalized populations. As a politically informed endeavor, CRE addresses issues of power and privilege, seeking to redress imbalances within the evaluation process. Therefore, in exploring the practices of evaluators in Black communities, CRE emerges as a vital theoretical framework, offering insights and methodologies that honor cultural diversity, promote equity, and advocate for social justice.

Key Terms

The following section provides definitions for key terms used in this study.

Race. Race refers to a social construct that categorizes people into distinct groups based on shared physical and genetic traits, such as skin color, hair type, and facial features. Although lacking scientific basis, these categories have historically been employed to categorize and differentiate human populations, frequently resulting in the establishment of social hierarchies and disparities.

Social Justice*.* Social justice is a concept centered on the fair and equitable distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities within a society. It involves advocating for the eradication of systemic injustices and inequities based on factors such as race, class, gender, or other social identifiers. Social justice seeks to create a more just society where all individuals have equal access to basic human rights and can actively engage in various dimensions of their community, including education, economics, social interactions, and politics.

Identity. Identity refers to the characteristics, beliefs, values, and experiences that define an individual or group and distinguish them from others. Identity encompasses various aspects such as cultural, ethnic, gender, professional status, and personal dimensions, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and how they are viewed by others.

Values. Values are core principles and beliefs that guide an individual's or a society's attitudes and behaviors. These principles influence decision-making, ethics, and the way people prioritize and evaluate what is important in life. In the context of program evaluation, the term "values" commonly denotes the evaluators' responsibility to exercise judgment in assessing the merit or worth of the object under evaluation (Hall et al, 2012).

Black Communities. Individuals who identify as having indigenous African ancestry or heritage.

African American Communities. African Americans are a population in the United States that are identified by their ancestry to Black Africans. Specifically, African Americans are of American nationality. African Americans account for 13.4% of the US population and are the second largest minority group (Palmer et al., 2021).

Program Evaluation. Program evaluation was established in the 20th century to promote accountability in social programs implemented under the New Deal Act of 1935 (Dean-Coffey, 2018; Thomas & Campbell, 2021). Throughout this study, program evaluation will refer to a form of social inquiry that is systematic and focuses on collecting and analyzing data to make judgments about the merit, value, and worth of a program (Scriven, 1998; Patton, 1997; Rossi et al., 2004; Newcomer et al., 2015). Through inquiry, program evaluation aims to answer evaluation questions associated with projects, programs, and/or policies, offering valuable insights to guide decision-making, enhance programs, and improve accountability (Mertens, 2013).

Culture. SenGupta et al. (2004) state that "culture shapes values, beliefs, and worldviews" (p. 6). Hood et al. (2015) emphasize that culture is specific to a particular group or society., As cited in Hood et al. (2015), Frierson et al. (2002) define culture as "a cumulative body of learned and shared behavior, values, customs, and beliefs common to a particular group or society" (p. 283). For this study, culture will be used broadly to describe the social behaviors and norms found within particular groups of people (SenGupta et al., 2004; Hood et al., 2015).

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE). CRE is an evaluation framework and theory which incorporates cultural values and beliefs throughout an evaluation (Hood et al., 2015). CRE

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incorporates critical paradigms and rejects notions of culture-free evaluation (Hood et al, 2014; Mertens & Wilson, 2018). CRE acknowledges issues of power and privilege in evaluation and makes issues of equity and equality explicit by giving voice to marginalized groups throughout the evaluation process. In this study, CRE will refer to evaluation approaches that address issues of equity and equality by centering the voices of marginalized groups and being responsive to their cultural values and beliefs (Hood et al, 2014; Mertens & Wilson, 2018).

Organization of the Study

Chapters are used to organize this study. Chapter I has introduced the study, providing a statement of the problem, purpose, positionality, significance, and definitions for key terms. Next, Chapter II provides a comprehensive review of literature on social programming's relevance to Black America and program evaluation history. Literature on evaluation practice, particularly within African American and/or Black communities, and evaluation approaches prioritizing social justice values will also be reviewed. Chapter III presents an overview of the methodological approach to this study, describing the proposed research design, population, data collection strategy, and data analyses. Chapter IV provides the study's findings, while Chapter V examines the implications of these findings and provides feedback on potential future research directions.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation investigated the backgrounds and identities of program evaluators and their evaluation practices within programs serving Black and/or African American communities. The literature underpinning this analysis is situated within the field of program evaluation, particularly focusing on evaluation practice and evaluator backgrounds and identities. While existing literature on the backgrounds and identities of evaluators offers insights into practitioners in the field, it lacks specificity in addressing how these backgrounds and identities influence practices within specific communities. Literature on the evaluation of programs serving Black and/or African American communities provides insights into evaluation methodologies and findings. However, there is limited research addressing the evaluation practices of evaluators and the values and issues considered throughout the evaluation process. Despite program evaluation research emphasizing the importance of considering race and culture in evaluations, the existing literature lacks a detailed exploration of this concern.

Thus, this chapter commences with an overview of social programming and its relevance to Black America, followed by an overview of literature regarding the history of evaluation. Literature is them presented on evaluation practice, emphasizing foundational documents guiding evaluators. Considering the study's emphasis on evaluators in African American and/or Black communities, this chapter reviews literature on evaluator backgrounds, identities, and the role of race in evaluation, alongside approaches prioritizing social justice values. Finally, the chapter concludes with literature on evaluation practices within initiatives serving Black and/or African American communities.

Social Programming and Black America

Hamilton's (1987) investigation into the impact of social policies and welfare initiatives on the Black American community offers a historical analysis spanning from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. In the 1880s and 1890s, the emergence of "self-help associations," often rooted in black churches, facilitated the establishment of crucial community services like childcare facilities, elementary schools, and elderly care arrangements within Black communities. Central to Hamilton's analysis is the acknowledgment of enduring racial disparities in the United States, stemming from the legacy of slavery. He underscores the profound influence of slavery on perceptions of race and social policy, highlighting the fact that while others immigrated to seek property, Black Americans were brought to the country as property.

When considering social welfare policies, Hamilton (1986) delineates two tiers: those aimed at preventing dependence on government resources and those offering temporary relief until individuals can support themselves. While the New Deal addressed both tiers, its primary focus was on preventing dependency. Despite Black Americans being included in the original social security legislation of 1935 under the New Dela, these programs provided minimal assistance to the Black community. The implementation of social insurance programs during the New Deal era was marred by widespread racial discrimination in employment, limiting access for Black individuals. State-imposed eligibility criteria further hindered full participation due to the "separate but equal" doctrine upheld by the Supreme Court.

During the Civil Rights era, the nation grappled with constitutional rights, shifting towards interpreting the constitutional status of emancipated Black citizens and emphasizing court-ordered remedies. By the mid-1960s, the focus shifted from advocating for Black American rights to prioritizing resource allocation (Hamilton,1986). The importance of

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providing entitlements such as job opportunities for Black Americans gained prominence during this period. Black Americans often faced challenges in employment, prompting the establishment of policies like Affirmative Action. As the 21st century unfolds, the pursuit of Black American rights remains ongoing, with many programs still making efforts to address to the civil rights of minoritized groups.

History and Philosophy of Program Evaluation

As a standard of scientific investigation and a key component of everyday life, evaluation skills date back to biblical times (Scriven, 1998). History supports that Egyptians used evaluation skills to track production outputs in grain and livestock. Additionally, evaluative processes were present in the research on diet and scurvy among British sailors (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). At some point, everyone has used evaluation to "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" (Thomas & Campbell, 2021, p. 4).

However, program evaluation is different as it focuses on collecting data to answer evaluative questions related to projects, programs, and/or policies (Mertens, 2013). Table 1 provides a review of various definitions of program evaluation.

Table 1. Definitions of Program Evaluation

Author(s)	Year	Definition
Scriven	1998	A process of determining merit, worth or value of a project, program, or other evaluand
Michael Quinn Patton	1997	The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming
Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman	2004	The use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action in ways that improve social condition
Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey	2015	The application of systematic methods to address questions about program operations and results. It may include ongoing monitoring of a program as well as one-shot studies of program processes or program impact. The approaches used are based on social science research methodologies and professional standards (p. 8).

While several scholars have contributed various definitions of program evaluation, consistent themes include systematic inquiry, collecting and analyzing data, merit, value, worth, and drawing conclusions. Value is a key factor of evaluation that helps to differentiate it from other types of inquiry (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). Unlike other forms of social inquiry through evaluation, one can assess the value that a program or activity brings to the stakeholders.

Modern program evaluation was established in the early 20th century in response to the need for supporting outputs, costs, efficiency, and compliance of government and academic research (Dean-Coffey, 2019). The use of program evaluation in the United States of America in the 20th century traces back to the 1920s with the U.S. government agencies such as the General Accounting Office and the Bureau of the Budget practicing evaluation (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). Specifically, the New Deal implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s

had serious implications for the field of program evaluation. By concentrating on providing social programs to improve societal issues such as poverty, unemployment, and economic recession, the New Deal provided a mandate for evaluations. Evaluations were used to assess the effectiveness of the newly implemented social programs which focused on providing a social safety net by developing the economy and creating jobs (Thomas & Campbell, 2021).

Throughout the 20th century, program evaluation maintained its focus on government-funded education research, shaped by the prevailing social, political, and economic circumstances of the time (Dean-Coffey, 2018; Thomas & Campbell, 2021). At the onset of the century, the work and philosophical perspectives of numerous scholars significantly influenced the evolution of program evaluation. Notable figures such as Kurt Lewin, Alva Myrdal, Gunnar Myrdal, and Ralph Tyler introduced research and evaluation methodologies, including action research and social justice approaches, along with innovative data collection techniques like questionnaires, interviews, observations, and checklists (Thomas & Campbell, 2021).

In the 1960s, incited by the implementation of programs addressing poverty in response to the War on Poverty, program evaluation pivoted towards accountability to gauge the effectiveness of these initiatives. This resulted in systematic evaluation being mandated in legislation. Evaluators argued for more scholars "to take advantage of the methods research and analysis being utilized in the most prestigious domains (mostly quantitative methods) of social science such as psychology and sociology" (Thomas & Campbell, 2021, p. 87). This in addition to the demand for systematic evaluations resulted in evaluators overwhelmingly using quantitative measures to assess the effectiveness of programs. However, by the 1970s, the use of quantitative methods became scrutinized as scholars began to understand the value added by qualitative data ultimately leading to paradigm wars. The paradigm wars recognized that

although the experimental design works on small-scale evaluations, it is not as successful with larger programs often resulting in findings that show program failure (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). In the 1980s, the field of evaluation embraced the incorporation of qualitative methods, culminating in the publication of Michael Quinn Patton's first edition of "Qualitative Evaluation Methods" in 1980.

Influential scholars who contributed to the different methodological views of evaluation were Donald T Campbell and Lee Cronbach. These scholars challenged the methodologies used in the evaluation of federally sponsored programs. Campbell's work highlighted issues related to validity and contributed greatly to the use of quasi-experiments and randomized control trials in the field of evaluations. Cronbach however argued that the current evaluation methodology was inadequate and was apprehensive about the view of evaluation as objective (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). Instead, Cronbach often criticized the use of RCTs in evaluation and focused on using appropriate methods (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods) to understand the social and political aspects of evaluation.

The early 21st century provided increasing diversity in theoretical and methodological choices for program evaluators. Evaluation during this period is branded by efforts made toward professionalization (i.e., professional societies), research (i.e., publications, interdisciplinary studies), and collaboration within the field (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). In response to the increased value of evaluation because of federal budget cuts, evaluation expanded the approaches, paradigms, and methodologies. Also, more emphasis was given to social justice and diversity in the field. Subsequently, Rodney Hopson became the first African American president of the American Evaluation Association (AEA) in 2012. Emphasis on issues of culture, social justice, and race led to significant advancements in the development of culturally responsive

evaluation (CRE) providing research centered on the theory and practice of CRE (Thomas & Campbell, 2021).

Program Evaluation Practice

Evaluation practice is unique to the culture of the evaluand, therefore developing an appropriate evaluation is dependent on various factors (Hennessy, 1995; Newcomer et al., 2015; Mertens & Wilson, 2018). Newcomer et al. (2015) explains that selecting evaluation approaches can be challenging for both evaluation and program staff. However, "the value of program evaluation endeavors will be enhanced when clients for the information know what they are looking for" (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 9). It is important to consider the purpose of the evaluation when selecting an evaluation design (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). Mertens & Wilson (2018) discuss four general purposes of evaluations when discussing how to select an appropriate evaluation type. The purposes of evaluation include gaining insights, determining necessary inputs, finding areas in need of improvement or change practices, assessing program effectiveness, and addressing issues of human rights and social justice. Table 2 below outlines common types of evaluations used based on the purpose of the evaluation as outlined by Mertens & Wilson (2018).

Table 2. Evaluation Types and their Aligned Purpose

Evaluation Purpose	Evaluation Type
To gain insight or determine inputs	context evaluations, capacity building, relevance evaluation, and needs and assets assessment
To find areas in need of improvement or to change practices	implementation evaluation, responsive evaluation, development evaluation, collaborative evaluation, process evaluation, and monitoring in international development
To assess the effectiveness of a program	summative evaluations, outcomes/impact evaluations, policy evaluation, replicability evaluations, sustainability evaluations, and/or cost analysis for their evaluation type
To address issues of human rights	deliberative democratic evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation, country-led evaluation, and gender analysis

As many programs have multiple purposes, it is important to understand that these evaluation types are often used in conjunction with one another. Therefore, it is common that evaluators may select more than one evaluation type such as implementation and sustainability, or context and process evaluation when tailoring an evaluation for a specific program (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). In addition, theories, frameworks, and approaches are used to help guide those who practice program evaluation. are commonly utilized to conduct program evaluations. The selection of evaluation methods (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods) is often based on the needs of the program, the funder, and the values of the evaluator.

Values plays a significant role in the practices of evaluators, often shaping the approaches and methods used to conduct evaluations. Teasdale et al. (2023) challenged persistent misrepresentations of evaluation as a value-neutral inquiry process by presenting an empirical study that deepened understanding of evaluators' values and how they "showed up" in evaluation practice. They found that each evaluator in their study discussed values related to the character of the evaluation process and results, emphasizing four key beliefs: Systematic, high-quality

empiricism; Usefulness; Credibility; and Educating stakeholders. These values formed the foundational principles guiding most evaluators in their practice. Additionally, evaluators expressed a belief in the active promotion of equity, addressing power imbalances, and serving historically marginalized individuals and communities within the realm of evaluation. This commitment was reflected in their practical approach, which centered on evaluating programs specifically designed to advance equity.

Making value judgments is a crucial role of evaluation practice that is often supported by various factors. Value judgments often arise from the subtle interplay of intuition, reflecting deeply ingrained beliefs and societal norms that guide our perception of what is right or wrong. Hurteau et al. (2020) explored the growing recognition of expert intuition as a valid form of knowledge, supported by research showcasing its effectiveness in judgment and decision-making across diverse fields. While theorists acknowledged the role of intuition in evaluative practice, this study filled a crucial gap by conducting an exploratory investigation through in-depth, in-person interviews with eight novice and eight experienced evaluators. The research aimed to understand the development of intuition and its contributions to judgment, specifically within the context of program evaluation. The findings highlighted that intuition underwent a rigorous evolution, involving reflective analysis of experiments, successes, and failures, with expertise and experience playing critical roles in its development.

Evaluation Competencies, Standards, and Guiding Principles

As the practice of evaluation is complex, scholars in the field have argued the need for competencies and principles to define the work of the program evaluation (King & Ayoo, 2020). Since the implementation of the National Defense Act of 1958 (NDEA), and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 program evaluation has become a requirement of

most federal grants. Due to the professional status of program evaluation, some scholars

emphasize the need for a body of principles and competencies to help define and guide the

practice of program evaluation. In response to the need for guiding principles in the field,

American Evaluation Association (AEA) created a task force that worked to develop the

Program Evaluation Guiding Principles in 1995 (Ayoo et al., 2020). The goals of the Program

Evaluation Guiding Principles are,

The Guiding Principles reflect the core values of the AEA and are intended as a guide to

the professional ethical conduct of evaluators. The five Principles address systematic inquiry,

competence, integrity, respect for people, and common good and equity. The principles are

interdependent and interconnected. At times, they might even conflict with one another.

Therefore, evaluators should carefully examine how they justify professional actions.

In 2005, a group of program evaluator volunteers at the University of Minnesota created

the Essential Competencies for Program Evaluators (Stevahn et al., 2005). These competencies

were used in the development of the Canadian Evaluation Society's Credentialed Evaluator

Program (Ayoo et al., 2020).

As culture is foundational to program evaluation and works to shape its practice, in 2011,

the AEA provided a statement on cultural competence (*American evaluation association

statement on cultural competence in evaluation,* n.d). The AEA Public Statement on Cultural

Competence in Evaluation states the significance of cultural competence in evaluation and

provides expectations for cultural competence in evaluation (*American evaluation association

statement on cultural competence in evaluation,* n.d). Table 3 overviews the American

Evaluation Association *Essential Practices for Cultural Competence* which provides guidelines

for evaluation practices (*American evaluation association statement on cultural competence in evaluation,* n.d).

Table 3. AEA Essential Practices for Cultural Competence

Competency	Description
Acknowledge the complexity of cultural identity.	Culturally competent evaluators recognize, respond to, and work to reconcile differences between and within cultures and subcultures.
Recognize the dynamics of power.	Culturally competent evaluators work to avoid reinforcing cultural stereotypes and prejudice in their work.
Recognize and eliminate bias in social relations.	Culturally competent evaluators are thoughtful and deliberate in their use of language and other social relations in order to reduce bias when conducting evaluations.
Employ culturally congruent epistemologies, theories, and methods.	Culturally competent evaluators seek to understand how the constructs are defined by cultures and are aware of the many ways epistemologies and theories can be utilized, how data can be collected, analyzed and interpreted, and the diversity of contexts in which findings can be disseminated.
Continue self-assessments.	Regularly monitor the extent to which you can serve as an open, responsive instrument given relevant attributes of an evaluation context.

In 2018, the American Evaluation Association (AEA) Evaluator Competencies were developed to help provide language to discuss what it means to be an evaluator and provide a "roadmap" to guide the training, education, and practice of evaluators (*AEA evaluator competencies*, n.d.). The competencies were established by an AEA task force which included a group of evaluators in the AEA with an intent to establish program evaluation competencies that are pragmatic, inclusive, intentional, and dynamic. Five domains are included in the AEA competencies which include: professional practice, methodology, context, planning and management, and interpersonal.

Researchers have started to investigate the use of competencies and standards in program evaluation education. Montrosse-Moorhead et al. (2022) use the AEA competencies to investigate which competencies should be taught in evaluation education programs. Using the Delphi method, they surveyed 11 evaluators across various disciplines on which competencies should guide the development and implementation of evaluation education (Montrosse-Moorhead et al., 2022). They found that the highest priority competencies for both master and doctoral programs were dominantly from the methodology competencies. Stevahn et al. (2020) discuss ways that the 2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies can be used for effective program evaluation practice. They identify three primary users of the competencies which consist of individuals, organizations/institutions, and evaluation associations (Stevahn et al., 2020). Further, they explain how the competencies can be used for self-assessing and reflecting on personal practice, pursuing professional development, and providing a common language for program evaluation discourse (Stevahn et al., 2020). Stevahn et al. (2020) explain how using the competencies for self-assessing and reflecting may "illuminate areas of strength or weakness and provide direction for developing, sharpening, or advancing proficiencies" (p. 76). They describe using *the 2018 Evaluator Competencies Self Assessment* instrument for reflection on one's practice. This tool allows evaluators to systematically reflect on their practice using a seven-point scale (Stevahn et al., 2020). Utilization of the *2018 Evaluator Competencies Self Assessment* tool may provide insight for individual program evaluators on program evaluation competencies (Stevahn et al., 2020). To date, there is no published literature utilizing this tool.

Cultural Considerations in Evaluation Practice

Research on evaluation practice provides awareness of how equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture are used and conceptualized. Boyce (2017) conducted a case study investigating how well a values-engaged educative (VEE) approach to a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) program attended to equity, inclusion, and culture. This case study included data from weekly evaluator systematic reflections, document review of evaluation and program artifacts, interviews with stakeholders, and peer review and assessment. (Boyce, 2017). She found that "(a) explicit attention to culture, diversity, and equity was initially challenged by the Center organizational culture and (b) evidence for successful attention to culture, diversity, and equity emerged in formal evaluation criteria and documents, and informal dialogue and discussion with stakeholders" (p. 37). Boyce (2017) underscores crucial insights for evaluation practitioners, stressing the significance of thoroughly engaging with stakeholders and the cultures and values of the program, demonstrating patience and respect when tackling culture, diversity, and equity, actively communicating with stakeholders about these matters, and the effectiveness of utilizing a VEE evaluation approach or framework to focus on these issues (p.40).

