Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation
Volume 16, Issue 36, 2020

JMDE
Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation

ISSN 1556-8180
http://www.jmde.com

Evaluating in a Fragmented Society

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Background: Over decades American society has become increasingly fragmented, distrusting, and unequal. Distrust and inequality interact with institutions performing improperly to weaken the society.

Purpose: To suggest ways to strengthen evaluation's role in a changing society

Setting: Evaluation has entered a post normal phase where evaluations are losing credibility and effectiveness.

Intervention: Analyze the changing society and suggest adjustments that evaluators might make.

Research design: Collate and synthesize empirical studies about society and the implications for evaluators.

Data collection and analysis: Collect and interpret seminal empirical economic, sociological, and political studies of beliefs and inequality in the United States.

Findings: To strengthen the potency of evaluations of any type, evaluators could act as moral fiduciaries, practice transparency, cultivate cognitive empathy, focus on deep stories and deep values, and mitigate inequalities in the evaluation space. They can act as critics of evaluation practices inside and outside the evaluation space. They should avoid technical, social, and situational biases, including racism, sexism, and conflicts of interest, to increase the honesty and credibility of evaluations. They should not allow career concerns to prevent them from doing the right thing. These professional ethics and practices can be applied singly or collectively to most evaluation approaches to strengthen the evaluator's role and address major societal problems.

Keywords: *moral fiduciary; cognitive empathy; post normal; inequality; transparency; distrust; deep stories; values*

Introduction

Over the past several decades, American society has become fragmented, polarized, and driven by distrust, severe inequality, and institutional corruption. The evaluation approach I've advocated, deliberative democratic evaluation based on inclusion, discussion, and deliberation, doesn't seem potent enough. To strengthen evaluations in general, I propose that evaluators should act as moral fiduciaries, practice transparency, cultivate cognitive empathy, focus on deep stories and deep values, and control technical and social biases, like racism and sexism. We should strive to enhance the honesty, fairness, and impartiality of evaluations and address the emerging problems of society.

I was led to this reconsideration by Trump's election. What surprised me most was that my relatives in my hometown had become Trump supporters. My family had been Roosevelt Democrats coming out of the Great Depression. Most worked in a huge munitions plant and nearby heavy industries. When I left the area in 1964, they were still avid Democrats. I've tried to figure out what happened, which led me to reassess the evaluator's role in a changing society.

Consensus to Fragmentation

Over the past seventy years, American society has changed dramatically. When I was young, say about 1960, there was a consensus among the majority that the government was good and society was on the right track. This consensus emerged from World War II and Roosevelt's New Deal (Kennedy, 1999). There was a palpable sense of unity and national purpose. Of course, minorities who had been seriously exploited never held such benign views.

During the 1960s the majority consensus and trust in government began breaking down. There was the Vietnam War, during which government officials deceived the public, wasted hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of dollars. There was the Civil Rights movement, in which activists attempted to rectify long-standing injustices. Majority opinion split on Vietnam and civil rights. The 1970s brought Nixon and Watergate, more disagreement, discord, distrust of government.

By 1980 Reagan could run on the slogan, "The government is not the solution to the problem; the government is the problem." He ushered in an era of privatization, deregulation, and anti-government sentiment. In 1996 Clinton said, "The era of big government is over." He deregulated the banks. The 21st century brought the contested Bush/Gore election, the trauma of 9/11, the Afghan and Iraq wars, and the Great Financial Crisis that put the financial system in jeopardy. Distrust deepened. American society fragmented.

Distrust, Inequality, and Corruption

During these decades, three powerful trends emerged: a deep decline in trust, a sharp spike in inequality, and a marked increase in corruption. People did not trust the government, they did not trust their institutions, and they did not trust each other. Decline in trust was precipitous during Vietnam and Watergate when trust in government dropped from 77% in 1964 to 30% by 1980 (Rothstein, 2018). By 2014 trust in government was 20%. Trust in Congress was 6%. Not all countries are like this. Trust in government in the Nordic countries is 70%.