In their investigation, Boyce et al (2022) discovered that Black evaluators characterized their approach as multifaceted, responsive, and robust, underscoring their commitment as advocates within their practice. Moreover, they highlighted their adaptability and effectiveness in addressing the needs of the communities served by the programs under evaluation. This capability was attributed to their thorough preparedness and expertise in employing a wide array of methodologies and theoretical frameworks.

In their examination of equity-oriented evaluation in New England, Gates et al. (2022) employed a mixed methods approach, utilizing interviews and a questionnaire. They aimed to

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investigate several aspects, including the characteristics of evaluators and evaluation providers in the region, the interpretation of equity within evaluators' professional contexts, the implementation of equity-related practices during different phases of evaluation, challenges and facilitators to equity-oriented evaluation, and methods to enhance capacity for equity-focused evaluation.

They found that although there is an increasing attention to equity in evaluation work, many evaluators had little to no formal training in equity-oriented evaluation approaches. Additionally, they found that stakeholder and evaluator relationships can help to shape equity-oriented evaluations. They argue for more research on evaluator groups instead of individuals as most evaluators work on teams. To conclude they support current calls for more racially and ethnically diverse evaluators in the field (Gates et al., 2022). Research on equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture and evaluation practice is limited (Gates et al., 2022). Available empirical evidence supports the use of qualitative and mixed methods approaches to inquire about equity, diversity, inclusion, and culture and evaluation practice.

Evaluator Background and Identity

A fundamental aspect of this study is to grasp the backgrounds and identities of evaluators engaged in programs serving Black and/or African American communities. Sturges (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis focusing on the formation of evaluator identity. The research investigates how political economy, knowledge work, and personal history influence individuals' perceptions of themselves as proficient evaluators. The findings reveal four distinct adaptations to program evaluation: academic entrepreneurs in higher education, post-academics seeking intellectual freedom, professional evaluators closely aligned with research organizations, and layover evaluators preparing for their next career move.

Reid et al. (2020) highlights the absence of a precise definition for identity in the literature, recognizing its commonly perceived dynamic nature. This dynamic perspective aids evaluators in understanding and reconciling conflicting ideologies within their daily experiences. In their study surveying evaluators of color (EOCs) diverse in age, gender, sector of employment, nation of origin, and experience, Reid et al. (2020) discover that beyond racial and ethnic identities, factors such as education, evaluation training, experience, and employment sector also shape EOCs' identity as evaluators. The practice of evaluation presents numerous challenges for EOCs stemming from various identities, including race/ethnicity, experience, evaluation sector, gender, physical appearance, and age. In their exploration of the professional experiences of Black evaluators, with a specific focus on the intersections of their identities, roles, and practices, Boyce et al. (2022) find that participants identify traits such as race, childhood socioeconomic status, gender identity, and age as significant factors shaping their identity.

Hartman et al. (2022) challenge conventional Western perspectives in scientific inquiry, advocating for the inclusion of personal perspectives and experiences in evaluative research. They emphasize the importance of cultivating self-awareness, engaging in reflection, and rejecting biases. They discuss the concept of "wholeness," which encourages individuals to integrate their complete selves into their work, embracing the diversity inherent in identity. Additionally, they explore the theme of "seeing," extending beyond the physical, prompting observers to delve into tensions, dynamics, and histories within spaces. Hartman et al. (2022) delve into the complexities of "community," underscoring the importance of comprehending and reflecting on these complexities, acknowledging the influential role of communal histories and shared experiences.

The literature reviewed contributes to a nuanced understanding of the backgrounds, identities, and practices of program evaluators, highlighting diversity, self-awareness, collaboration, and commitment to equity.

Race and Evaluation

While race is commonly acknowledged as a variable in program evaluation across diverse communities, scholarly discourse on its implications on practice within the field remains limited. Social scientists, recognizing race as a socially constructed concept lacking a universally accepted definition, suggest replacing it in theory and research to avoid reinforcing stereotypes. Hall (2018) argues that race, with its unclear scientific meaning, presents challenges in evaluation as a generative construct impacting perceptions. Despite a desire for reduced significance, its influence persists. Given its impact on behavior, it is imperative for evaluators to acknowledge and address its relevance (Hall, 2018). As the practice of program evaluation continues, reflection on whether its theories inadvertently perpetuate acts influenced by race, defining an evaluation challenge.

Hopson (1999) addresses the inherent challenges in conceptualizing and constructing minority issues within evaluation, particularly regarding race, power, and hegemony in American institutions. He critiques traditional assessment methods for communities of color, suggesting that standardized tests and normative approaches may be inappropriate. Hopson advocates for the promotion and utilization of inclusive, collaborative, participatory, and empowerment evaluation models to ensure equitable involvement of diverse stakeholders. However, he emphasizes that these approaches are insufficient if evaluators do not reconsider the conceptual lenses through which they evaluate marginalized groups. Hopson underscores the importance of

evaluators of color, highlighting their role in bringing perspectives that can enhance the social, psychological, and educational conditions of disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Ladson-Billings (2023) discusses the persistent role of race in the United States education system, examining the ongoing challenges of desegregation efforts. She highlights how the curriculum often centers on the white perspective, negatively impacting the self-esteem of Black children. Ladson-Billings also explores the segregation within current schooling, noting disparities in enriched experiences for Black students. She points out how policies like natural hair bans and clear backpack mandates disproportionately affect Black children. These issues carry significant implications for educational research and program evaluation, as many programs are influenced by a racialized lens. Ladson-Billings emphasizes the importance of using precise language and recognizes the unique perspective that researchers of color bring to their work. She concludes by urging researchers to critically interrogate how race shapes the questions they investigate.

Overview of Social Justice Oriented Approaches to Evaluation

The role of social justice has been highly contended within the field of evaluation. Caldwell and Bledsoe (2019) explain social just evaluation approaches as those "that have sought to address and validate issues of culture, equity, and responsiveness" (p. 8). While the New Deal introduced inclusive policies, evaluations from that era lacked a social justice perspective. As evaluation practices were often shaped by the majority culture, white males, program evaluations often failed to pay attention to the mistreatment of African Americans and other marginalized groups who experienced bias and limited advancement under the New Deal. Consequently, the voices of African American evaluators, such as Ambrose Caliver, Reid E. Jackson, Rose Butler Browne, Aaron A Brown, Leander L Boykin, and Charles H Thompson,

whose research focused on segregation and education aligning with civil rights issues, have been erased from mainstream evaluation despite their significant contributions (Hood, 2001).

Since the 1970s, evaluators questioned the role of evaluation in the political landscape (Caldwell & Bledsoe, 2019, p. 8). Calls for social justice in evaluation highlight issues like race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and privilege (Caldwell & Bledsoe, 2019). Despite programs for Black communities, the evaluation literature offers limited insight, often excluding evaluators of color. Modern program evaluation, rooted in white supremacist principles, perpetuates exclusion (Caldwell & Bledsoe, 2019, p. 8), reflecting Critical Race Theory's notion that racism is ordinary. Evaluation theories, aligned with the dominant culture, lack representation of marginalized groups. Despite their limited applicability, these theories are regularly treated as the norm. Hopson (1999) urged, "the evaluation discipline to revisit the conventional epistemologies, theories, and methods that are concerned with people of color in their own terms" (p. 450).

In answer to the demand for epistemologies, theories, and methods that embrace values of social justice and diverse perspectives, certain scholars in evaluation have introduced novel approaches. These include culturally responsive evaluation, transformative participatory evaluation, transformative evaluation, democratic evaluation, deliberative democratic evaluation, empowerment evaluation, equity-focused evaluation, and values-engaged evaluation (Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005; Greene et al., 2006; House & Howe, 2000; Hood et al., 2015; Kushner, 2002) For comprehensive details about each of these approaches please refer to Appendix A.

Evaluation of Programs Serving Black and/or African American Communities

Okoro et al. (2020) conducted a program impact evaluation focusing on culturally responsive health promotion to address health disparities in African American (AA) men. The intervention aimed to increase knowledge and risk awareness of targeted health conditions, change healthcare-seeking attitudes, and improve lifestyle-related health behaviors. It consisted of eight 90-minute sessions targeting both men and women.

Following the intervention, a program impact evaluation was conducted, involving a pre-/post-knowledge questionnaire assessing knowledge of prostate cancer, cardiovascular disease (CVD), diabetes, and mental health. Interviews with male participants and a focus group discussion with female participants were also conducted to gather feedback. Data analysis showed an increase in knowledge among participants, with qualitative analysis highlighting themes related to the intervention's value and recommendations for improvement. The findings suggest positive impacts on knowledge and attitudes related to health among AA men, with insights provided for enhancing program effectiveness.

Okoro et al. (2020) did not explicitly address how culture or race influenced the evaluation process, including data collection methods and the involvement of evaluation participants (community members, stakeholders) throughout the process. The evaluation primarily focused on the impact of the intervention in addressing health disparities among African American men and did not delve into the specific cultural or racial dynamics affecting the evaluation process. However, it is worth noting that the intervention itself was culturally responsive, targeting African American men and leveraging the influence of women in their lives, indicating an awareness of cultural factors in health promotion efforts.

Boyce et al. (2019) conducted an evaluation of a high school STEM program called Project ENGAGES, aimed at providing authentic research experiences for African American students and fostering their interest in STEM careers. The evaluation served both formative and summative purposes, aiming to provide valid and useful information about program implementation, effectiveness, impacts, institutionalization, and sustainability to stakeholders, including the National Science Foundation (NSF), program directors, managers, participants, and the public. The evaluation prioritized assessing the quality of the program experience, short- and long-term effectiveness and impact, and factors influencing students' pursuit of advanced degrees and careers in STEM, while also being responsive to the interests and concerns of program managers and directors.

Boyce et al. (2019) provided insight into how values and diversity were considered throughout the evaluation practice and approach. The Values-Engaged, Educative (VEE) approach employed in the evaluation emphasized the importance of incorporating scientific content, instructional pedagogy, and sensitivity to diversity and equity issues. This approach called for explicit attention to diversity and equity, responsiveness to program culture and context, and engagement with all stakeholders' perspectives and values. By prioritizing these considerations, the evaluation not only assessed program effectiveness but also ensured that the evaluation process itself reflected and respected the values of inclusivity and equity.

Furthermore, Boyce et al. (2019) employed a mixed methods evaluation design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program, represent its complexity fairly, and explore various dimensions of the same phenomena. Data collection methods were chosen based on the VEE approach guidelines, considering knowledge, access, and the data needed to answer evaluation questions. These methods included observations, interviews with program staff,

participant surveys assessing satisfaction and knowledge/skill growth, focus groups, document analysis, and longitudinal tracking.

In Paylan et al. (2019), the study focuses on integrating health messages into sermons as a means to address HIV stigma and promote testing in African American and Latino churches, which predominantly serve racial and ethnic minorities. This multi-component intervention was implemented in three churches - a Latino Catholic, a Latino Pentecostal, and an African American Baptist church - located in high HIV prevalence areas of Los Angeles County, California.

A process evaluation was conducted to assess the implementation of various components within each intervention church. Key evaluation factors included reach, dose delivered, fidelity, and implementation. The study invited churches in and around Long Beach, a city with a notably high cumulative AIDS incidence rate, to participate. These churches were matched based on race-ethnicity, denomination, and congregation size. The evaluation employed an intervention and control group design to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention within the participating churches.

Schultz & Sontag-Padilla (2015) conducted an evaluation of programs funded by the African American Men and Boys Task Force Initiative, focusing on African American youth in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. The programs aimed to tackle issues such as poor employment, education, and criminal justice outcomes by harnessing the strengths of youth and recognizing the impact of cultural, family, and community factors.

Led by the RAND team, the evaluation assessed each grantee's implementation process and progress toward program goals across four priority areas: communication, innovation economy/community & economic development, education, and identity, gender, and character

development. Drawing on the Getting to Outcomes (GTO) framework, which integrates principles of program planning, implementation, and evaluation, the evaluation developed metrics to gauge program progress and understand the processes involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Figure 1. Getting to Outcomes (GTO) Framework
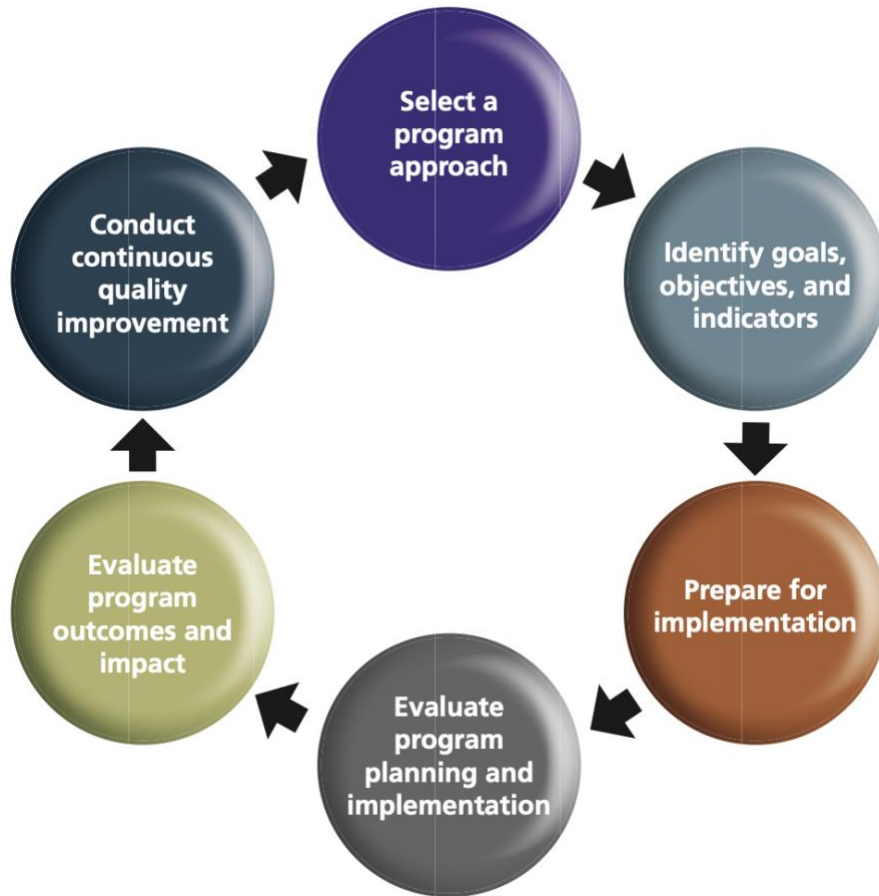
While explicit considerations for culture and race were not addressed in the evaluation approach, the process was interactive. Conversations were held with the grantees to identify potential data sources and assess outcomes linked to the program's goals. Grantees were asked to provide outcomes data in quarterly progress reports. The evaluation revealed that culture, family, and community significantly influenced program delivery and outcomes. Challenges such as

exposure to community violence and lack of agency coordination negatively impacted program engagement and success.

Overall, the literature on the evaluation of programs serving Black and/or African American communities offers insights into evaluation practices, emphasizing the use of both process and outcome evaluations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the programs. Methods employed in these evaluations included surveys, questionnaires, document reviews, and observations. While Boyce et al. (2019) shed light on how a values-engaged educative approach influences the evaluation process, there is limited discussion on the role of culture and race in these evaluations and their impact on evaluative decisions. This significant gap underscores the need for a deeper exploration of how race and culture shape evaluation practices and their implications for evaluation outcomes.

Summary of the Literature

Mertens & Wilson (2018) examine the objectives of program evaluation and their connection to various evaluation types (such as summative, content, outcome, impact, etc.). Despite limited literature on the integration of culture into evaluation practice, it suggests challenges in prioritizing culture, equity, diversity, and inclusion in evaluation work, with many evaluators lacking training in equity-oriented approaches (Boyce, 2017; Gates et al., 2022). Similarly, evaluation literature on programs serving Black and/or African American communities often overlooks the consideration of race throughout the evaluation process, despite calls for more extensive discussions on how culture and race are factored into evaluations, especially within programs serving Black communities (Hood et al., 2022). The aim of this study was to explore the methodologies of evaluators working within programs serving African

American communities and examine the values and issues that the attend to in their evaluation

practices.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Study Purpose and Research Questions

There is limited literature available on program evaluation specifically within Black and/or African American communities. Bryan, Lewis, & Hopson (2023) suggest that in today's evaluation landscape, there's a rising awareness of the need to directly address issues related to race and racism. This recognition spans across various sectors, indicating an important opportunity to deepen our understanding of how and when race-conscious thinking can enhance clarity within evaluation contexts. The aim of this study was to investigate program evaluators and their practices who are actively involved with programs catering to Black and/or African American communities. Employing a qualitative research design, I sought to enhance my understanding of the backgrounds and identities of program evaluators who evaluate programs serving these communities. Furthermore, I gained insight into the evaluation practices applied within these programs, revealing the various values and issues addressed by these evaluators.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the identities of program evaluators serving African American communities influence their evaluation practices?

2. Which values and issues (i.e., culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, diversity) do program evaluators serving African American communities attend in their evaluation practice?

    a. How do they respond to these values and issues in their evaluation practice?

Research Methodology

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the identities and backgrounds of evaluators actively involved in programs serving Black and/or African American communities. Specifically, the research sought to identify the values and issues that these evaluators prioritize in their practice, with the overarching goal of gaining a more profound understanding of evaluation practices within Black ecosystems.

A generic qualitative research study was applied to capture the subjective experiences of program evaluators and their engagement with programs designed for Black and/or African American communities. Qualitative research, as emphasized by Creswell and Plano (2018), is focused on understanding, process, and meanings. In the context of this study, the qualitative approach aimed to gain insights into the meaning and significance of the personal experiences of evaluators working with programs serving Black and/or African American communities.

Generic qualitative studies are rooted in the epistemology of critical realism, encompassing two philosophical perspectives (Maxwell, 2013). Ontological realism centers on the belief that there exists a real world independently of our perceptions and theories, emphasizing an objective reality. In contrast, constructivism posits that our understanding of this world is inherently a construct, and no such construction can claim absolute truth (Maxwell, 2013). The main goal of this research design is to reveal both individual and collective meanings, along with shared practices, thereby bridging the divide between the known and the unknown (Kahlke, 2014). Employing this design enabled participants to express their interpretations of lived experiences and identities that frame their program evaluation practices with Black and/or African American communities.

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Population and Sample

The initial focus of this study was on evaluators responsible for the evaluation of programs designed for Black and/or African American communities. These professionals were identified as individuals overseeing the evaluation of at least one health promotion program serving the Black and/or African American communities. Health promotions programs were identified as programs that address chronic illnesses. The sampling strategy employed both snowball and convenience sampling. Convenience sampling, a non-probabilistic approach, involves selecting samples conveniently located (Creswell & Plano, 2018). In addition to convenience sampling, recruitment materials were disseminated to a member of the Physical Activity Policy Research and Evaluation Network (PAPREN) equity and inclusions working group and shared with its listserv. PAPREN, a CDC-funded Network, is focused on creating environments that promote physical activity. The recruitment period extended from May 2023 to September 2023. Despite efforts, only five participants were initially recruited, prompting adjustments to the study's design.

As a result, the revised design targeted evaluators responsible for overseeing any type of program serving Black and/or African American communities, requiring them to be involved with at least one program serving Black communities. There were no criteria established around the age, gender, sex, or race of participants in an effort to include diverse perspectives of evaluators working within these communities. To recruit these individuals, a convenience sample was used, increasing the sample size by an additional 10 participants. Utilizing personal networks established through professional conferences such as the American Evaluation Association Conference and the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) Conference, as well as leveraging the personal networks of committee members,

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connections were made with evaluators across the USA responsible for evaluating programs serving Black and/or African American communities, inviting them to participate in the study.

Participants' Gender and Racial/Ethnic Demographics

I engaged in interviews with 15 professionals responsible for evaluating programs tailored to serve Black and/or African American communities. To gather comprehensive demographic information, participants first completed a screener survey prior to the interviews. The participant group comprised 13 cisgender women and 2 cisgender men. Notably, participants had the opportunity to self-identify their racial or ethnic background, resulting in a diverse representation, including 1 Southeast/East Asian, 1 Latino/a/e/x, 1 White/Eastern European, 1 Latino/a/e and Black, African American, African, or Caribbean, and 11 individuals aligning with Black, African American, African, or Caribbean identities.

Participants' Education and Evaluation Background

Examining the educational background of the participants, 4 held master's degrees, while 11 had obtained doctoral degrees. Seven participants shared insights into their program evaluation education, acquired through either formal degree programs or other related coursework. Among these individuals, four participants emphasized their educational background, highlighting coursework and degrees with a significant focus on program evaluation. In this subgroup, one participant obtained a doctoral degree specifically concentrated on program evaluation, while two pursued degrees in evaluation psychology with a clear focus on program evaluation. One participant mentioned taking program evaluation courses throughout their doctoral studies, despite their degree focus being on kinesiology.

Five participants explicated how their dissertation work served as an introduction and preparation for conducting program evaluation. Among them, three participants emphasized that

their dissertation work was their only opportunity to actively participate in program evaluation before their current pursuits. Additionally, two participants specified that, in addition to their dissertation work, they received additional education and training.

Three individuals participated in specialized program evaluation training initiatives, including the Pathways Initiatives Emerging Evaluator Program, Annie E. Casey Leaders in Equitable Evaluation and Diversity (LEEAD), and AEA Graduate Education Diversity Internship (GEDI). These programs proved instrumental in providing participants with practical, hands-on experience and comprehensive knowledge in the realm of program evaluation.

Three participants underscored the importance of professional development experiences in preparing them for program evaluations. They highlighted the significant support received from organizations like the American Evaluation Association, emphasizing its role in enhancing their evaluation skills. Additionally, two participants specifically recognized the value of resources provided by the CDC. One participant stressed the influence of the Citi modules on their evaluation training.

Two participants shared insights into how their colleagues have impacted their approach to program evaluation. They conveyed the value of learning from team members, leveraging each other's strengths and addressing weaknesses collaboratively, contributing to the overall enhancement of their team's work.

Participants' Evaluation Experience

The collective experience in program evaluation among participants averaged 12.57 years, ranging from 1 to 27 years of valuable expertise in this field. Seven participants held positions as associate (5) and assistant (2) professors at universities spanning the Midwest, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeast regions of the United States. Another participant was

pursuing a doctoral program as a graduate student at a Midwest university. The remaining seven

individuals were professionals in the program evaluation industry, occupying roles such as

Evaluation Specialist, Associate Director of State and Community Relations, Founder, Chief

Strategist, Managing Strategist, Researcher, and Capacity Building Partnerships Lead. Three

participants represented research and evaluation organizations in the Southeastern region, while

the remaining four participants represented the Midwestern region. Three participants held

leadership positions within their respective organizations, with two of them also serving as

proprietors. Additionally, two participants were actively involved in roles at a research and

evaluation center affiliated with a university.

Study participants exhibited diverse experiences across various evaluation sectors.

During the screener survey, participants were prompted to indicate the evaluation sectors in

which they had practical experience. They had the option to make multiple selections and specify

program types not listed. Table 4 below delineates the sectors in which study participants have

gained experience, along with the corresponding number of participants in each area.

Table 4. Distribution of Participants Across Sectors

Type of Program	# of participants
Health Promotion	8
Non-Profit	7
Education	10
Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.)	7
Other	4

Participants who chose the "other" option identified their experience in evaluating

various program types, including advocacy, programs focused on the Black community, youth-

centered initiatives, piloted programs, mental health/substance abuse interventions, and

leadership programs.

Participants had varying experiences evaluating programs within Black and/or African American communities. Seven individuals evaluated one program each, four evaluated two programs each, two evaluated three programs each, and one participant evaluated six programs, while another evaluated ten. Programs evaluated tailored to Black and/or African American communities encompassed multifaceted areas such as restorative justice initiatives within physical education settings, advocacy for reproductive rights and education, educational interventions in K-12 settings, community health promotion programs, vocational training initiatives to enhance workforce readiness, community gardening projects aimed at improving access to fresh produce, support programs tailored for caregivers of school-aged children, efforts to rehabilitate individuals within prison systems, provision of mental health services tailored for veterans, and the development and implementation of library-based programs. This extensive involvement across such diverse domains underscores the breadth of their expertise and their comprehensive engagement in addressing the multifaceted needs of Black and/or African American communities.

When describing the goals of the programs evaluated which specifically serve the African American and Black community participants explicitly identified program goals around, broadening participation, increasing access, increasing academic performance, increasing representation, reproductive justice, restorative justice, and workforce development.

Pseudonyms and Background Information on Participants

Table 5 below provides a brief description go the backgrounds for each participant, which is essential for understanding their contributions. Pseudonyms are utilized to safeguard participant identities, enabling a clearer understanding of the findings by facilitating the correlation between individual backgrounds and their respective contributions.

Table 5. Participant Pseudonyms and Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Racial/Ethnic Background	Highest Education Level	Brief Description
Cristina	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Master's degree	• 10 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Kinesiology/Physical Education
Matthew	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 16 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Kinesiology/Physical Education
Tiffany	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 27 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Kinesiology/Physical Education
Monica	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 14 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Kinesiology/Physical Education
Brittany	Southeast/East Asian	Doctorate	• 15 years of program evaluation • 2 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Kinesiology/Physical Education
Allison	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean, Latino/a/e/x	Doctorate	• 15 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year.

			• Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Non Profit, Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.)
Katherine	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 20 years of program evaluation • 2 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Non Profit, Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.), Other: Advocacy on Profit, Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.)
Kristen	White/Eastern European	Master's degree	• 20 years of program evaluation • 2 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.)
Charlotte	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 7 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Non Profit, Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.)
Rebecca	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Master's degree	• 5 years of program evaluation • 6 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Health Promotion, Non Profit, Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.), Other: Black, youth centered, piloted programs
Kayla	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Master's degree	• 1.5 years of program evaluation • 3 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Non Profit,

			Education, Government (federal, state, city, county, etc.
Derrick	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 7 years of program evaluation • 10 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Education, Other: Mental Health/Substance Abuse
Michelle	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 10 years of program evaluation • 3 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Non Profit, Education
Laura	Black/African-American/African/Caribbean	Doctorate	• 8 years of program evaluation • 2 programs evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Health Promotion, Non Profit, Education
Grace	Latino/a/e/x	Doctorate	• 13 years of program evaluation • 1 program evaluated that served majority African American/Black communities in the past year. • Experience evaluating the following types of programs: Health Promotion, Non Profit, Education, Other: Leadership

Data Sources and Data Collection

I conducted interviews utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B), specifically designed to organize participant responses and facilitate focused questioning on relevant topics during the interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol covered a wide spectrum of topics, including professional background, training experiences, evaluator identities, and the integration of social justice and cultural responsiveness into evaluation practices. In alignment with the principles of generic qualitative studies, which emphasize gaining insights

into participants' perspectives and experiences, this study specifically targeted evaluators working with programs serving Black and/or African American communities (Kahlke, 2014). The interviews aimed to provide comprehensive insights into various aspects related to participants' backgrounds, identities, and evaluation practices within the context of programs serving these communities.

Recruitment for this study began in May 2023. For participants who met the criteria for the study, I initiated contact by sending an email invitation that outlined the confidentiality measures and the study's procedures. A maximum of three recruitment emails were sent. Those expressing interest in participating were invited to complete a Qualtrics screener demographic survey. This survey, conducted via Qualtrics, aimed to collect essential information about participants' backgrounds and experiences. Participation in the survey was a mandatory prerequisite for proceeding to the interview stage, and it garnered a 100% response rate from all 15 participants. The demographic questions inquired about participants' personal details such as their name, gender identity, racial/ethnic background, education level, program evaluation experience, types of programs evaluated, and their experience with programs serving majority African American/Black communities, including the number of such programs evaluated in the past year (for a complete list of demographic questions please see Appendix C)

Using Calendly, an appointment scheduling software, participants who qualified for the study scheduled time for their 60-minute semi-structured interview. I collected their interview narratives through audio recordings. Given that evaluators were recruited nationally, I opted to conduct all interviews via Zoom, a versatile communication platform supporting video, audio, phone, and chat interactions. Subsequently, I transcribed the audio recordings using the Otter.ai transcription software, employing the clean verbatim technique to maintain essential content

while removing unnecessary speech elements (Zhou et al., 2013). Following the cleaning process for all 15 transcripts, I performed member-checking by emailing each participant their respective transcripts for authentication. Participants were invited to suggest any adjustments or additions/deletions, and all confirmed satisfaction without requesting edits. To ensure participant confidentiality, each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym, which was utilized in communications and feedback monitoring. All data were securely stored in a password-protected file.

Remuneration, in the context of this study, refers to the compensation provided to participants for their engagement in the research. Initially focused on recruiting a distinct group of professionals responsible for evaluating health promotion programs, participants in this study were offered a $20 Amazon gift card as an incentive for successfully participating in the interview process. However, the introduction of remuneration inadvertently attracted individuals unqualified for participation, resulting in five ineligible participants attempting to partake in the semi-structured interviews. Upon completion of the interviews, these participants were identified as ineligible due to their lack of relevant experience, and their IP locations were considered. Recognizing the need to maintain the integrity of the study, particularly in light of attempts by unqualified individuals to obtain remuneration, incentives were removed when the study was modified, and the participant pool was expanded. The initial five participants, recruited under the original study purpose, received their incentives electronically via their preferred email addresses in August 2022. However, with the study's alteration, no further incentives were offered to prevent similar issues from arising.

Institutional Review Board

This study underwent the approval process with the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Adherence to the ethical guidelines of the University of North Carolina Greensboro IRB ensured the proper treatment of all participants. During the research design phase, potential concerns were considered. Program evaluators might have been hesitant to openly share personal opinions on social justice and discuss the influence of their identities on professional practice. Additionally, there was a possibility of professionals withholding information to protect their organization's reputation. To address concerns about personal confidentiality, precautions were implemented to prioritize participants' safety, comfort, and the option to withdraw from the study at any point.

Data Analysis

Integral to the qualitative study, I engaged in journaling to document personal perspectives and responses to interviews. The data extracted from my reflective journal underwent coding and analysis. Subsequent to the coding process, a thorough examination of the data was conducted to achieve a deeper understanding of the judgments, practices, and belief systems employed throughout the data collection process. This exploration allowed me to pinpoint how my personal perspectives influenced the study. The reflections documented in the journal served as a starting point for identifying themes within the data (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004)

Following the conclusion of all interviews, I analyzed participant responses, aligning them with the protocol questions, and assessed their alignment with the research questions. Thematic analysis, as a categorization method in qualitative analysis, employed codes to generate themes by grouping similar codes together to form major ideas in the database (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Maxwell, 2013).

While performing my thematic analysis, I adhered to the six iterative steps delineated by Terry et al. (2017), encompassing tasks such as becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and ultimately producing the final report.

Prior to initiating the analysis process, I listened to the interview audio twice, with recordings uploaded to Otter.ai. During the first round, I familiarized myself with the data, focusing on tone and key points of the conversation. During the second review, I concentrated on cleaning the transcript data. This two-step approach ensured my familiarity with the data before commencing the coding process. In this study, I employed inductive coding, an approach in qualitative research where themes, categories, or patterns are derived directly from raw data without preconceived notions or predefined categories, allowing themes to emerge organically (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Microsoft Excel was employed for the coding process to organize and analyze the data systematically. I adopted an iterative approach, where, subsequent to coding each interview, I revisited the generated codes to determine if new ones were necessary or if the existing ones effectively described the data. Following inductive coding, each interaction was deductively coded for the Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) components it addressed. Themes reiterated by multiple participants were identified, followed by a thorough review and further categorization into specific codes within overarching themes. The concluding step comprised creating a codebook providing definitions for each code.

Data Quality Assurance

Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptually connect qualitative trustworthiness with four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2014).

Credibility is established by utilizing various approaches or checking data accuracy and interpretations with project participants. Transferability assesses the applicability of research findings to other studies. Dependability focuses on the study's replicability through the use of intersecting methods and detailed descriptions of methodological procedures (Bailey, 2007). Confirmability involves addressing biases, challenging assumptions, and acknowledging limitations in the study's methodology (Creswell, 2014).

Member checking is a method that is often used to validate the accuracy of qualitative results and interpretations. Creswell & Guetterman (2019) describe member checking as, "a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants to check the accuracy of the account" (p. 261). To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, each participant was sent a deidentified verbatim transcription of their interview. Though participants confirmed receiving the transcriptions, none of the participants provided revisions. Transcriptions were used to provide direct quotes throughout the study to capture participant responses.

In conducting this study, a systematic process was followed for theming and coding participant interview data. The approach involved the creation of a comprehensive data sheet structured around the question sections in the interview protocol, encompassing research questions. During participant interactions, a template organized by research question sections facilitated the collection of live notes, ensuring a thorough capture of responses and fostering dialogue. The subsequent steps included populating the sheet with data drawn from interview notes, segmenting it into sections aligned with research questions, and conducting an initial run-through to identify coded themes for each participant's responses. Notations were made when themes were echoed by multiple participants. The identified themes were then exported into a Word document into a table organized by research question. A comprehensive review of these

themes followed, leading to their further categorization into specific codes within each overarching theme. Additionally, relevant quotes were extracted and placed within the corresponding code sections. The final step involved the creation of a codebook, condensing the extracted data by providing one illustrative example per code. Each code was accompanied by a defined explanation, enhancing clarity, and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the coded content.

Utilizing reflective journaling is crucial in centralizing the research process, thereby enhancing the credibility of findings (Jasper, 2005). I employed a reflective journal to document the research process and ensure data quality. After each interview and following adjustments from the member checking process, I engaged in reflective journaling to document my thinking and interpretive process. The journal involved addressing questions (see Appendix D) designed to reflect on potential biases and challenges encountered during the interviewing process. This included considerations about the flow of questioning, adjustments needed in question ordering, challenges observed, emotional responses and discomfort for participants, personal emotions experienced during dialogue, reflections on changes for future interviews, and noteworthy participant responses and their significance. Throughout the construction of a codebook, continuous reflection was applied to the process, from transferring individual participant data to a data analysis spreadsheet to developing broad themes and codes, ensuring an organized approach to information.

Reflective journaling allows researchers to centralize their research process, which helps to enhance the credibility of the findings (Jasper, 2005). Following each interview, I engaged in reflective journaling to articulate my thoughts and interpretive process. This journal involved a series of self-directed questions (see Appendix D), designed to prompt reflection on potential

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biases and challenges encountered as an interviewer. I examined aspects such as the flow of questioning, considering whether adjustments to question ordering were necessary, and examining the manner in which challenges, emotional responses, and discomfort manifested for participants. Additionally, I reflected on my own emotional experiences during dialogues with participants, contemplated any changes required for future interviews, and considered notable aspects within participant responses and the reasons they resonated with me. Reflection was ongoing, occurring at each stage of the research process.

Reflexivity Statement

My backgrounds and experience influence my approaches to research and connection with this study. From my experience with research and evaluation to my experiences as a Black woman in America where I have been exposed to so many issues of social injustices, I am deeply connected and heavily rooted in the content of this study. In this study, my identity significantly influences the judgments I made, directly shaping how I collected and analyzed my data (Yanow, 2009; van Draanen, 2017).

In an effort to be aware of my biases, reflective journaling was incorporated throughout the implementation of this study. For this study, reflections were stored and submitted using Google Docs throughout the implementation phase. Upon completion of the implementation, reflective journaling was analyzed. Data from the journaling documented how my biases and judgments influenced this study (Yanow, 2009; van Draanen, 2017). Ultimately, the use of reflective journaling strengthened the context of the study and provided a better understanding of how my biases influenced this research.

Chapter Summary

Scant research exists on evaluators and their practices within black ecosystems. In this investigation, I carried out a generic qualitative study to explore the practices of program evaluators actively engaged with programs targeting Black and/or African American communities. Participants encompassed academics, graduate students, and evaluation professionals. Individuals in this study were responsible for evaluating at least one program serving predominantly Black and African American students. Interviews and reflective journaling were employed as data collection methods throughout the study. The data analysis involved a thematic analysis utilizing the six iterative steps outlined by Terry et al. (2017).

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research investigated the evaluation practices employed by evaluators involved with programs that primarily cater to Black and African American communities. The study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the backgrounds and experiences of evaluators, particularly in the context of programs serving Black communities. It sought to identify the values and considerations—such as culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, and diversity—that evaluators working in these communities consider in their evaluation processes. The study employed qualitative research methods, including interviews, to provide a platform for evaluators to reflect on their personal backgrounds, identities, and values, and examine how these factors shape their approach to evaluations. Prior to interviews, participants completed a survey collecting demographic details and information on their evaluation experience. Fifteen interviews were conducted with professionals responsible for evaluating programs predominantly serving Black and/or African American communities. The study's findings hold promise for future research on evaluation practices within these communities, contributing to the expansion of scholarship in this field.

The study was guided by two research questions:

1. How do the identities of program evaluators serving African American communities influence their evaluation practices?

2. Which values and issues (i.e., culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, diversity) do program evaluators serving African American communities attend in their evaluation practice?

    a. How do they respond to these values and issues in their evaluation practice?

The findings obtained through the qualitative data collection process are presented in this chapter. It is structured into two sections, each dedicated to addressing one of the research questions posed in the study. Each section commences with a brief summary statement of the research question, followed by a thematic analysis of the results. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive summary that encapsulates the essential findings of the study.

Research Question 1: How do the identities of program evaluators serving African American communities influence their evaluation practices?

This section discusses the integral role of identity in the field of evaluation practice. Participants emphasize the need to incorporate their complete selves into the evaluation process, recognizing identity's crucial role in assessing the value of projects or initiatives. Insights reveal how diverse backgrounds, encompassing origin, family structures, religion, sexual orientation, and affiliations, shape participants' perspectives.

Challenges associated with integrating identity into evaluation practices are explored, with participants referencing educational experiences that emphasized objectivity and separation between personal identity and evaluation. Despite varied educational backgrounds, heightened awareness and reflective practices are deemed essential to prevent personal identity from unduly influencing evaluation efforts.

Findings highlight the profound impact of racial identity on evaluators' viewpoints, particularly for evaluators of color and Black evaluators. The section also explores a participant's reflection on their privileged identity, revealing nuanced experiences of being both minimized and maximized based on identity. Participants employ strategic responses, including seeking support, project removal, and showcasing expertise to legitimize their knowledge.

In essence, the section emphasizes the intricate interplay of identity in shaping evaluators' approaches, calling for heightened awareness and proactive strategies to navigate these dynamics effectively within the evaluation practice.

Table 6. Themes Related to the Identity of Program Evaluators Serving African American Communities

Thematic Category	Description
Navigating Identities in Evaluation Practice	Participants stressed the importance of incorporating personal identities into evaluation processes, acknowledging their significance. Conversations surrounding racial identity underscored its influence on evaluation methodologies. Some participants explored privileged identities and how they addressed challenges in professional settings concerning identity.
Evaluation Approaches and Values	Participants emphasized the importance of aligning evaluation projects with personal values and the necessity of clear communication regarding values within project teams. They discussed how identity profoundly influences evaluation approaches and the questions raised. Additionally, participants highlighted the significance of diverse voices in evaluations, acknowledging the impact of their own identities on representation and engagement throughout the evaluation process.

Theme 1: Navigating Identities and Evaluation Practice

Embracing Identity in Evaluation Practice

In discussions about the significance of identity in evaluation practice, participants emphasized the intrinsic link between their identities and their work, stressing the need to integrate their complete selves into the evaluation process. Michelle underscored the pivotal role of identity, stating,

> *I think it's the key. Actually. I mean, as evaluators we're charged with judging the value*
>
> *worth or merit of an object, initiative, whatever. And I feel like that judgment comes from*

understanding our position. And our position is always going to be relative to how we

judge the value worth or merit of something.

Participants collectively recognized their identities as indispensable instruments in the intricate task of evaluation. Kayla referenced to Hazel Symonnette's work, particularly her concept of the evaluator as an instrument (Symonnette, 2009).