Another powerful trend has been steepening inequality, which began in the 1970s when the economic rules were rewritten. In 1981 Reagan dropped the tax rate on the wealthy dramatically. America now has the most extreme inequality of income and wealth of any developed country (Piketty, 2014; Saez & Zucman, 2019; Stiglitz, 2018). The three richest Americans own more than the bottom 160 million. The richest .1 percent have as much wealth as the lower 90 percent (Hacker and Pierson, 2020). CEOs of major corporations, who used to make 20 times the average worker wage, now make 360 times as much. The CEO of Disney makes 1424 times the average wage of Disney workers (Dubchuk & Fried, 2004). Wages have stagnated for decades. Social mobility has declined below that in many countries.

Those who control the money take huge slices off the top. When the head of the Citadel

hedge fund reached a stalemate in divorce negotiations with his second wife, she revealed he was making 100 hundred million dollars per month. He settled with her in two days. Top hedge fund CEOs make a billion dollars a year personally. They pay 15% tax, if any (Saez & Zucman, 2019). Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz (2018) said the economy is rigged in favor of the wealthy. Conservative media mogul Rupert Murdoch noted America is developing permanent social classes.

A third trend has been worsening corruption. When Governor Blagojevich of Illinois moved to fill the Senate seat vacated by Obama, few expected him to auction the seat to the highest bidder for personal gain. Patronage had become corruption. American society was beset with cronyism, favoritism, and conflicts of interest. Special interests dominated legislatures to secure favors. Political scientists call such behavior institutional corruption (Lessig, 2018). About 75% of Americans believe corruption is widespread throughout the government (Rothstein 2018, Rothstein & Varraich, 2017).

Distrust, inequality, and corruption interact in downward spirals. The more a government is distrusted, the less it can remedy corruption or inequality, and the more it becomes vulnerable to cronyism and conflicts of interest. Distrust allows corruption that generates more distrust and inequality. These trends are reflected in polarized politics, dystopian novels, and apocalyptic films. How should evaluators behave in such a society?

Post Normal Evaluation

Normally, evaluators conduct studies based on accepted criteria and methods. But how can we agree amidst severe fragmentation? The forces affecting society affect evaluation. Evaluators operate inside society, not outside. Evaluator Tom Schwandt (2019) contends that the field of evaluation has entered a "post normal" phase, based on a distinction between normal and post normal science.

In normal science, researchers conduct studies accepted by government and citizens. In post normal science, the findings are called into question. Environmental science is an example. Distrust of government and institutions spreads to science. According to Schwandt, the same is happening with evaluation. In post normal evaluation, a positive reception for studies cannot be assumed. Findings may be contested, and the legitimacy of the study disputed.

I would add that evaluation has also been changed directly by privatization and deregulation. At one time universities conducted evaluations of pharmaceutical drugs, but Clinton allowed companies to control the evaluation of their own drugs. This resulted in strong biases in drug evaluations, biases favoring positive findings for company drugs (House, 2011). Evaluation studies have lost credibility in part because evaluation changed. Nielsen, Lemire, and Christie (2018) found that single purchasers of evaluations, usually governments, contract with firms they trust to conduct studies in a reliable manner. Over time these agencies and a few firms develop close ties that shape studies in certain ways (House, 1997).

What should evaluators do? One of John Maynard Keynes insights is that nations can choose the kind of society they want to be (Carter, 2020). Some choices lie beyond evaluators, but evaluators can effect positive changes within their domain. And perhaps their influence can be extended.

Develop a Perspective Based on Empirical Evidence and Moral Sensibility

In the midst of fragmentation, it's important to have an idea of what's happening in the larger society. Otherwise, evaluators are buffeted about by claims and counter-claims. A careful understanding of where society is and what evaluators might do provides a sense of direction and enables them to be proactive rather than reactive.

It's essential to base this understanding on empirical evidence and moral responsibility. An informed view is based on empirical evidence. A moral view is concerned about the welfare of others. There are unbiased empirical studies of inequality by economists, of political behavior by political scientists, of beliefs and communities by sociologists and anthropologists, and of events and institutions by historians and journalists. Might these be

wrong? Certainly, but if the findings prove incorrect, they can be corrected based on empirical evidence. Sound research is responsive to empirical evidence.

By contrast, many analyses are ideological and ill-founded. Privately owned media advance views acceptable to sponsors. Fox News is an example, as are the Koch influence networks (Mayer, 2016; McLean, 2017). Powerful groups sponsor biased studies to support their interests, conducted by organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and Heritage Foundation. Ideological researchers omit critical evidence and fail to respond to evidence counter to their claims. Liberal groups also sponsor studies, but their efforts are miniscule. We live in an age of deliberate disinformation.

Cultivate Cognitive Empathy

Schwandt recommends that evaluators strive to understand other people's perspectives. I strongly agree. Evaluators cannot assume their perspective is the only perspective. Understanding is not the same as agreeing. If the Allies in World War II had understood the Nazi perspective better, they could have ended the war sooner. If they had agreed with it, they would have surrendered.

Sociologist Mario Small (2019) calls such understanding "cognitive empathy." He contends that social researchers are quantitatively literate, but not as qualitatively literate. Qualitative literacy entails understanding other perspectives in depth. Cognitive empathy is not feeling empathy. It's not feeling the same as others. Nor is it sympathy, feeling sorrow or pity for them. Rather it's the ability to understand people's predicament as they understand it. Their view will seem rational within their perspective. We can understand why they believe the way they do.

Small has two admonitions. One is to avoid overgeneralizing other views. He calls this avoiding "out-group homogeneity bias." When groups are far removed from our perspective, their views appear to be less diverse than they are. Not all Trump supporters are alike, nor do they believe the same things. Tea Party views are not those of Wall Street.

A second admonition is to be sensitive to data used as supporting evidence. For example, when journalists report standardized test scores, they often explain the results based on no empirical evidence whatsoever. They may contend scores are low because the education system is dysfunctional. But there's no supporting evidence about causes in the test scores themselves. Where do such explanations come from? From beliefs and stereotypes held by those making the claims. Politically conservative researchers have exploited this propensity by citing poor outcomes for social programs and attributing them to laziness or lack of intelligence by minorities. Since some believe these stereotypes, they take the studies to be empirical validation of the conclusions without any supporting evidence. Small notes liberal attempts to explain why Trump supporters vote against their economic interests. They often contend Trump supporters do so because they derive psychological satisfaction. Few offer data to support such claims.

An Example

In trying to understand my relatives support for Trump, I knew that many industrial jobs were gone from the area, some overseas. My relatives were now retired, employed in service jobs in retail, or unemployed. A few had gone to college. Guns and religion were still important. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2014) studied a similar community 600 miles down the Mississippi from the St. Louis area, in the South rather than Midwest. Tea Party voters in Lake Charles, Louisiana, had voted for Trump overwhelmingly.

In their view life is a long march towards the American dream, which lies just over the hill. But the line they're in is stalled. Others are cutting in line ahead of them, minorities and immigrants, people who used to be behind them. That's not fair, in their view. Government agencies are helping these people. It's the government's fault. Trump agrees and blames the government, minorities, and immigrants. He derides the elites. This is the "deep story" of the Tea Party (Hochschild, 2014). It's also the deep story of Fox News, their main source of news. Fairness is critical, construed a particular way.

Sociologist Katherine Cramer (2014) studied people in small towns and rural areas of Wisconsin. Their towns are struggling, though people work hard. They believe the government is taking money away from them and giving it to minorities and immigrants in Madison and Milwaukee. Decision-makers don't respect rural people, in their view. These resentful voters tipped the state to Trump. A total of 80,000 people in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania swung enough votes to culminate in Trump's victory. Many had been Obama voters. They felt left out of the larger society.

There are many other deep stories, like that of the progressives in Berkeley. In their view, Americans built a magnificent public square, but marauders invaded the square, dismantled it, and stole pieces to build private mansions. Massive accumulations of wealth threaten democracy itself. That's not fair, either. They supported Bernie Sanders (Hochschild, 2014). These are only a few of America's deep stories.

If I were evaluating an environmental education program in these communities, it would help considerably to understand their perspectives. Lake Charles has oil refineries and toxic industries, like my hometown. Even though people die of cancer at high rates, they see these industries as vital to their livelihoods, and have ways of thinking about the problem, including religion. In rural Wisconsin my evaluation would be different, and different yet again in Berkeley or Oregon.

Focus on Deep Stories and Deep Values

Deep stories are the subjective prisms through which we view the world, including how we feel about it. They are stories that feel right emotionally. They are interpretations of events and situations that people act on. In the Louisiana Tea Party deep story about standing in line pursuing the American dream, itself an expectation that each generation will be better off, the line cutters have been helped by the government. Hard working people like them made American great, Trump assures them. Their rightful honor and dignity can be restored, despite elites who write them off as "crazy red necks" or "deplorables." For Tea Party people, these are matters of self-worth. They will cling to their view tenaciously.