As they considered the intersection of identity and evaluation, participants shared profound insights into how their diverse backgrounds shape their perspectives. Elements contributing to their identity, such as origin, family structures, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, future aspirations, and affiliations with various organizations, collectively shape their individuality. Katherine illustrated the complexity of identity, describing it as a multifaceted interplay of various aspects. Using personal appearance as an example, she stated,

So, when I entered the room, you will know, I'm a short round black woman with glasses,

and most of the time with braids or some other natural hairstyle pulled back in an afro

puff... That's part of who you will see when I enter the room or enter the space that

you're in…

Exploring Racial Identities in Evaluation Practice

In exploring the link between identity and evaluation practice, participants provided insightful perspectives on how their racial backgrounds shape their viewpoints. Charlotte emphasized the impact of racial identity on her approach to evaluation, noting recent discussions in the field regarding evaluators of color and black evaluators who highlight the prominence of their race. She emphasized,

We've had articles come out around, particularly evaluators of color and black

evaluators who underscore the fact that their race is very prominent, and what are the

ways in which they attend to issues that impact how they are seen from a racial

perspective impact how people interact with them. And so, I don't believe evaluators can

eliminate the role their identity plays, and their practice, or how they do their work.

Matthew stressed the importance of considering racial perspectives, asserting that his race

enhances his credibility when working in Black communities. He pointed out the role of identity

in the evaluation process, suggesting that evaluators of color are more likely to consider a racial

perspective. He noted,

I would say that the identify of an evaluator plays a role and that role can be hard to

discern. Certainly, evaluators of color are more likely to consider a racial perspective in

the evaluation; whereas white evaluators may be more prone to a colorblind or race

neutral perspective. I think my race has given me credibility to work in a Black school

and discuss race candidly with key stakeholders.

Tiffany, influenced by a pro-Black upbringing and encounters with racism in educational

settings, underscored the essential role of anti-racism in their identity. Rooted in experiences of

injustice, she emphasized the need to incorporate a critical anti-racist perspective into her

evaluation methodology. This perspective is deeply influenced by her mother's guidance,

illustrated by a childhood incident where a teacher's racist practices persisted even under

observation.

So, I think just having a critical, anti-racist lens... I'll give you an example, and I've

talked about this in many talks, I was in fifth grade, and I came home to my mother and I

just said, Mom, you know, when the black students say something, or answer incorrectly,

the teacher berates them, blah, blah, blah, but when the white kids, she doesn't berate

them, she has an opportunity, and so forth... And my mom comes in, she observes all day,

she transcribes the entire lesson, and the woman did not change her behavior. Yeah, she

was still engaging in racist practices in front of my mother. And so, I use that example to

let people know how deeply rooted racism is and anti-blackness.

Furthermore, several participants touched on the diversity of identities represented within the Black community. When reflecting on her identity as a Black woman, Rebecca acknowledged that the Black community is not a monolith. She emphasized that blackness is not uniform in its expression, suggesting that since Blackness varies, so do individuals. Therefore, people bring diverse values, questions, experiences, and perspectives to their interactions and self-understanding.

Katherine, an African American woman, highlighted how her identity from the African diaspora significantly shapes her worldview. She emphasized the diverse identities within the Black and Brown community, pointing out instances of internal "othering." She expressed the importance of addressing these dynamics before initiating work to prevent harm to families and students.

Because once again, even in Black and brown communities, we will other each other, if

they are not from where we're from, does that make any sense? And so I try, because I've

been the other, to stop all that and break all that and ask those probing questions before

the work begins. Because otherwise you will be in the harming space of families and

students, if you don't fix some of those things before the work begins.

Allison, who identifies as both Black and Latina and as a cisgendered woman, emphasized her alignment with projects focused on social justice, attributing her attraction to such initiatives to her identity. She also stressed the significance of specific identities, such as

being a mother, in establishing meaningful connections with participants, as observed in projects

involving Alack caregivers.

Specifically, Katherine highlighted safety concerns faced as a Black evaluator, recounting

an incident in Mississippi where she was warned against certain places due to racial

discrimination. She shared the challenge of navigating unfamiliar territories with potential racial

bias and the need to adapt by conducting personal investigations on the demographics and safety

of the area. The experience, led her to proactively assess the climate of each new location,

emphasizing the importance of being prepared and aware before engaging in evaluation work.

> *And so those experiences as a black woman, it's really daunting. And you kind of have to*
>
> *settle all that within yourself, because you still have to show up for work the next day,*
>
> *you don't live there, you know, you're going to leave…..So one of my takeaways from that*
>
> *though, was that every time I had to go somewhere, either with someone or by myself,*
>
> *because then after that first trip or two, I'm by myself, I knew the principal, I knew*
>
> *whoever I was supposed to work with, and you don't need to come with me. That means*
>
> *now I do investigation, like what are the demographics of this area? What do people say*
>
> *about what safe and where to stay like, like it's I'm doing my own Green Book. But I need*
>
> *to be aware in what's the climate temperature here, right. So, what's happening here that*
>
> *I need to be aware of before I come.*

Participants with racial identities that differ from Black and/or African American

communities discussed their considerations regarding racial identity when evaluating programs

within these communities. Grace, a Latina participant, noted her awareness of being an outsider

when engaging with these communities, prompting her to carefully assess her role within such

contexts. She emphasized consulting with other professionals who identify with the community to ensure program alignment with their needs.

Brittany, a Southeast/East Asian woman, stressed the importance of collaborating with research teams that mirror the population being studied. She highlighted her intentionality in working with team members who may identify with the program population when evaluating programs within Black and/or African American communities.

Privileged Identity

Reflecting on her identity, Kristen discussed how her professional journey serves as a platform for a critical examination of the privileges present in their life. Through her work, she engages in a thoughtful exploration of the various points of privilege that shape their perspective and position within broader societal contexts.

> *So, I come from a very privileged background, I had two parents in my family, I finished high school, my parents helped me pay for my college, I was able to then pay for graduate school… work and pay for graduate school. So I was able to… get all these things, with, , it was hard work, but it wasn't, I didn't feel like I had as many barriers, as I see when you know, working at 21st century and seeing these students come in with a new set of barriers that they have. Students whose parents have substance abuse problems… students who are homeless, teenaged students that are homeless and couch surfing.*

She perceives her privileged identity as an opportunity for curiosity, enabling a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and prompting self-reflection to scrutinize preconceptions before engaging with unfamiliar communities.

Additionally, Allison, Charlotte, and Derrick engaged in a discussion about the privileges they possess in their roles as academics. They stressed the importance of acknowledging and being attentive to these privileges, particularly when working in Black and/or African American communities.

Challenges with Identity in Evaluation Practice

Two participants shared insights into the challenges and considerations related to personal identity in their research and evaluation practices. Kristen expressed the ongoing struggle of separating personal identity from the evaluation process, emphasizing the need for constant self-awareness. She highlighted the difficulty in discerning whether her perspectives were solely driven by stakeholders, observed project data, observations or influenced by her own background and opinions. She stressed the importance of consistently checking and ensuring that they do not impose their own identity into their work.

> *It is always that check in there, like wait… is this coming from just the stakeholders, and just the data collected, and the observations, or is there something about my identity or background or my own opinions that I am inserting and always trying to, you know, kind of check that.*

Laura underscored the importance of openly addressing personal identity in evaluation, challenging potential misconceptions that such transparency might compromise rigor. She emphasized the value of self-reflection, particularly in a Jesuit school environment, where introspection and consideration of personal biases contribute to a more thoughtful and nuanced approach to evaluation. She explained,

> *For me, it's a lot. I know we're taught in our personal training from our discipline often to be a little more neutral or to sort of compartmentalize our identity. But I have found*

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that that's not a viable option for me and maybe it's different for other people… I think

when I've seen people who are successful evaluators, and in a range of communities, not

just communities of color, I'm thinking also about queer communities, the ones who do

better are the ones who bring their whole selves.

Despite differences in educational backgrounds, both participants emphasized the continuous need for awareness and reflection to prevent personal identity from unduly influencing the rigor and seriousness of their evaluation efforts.

In the exploration of identity dynamics within evaluation practice, three Black participants shared nuanced experiences and strategic responses to challenges based on their racial identities. Charlotte discussed feeling both minimized and maximized in different contexts, highlighting proactive approaches to address these situations. Seeking guidance from a support network, she strategically removes herself from projects when necessary and finds opportunities to showcase her expertise, aiming to legitimize her knowledge and value.

Derrick and Kayla addressed being aware of stereotypes in professional spaces. Kayla explained how she strategically embraces stereotypes, candidly acknowledging the influence of her identity as an "angry black woman" on her work. She sees this as an opportunity to speak candidly without fear of judgment. She admits that her identity as an "angry Black woman" affects her work, as it empowers her to speak her mind without fear of repercussions. Embracing this identity allows her to express herself freely and assertively in her professional endeavors.

In contrast, Derrick a African American man, consciously mitigates stereotypes associated with his identity to avoid unintentionally intimidating clients. He emphasizes the importance of presenting himself in a professional manner, counteracting potential perceptions of aggression. He states,

But you have to ensure that the way in which you present is, especially me being an

African American male, with a beard, deep voice, I have to make sure and ensure that

I'm not coming off aggressive and or angry, right. And so really being monotone and

being able to have those conversations in a very professional manner, while also sticking

to facts.

Theme 2: Evaluation Approaches and Values

Values Alignment in Evaluation Projects: Fostering Purposeful Collaboration

Katherine highlighted the importance of engaging in evaluation projects that resonate
with their values, emphasizing their reluctance to participate in endeavors misaligned with these
principles. They expressed,

But most of all, I want to understand why you want to do this and who you serve. And

that is where that alignment piece has to be for me, and for my team. If it's not there, then

I can't do that.

Derrick stressed the necessity for clear communication in discussing values with project
team members, ensuring a distinct alignment between the evaluator's values and the project
team's objectives.

Well, I think based on my experience with that particular program, I put them up front,

right, and I'm very unapologetic about them. So, you will learn as an evaluator, you also

have to be responsive in terms of communication, but you also have to be upfront and

direct. And if you're not, that can lead into a lot of issues long term down the road in

terms of communication and expectations.

Most participants underscored the transparent communication of their values, often
intertwined with their identities, before commencing evaluation work. This candid approach

aims to establish a foundation where values guide the collaborative efforts of both teams, fostering a cohesive and purpose-driven collaboration.

Evaluation Approaches

Eleven participants connected their identities to the evaluation approaches, methods, and questions raised throughout the evaluation process. Katherine, who came from a family of educators and caretakers, noted the importance of her evaluations being useful. She explained,

> *It shapes my approach because it's got to be useful. And the part of my identity that I shared earlier that's important to me is that I've come from a family of educators and caretakers in the sense that they were nurses, and so I know how important it is to help others, I know how important it is to help others change the lives of their communities and or their stakeholders.*

In articulating her research focus on the dignity of identity and its implications for safeguarding or enhancing individuals' sense of dignity based on their self-claimed identities, Michelle emphasized the nuanced nature of shared identities. She clarified that having a common identity does not necessarily mean that it holds the same level of importance for both individuals, despite the expectation that it should. Exploring her primary identity as a Black woman, she detailed how this perspective guided the implementation of an Afrofuturistic approach to evaluation in her role. She expressed that,

> *So, I know, for me that my primary identity is Black woman. So, when it comes to my role as an evaluator, you know, we created the space and developed a whole framework around Afrofuturist evaluation, because we realize how limited folks, people's imaginations were around imagining Black people in the future without racism. So, my primary identity shaped the lens in which I evaluate the work that I do., All of the work is*

evaluated with the lens of like, how does this contribute to Black people being free in the

future? And the intersections they're in, you know, what about other people of color?

Several participants drew connections between their identities and the nature of

evaluation questions that pique their interest. When explaining how an evaluator's identities

shape their approach to evaluation, Charlotte mentioned,

I think our identity and our values are intertwined and they influence how we approach

evaluation, the questions that we ask, the lenses or approaches that we draw from, how

we engage with people in the conduct of our evaluation work.

Derrick shed light on how his personal identity and background mold the types of

questions that captivate him as an evaluator,

And so, when I really started to get into the whole mental health piece, I began to see a

field of professionals who were not of color, right, so specifically African American, and

then even within African American clinicians, I would see even less men, right. And so, I

think that kind of that really led me to start looking at programming, at least

[inaudible] from evaluation context differently. And my questions begin to change.

In summary, participants underscored the deep connection between their identities and

the trajectory of evaluation approaches, methods, and questions.

Representation of Diverse Voices in Evaluation Processes

Examining the influence of background on the evaluation process, two participants

shared valuable insights into how their identity heightens their awareness of the voices

represented. Brittany highlighted the impact of her identity as a South Indian woman on her

work, emphasizing the role of an evaluator's identity and lived experience in the evaluation

process.

An evaluator's identity and lived experience, in my experience at least, has played a significant role in the evaluation process. I'm a South Indian daughter of immigrants who grew up in Central Illinois; my father was a school teacher before retirement and my mother stayed at home. So, while my family was well-educated, growing up, we were lower middle class; I grew up in a 3 bedroom/1 bath, 1000 square foot home. Because I grew up in a mostly White, rural community, I am used to being the only minority in my spaces, which has influenced the way I think and ultimately conduct evaluation because I'm quite cognizant of the lone voice in the room and how that lone voice may not go with the other norms in the room. One of the things I've learned is to look for the person who doesn't agree with the other folks and figure out why not.

Rebeca reflected on her intersectional identity as a woman and a Black person, emphasized the critical significance of representation. Expressing concerns about potential oversight or being an afterthought, she underscored the necessity of not merely having diverse voices but actively including them in the evaluation discourse. She articulated the unique challenges faced by individuals combining identities, emphasizing that representation goes beyond mere presence to ensure meaningful engagement.

And that's been a thing as either a woman or a Black person, right? So, to combine those identities, like damn if I'm not here, y'all ain't gonna think about me? Or it's gonna be a second thought …I don't want to say it's cliché… but that's the thing…representation is a thing. Like okay, Black people here, but hearing the Black people that are present is important.

Research Question 2: Which values and issues (i.e., culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, diversity) do program evaluators serving African American communities attend to in their evaluation practice? How do they respond to these values and issues in their evaluation practice?

This comprehensive overview reviews findings into key aspects of program evaluation, beginning with the exploration of intuition, authenticity, and the moral/ethical compass in evaluation. Participants emphasize the role of intuition as a valuable data source, promoting openness within evaluation teams about intuitive feelings. Authenticity is highlighted, advocating for the inclusion of one's complete self, including emotional responsiveness, during the evaluation process. The moral and ethical compass of evaluators is scrutinized, emphasizing a commitment to morally right actions.

The study then shifts to understanding the cultural context within Black and African American communities. Participants stress the fundamental necessity of grasping the community's context before embarking on evaluation work. Meaningful relationships, trust, vulnerability, and effective collaboration within both the project team and the community are emphasized. Various methods, including literature reviews and informal conversations, are identified as effective means to enhance understanding, particularly when working with Black and African American communities.

Diverse methodologies used for programs serving Black and African American communities are discussed in another segment, spanning developmental evaluations, process evaluations, and outcome evaluations. The commitment to usefulness and utilization-focused evaluation approaches is highlighted, ensuring practical benefits beyond documentation. The inclusion of educative evaluation approaches reveals a holistic view of participants, extending

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beyond conventional roles to involve them in educational and transformative interactions. Responsive evaluation practices underscore the importance of adapting to the unique needs of Black and/or African American communities, fostering genuine engagement and impactful outcomes.

The exploration of social justice and evaluation introduces a futuristic dimension to the discourse, envisioning a world liberated from the constraints of white supremacy. Participants articulate the integration of Afrofuturism and equity into their methodologies, shaping evaluations that resonate with justice and dignity. Deliberate efforts towards representation within evaluation teams underscore the strategic importance of aligning interventions with served populations, reinforcing the idea that visual similarity enhances community acceptance. Culturally commensurate approaches and qualitative methodologies are illuminated, emphasizing the necessity of adapting evaluation tools to align with the culture of the community being served.

The section explores methods to strengthen evaluation efforts within Black and/or African American communities through engagement and capacity building. Participants highlight the significance of advancing evaluation through thoughtful community engagement, purposeful dissemination practices, and capacity building within Black and/or African American communities. Active community involvement enhances the relevance and effectiveness of evaluations, contributing to the empowerment and betterment of the communities served. Ensuring accessibility and building program capacity through evaluation services are underscored for sustained impact and meaningful participation.

Lastly, the discussion centered on the role of social justice in evaluation practice, showcasing diverse perspectives among participants. While some strongly correlated evaluation

with social justice and highlighted its effectiveness in addressing equity issues, others acknowledged challenges in fully integrating social justice goals into evaluation work due to its inherent service-oriented nature. Participants expressed varying levels of readiness to address social justice concerns within their evaluation practices, influenced by their personal experiences, values, and professional backgrounds. Some participants emphasized the importance of allowing communities to define social justice and stressed the need for a shared understanding of the concept before engagement. Additionally, participants raised questions about what defines a social justice-oriented evaluation, including whether it requires influencing policy change. These discussions underscore the complexity and diverse viewpoints surrounding the integration of social justice principles into evaluation practices.

Table 7. Themes on Evaluation Practices in Programs Serving Black Communities

Thematic Category	Description
Fostering Intuition, Authenticity, and Moral/Ethical Compass in Evaluation	Participants in the study emphasized the integration of intuition, authenticity, and moral compass in their evaluation practices, challenging traditional roles and embracing vulnerability. They highlighted the importance of openness, emotional responsiveness, and transparency to foster trust and credibility throughout the evaluation process.
Cultural and Contextual Understanding within Black and African American Communities	Participants stressed the importance of deeply understanding program context for effective evaluation, utilizing needs assessments, literature reviews, and community engagement. Challenges and successes related to understanding the culture and context of programs and communities were discussed. Subsequently, participants emphasized the importance of representation on evaluation teams to foster greater understanding between communities and stakeholders, ensuring culturally responsive and impactful evaluations.
Applying Diverse Methodologies to Evaluate Programs Serving Black and African American Communities	Participants prioritize diverse evaluation methodologies for Black communities, emphasizing developmental, process, and outcome evaluations. They employ various approaches including utilization-focused, educative, responsive, Afrofuturism, equity, and capacity building. Participants stressed the importance of dissemination to ensure accessible findings, empowering communities for informed decision-making and advocacy.
Attending to Values of Social Justice in Evaluation Practice	Participants stressed understanding social justice concepts prior to engagement. Participants' views on the connection between evaluation and social justice varied, with their readiness to address social justice differing based on personal experiences. Participants elaborated on how their identities, values, and backgrounds influenced their stance on social justice in their evaluation practice.

Theme 1: Fostering Intuition, Authenticity, and Moral/Ethical Compass in Evaluation

Participants in this study discussed the use of intuition, authenticity, and moral/ethical compass in their evaluation practice to help guide evaluative decisions and determine how they conduct themselves throughout the evaluation process. Three participants underscored the significance of relying on intuition and spiritual gifts as valuable sources of data throughout the evaluation process. Rebecca highlighted the importance of openness about intuitive feelings within the team, recognizing that individual feelings can be subjective. Kayla emphasized the role of the evaluator as a tool, trusting intuition to detect discrepancies in information and noting the importance of non-verbal cues, even in virtual settings.

> *...like debrief memo because that goes other ways of knowing...I don't know how I felt about that conversation, like nothing was said, or everything that was said was said but like this don't sit right ... So, it's the small things that you pay a lot of attention to, like you trust your intuition...*

Allison, holding roles as both an associate professor and an external evaluator, expressed a commitment to what they perceive as the morally right course of action. She emphasized leading with their moral and ethical compass, often diverging from the perceived traditional role of an evaluator.

> *But I feel like that's the right thing to do. So I often lead with a my moral and ethical compass. And a lot of times that will override what maybe others might think is the traditional role for an evaluator to play.*

Additionally, Allison stressed the importance of authenticity in evaluation interactions, advocating for the incorporation of one's complete self into the process. This involves emotional

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responsiveness, sharing personal stories, and allowing genuine reactions to unfold during interviews.

Highlighting the importance of vulnerability in the role of a researcher and evaluator, Laura emphasized the value of openness about one's identity and motivations for joining a project when communicating with project participants. She recognized that people are more willing to share their backgrounds, interests, and project motivations when the evaluator is transparent. Stressing the significance of achieving a balance, the participant underscored the need to maintain openness without encroaching on personal boundaries to foster trust and establish credibility throughout the evaluation process.