Deep values are entwined in deep stories. The Louisiana story is built around deep values about race, gender, and social class, around assumptions of a hierarchy of race, gender, and social class. It's assumed that some should be behind others in the natural order, a vision derived in part from Louisiana history, with its tradition of populist movements led by politicians like Huey Long (Hochschild, 2016; Judis, 2013, 2018). Within this perspective, social status is determined by how far a person is from the bottom. Being ahead of minorities and immigrants is a matter of entitlement. My relatives have similar views of race and pollution, but with a Midwestern slant.

Everyone has a hierarchy of values, with some values more central to the belief structure. These might be called core values or deep values. For most, they include family, fairness, and in-group loyalty. For some, they also include racism and sexism, deep-seated beliefs about who belongs where and deserves what. Not all deep values are good or benign.

The value of fairness plays a central role for everyone. Fairness is construed as people deserving what they get and not getting what they don't deserve. Tea Party people see line cutters as acting unfairly. Progressives see the wealthy seizing a large share of national wealth as unfair. Both blame elites, with Tea Party members also blaming minorities and immigrants (Judis, 2018).

Everyone has a deep story and deep values, and it's worthwhile for evaluators to reflect on theirs. I've discussed mine elsewhere, which began in childhood as a Roosevelt Democrat (House, 2015). Attending university made a huge difference in how I think about the world. Relatives in my hometown who went to college often were not Trump supporters.

Evaluators might locate their story within the population of deep stories. Evaluators grow up in a particular region, social class, and identify with those in their vocation. Having an idea of your position helps understand others. An inability or reluctance to understand other perspectives is often cited in failures of American foreign policy (Judis, 2018). It can threaten evaluations.

I'm not suggesting that all views are relative or equally good. Some views are better than others because they are more moral and soundly based. An informed view includes a grasp of other views. A moral view takes into account the welfare of others. Even in fragmented societies, there may be room for agreement based on shared deep values. In conducting an evaluation of environmental education in Lake Charles or my hometown, I would focus on shared deep values. I would be unlikely to change their world view, but I might find agreement about environmental education in some areas, such as how pollution affects their children long term. They care deeply about their children's future, and they have a sense of fairness.

Be Transparent

Trust is at a premium. Transparency engenders trust; lack of transparency engenders mistrust. In climates of distrust, people imagine bad things are happening. Evaluators should be transparent about what they're doing. In a Denver bilingual education program beset with years of distrust between the school administration and Latino community, in my role as federal court monitor, I made clear to each group what I was doing. I was open to discussion and recommendations from them. I shared the data we collected and solicited advice as to what to collect next to determine whether the program was being implemented. Over time transparency helped establish trust in the evaluation and improved trust among groups. Transparency is no panacea, but it helps.

Control for Biases to Enhance Fairness and Honesty

Being biased means being influenced by things evaluators should not be influenced by. The biases might be technical, like sampling error and response error, or social, like racial and sexual framing, or situational, like conflict of interest or misunderstanding other views, or psychological, like recency bias or inappropriate anchoring. Whatever the biases, they can result in distorted findings. Stakeholders are justified in seeing biased studies as unfair. Taking care to mitigate bias is critical in conducting fair evaluations. Fortunately, there are careful analyses about how to protect against biases (House, 2011; Scriven, 1976; Kahneman, 2011; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

Focus on Racial and Sexual Framing

When Europeans acquired the military technology to dominate the world, they seized large tracts of land everywhere to build empires. Native peoples were exploited, had their land seized, and often were removed or exterminated. Sometimes, slaves were imported (Beckert, 2014). To justify such brutal acts, Europeans developed an ideology that these people were savages and deserved such treatment. They were inferior, uncivilized.

This belief system has endured for many centuries through racist laws and racial framing, embedded in institutions. Racial frames are key mechanisms through which racist beliefs are perpetuated. They play a huge role in American history (DuBois, 1986; Feagin, 2011). The white racial frame asserts that African Americans are violent, criminal, unintelligent, lazy, and oversexed (Feagin, 2013, p. 101). Whites are superior. Whites are immersed in racial framing in childhood and often act on it unconsciously (House, 2017).