> *But I think people get suspicious when you're like, I'm just a blank slate and I don't have any opinions that I am totally neutral. Nobody believes that nobody. And so, I think people are even less inclined when they are approached by somebody who's like, Oh, I'm just you know, neutral person just recording. You know, this person is hiding something, and I don't want to have anything to do with this right? So, for me, like I said, you have to sort of find the balance, you don't want people all up in your biz.*

Theme 2: Cultural and Contextual Understanding within Black and African American Communities

Understanding Program Context

Participants adamantly stressed the pivotal importance of acquiring a profound comprehension of the program's contextual landscape both prior to and during its evaluation process. Charlotte highlighted the initial phase of conversations for context and understanding before moving on to formalizing the needs assessment. She explained, *"So, we had a number of*

meetings that were just like get to know [and] understand context. Then we started to move into

planning the needs assessment.”

Over half of the participants discussed the utilization of needs assessments to gain

insights into the culture and context of the programs they served. Cristina shared her experience

in developing a needs assessment for a physical activity program with a specific focus on Black

and Brown populations. She stressed the importance of conducting a needs assessment before

conducting an evaluation. When describing her process for a needs assessment she explained,

> *I would start with a needs assessment. And since we're going to the schools, I would*
>
> *[contact]…whoever had contact with the population at hand. So, if it's a teacher, I would*
>
> *be curious to do like some type of form, surveys, any type of something to get more*
>
> *information about the students.*

Participants emphasized that clear and open communication is essential for building

effective relationships between evaluators and project participants. Monica expressed the need

for transparent commitment to ensure all parties’ need are met and aid in the understanding of

the program context and goals.

Similarly, Derrick discussed the importance of clearly communicating your values with

project teams and communities. He stated, “*I try and be as upfront as possible as to what my*

values are, what I'm bringing, the types of questions that I would ask as a part of the

evaluation.” This approach aims to ensure a shared understanding and alignment of goals among

all involved parties.

Participants discussed utilizing literature to prepare for evaluations and enhance their

understanding of program contexts. In collaboration with a program focused on African

American caregivers, Allison conducted a literature review to identify best practices for

engaging with Black parents, a topic unfamiliar to the client. The goal was to provide the client with valuable insights by combining literature findings with firsthand observations, covering the needs of Black parents, caregivers, and best practices for text messaging programs.

Matthew expanded the literature review to grasp the systematic nature of the program, delving into background reading about the school, district, and local city to understand broader contextual challenges.

Yeah, so one was doing some background reading, to understand not only the school and the context of the school, but also understanding like the district in which the school is located, doing some reading around, like the local city, to understand the makeup of the city, challenges potentially with the city.

Participants also mentioned reviewing various documents such as program proposals, websites, and related literature to form a comprehensive understanding of program culture and context. Rebecca emphasized examining websites as an initial source of data.

I try to look at the website, that's preparation. And then the website is like the first round of data or the data observation like who's on the website? What words do they use? What languages is showing up? What's not being shown up? You know, I'm saying and then I often compare the website to the RFP to the contract. Like what, what, what? What left? What words did it make the final round?

In recounting her experience evaluating Katherine stressed the importance of always learning to ensure that the programs needs are met and to gain a better understanding of the context of the program evaluated. She stated,

Always learning, I mean, I think you're never going to know everything about evaluation, you're never going to know everything about the topic area, no matter how many times

you've done it, no matter how many times you've worked in STEM, there's always

something new, there's always something different. And so, I'm always open to learning

and hearing about what's new, and reading, and however I can get my act together.

Because if I don't, I'm doing a disservice to the people that I work for.

Integration of Personal Interests in Comprehending the Context of Evaluation

Work. In their engagement with evaluation work, four participants shared a common thread –

their involvement in projects aligned with personal interests. This connection not only provided

them with a deeper understanding of the context but also, as Kayla highlighted, enhanced their

productivity.

We typically lean on what was of interest to us and recognizing interest is going to

influence, our productivity, our motivation, you know, I'm saying our connectedness to

the information, that's important. And if that's gonna make us do the job better, we

probably should lean into that.

Michelle, drawing on her extensive background in the program context area, felt well-

prepared as she entered the evaluation space. Emphasizing the significance of her experience in

the content area, she considered herself a suitable fit for evaluating and collaborating with the

organization.

I'm topically aligned with this reproductive justice organization, having been trained as a

doula and involved in reproductive justice work locally. Grounded in the topic due to

personal interests, I found compatibility with the organization, eliminating the need for

extensive learning about reproductive justice implementation. This allowed me to discuss

the topic on a nuanced level, avoiding confusion between reproductive justice, birth

justice, reproductive rights, and birthright.

The insights from these participants emphasize the significant synergy that emerges when personal interests align with the context of evaluation work, resulting in a profound understanding of the community and cultural contexts within specific programs.

Relationship Building and Community Engagement

Several participants emphasized the importance of establishing relationships with key stakeholders and the community to gain a deeper understanding of a program's cultural context. Kayla highlighted the significance of building relationships between evaluators and project team members.

> *So, we don't believe that a lot of real change in work can occur without relationships being built. And so, if you are not able to feel safe and be vulnerable in this space…then it is unlikely for you to be enriched by it and to get what you need from it. If you aren't able to feel like you trust here or feel seen here or feel heard here in those ways. So, relationship building is actually really important.*

Similarly, Laura provided insights into her approach to relationship building during evaluations. She emphasized the deliberate process of building relationships, taking the time to engage with people and avoiding a deficit-based approach which assumes that students from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle academically due to their circumstances. Instead of making assumptions about the community's capabilities, she invested time in understanding their ongoing initiatives, recognizing the value in what they were already accomplishing. Reflecting on her preferred work environment and collaborators, she highlighted the importance of learning from and appreciating the existing strengths within the community.

Participants underscored the vital importance of cultivating relationships with the communities they serve in their evaluation practices. Cristina highlighted the importance of

cultural competency when entering communities for program evaluation. The emphasis was on avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach and recognizing the value of conducting needs assessments before implementing interventions. Cultural competency, in this context, involves understanding and respecting the cultural norms of the demographic being studied. She stressed the usefulness of this approach in preventing mismatches between interventions and community needs, fostering more effective and culturally sensitive evaluations.

> *Essentially, I think that that's cultural competency when you come inside of a community as a researcher, and it doesn't have to be with skin color or anything, it's just the cultural norms of this demographic that you are studying. I think that is a step that I think should be more valued.*

Additionally, Matthew emphasized that this is essential to ground physical activity programs for Black communities in his cultural context, ensuring their relevance and sustainability. Additionally, he stressed the significance of involving community stakeholders throughout the evaluation process, highlighting the need for diverse activities to boost accessibility and foster widespread participation in physical activity programs.

> *I think community engagement is really important, I think, grounding physical activity experiences in the culture and the community where people live, makes them more likely to be sustainable. And sometimes I don't know that we do a good job with that in physical activity program. So, I would just try to think about, you know, how are local community stakeholders engaged? What are the assets for physical activity in the community? What are the inhibitors to physical activity in the community?*

Laura emphasized the crucial role of involving community stakeholders, particularly when conducting a developmental evaluation within a program serving the Black librarian

community. She highlighted that through engagement with community members, she could effectively center the voices of the community.

> *And I think that's why I like it so much because in the developmental evaluation process, we're much closer to the community being served, because they're still forming the project at that point, right. And so, I felt like I had a chance, in my own small way as a developmental evaluation evaluator doing focus groups and photovoice and all this, other stuff to get that community's voice in front of these people before they get too far into the process.*

Allison explained the approach of employing advisory boards, each comprising diverse community members, to address the specific needs of the community being served. She detailed the process, initiating the creation of three separate advisory boards, each consisting of six to eight members. These boards included a community advisory board, a student advisory board comprising incarcerated men, and a family advisory board consisting of the families of the incarcerated men. The objective was to comprehensively address the unique requirements of the community served within a particular context.

Participants expressed their dedication to empowering the communities they serve through their evaluation practices. In particular, they highlighted the significance of involving and engaging community members to ensure that evaluations actively contribute to the improvement of the served communities. Charlotte expressed a commitment to thoughtful collaboration throughout the evaluation, emphasizing the importance of open communication and collaboration from the project's inception. She stressed the need for the evaluator to be educative and maintain regular communication with the project team. She described hoe her

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approach involves collaborative efforts in developing plans and evaluation matrices, seeking feedback, and aligning data collection instruments with the studied population.

In the context of collaboration with program participants, Allison highlighted the significance of thoughtful engagement. Adapting their communication style to align with participants' informal tone, the evaluator emphasized humanizing communication and addressing practical issues like time zone differences to enhance overall engagement. Grace emphasized the paramount importance of community-focused work to address program populations' needs effectively. She advocated for starting with a community-driven approach to adequately address the needs of the populations in the programs.

Yeah, so, always starting with the community focused, community driven approach first. I think is the best way to adapt, because [you] have to understand from their perspective what the needs are.

Participants stressed the importance of involving the community and other stakeholders in order to strengthen understanding and develop more comprehensive evaluation questions. Emphasizing the importance of this collaborative approach, they highlighted how including diverse perspectives ensures that the questions generated are not only inclusive but also representative of the community's unique needs and viewpoints. This active engagement with various stakeholders contributes to the development of more comprehensive and contextually relevant evaluation inquiries.

Charlotte shared their approach to community involvement in planning a needs assessment. She intentionally immersed herself in the community by attending events like Back to School Nights and volunteering in school classrooms. This hands-on engagement allowed her

to better understand the community involved in the programs, making it easier to formulate relevant questions for the needs assessment.

> *We also talked with a few parents to get their perspective, prior to or just around what is education like in this area, and if their child happened to be at that school, their suggestions on how we approach the needs assessment, and how we engage parents and youth in that process.*

Addressing challenges, Charlotte acknowledged difficulties in establishing relationships with the community served by the program. Despite recognizing the necessity of community relationships for evaluation success, the participant highlighted the inherent challenges.

> *I think another challenge can be the relationship building piece. Especially if you're working in a space where, for instance, community members have felt like they have been exploited before.*

She detailed further challenges related to Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes, expressing a need for IRB to recognize the importance of employing non-coercive methods, especially when engaging with Black and brown youth beyond conventional data collection means. She highlighted,

> *One challenge being IRB… I understand the role of IRB, it's also getting IRB to understand the importance of using methods that really are not coercive, but are ways to engage youth, particularly Black and Brown youth, kind of beyond the standard data collection means or methods and why that's important. So that was a challenge.*

In a related discussion, Allison emphasized the importance of intentionality when working with traditionally mistreated populations. She shared their approach of being thoughtful

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in engaging participants, driven by the awareness that the population they were working with had been mistreated and provided with misinformation, including Black parents or incarcerated men.

Both Charlotte and Allison discussed the utilization of incentives and compensations to promote participation in program evaluations within Black communities. Allison emphasized the importance of incorporating incentives while highlighting the need for thoughtfulness in engaging participants, especially in demographics that have experienced mistreatment and misinformation, such as Black parents or incarcerated men.

Cultural Understanding through Representative Evaluation Teams

Participants in the study emphasized the importance of having evaluation teams that mirror the diversity of the participants. This helps ensure a deeper cultural and contextual understanding and encourages greater participation among participants. Brittany highlighted her intentional strategy of aligning interventionists with served populations, driven by her public health expertise, emphasizing that community members are more receptive when they see a resemblance with interventionists. This deliberate strategy stems from the participant's awareness that visual similarity enhances community acceptance, showcasing their intentional approach in public health interventions.

> *But I know from my public health background, that populations are more likely to be more receptive to an intervention if the interventionist looks like them. And so, I am incredibly intentional about that.*

Five other participants noted their experiences working with project teams that were reflective of the community served. Michelle explained that project teams that are representative of the community allowed them to talk about representation in more nuanced ways when it comes to factors such as race and class.

This is also a great sense because the leadership staff, and board are all representative of

the community that they're serving, like every single member of the organization that we

had would also be served by this organization. Very rare, right… And because of that, in

a good way, we were able to talk about more nuanced representation that I feel like is

often talked about when it comes to race, class, gender, in this work,

Additionally, Matthew identified the challenge of achieving diversity in the evaluation

team for physical activity programs when addressing social justice in their evaluation practice,

emphasizing the importance of representation in considerations of access and student voice.

So, a challenge is probably maybe kind of representation…diversity on the evaluation

team because I definitely have experienced that. Representation really matters when I

think about things like access and student voice.

Theme 3: Applying Diverse Methodologies to Evaluate Programs Serving Black and

African American Communities

Developmental, Process, and Outcome Evaluations

Within this study, participants emphasized employing developmental, process, and

outcome evaluations to address values and concerns while evaluating programs serving Black

and/or African American communities. Two participants highlighted the value of adopting

developmental approaches to evaluation to gain insights into program and community needs.

Derrick stated,

And so, on the developmental side, really getting them to sit down and understand that

it's going to take time, and it's going to take commitment from you. Because if you don't

understand it, then the implementation isn't gonna go as we think it's going to go right.

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Laura expressed a preference for developmental evaluations, emphasizing their proximity to the community during the project's formative stages. This approach allowed for early involvement in shaping the project and incorporating community voices through methods such as focus groups and photovoice.

By employing developmental approaches to evaluation, participants not only educate themselves about the program but also aim to educate stakeholders and communities about the evaluation process, ensuring alignment with the intended impact.

Several participants indicated the importance of process evaluations to better understand the program growth and alignment with target objectives. Cristina explained how she preferred to conduct process evaluations as it allows them to understand the progress of the program in real time. She stated, *"I'm also a fan of process evaluation. I don't like to wait till the end to look at everything. Let's go in while we're doing it to make sure that everything's good."*

In his work within the Black and African American community, Derrick emphasized the significance of integrating formative and summative approaches in process evaluations to gauge the overall effectiveness of the program.

However, my goal is clearly going to be summative and formative evaluation. So, we did a lot of process evaluation in terms of what are we doing? How are the clients, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes towards our services, etc.

Furthermore, Tiffany, a seasoned associate professor, listed process evaluations as a traditional approach that she regularly takes when evaluating any program that she works on.

While nine participants acknowledged the importance of understanding program outcomes, only three specifically identified outcome evaluations as part of their approach. Brittany, a professor responsible for health promotion program evaluations highlighted the use of

both process and outcome evaluations, detailing the methods employed, such as Qualtrics surveys, entry and exit interviews, and baseline and post-intervention testing.

> *So, our weekly process evaluation questions were a Qualtrics survey. We also did entry interviews so, asking them, why were they joining the program…We did exit interviews as well…Then for the outcomes data we had, we did baseline and post intervention testing. So, we asked them, you know, they wore a Garmin watch for their physical activity. And then we asked them questions about like quality of life, pain, sleep, and you know, mental health outcomes, just a whole battery of things, social support.*

Participants stressed the significance of comprehending both desired and achieved outcomes. When discussing the importance of outcomes, several participants explained the importance of understanding the desired and achieved outcomes that a project has. Specifically, Katherine described how she used logic models to facilitate discussions on project goals and visualizing essential components, short-term, and long-term outcomes in proposals.

> She explained,

> *So, this is like, just even to understand what a proposal looks like, my first thing is like I just draft a logic model. So, I say is this is my understanding of it, of the essential components and the short term and long term outcomes. Does this visualize what your understanding, you know, what your perception of this program is going to be?*

Employing Diverse Evaluation Approaches for the Evaluation of Programs Serving Black and African American Communities

Participants in the study articulated their adoption of diverse evaluation approaches to cater to the varied needs of the Black and African American communities they serve in their evaluations. These approaches included Usefulness and Utilization Focused Evaluation

Approaches, Educative Evaluation Approaches, Responsive Approaches to Evaluation, and Afrofuturistic and Equitable Approaches to Evaluation. The multifaceted approaches used by participants within their evaluation practices underscores a commitment to comprehensively understanding and addressing the complexities within these communities, ensuring evaluations are not only rigorous but also culturally sensitive and responsive to the unique contexts and perspectives of those being served.

Usefulness and Utilization Focused Evaluation Approaches. A couple of participants underscored the importance of providing useful evaluations, particularly in the context of their work within Black and/or African American communities. They expressed a dedication to ensuring that their evaluations prove beneficial for program teams, aiming to enhance the utilization of the evaluation findings. In particular, Katherine mentioned adopting utilization-focused approaches in her evaluation practice, underscoring the importance of providing evaluations that are genuinely useful and emphasizing her commitment to implementing a utilization-focused evaluation.

> *We are a utilization focused evaluation type of team. That means we do not want our evaluations to ever sit on a shelf, we want them to be useful to whoever needs it, and most importantly, to the community that it's responding to and its stakeholders.*

Furthermore, Kristen stressed the importance of prioritizing the usability of their evaluation work and recognizing the audience's needs to effectively achieve this goal.

Educative Evaluation Approaches. Two participants highlighted the importance of incorporating an educative approach into their evaluation practices. Allison stressed that her role extends beyond traditional evaluation boundaries, emphasizing a highly involved and educative stance. She provided an example wherein, during a project focusing on race, she consciously

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transitioned from the evaluator role to that of an educator and a person of color. In this instance, she took the initiative to discuss and educate about racism. Explaining her approach, she stated,

But I will say that no matter what I see, my role is being very involved and being educative and sometimes that means about things that are evaluation, sometimes that means that things are not about evaluation. For example, I had another project where I literally said to the principal investigator, we were talking about issues of race, I said, I'm going to take a moment to take off my evaluator hat. And I'm going to put on my educator hat and my hat of a Black woman, and I want to talk a little bit about racism.

Charlotte expressed her commitment to educating the project team throughout the evaluation process, stating, "*So it's our job to educate as well. Even though we might not always have time to educate, we still have to figure out how to educate.*"

Participants' commitment to educative evaluation approaches highlights the dynamic and responsive nature of their evaluation practices, reflecting a holistic approach beyond traditional boundaries, emphasizing engagement, education, and meaningful impact.

Responsive Approaches to Evaluation. Most participants stressed the importance of responsiveness in their evaluation practices, particularly when working with Black and/or African American communities. They highlighted the paramount significance of being attuned to the needs of both clients and the communities they serve. Kristen stated,

So, we always have to be very responsive to the client. And I think that is one thing that is probably the key to all of our program evaluations is we aren't just the client comes first, the programming comes first and being willing to adjust as needed.

Katherine detailed her highly responsive method, focusing on meeting community and stakeholder needs to enhance the quality of the evaluation. Additionally, Charlotte who

completed a social justice-focused evaluation program emphasized the utilization of responsive practices to effectively serve communities.

> *For more of a community-based projects, goals have been around what are like community needs and designing programs, designing actions that amplify community voices in ways that are responsive to meeting their needs. And how to do that in in ways that ultimately bring about transformative change for these communities based on how they define it.*

Michelle, a consultant at a justice-oriented organization underscored the importance of employing culturally responsive approaches in her evaluation practice, emphasizing the use of creative and relevant methods to grasp the impact of programs for securing funding.

While not explicitly using the term "responsive," many participants highlighted the importance of understanding communities to adapt practices and tools. For instance, Matthew, an associate professor evaluating health promotion programs emphasized responding to the needs of the population served, citing the example of a childhood obesity program.

> *And so, they probably go to physical education class, take a fitness gram, and that FITNESSGRAM tells them their BMI is high, so they're obese, and they send that home to their parents, and so their parents are told they're obese. And most of the kids look around their whole family, and then say, oh, my whole family is obese. So, it can really shape how they see themselves and their loved ones. And so, I would think a program like this would need to validate that the diversity of human bodies is beautiful and can experience physical activity in a variety of ways. So, I would want to see those kids exposed to people with various body sizes, enjoying and participating in physical*

activities in appropriate ways. And to include content that is accessible for people with

body types who aren't ready to do vigorous sports...

Brittany, stressed flexibility in her evaluation practices to respond to the diverse needs of the populations she works with, citing examples related to access to transportation and varying work schedules.

So, just try and provide flexibility, especially when...we're focusing on there's different

things like access to transportation, and so they might not be able to drive somewhere,

you know, to participate in a whole group... check in on a zoom or phone call. Or there

might be you know, folks who work later hours and so they need something, or they might

work on weekends or something. So, they need something that's more conducive to what

their schedule is.

Laura emphasized the importance of giving priority to respecting the community's culture, placing their narratives at the center, and meeting them on their terms, ultimately leading to the acquisition of more meaningful data.

But I can do that in a way that actually gets you better data because I'm respecting the

culture of the community. I'm centering their stories, I'm meeting them where they are,

rather than making them come to me, whatever that looks like, for somebody.

Similarly, when discussing methods used for evaluating programs serving the Black community, many evaluators emphasized the need for culturally commensurate and responsive methods. They provided examples, including the use of suitable language and adjusting the reading level of data collection tools to align with the population. Charlotte noted how they developed culturally appropriate tools for data collection when working with elementary aged students.

And particularly for the youth, instead of doing just straight interviews with like, third and fourth graders, having them draw… you're asking them questions related to STEM and having them create art and draw to represent. And so, we did that as a way to engage the youth.

Additionally, Michelle highlighted the advantage of shared cultural backgrounds within the project team, allowing for the use of illustrations and metaphors that resonated with the community served without the need for justification. This cultural alignment facilitated a more illustrative and meaningful sense-making session.

Because we shared cultural backgrounds, and I mean that beyond just race, I think that we were able to use illustration and metaphor that more acutely described some of the experiences that were had…for example, in grounding, their sense making session, we took some time to sit with the singing bowl, we took some time to review, Toni Cade Bambara's, The Salt Eaters, and then talk a little bit about Toni Morrison's Transition. Like that was the grounding conversation for the sensemaking. Not that we wouldn't have used those things in another space. But we didn't have to defend why we were using those things in that space.

Additionally, Rebecca discussed the use of storytelling to highlight the experiences of the participants of the programs that they serve. The use of storytelling ensure that their voices are highlighted.

… our emphasis on the storytelling evaluation is an adjustment for sure. Because I think it can be intimidating to try to fit into a mold of white supremacy, that's gonna translate, right. But we have emphasized this bridge, what it feels like to me. So that their voices do

get included in whatever regard, that means that we can [be] as much and as loud as

possible.

These narratives underscore the diverse and collaborative efforts employed by evaluators

to adapt tools and methods in response to the unique needs of the communities they serve,

emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and cultural relevance in the evaluation process.

Detailing the evaluation process of a National Library Association program fostering

relationships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Laura outlined the

methods used, including surveys, a graphic notetaker, and developmental evaluation sessions.

These methods were identified as appropriate and effective when engaging with Black and/or

African American communities. Laura noted push back that they received from program teams

when trying to apply more culturally appropriate tools. She explained how the use of more

appropriate tools led to data which was able to better articulate the experiences of program

participants.

> *But yeah, so I think, because they were all academics, they were all just like, let's just do*
>
> *a survey and we did end up doing like I said, surveys with the HBCUs in addition to the*
>
> *conversations and then evaluations are raised with the attendees and all of the sort of*
>
> *you know, connected people that are part of the planning and part of the grant in the first*
>
> *place. But I don't think that the data we had even just in the conversation and the themes*
>
> *and then connecting with the graphic recordings and that was better detail in terms of*
>
> *like the lived experience and the barriers that people were going to have around sort of*
>
> *implementing this mentorship program.*

The adoption of qualitative methodologies, such as interviews and focus groups, were

underscored by many participants as appropriate evaluation methods to respond to the needs of

Black and African American communities. Kayla expressed the importance of using qualitative

methods to better understand the experiences of the targeted populations.

> *I think that is the largest adjustment as far as because a lot of other organizations that*
>
> *are evaluation focused, will do like the mixed methodology, but it's still dominantly*
>
> *numbers and like, everything is biased, but like numbers specifically don't tell the full*
>
> *story…but we're dominantly qualitative, because it speaks to the human parts, we could*
>
> *crunch some numbers all day long. But that doesn't tell us if these people felt good about*
>
> *their experience with you.*

In embracing qualitative methodologies for evaluating programs serving Black and

African American communities, participants demonstrate a commitment to a more nuanced

understanding.

Noteworthy barriers to conducting evaluations that are responsive to the community

included issues related to technology, the need to justify methodological choices, budget, a lack

of support, and tight timelines. Participants highlighted technology-related challenges, pointing

to specific instances where they faced difficulties, contributing to the overall complexities of

their evaluation work. Laura highlighted the struggle of getting a group of people to adapt to

online technology. She explained,

> *I think the challenges were trying to get a group of people, a lot, a lot of folks were able*
>
> *to adapt to using online technology. But some folks were not, you know, just like we were,*
>
> *you know, just like now, I still have colleagues who can't figure out [Microsoft] Teams,*
>
> *right. So that was like the challenge.*

Participants also cited challenges centered on the engagement of Black and/or African

American communities. Allison noted the extensive amount of time that it took to recruit

participants for an interview activity. Monica discussed challenges around scheduling activities to warrant participant engagement.

Three participants discussed challenges centered on justifying methodological choices and the rigor of practicing culturally responsive evaluation. While Michelle acknowledged the success of upholding values, she also noted the defensive stance required to justify their chosen approaches.

> *I think that another success that we've had is being able to grow, embody this and stayed on our values and principles as we do our work. I think the challenges that come along with that is, you know, in a lot of ways, you're in defense of yourself. You know, you got to defend why you're doing things in a certain way.*

Additionally, Rebecca emphasized the challenge of avoiding conformity to white norms in their evaluation practice and the need to address the internalized sense of obligation within the community.

Budget constraints were a recurring challenge, especially in the context of culturally responsive evaluations. Two participants mentioned the expenses associated with responsive evaluations. They noted that resources such as translation often add unexpected costs in the budget. Additionally, Michelle emphasized the differences between how culturally responsive evaluation is perceived but the reality of its expenses.

> *Culturally responsive is expensive. Stop treating it like this the cheap option. We have $5 and we want you to create a three-year evaluation framework you play and do it culturally responsibly, because you're Black. Like that's end of the organization's cultural responsiveness. And it's like, yeah, we're Black. But the population of concern that you're working with includes a whole bunch of different folks. And for us to do it*

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justice we have to do this, this, and this. But aren't you all Black? Okay, that's not the

end of the rope here. Yeah, that's not what culturally responsive means. So, yeah, it's

expensive and people forget how expensive it is.

Creating an evaluation plan that caters to the diverse community it serves is often restricted by tight timelines. Charlotte stated, *"one of the bigger challenges is just like the time that it can take that if you want to do it, well, it's not a quick, fast and easy that it takes time."* Another participant clarified that, despite initial aspirations for an ideal plan, practical constraints like time limitations and contractual obligations often influence their planning process.

Moreover, participants highlighted successes in responsive evaluation methods. Brittany observed success in participant access and adherence, with a health promotion program evaluator citing a high completion rate (27 out of 30 participants finishing the program). Additionally, the utilization of online conference platforms increased accessibility for program participants.

Change and learning established throughout the evaluation process was noted by four evaluators in this study as a success experienced when adapting tools and methods throughout the evaluation process. Participants explain that although there are challenges when utilizing responsive methods, it can be an area for growth and learning for the project and evaluation team. Specifically, a participant explained how interactions throughout the evaluation process can be used to incite change.

So, because of us thinking about all of these interactions, contracts, negotiations that

happen within capitalism are built upon exploitive relationship, that we are constantly

thinking of ways that we can make it more equitable.

Furthermore, a participant emphasized success in witnessing clients utilize conveyed information to enhance program effectiveness. This underlines the tangible impact of evaluation efforts in improving program outcomes.

While participants navigated challenges in technology, support, budget, and timeline, participants succeeded in enhancing participant engagement and fostering both change and learning. The ongoing commitment of participants reflects their dedication to surmounting obstacles and advancing social justice-oriented evaluation practices.

Afrofuturistic and Equitable Approaches to Evaluation. Three participants explored the integration of Afrofuturistic approaches into their evaluation methods. Kayla defined Afrofuturism in the context of evaluation as,

So Afro futurist as an idea imagines the future where Black people are present, because we are going to be present, but we are a present, unencumbered by white supremacy. So, it is essentially a different world, that it allows us to kind of take us outside of our imagination, because our imagination is still tied to our tangible realities. Also, Afrofuturism takes us to this, like further elsewhere, that we can kind of take off the default setting of white supremacy, and so is just envisioning and understanding Black people to be dignified in the future and from that…what is present was not present. What worries do Black people have? What worries do we not have, and using that as relevant and viable data to inform how we build the world today.

Michelle conveyed that by embracing Afrofuturism and incorporating its ideology into her evaluation practices, her focus inherently leans towards justice for a future existence (liston, 2022). Additionally, participants explained the utilization of the Afrofuturistic framework in conjunction with equity, emphasizing that this approach is introduced to organizations that have

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expressed a desire to be forward-thinking or embark upon new initiatives rather than imposing it abruptly.

Several evaluators highlighted the incorporation of equity throughout their evaluation processes. Two participants specifically mentioned that their organization prioritizes equity, making it a central focus in their evaluation approaches. Kristen explained:

Our approach for [omitted] has been a focus on equity. Last couple of years, we've had an internal working group where we were trying to understand what equity looks like... because like I said, we have a mission and vision from the university. But as people that work primarily in the educational field with vulnerable populations, we have to have a lens through which we looked at our work as well. And determine what kind of work we would accept and making sure that it did align with our philosophy.

Three participants also elaborated on how equity is ingrained in the work carried out by their organizations. Rebecca emphasized a reframing of equity work to concentrate on dignity, stating:

We do dignity... But it's just a reframe of equity. Right, and that's what I'm learning, people are much more inclined to understand dignity than they are equity. But it's because it's the language, equity inherently has racism in it... and then dignity allows you to be individualistic... or allows you [to]center yourself first before somebody else. Like, I'm looking at me, I deserve these things, and by way of me, you do…. so, I think that reframe is like easier for people to grasp.

Participants emphasized the integration of Afrofuturistic approaches and equity considerations into their evaluation methods, prioritizing dignity, while recognizing the

importance of introducing these frameworks to organizations embracing forward-thinking initiatives.

Program Evaluation Capacity Building. Six participants emphasized the significance of building program capacities for conducting evaluations within Black and/or African American communities. Some participants highlighted the challenge of limited funding for evaluations in these communities and stressed the importance of educating programs on developing, implementing, and analyzing tools and data effectively. While working with programs that cater to Black and African American communities, Katherine emphasized the significance of offering evaluation capacity services. This ensures that program leaders possess the necessary skills to independently conduct evaluations.

> *But I will say that the majority of our evaluation projects and projects that we're doing with nonprofits, where we actually provide evaluation capacity building services, so these nonprofits can do evaluations or evaluations with a small e I don't know for themselves. They work with communities of color, not just Black and African American, but a lot of refugee and immigrant communities.*

Rebecca mentioned using capacity building as a way to increase the youth's capacity to engage in evaluative thinking when reflecting on her role evaluating a program aiming to promote gardening and involve youth in the evaluative activities. She outlined the process of developing youth's proficiency in utilizing methods like observations, focus groups, journaling, and reflections to empower them with the essential skills for active engagement in evaluation.

The incorporation of evaluation capacity services, as supported by various participants, not only empowers program leaders but also fosters a broader community engagement, ensuring sustained impact and meaningful participation in evaluative activities.

Methods Dissemination of Evaluation Findings

Several participants emphasized the importance of sharing evaluation findings with the community served in their evaluation practices. To ensure the utility of evaluation findings, Kayla stressed the importance of integrating participants' perspectives and recommendations into the presented program recommendations.

And I included their perspectives and recommendations like the solutions that they offered to me during those conversations were included in my actual recommendations.

Recognizing the need for accessibility, participants stressed the importance of creating visually engaging dissemination materials when presenting information to the community. Furthermore, participants noted the importance of making evaluation findings accessible to the participants and their community. Charlotte discussed the importance of having physical copies of findings accessible to participants when working in a program set in a school.

And so similar to how we did our IRB documents, where we make copies for all kids in certain grade levels, and included them in like their take home packet, doing the same that way, with our results is creating a report that has more visuals, and making copies so that it can go home with the youth, for parents to see...

Additionally, Allison underscored the significance of disseminating insights to the wider evaluation community. This encompasses not just the outcomes but also the methodology, gleaned lessons, and practical advice for fellow practitioners.

I also try to share with the broader evaluation community, not necessarily the findings, but like, how did I go about this? What worked? Well, what are some tips that I learned, some lessons learned that I think would be useful for others? That sort of thing.

By ensuring that communities receive evaluation findings and conclusions in appropriate ways, participants in this study aim to empower communities to make informed decisions, advocate for necessary changes, and actively engage in improving their own communities.

Theme 4: Attending to Values of Social Justice in Evaluation Practice

Conceptualizing Social Justice in Evaluation Practice

Participants emphasized the need for a shared understanding of social justice before engagement. In expressing her preparedness for addressing social justice, Charlotte stressed the importance of operationalizing the concept. When faced with diverse viewpoints on social justice within the communities she works with, she emphasized the role of allowing these communities to define social justice. She explained,

> *In my own work part of it, I think a big part of it is one allowing the community or communities that I'm working with, to define social justice. And if there are diverging viewpoints, where they're like, we don't know, it's then being able to… bring a framework to start us on to draw from, and then kind of creating some type of understanding, and then based on that understanding, thinking and talking about, how do we operationalize this so that we can move it into action...*

Rebecca echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the importance of defining what social justice means in the context of evaluation work. They underscored the need to prioritize key stakeholders in the community, involving them not just in providing insights but also in shaping questions and determining how information is disseminated.

In a different perspective, Derrick stressed the importance of establishing a shared understanding around social justice. He shared his experience of working in a less progressive area, emphasizing the regional context's impact on social justice discussions. He highlighted

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challenges related to language, particularly terms like "social justice" and "cultural responsiveness" being contested in their location. Derrick emphasized the need to find alternative ways to engage in these conversations that align with the local context and emphasized the importance of building relationships in such environments.

Considering what constitutes a social justice-oriented evaluation, Allison raised a question, *"Does your evaluation have to have changed some policy to ultimately be able to be called Social Justice oriented?"*

The Role of Social Justice in Evaluation Practice

Participants shared diverse perspectives on the intersection of social justice and evaluation practice. Four participants strongly associated evaluation with social justice, emphasizing its role in addressing issues related to equity. Participants expressed a deliberate choice to engage with programs with social justice goals. Laura explained,

And for me, it matters, that the work that I do matters to people that look like me, in some way, like not physically look like me necessarily, but their lived experiences like mine. So, whether it's research, whether it's teaching, whether it's evaluation, it's at the core of what I do. And if it doesn't do that, I'm less likely to agree to do the evaluation.

Derrick highlighted the advocacy aspect of evaluation, viewing it as a tool for championing social justice. Rebecca underscored their organization's explicit commitment to justice-oriented evaluation work, emphasizing that it is inherent to their organizational mission.

In contrast, Allison touched upon the inherent service-oriented nature of evaluation work. While expressing a desire for social justice aims, she acknowledged the challenges in fully controlling the extent to which evaluation contributes to social justice. She recognized,

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But you know, evaluation is conducted in service to something else, oftentimes to the

program or the commissioner. So, it can be difficult, like I can have social justice aims,

but there's always this question of like, to what extent is evaluation actually contributing

to social justice?

Despite her contemplative feelings, she articulates her commitment to advancing social justice through her approach to evaluation. This involves challenging the status quo and maintaining thoughtfulness and mindfulness in her evaluation practices, such as raising awareness within project teams about instances of injustice.

When asked about their readiness to address social justice concerns within their evaluation practices, participants exhibited a spectrum of preparedness, ranging from not very prepared to highly prepared. Eight participants expressed confidence in their preparedness, emphasizing the centrality of social justice to their work in evaluation.

Michelle stated that she was highly prepared to address social issues, as it is the core of her work. She explained,

Highly prepared. I feel like it's our reason for moving right. And we do evaluation

because of them. So it's like, that's the core of our work in evaluation is the outcome of it.

Cristina highlighted their personal readiness to carry out social justice in their own capacity as a principal investigator but acknowledged challenges when advocating for ethical practices within a team setting. Reflecting on her readiness, Katherine emphasized a continuous state of preparedness rooted in an equity-focused approach. She noted,

So, I guess I'm always prepared. Since that's our approach, we've taken on equity… be

ready in terms of a period or something that may not be what you expected. And that's

the part of the emergent strategy is like, okay, we're smart, but people could be smarter,

or maybe we didn't think about something.

However, three participants conveyed a nuanced sense of preparedness. Two participants grappled with the evolving nature of culture and their changing perceptions, recognizing a shift from feeling adequately prepared in the past to a more nuanced understanding at present. Brittany, who evaluates health promotion programs, expressed an evolving perspective on her readiness to address social justice, stating,

I thought I was prepared, but I feel like the more I do it, the less prepared I feel like it's

sort of like this promethium task of I take the stone up and then it rolls back down and I

take it up again. If you'd asked me this question four years ago, I would have said I was

fairly prepared. Now, I just feel like I tried to do the best I can and advocate the best I

can. And yeah, I feel like I just on a scale of one to 10 I'm a five right now.

Likewise, in the conversation about his readiness to tackle social justice concerns in evaluations, Matthew highlighted the diversity of cultures and acknowledged that there is always room for further learning.

On one hand, I'd say, very prepared, but you know, on another hand to say, I'm not sure,

I've felt good about it in the spaces that I've worked with. But the thing about this is, you

usually don't hear from our people whose culture was not considered…but I would have

given myself a high rating, if you told me to do so… I think sometimes you don't know

what you don't know, in these in these spaces.

Some participants noted that their readiness to address social justice issues presented in their evaluation work is dependent on the context. Charlotte explains how social justice is defined influences her readiness to handle these concerns.

I think that varies depending upon, like the context, and how those in that specific context

are defining what social justice is, and what the needs or aims are thereafter. Right. And

I think it's important for me to understand, like what I'm able to do [and] what I'm not

able to do…

Addressing specific contexts, Monica admitted limited experience in navigating legal and

voting rights issues related to social justice, rating their preparedness at around 3.5 or four on a

scale of one to five.

Conversely, Kristen expressed feeling not very prepared in the context of social justice

within evaluation practices. She explained that she had not spent much time thinking about the

role of social justice in evaluation and therefore were not prepared. The diverse range of

responses highlights the complexity and varied perspectives on the role and readiness of

participants to address social justice concerns in their evaluation practice.

Exploring Social Justice in Evaluation Through Identities, Values, and Backgrounds

Seven participants in the study shared insights into how their identities and values shape

their approach and readiness to engage with social justice in their evaluation practices. Laura

underscored the influence of their lived experiences on their preparation to address social justice

issues. She emphasized the importance of working with programs aimed to address issues of

justice.

I think because of my own lived experience, I guess I should say, I've had cancer three

times once when I was in high school…And my dad's mother died when he was a child

from untreated cancer. My dad's father was incarcerated and died in police custody.

Right… but I think for me, because I've seen how social injustice has impacted my

family's hopes and dreams… And for me, it matters, that the work that I do matters to

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people that look like me, in some way, like not physically look like me necessarily, but

their lived experiences like mine.

Additionally, Michelle mentioned that her values centered on Black liberation influence her approach to social justice in her evaluation practice. She stated that evaluation should go beyond looking at the success of the program as articulated in the planning documents but also looking at the impact on the overall wellbeing of Black people as a way of accountability.

Yeah, I think it becomes sort of accountability towards that we're doing it's in service.

And I think this comes with being a culturally responsive evaluator. I think this comes

with thinking about social justice. I think this comes with Black liberatory thought. I think

this comes with Black feminists. I think it comes from a lot of different places. But that

means that you don't just say, did I do what I was asked to? You ask yourself; did this

move us who are involved closer to liberation…And if so, how? And if not why?

Derrick, drawing from a background as a social worker, outlined how this experience equips them with the skills to navigate social justice concerns in their evaluation practice. He explains his position that evaluators are also advocates and doing so requires them to speak up on issues even when it is uncomfortable. He stated,

I think the social justice component comes out in my training as a social worker. So, it's

just something that's kind of already embedded. And so, I am a firm believer that

evaluators are also advocates. And by being an advocate, you have to be able to speak up

even when it's uncomfortable.

Tiffany, who considers herself an "equity scholar" with strong values tied to racial equity in health and physical education programs, recognized that she focuses on what's there,

prioritizing the identification and rectification of disparities and injustices to ensure equitable outcomes for all participants.

Kristen mentioned that her limited formal education in program evaluation leaves her insufficiently equipped to address social justice in evaluations. She explained,

But I would say I just don't think that...that goes back to that theoretical component that I think I would probably get more instruction and greater skills at the university level through a formal program, then, you know, then the path that I have taken.

These narratives underscore the profound impact of personal experiences and professional backgrounds on participants' perspectives, emphasizing the intertwined nature of identity, values, and the commitment to social justice in the realm of program evaluation.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the study's findings, structured around its research questions. The interviews yielded valuable data concerning the backgrounds and identities of evaluators working within Black and/or African American communities. Participants highlighted the crucial role of identity in evaluation practice, discussing challenges and effective strategies for managing identity dynamics. The analysis also provided insight into various aspects of evaluation practices within Black and/or African American communities, including cultural context, diverse evaluation methodologies, integration of social justice principles, and strategies for enhancing evaluation.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

While literature on culturally responsive evaluation practices and the intersection of race and evaluation advocate for an enhanced understanding of evaluation within Black ecosystems, there persists a significant gap in comprehending evaluation practices within these communities. The current body of literature on evaluation frequently overlooks discussions of race, which limits our capacity to understand evaluation dynamics within Black and African American communities (Hood et al., 2022). This study used a generic qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews to explore how the backgrounds and identities of program evaluators who evaluate programs serving Black and/or African American communities influence their practices, and to understand the values and issues addressed in their evaluation processes. Critical race theory (CRT) and culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) were fundamental concepts that informed the theoretical framework and guided this research.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the identities of program evaluators serving African American communities influence their evaluation practices?

2. Which values and issues (i.e., culture, context, race, equity, inclusion, diversity) do program evaluators serving African American communities attend in their evaluation practice?

   a. How do they respond to these values and issues in their evaluation practice?

This chapter begins with a summary and discussion of important findings and implications for the field. After that, I discuss the study's limitations. The chapter concludes by offering recommendations for future research and drawing conclusions based on its findings.

Discussion of Key Findings

Educational Backgrounds and Experiences of Program Evaluators in Black Ecosystems

The existing research on the backgrounds and experiences of program evaluators, particularly those serving Black ecosystems, is limited. This study aimed to fill this gap by collecting information on factors like gender, race/ethnicity, education level, and program evaluation experience. The goal was to gain insights into the individuals responsible for evaluating programs within Black ecosystems and understand how their backgrounds might influence their choices in designing evaluations.

The findings revealed that evaluators working with programs in predominantly Black or African American communities had diverse educational achievements, ranging from doctoral to master's degrees. The majority of participants held doctoral degrees, aligning with similar studies showing that most evaluators have completed doctoral or master's programs (Azzam, 2011).

Initially, this study specifically focused on evaluators with experience in evaluating health promotion programs within majority Black communities, resulting in participants representing a variety of academic backgrounds such as kinesiology (5), public health (2), communications (1), psychology (3), and education (3)—differing from other research on evaluator backgrounds in the field (Azzam, 2011; Boyce et al., 2022).

Numerous scholars highlight the interdisciplinary aspect of program evaluation. Stufflebeam (2001) underscored the necessity for evaluation to cut across disciplines, advocating for the preparation of evaluators who can transcend disciplinary boundaries and apply their skills to enhance the efficiency, quality, and effectiveness of programs. The results of this study indicated that, while some participants (n = 4) had formal education in evaluation, many gained their evaluation experience informally outside of their educational programs (n = 6). These

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informal experiences involved participation in evaluation training programs like the Pathways

Initiative and the American Evaluation Association's GEDI program, internships, and

engagement in dissertation research. This finding aligns with existing knowledge in the field,

which recognizes that many evaluators enter the field informally, acquiring experiences beyond

formal program evaluation education (Diaz et al., 2020).

Participants without formal evaluation education, specifically those focused on health

promotion programs had unique perspectives on what program evaluation was which proved to

be challenging for myself as the researcher when collecting data. Throughout the data collection

process, I experienced feelings of frustration when attempting to dig deeper into the perspectives

of participants involved in health promotion program evaluation. Throughout the data collection,

I noted that many of the health promotion and physical activity program evaluators struggled to

articulate a difference between research and program evaluation, making it difficult for me to

understand how they conceptualized program evaluation. Literature on health promotion and

physical activity programs, notes that the interconnection between program evaluation and

research, leads to challenges discerning the distinctions between the two (Kennedy et al., 2019;

Viester et al., 2014; Sternfeld et al., 1999; Joseph et al., 2023; Hassandra et al., 2013).

The challenges encountered during data collection underscore the importance of

addressing the conceptual understanding of program evaluation among individuals without

formal education in the field, especially within specialized areas like health promotion. Informal

evaluator education programs, such as trainings offered through professional associations and

internships coupled with interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration between researchers and

evaluators can enhance comprehension and alignment of evaluation practices within these fields.

By addressing these gaps in understanding, we can strengthen the effectiveness and rigor of

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program evaluation efforts, ultimately contributing to more informed decision-making and improved outcomes in health promotion and related fields (Symonette et al., 2014).

Exploring Racial Identity in Program Evaluation

Sturges (2014) articulated that identity is a fluid process that aids individuals in comprehending and incorporating conflicting ideologies and experiences in relation to their daily lives. This process involves negotiation, construction, and continual development of an identity narrative, facilitating the interpretation and reinterpretation of past experiences, ultimately leading to the revision of self-understandings. The racial identity of evaluators in this study was very prominent when discussing how their identities influence their practice. Most participants identified as African American or Black (11), with 1 participant identifying as multi-ethnic, specifically African American and Latina, 1 as white, 1 as Southeast Asian, and 1 as Latina. Although convenience sampling was utilized in this study, the results suggest that many people doing evaluative work in Black and/or African American communities share similar racial and ethnic backgrounds with the target communities. This finding corresponds with existing literature in the field indicating that evaluators of color often bear the responsibility of serving their communities because if they do not, oftentimes no one else will (Boyce et al., 2022, Reid et al., 2020, Thomas & Campbell, 2021). Throughout the data collection process, I found it difficult to reconcile with this finding. I frequently believed that individuals from diverse backgrounds should be actively engaged in working within these communities, leading me to question whether the study's sample accurately represented the broader population of evaluators serving programs in Black and/or African American communities. Nevertheless, the study serves as a catalyst for important conversations and future research endeavors aimed at understanding the

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burden of Black evaluators and addressing the systemic inequalities that result in them often being the sole individuals doing work in these communities.

Black evaluators' racial identity was very prominent when discussing how their identities influence their practice. They described how their racial identity allows them to connect the population served, thus creating strong relationships and a deeper understanding of the cultural and contextual factors which underlie programs serving Black and/or African American communities. This aligns with the principles of CRE, which emphasize the importance of cultural competence, humility, and responsiveness in evaluation practices to ensure evaluations are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and perspectives of diverse communities (Hood et al., 2015; Hopson, 2009). Moreover, Reid et al. (2020) note that racial and ethnic identity, is recognized as a crucial element that significantly influences the evaluation practices of evaluators of color.

In exploring their identities, the majority of participants (n = 14) highlighted the impact of their racial identity on their capacity to establish connections, particularly when engaging with communities. A Latina participant shared that when working with Black and/or African American communities, she recognizes that she is an outsider. She's careful to think about her role in the space and actively reaches out to others within these communities to make sure the program meets their needs. Similarly, a Southeast Asian woman emphasized the importance, as a woman of color, of working with research teams that represent the population being studied. She acknowledged that individuals are often more inclined to share information with researchers and evaluators who share similar identities. On the other hand, a white woman working as an evaluator at a university-affiliated center recognized the impact of identities on evaluation practices but struggled to discern how they specifically played a role in her own evaluation

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procedures. Delgado et al. (2017) elucidate the normalcy associated with whiteness, emphasizing

its prevailing status as the standard. The participant's difficulty in pinpointing how her racial

identity affects her practice exemplifies the normalization of whiteness. Although she didn't

explicitly articulate how her racial identity influences her work, she acknowledged the privilege

stemming from her suburban, middle-class status as a woman. Culturally responsive literature

encourages evaluators to confront white privilege and forsake deficit-based thinking that tends to

"evaluate down" (Hood et al., 2015). However, when reflecting on her identity, this participant

noted engaging in deficit-based thinking when evaluating the Black and/or African American

communities she serves, expressing empathy toward those that she perceived as less fortunate

(Davis & Museus, 2019). Given the scarcity of research on White evaluators evaluating

programs in communities of color, this discovery suggests that white evaluators may

unintentionally demonstrate deficit-based thinking when evaluating programs within Black

and/or African American communities (Shanker, 2019). As a result, it is essential for evaluators,

particularly those belonging to dominant racial and ethnic groups, to thoroughly scrutinize their

privilege and biases. Introducing reflective practice exercises into evaluator education can inspire

students to conduct a critical examination of their personal identities, biases, and presumptions

(Tovey & Skolits, 2022). These activities might encompass journaling, group deliberations, or

case studies, all aimed at prompting students to contemplate how their social identities influence

their viewpoints and methodologies in evaluation (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Oliver et al.,

2008).

 These findings are in line with current literature, highlighting how the work of Black

evaluators is often influenced by their racial identity (Boyce et al., 2022). This study is

particularly significant as it provides valuable insight into how evaluators who may not

personally identify with the community conceptualize race and integrate race-based considerations into their evaluation practices. Additionally, it emphasizes the pivotal role of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in shaping evaluation methodologies, allowing evaluators to analyze how race intersects with social structures, power dynamics, and institutional practices within evaluation contexts. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE) training for evaluators to effectively navigate issues of race and promote racial equity in their work.

Advancing Responsive Evaluation Practices

This study's findings underscored the significance of responsive evaluation practices within programs serving Black and/or African American communities. Literature underscores the importance of evaluators in marginalized communities being responsive to enhance evaluation quality (Hood et al., 2015; Hall, 2018). When discussing responsive approaches used in the evaluation of programs serving Black and/or African American communities, participants emphasize the importance of understanding the culture and context of the evaluation. Participants highlighted the necessity of investing time to develop a deep understanding of program contexts and cultures through relationship building and community engagement. They also mentioned using methods such as needs assessments and literature reviews to enhance their understanding of program context and culture. Understanding the culture and context of evaluations permeates foundational documents from the American Evaluation Association (AEA), such as the Guiding Principles, Statement on Cultural Competence, and 2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies. Within the 2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies, context is highlighted as a foundational domain, defined as the focus on comprehending the unique circumstances, diverse perspectives, and dynamic settings involved in evaluations and their users/stakeholders.

Additionally, the Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework underscores the necessity of grasping the cultural context before embarking on an evaluation. The initial step in this framework, as stressed by Hood et al. (2015), underscores the importance of dedicating time to understand the cultural norms within the community for a more profound understanding.

Part of understanding the cultural context revolves around understanding the relationships that these communities have with the research and evaluation process. When discussing the connection between Black and/or African American communities and researchers and evaluators, many participants highlighted tensions stemming from historical exploitation in these communities. This historical exploitation dates back to research trials such as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study (Freimuth et al., 2001). Culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) strives to confront the historical context of evaluation within a community, particularly if it has been marked by oppression or exploitation. A key characteristic of CRE is to protect and prevent the exploitation of cultural minority and economically disadvantaged evaluation participants (Hood et al., 2015). To address these concerns of exploitation, study participants underscored the significance of prioritizing the trust of evaluation participants throughout the evaluation process and emphasized the importance of providing compensation to engage them effectively.

As a Black woman reflecting on this, I strongly identified with the historical exploitation highlighted by the participants. Having witnessed firsthand the mistrust between members of my community and research and evaluation endeavors, this finding deeply affected me. It stirred feelings of frustration and renewed my dedication to uphold ethical and equitable evaluation practices, particularly within my community. These insights underscored the significance of prioritizing trust-building throughout the evaluation processes to uphold the dignity and agency of all participants.

Moreover, in discussions about responsiveness and collaboration with Black and/or African communities, some participants emphasized the crucial aspect of liberating these communities. Liberation, in this context, revolves around freeing these communities from oppression, particularly from their oppressors. Delgado et al. (2017) discuss how some critical scholars have introduced new concepts like liberation to challenge longstanding restrictions on thought and speech, aiming to free people from oppression. Likewise, participants in this study highlighted how liberation manifests in their evaluations through the adoption of approaches such as Afrofuturism and the implementation of equity-centered practices. This dedication to fairness aligns with the AEA Guiding Principles, specifically emphasizing the Common Good and Equity. In doing so, evaluators aim to contribute to the progress of a society that is both fair and just.

Practicums in evaluation training must prioritize cultural competence, trust-building skills, and the integration of liberation-focused approaches to prepare future evaluators for working within Black and/or African American communities (Chouinard et al., 2017; Levin-Rozalis & Rosenstein, 2003). This involves fostering an understanding of the historical exploitation experienced by these communities, encouraging reflexivity and self-reflection among students, and providing opportunities for immersive experiences that deepen cultural sensitivity and understanding. By addressing these implications, practicums can empower students to engage in ethical, equitable, and culturally responsive evaluation practices, ultimately contributing to positive outcomes for Black and/or African American communities.

Communication in Evaluating Programs in Black and/or African American Communities

Robles-Schrader & Lemos (2023) emphasized the significance of language equity in the context of evaluation practice. They critically examine English-dominant settings and advocate

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for a more asset-based approach to conducting multilingual evaluations. Despite many Black

ecosystems being English-dominant communities, the study unveils nuances in language and

communication modes within these contexts. Participants emphasized the importance of

language, sharing alternative methods of communication. One participant described how they

use metaphors and stories to effectively communicate and establish relationships with evaluation

participants. Another participant highlighted the distinctive English language nuances within

Black ecosystems, noting the need to clarify messages for those outside the community and

explaining unique acronyms used in Black community communication. Additionally, in

discussions about communication practices within evaluations of Black and/or African American

communities, participants stressed the importance of sharing evaluation findings and information

with the communities and stakeholders in a manner that resonates with their language and

culture, often avoiding academic terminology. They emphasized the critical role of language in

ensuring universal understanding of the results. Participants highlighted the necessity of

employing alternative communication methods and tools, such as infographics, presentations,

and translators, to enhance accessibility and comprehension for all involved parties.

This finding aligns with the principles of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE), which

underscore the significance of considering cultural and linguistic diversity in evaluation

processes to ensure inclusivity and relevance for diverse communities. By recognizing the

nuances of language and communication within Black ecosystems, this finding supports CRE's

advocacy for valuing and integrating diverse perspectives and communication styles (Hood et al.,

2015; Hood et al., 2023; Hopson, 1999). Furthermore, critical race theory (CRT), which

examines power dynamics and structural inequalities, offers a framework to analyze the

implications of language equity in evaluation (Delgado et al., 2017). Acknowledging language as

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a tool for both power and oppression, CRT underscores the importance of addressing linguistic

diversity to challenge dominant narratives and advance social justice agendas.

This study highlights the importance of understanding the nuanced dynamics of language

and communication within Black communities, often overlooked in research. Recognizing these

unique linguistic and communicative patterns is crucial for evaluators and evaluation educators.

Incorporating coursework on language and communication within Black and/or African

American communities, such as Ebonics or AAVE, can better equip evaluators to tailor their

communication strategies effectively. This underscores the significance of culturally responsive

evaluation approaches that embrace diverse linguistic backgrounds and communication

preferences within Black communities, thereby enhancing the inclusivity and impact of

evaluations.

The Role of Social Justice in Evaluating Black and/or African American Communities

The study participants generally expressed a sense of readiness to confront social justice

issues in their evaluation practice. However, some participants exhibited hesitancy in discussing

their preparedness, noting its dependence on the specific context and cultural aspects of the

program. Recognizing the importance of considering the cultural and contextual dimensions in

evaluations is a fundamental element of social justice approaches (Boyce et al., 2023; House,

2019, Hood et al, 2015). House (2019) introduces three social justice approaches in evaluation:

justice as fairness, justice as democracy, and justice as equality. Justice as fairness emphasizes

situations where evaluations might be perceived as unfair, such as the biased selection of

outcome measures. As an illustration of justice as fairness, House (2019) cites culturally

responsive evaluation (Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2015), underscoring the need for evaluators to

be well-informed about the culture they are operating in and sensitive to its norms, practices, and

nuances. The study participants demonstrated sensitivity to understanding the intricacies of the community, recognizing that their readiness to address social justice issues might vary across different evaluation contexts.

Hall (2018) articulated the idea that there could be disagreement about whether evaluation should explore social issues. He observed that some individuals maintain this perspective. Conversely, others argue that sponsors of evaluation projects possess the right to determine the study's scope. A participant in this study tied the service-oriented nature of evaluation to social justice. They explained that due to conflicting interests between the project teams, funders, and evaluation team it can often be difficult to discern the role of social justice in evaluation. Despite the challenges that many participants faced in effectively utilizing evaluation to address these issues, a significant number felt well-prepared to confront social justice matters in their evaluation practice. Boyce et al. (2023) examined the role of Black evaluators in addressing inequities within the evaluation process. Boyce et al.'s participants voiced their commitment to using evaluation as a tool for advocating on behalf of the communities involved throughout their professional endeavors. This dissertation's findings contribute valuable insights to the literature on evaluation practices in Black ecosystems, demonstrating that evaluators engaged with programs serving this community often navigate within familiar or passionately embraced contexts and cultures. A more profound understanding of the evaluation's culture and context equips participants to systematically address social justice issues.

When describing what social justice looks like in their evaluation practice, evaluators often emphasized the importance of centering the voices of the community and those directly impacted by the evaluation findings. Culturally responsive evaluation practices highlight the importance of highlighting all voices throughout the evaluation process (Hood et al., 2015).

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Study participants were explicit when discussing the importance of intentionally including the voices of the communities impacted by the programs and evaluation as a vital component of their evaluation practice. They underscored the significance of communication throughout this process and described how they collaborate with evaluation participants to ensure that often marginalized voices are heard throughout the evaluation. Participants explain how they modify data collection methods, adjusting formats and language to enhance engagement with the target population. In allowing communities to voice their experiences, evaluators empower them to shape their own narratives. Delgado et al. (2017) advocate for counter storytelling, a tenant of CRT, to amplify the stories of marginalized communities to provide an alternative to dominant, often white narratives. Granting evaluation participants, the opportunity to share their stories emphasizes the importance of minimizing the dominant cultural lens.

These conclusions highlight the need for increased dialogue among evaluation leaders regarding the role of social justice in evaluation. Moreover, developing competencies centered on social justice can provide valuable guidance for evaluators striving to uphold these values. Additionally, evaluation education programs should integrate modules or coursework that address the intersection of social justice principles and evaluation methodologies, emphasizing the importance of balancing stakeholder needs with equity considerations. Practical exercises and case studies can challenge students to navigate ethical dilemmas, while professional development opportunities can offer strategies for engaging diverse communities and fostering inclusivity. By implementing these measures, the field can better prepare evaluators to navigate the intricate landscape of social justice in evaluation practice.

The Role of Intuition in Evaluation Practices

Participants in the study explained the use of intuition in their evaluation practice. Upon reflection, I found this finding to be particularly significant, given that intuition is frequently overlooked in research due to its lack of direct empirical support. Participants in the study conveyed how they possess a distinctive and intuitive insight into the experiences of people of color, which they frequently leverage in their practice. This intuitive understanding, rooted in their own lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, informs their approach to evaluation, and guides their decision-making processes. Three participants, African American women, emphasized the utilization of intuition as a valuable source of data throughout their evaluation process. One participant pointed out Hazel Symonette's concept of the self as a responsive tool, highlighting the idea that effective self-presentation and appropriate utilization of the self in relation to others are crucial for ethical practice and inclusion (Symonette, 2009). The participant discussed how she sees herself as a tool throughout the evaluation process emphasizing the importance of her intuition throughout her practice.

This concept suggests that individuals from marginalized racial backgrounds possess unique insights and perspectives based on their lived experiences. In this context, the intuitive understanding demonstrated by participants, rooted in their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, aligns with CRT's tenet, "voice of color," which describes how people of color are uniquely qualified to speak on behalf of other members of their group (or groups) regarding the forms and effects of racism due to their unique experiences (Delgado et al., 2017). Participants' intuitive insights into the experiences of people of color contribute to a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to evaluation, allowing them to better understand and address the needs and perspectives of diverse communities. Additionally, the emphasis on effective self-

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presentation and the utilization of the self as a tool underscores the importance of cultural humility and self-awareness in evaluation practice, which are central tenets of culturally responsive evaluation. Therefore, participants' intuitive approach to evaluation reflects the principles of "voice of color" and highlights the significance of incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences into evaluation processes.

Similarly, another participant talked about leaning into their feelings when making evaluative decisions. She noted leaning into what she feels is right noting that she often leads with her moral and ethical compass. The AEA Guiding Principles and Competency documents both address the need for the evaluator to act ethically, although not specifically outlining what this may look like. However, the AEA Statement on Cultural Competence outlines ethical practices which includes using approaches that are appropriate to the context, incorporating ways to make findings accessible to all stakeholders, and considering unintended consequences when reporting findings.

Hurteau et al. (2020) explores the connection between intuitions and ethics, examining the convergence of combined systems of thinking and the concept of praxis. This integration links knowledge and skills with practical wisdom to determine ethically appropriate actions in specific circumstances, echoing Aristotle's ethical framework and highlighting the role of intuition in decision-making that reflects practical wisdom (Hurteau et al., 2020). In this study, participants exemplify the application of this integrated approach, shedding light on how intuition contributes to ethical decision-making in their specific contexts.

The acknowledgment of intuition as a significant data source underscores the necessity for evaluators to expand their methodological repertoire beyond conventional approaches. By integrating intuitive insights rooted in lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, evaluation

practice can be enriched, yielding more nuanced and contextually relevant findings. Evaluation education programs should prioritize cultivating a nuanced understanding of intuition and its responsible use in evaluation practice. Future evaluators need to be equipped with the skills to harness intuition effectively, ensuring that it complements rigorous empirical methods while also being ethically and culturally sensitive. This emphasis in evaluation education will prepare evaluators to navigate the complexities of real-world evaluation contexts, where intuition can play a valuable role in decision-making.

Study Strengths and Limitations

It is essential to recognize both the strengths and limitations of this study to provide a comprehensive contextual understanding of the findings. These details contribute to a comprehensive contextual understanding of the findings.

Firstly, this study initially targeted program evaluators involved in physical activity and health promotion programs. Challenges emerged in identifying program evaluators for physical activity programs, owing to nuanced distinctions between the researcher and evaluators in this programming, as well as limited professionals in the space conducting program evaluations. Moreover, as a graduate student in a program outside of kinesiology and physical education, I encountered obstacles in accessing the targeted evaluation community. These challenges influenced modifications to the study's design, accentuating the need to broaden the focus to include evaluators responsible for evaluating any type of program serving Black and/or African American communities. As a result, a strength of this study is its capacity to offer broader insights and perspectives beyond a specific context, such as physical activity and health promotion, in predominantly Black and/or African American communities.

Employing a convenience sample facilitated rapid data collection, ensuring timely analysis and interpretation to fulfill the study's goals within the designated timeframe. The resulting sample was predominantly Black and African American. While this composition offers valuable insights within its specified scope, there are concerns about whether the sample accurately represents the population of evaluators in programs serving predominantly Black and/or African American communities. The literature suggests that many individuals engaged in work within Black and African American communities share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds (Boyce et al., 2022).

One limitation of the study is the uncertainty surrounding the definition of a "black community." The diversity within black communities presents challenges in addressing the experiences and needs specific to Black, particularly African American communities. This lack of clarity may impede a nuanced understanding of the experiences and needs unique to diverse Black communities, potentially resulting in oversight of the unique challenges they encounter within these contexts.

It is important to consider time-related factors, given that the study was launched during the summer months, a period when individuals typically have varied commitments such as vacations, research, and programs. This timing may have resulted in challenges recruiting some participants, as they may have been less responsive to emails during this time. As a result, the study might not have fully captured the breadth of perspectives within the evaluator community.

Lastly, the qualitative design of this study provided a thorough examination of nuanced aspects and insights into evaluation practices within Black and/or African American communities. And, while the limited sample size did not achieve statistical representativeness of the entire population it nonetheless provided valuable qualitative perspectives. Nevertheless,

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interpretation of the study's findings should be limited to the specific context and demographics under investigation.

In summary, openly acknowledging the strengths and limitations establishes the base for a nuanced understanding of the study's parameters.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study has set the stage for future investigations to deepen our understanding of how evaluators operate within Black ecosystems. In future studies could explore the varied backgrounds of program evaluators, considering their diverse disciplinary origins. As program evaluators often emerge from a range of fields such as education, public health, and psychology, purposeful sampling of individuals with different backgrounds could illuminate trends in their practices. This intentional approach aims to further our understanding of the intersection between educational backgrounds and evaluation practices within this context.

Another area for future research could focus on exploring how evaluators utilize intuition in their evaluation practices. While much attention has been paid to the use of systematic methodologies and frameworks in evaluation, less is known about the role of intuition in decision-making processes. Understanding how evaluators draw on their intuition, subjective judgments, and tacit knowledge could provide valuable insights into the complexities of evaluation practice. This research could involve qualitative inquiry, such as interviews or case studies, to explore how evaluators perceive and apply intuition in different evaluation contexts.

Additionally, prospective studies may consider conducting focus groups specifically with evaluators operating within Black ecosystems. Findings in this study suggest that evaluators operating inside Black ecosystems may have nuanced approaches to communication and the ways in which relationships are established. Building on the diverse approaches highlighted in

this study, a focus group may allow for greater insight into these practices. Potential findings could be utilized to construct an evaluation framework that explicitly recognizes the communication and relationship-building inherent in the evaluation of programs serving majority Black and/or African American communities.

Numerous calls in the literature emphasize the need for a thorough understanding of the practical application of American Evaluation Association (AEA) 2018 competencies (Ayoo et al., 2020; King & Ayoo, 2020; LaVelle & Galport, 2020). The findings from this study suggest diverse levels of competence among evaluators engaged in programs for Black and/or African American communities. Future research efforts could further explore the proficiency and application of the AEA 2018 competencies within evaluators operating in Black ecosystems. Potential research studies can provide valuable insights, refining and improving evaluation practices within this specific context.

Finally, findings of this study indicate that evaluators of programs for Black and/or African American communities assume multiple roles that extend beyond the conventional scope of their duties. Subsequent research could investigate the diverse roles undertaken by evaluators in programs dedicated to Black ecosystems. Such exploration may yield a more comprehensive understanding of evaluation practices and illuminate how the evaluator's role influences their methodologies.

Conclusion

This research provides insights into evaluators working with Black and/or African American communities, highlighting their varied educational backgrounds and experiences across different disciplines. Participants recognized the impact of their racial identity when engaging with these communities. Key values and considerations in their evaluation practices

encompassed cultural understanding, building trust, effective communication, social justice, diverse methodologies, and community engagement. The study emphasized the importance of using nuanced language and prioritizing community perspectives, aligning with culturally responsive approaches.

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APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTIONS OF EVALUATION APPROACHES ADDRESSING

VALUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE)

As discussed earlier in this chapter, CRE is a holistic framework that focuses on evaluation and culture by rejecting culture-free evaluation and incorporating the cultural value and beliefs that are foundational to evaluation (Hood et al., 2015). Even though CRE is considered a practical approach to evaluation it does not involve an exclusive process different from other evaluation approaches. However, Hood et al. (2015) explicate that CRE is differentiated from other evaluation approaches based on the way in which the stages of evaluation are implemented. Hood et al. (2015) explains that "CRE aims to conduct evaluations in ways that create accurate, valid, and culturally-grounded understanding of the evaluand" (p. 287). Figure 2 provides an illustration from Hood et al. (2015) that can be used to visualize CRE throughout the evaluation process. As reflected in the diagram, cultural competence is embedded in each step of the evaluation process. The evaluator in this approach is to be responsive to the culture and cultural context prioritizing it during each step of the evaluation process.

Figure A2. Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework (Hood et al, 2015, p. 290)
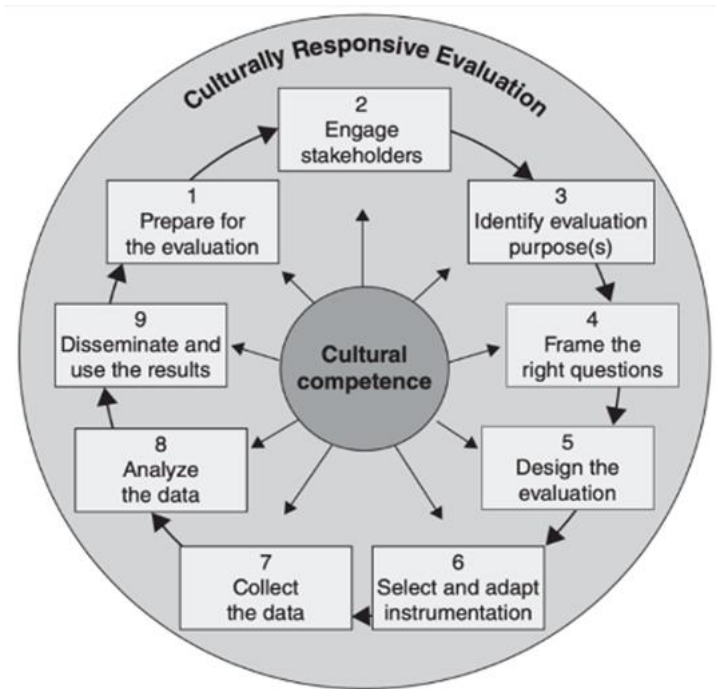
CRE is an evaluation approach that centers culture in an effort to provide accurate and

valid evaluations (Hood & Hopson, 2008; SenGupta et al., 2004; Symonette, 2004). As program

evaluation is not culture-free, by considering the culture of the evaluand evaluators are able to

better understand the needs of the stakeholders and tailor evaluation processes (i.e. evaluation

questions, evaluation instruments, data collection methods, dissemination, etc.) (Hood et al.,

2015). Culturally responsive evaluation provides a counternarrative to the evaluation process

because it considers the voices of stakeholders in evaluations who often are not considered. This

aligns with the tenet of counter-storytelling in CRT because it poses alternative voices and

approaches to the evaluation that may not be reflective of the dominant group (Hood et al., 2015;

Delgado et al., 2017). In the following section, I will provide an overview of the literature

discussing the purposes of program evaluations, how culture is considered in evaluation practice,

and background on the standards and competencies which help to guide evaluation practice.

Transformative Participatory Evaluation (T-PE)

Cousins & Whitmore (1998) state that "transformative participatory evaluation invokes participatory principles and actions in order to democratize social change" (p. 7). Transformative participatory evaluation (T-PE) was established in response to the needs of the developing world and is rooted in "community and international development, adult education, and more recently, the women's movement" (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998. p. 8). An essential component of T-PE is the attention that is given to understanding the control of knowledge. T-PE aims to empower program participants by respecting their knowledge and including them in the creating of knowledge. In T-PE participants and evaluators work to construct knowledge together. In the context of transformative participatory evaluation (T-PE), King et al. (2007) posit that evaluation practitioners play a role in overseeing extensive engagement by primary users. While T-PE evaluators bear the responsibility of evaluating programs, the extent of their managerial role is limited. In T-PE, evaluators are positioned as collaborators and learners rather than authoritative figures. The approach underscores the inclusion of diverse stakeholder voices to empower all groups involved (Cousin & Whitmore, 1998; King et al., 2007). T-PE actively promotes the direct engagement of participants in shaping and constructing the evaluation process, granting them a more significant role. Ultimately, the goal of T-PE is to promote change within the communities and highlight voices of all stakeholders.

Democratic Evaluation

According to Kushner (2002), democratic evaluation is characterized as an information service to the community, providing insights into the features of an educational program (p. 18). Barry MacDonald, a contributor to the field of democratic evaluation, elucidates key concepts of this approach, underscoring confidentiality, negotiation, and accessibility. In democratic

evaluation, there is a deliberate effort to avoid granting complete control over the evaluation process to sponsors, with an emphasis instead on recognizing the rights and obligations of program participants (Kushner, 2002). The democratic approach explicitly removes privileges traditionally held by evaluation sponsors, acknowledging that stakeholders may possess diverse interests in the evaluation, and seeks to comprehend these purposes more thoroughly.

In the realm of democratic evaluation, the evaluator cedes control over any collected data to the participants, exemplifying a commitment to participant empowerment. Within this approach, the evaluator assumes multiple roles, including that of a manager, researcher, diplomat, and negotiator. Acting as the leader of the evaluation, the evaluator collaborates with communities to acquire insights into the program under scrutiny.

Deliberative Democratic (DD) Evaluation

House & Howe (2000) propose deliberative democratic evaluation as an approach, emphasizing the importance of ordinary citizens in decision-making. Thomas and Campbell (2021) outline three core principles of DD: inclusion of all stakeholders, initiating dialogue to identify stakeholder needs, and conducting deliberations on results while reflecting on values and criteria.

DD evaluation aims to actively engage stakeholders, considering their perspectives in determining criteria and utilizing results. This process values clear objectives and underscores the democratic nature of decision-making, with dialogue playing a pivotal role in fostering empathy and mutual understanding among participants. Hreinsdottir & Davidsdottir (2012) stress the importance of representing all stakeholder groups for balanced power dynamics. Challenges in implementing DD evaluations may include difficulties in securing participation from less powerful groups and time constraints. Hreinsdottir & Davidsdottir (2012) caution against getting

entangled in discussions about evaluation methods, emphasizing the need to focus on core issues. Evaluators must also be vigilant about biases and ensure easy access to discussions for stakeholders with less power.

Unlike prescribing specific steps, DD evaluation challenges assumptions made by the evaluator, emphasizing systematic and unbiased methods for data collection and analysis. It also highlights the incorporation of social justice values as essential to democratic practices. In the DD approach, the role of the evaluator is envisioned as unbiased, objective, and impartial. Positioned as more of an outsider in a managerial role, the evaluator functions as a diplomat throughout the process, working with stakeholders to build trust and ensure the incorporation of all voices.

Empowerment Evaluation

Empowerment Evaluation (EE), introduced by David Fetterman in 1993, is a utilization-focused theory that emphasizes using evaluation concepts to facilitate improvement and self-determination (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2004). It aims to foster social justice by creating an inclusive evaluation environment through building relationships with participants. In EE, evaluators play a coaching role, guiding participants on an equal footing (Thomas & Campbell, 2021). This model operates on the belief that participants conducting their own evaluations are more likely to utilize the resulting information (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). The evaluator's coaching helps participants develop evaluation skills, ensuring the process becomes institutionalized and continues after the evaluator departs. The following principles help guide EE, "(1) improvement, (2) community ownership, (3) inclusion, (4) democratic participation, (5) social justice, (6) community knowledge, (7) evidence-based strategies, (8) capacity building, (9) organizational learning, and (10) accountability" (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007, p. 134).

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Equity Focused Evaluation

Bamberger & Segone (2011, p. 9) define Equity-Focused Evaluation (EFE) as, a judgment made of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability – and, in humanitarian settings, coverage, connectedness and coherence – of policies, programs and projects concerned with achieving equitable development results. EFE practitioners are expected to cultivate relationships with program participants. While EFE does not explicitly emphasize culture in the evaluation process, it actively pursues equity goals through evaluation, setting it apart from other social justice-oriented approaches.

Commonly employed in international contexts, particularly within health domains, EFE seeks to generate insights into effective strategies for promoting equity within organizations. Similar to deliberative democratic (DD) evaluations, EFE employs systematic and objective processes, requiring evaluators to assume a managerial role to facilitate the evaluation. The use of terms like "objective processes" is noteworthy, as it diverges from typical social justice approaches that eschew alignment with dominant paradigms, such as positivism. EFE explicitly aims to benefit minoritized groups by providing feedback on interventions' effectiveness in reducing inequity. Diplomacy in building relationships with stakeholders is crucial for evaluators striving to promote equity through the EFE approach.

Values Engaged

Similar to Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE), the values-engaged approach draws significant inspiration from the principles expounded by Robert Stake in responsive evaluation. This approach finds frequent application in the evaluation of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education programs, centering its focus on the active engagement with values.

These values encompass a broad spectrum, spanning both STEM-specific considerations and social justice values.

Greene et al. (2006) articulate the essence of the values-engaged approach, describing it as a methodology that aims to both describe and prescribe values within the realm of evaluation practice. They elaborate on the concept of values engagement, emphasizing the inclusive and comprehensive involvement of diverse stakeholders. The goal is to elucidate and understand the various values held by stakeholders in relation to the STEM educational program under evaluation (p. 59).

Values engagement places paramount importance on incorporating the perspectives and interests of all stakeholders involved in the evaluation process. This emphasis on inclusivity is integral to fostering a values-engaged environment that reflects the diverse array of viewpoints and priorities held by stakeholders. The evaluator in a values-engaged approach assumes multiple roles, functioning as a manager, facilitator, researcher, diplomat, and negotiator. However, in contrast to some other evaluation approaches, there may be a particular emphasis on the evaluator as a facilitator in values engagement, highlighting the importance of truly comprehending and appreciating the values of the stakeholders involved. This facilitative role aims to create a space for open dialogue and mutual understanding, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the diverse values inherent in the STEM education program being assessed.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself

    a. What is your current title/position?

2. Can you tell us a little bit about how you came to be in the field of evaluation?

    a. What training experiences stand out to you?

    b. In what ways, did the years and context you were trained in impact your training?

    (i.e. political environment, university setting, your own personal location, etc.)

3. What sorts of evaluation experiences have you had?

    a. Probe: What type of program settings do you work in?

    b. What are the goals and objectives of the programs that you work on?

    c. Who do these programs often serve?

4. How do you define program evaluation?

5. To what extent do you feel prepared to handle social justice and culturally responsive components of evaluation practice?

    When I say social justice, I mean how prepared you are to create a fair and equitable society in which each person and all groups are valued and affirmed throughout the evaluation process.

    a. What is the role of social justice in your own evaluation work?

    b. How do you adapt your evaluation process to adequately serve the diverse needs of the populations served in the physical activity programs that you evaluate?

        i. What challenges and successes have you experienced when adapting your evaluation practice?

6. For our next activity, we are going to review a vignette of a physical activity program. After reviewing the vignette, your job is to explain how you would approach the evaluation.

    a. How would you approach this evaluation?

    b. What evaluation approaches and methods would you use and why?

    c. Which methods would you use?

    d. What role does the population served, have throughout the evaluation planning and implementation process?

7. Before we go, I would like to present the results from your self-assessment and provide space for guided reflection [share screen and show self-assessment results]. Based on your results:

    a. What conclusions can you draw from your self-assessment in each domain?

    b. What if anything, surprises you about the self-assessment or affirms what is believed to be true?

    c. What actions might you take in the next year to strengthen or build on existing strengths in each domain?

    d. What longer-term actions might be appropriate or necessary?

8. Can you suggest other program evaluators that I should interview?

.

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Please provide your first name

2. Please provide your last name

3. How do you identify your gender? (Select all that apply)

   a. Cisgender man

   b. Transgender man

   c. Cisgender woman

   d. Transgender woman

   e. Agender

   f. Genderqueer

   g. Non-binary/non-confirming

   h. Two-Spirit

   i. Prefer to self-describe

4. How would you describe yourself?

   a. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

   b. Black/African-American/African/Caribbean

   c. Latino/a/e/x

   d. Middle Eastern

   e. Central Asian

   f. Southeast/East Asian

   g. Maori

   h. White

   i. Prefer to self-identify

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

    a. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (e.g., GED)

    b. Some college credit, no degree

    c. Associate degree (e.g., AA, AS)

    d. Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)

    e. Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)

    f. Professional degree (e.g., MD, DDS, DVM, JD)

    g. Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)

6. How many years of program evaluation experience do you have?

7. I have experience evaluating the following types of programs?

    a. Health Promotion

    b. Non Profit

    c. Education

    d. Government (federal, state, city, county, etc)

    e. Other

8. I have experience evaluating programs that serve majority (>50%) African American/Black communities.

    a. Yes

    b. No

9. In the past year, how many programs did you evaluate that served majority (>50%) African American/Black communities?

    .

APPENDIX D: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL PROTOCOLS

Data Collection Reflection Questions

Interview Subject (Deidentified)	
Date/time of interview	
How did the flow of questioning go with this participant? What stands out about the process of questioning?	
What insights did I gain from this participant about my dissertation topic/research questions? What was expected and what was unexpected?	
What challenges did I observe for the participant, and how did I notice these challenges?	
What feelings or reactions to the questions came up during the dialogue for the participant? Did it seem like the participant was uncomfortable, and if so, in what ways did I notice this? How did I respond?	
What feelings came up for me as the interviewer? Why did those feelings come up?	
What components of this interview, if any, led me to think I may need to adjust something in my questioning or flow for future interviews? Why?	
What are the key points/reflections that the interviewee shared that are sticking in my mind? Why those?	

Data Analysis Reflection Questions

Interview Subject (Deidentified)	
Date/time of interview	
What did you notice when you looked at the data?	
What are you seeing that you expected to see?	
What are you seeing that you didn't expect to see?	
What data confirms assumptions you had about the topic?	
What data disconfirms your assumptions	
What additional questions do these data generate?	
What does the data indicate for physical activity programming? What are possible implications for the field?	
What does the data mean for program evaluation practice? What are possible implications for the field?	