Racial framing is part of System 1 thinking, in which people interpret events instantly and automatically without being aware (Kahneman, 2011). The effects are pernicious. Something similar happens with the stereotyping of females. The nature of racial and sexual framing makes social biases extremely difficult to change. If the original intent was to justify exploitation, what's the continued utility? In the 2016 election, Trump joined the power of the wealthy to racial framing and right-wing issues to forge a winning "plutocratic populist" coalition (Hacker & Pierson, 2020). Politics is a key use.

Evaluators should look carefully for the social biases in programs and evaluations, especially in the effects of programs (House, 2017). They should check their own predispositions, those of colleagues, and

expect them to check theirs. An understanding of minority cultures and the majority culture in which racism is perpetuated is useful (Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005). Some knowledge of race history is essential. Perhaps the most frequent error of evaluation studies is that the conclusions don't match the data. If readers hold stereotypes, they believe the conclusions of studies even when the data don't provide support.

Act as Moral Fiduciary

One way to mitigate inequality is for evaluators to act as moral fiduciaries. Evaluators might assume some moral fiduciary responsibility for helping those lower in the social economic structure. They might strive to protect the interests of those less advantaged. The injustices of the larger society are often manifested in the evaluation space. Here's an example.

In 2009 eleven thousand forensic rape kits were discovered in a police warehouse in Detroit. The kits had not been processed. For the victims, undergoing a rape investigation is invasive. The process takes hours and involves swabbing samples from every orifice of the body. Rape is a crime often committed by repeat offenders, and rape kits provide an opportunity to identify serial rapists. Yet the kits remained unexamined after years.

In an examination of police files, Rebecca Campbell and her colleagues (Campbell, Shaw, & Fehler-Cabral, 2015) discovered that the police investigating the crimes repeatedly dismissed victim claims of rape on the grounds that the women were prostitutes, sexually permissive, or did not want their parents to know they had sexual partners. In the judgment of police officers, the women's claims were not worth pursuing as crimes. Such judgments reflected racial framing about the presumed character of minority women. Police reports often referred to victims in highly pejorative terms.

Campbell and her colleagues worked through the cases with the police until the kits were processed, an exhausting exercise, with police officials admitting that classifying women this way was mistaken. In a sense, the researchers appealed to empirical evidence and the police sense of fairness. This was a difficult study to conduct because it involved conflicts of deep stories and deep values. During the study, investigators kept in mind the welfare of those who had been abused. Their welfare was most at stake, not that of the police nor those who funded the study. In conditions of severe inequality, evaluators might give priority to the interests of those less able to defend their interests.

What is a fiduciary? In the financial community, the idea of a fiduciary means that the financial agent must act in the best interests of the client. As an active investor for decades, I can attest that investment transactions are riven with conflicts of interest. For example, if an investor asks the advice of a professional financial advisor, the advisor is free to recommend mutual funds that enrich the advisor, not the client. Advisors often receive fees or a percentage of the investment from mutual funds they recommend. Clients suffer because this is not the best investment for them. This is standard practice in finance.

Fortunately, there are advisors who swear to a higher fiduciary ethical standard. That is, they will offer advice that is in the best interests of the client. If they fail, they can be sued. Reformers have tried to make the fiduciary ethic the legal standard for investment professionals, but professionals have fought vigorously against this, an indication of how prevalent not acting in the best interests of the client is.

Evaluators might act as moral fiduciaries, meaning they act in the best interests of those less able to defend their interests, rather than in the interests of sponsors or other stakeholders. Such an ethic doesn't preclude acting in other stakeholder interests as well, but it does mean those less advantaged will be given priority. In most programs, it's not difficult to determine who's less advantaged. In Detroit, Campbell and her colleagues chose to work through case records with police to process the kits. They did not seek to reform the police perspective overall, but to change their view about specific cases. Hopefully, that might affect the overall police perspective, but that's far from certain. Another example of an evaluator acting as a moral fiduciary can be found in House (2019).

The ethic of moral fiduciary fits a long tradition of moral philosophy. John Rawls theory of justice as fairness changed the dominant utilitarian conception of justice. With utilitarianism, you could justify fighting wage inflation by inducing a recession that would force large numbers of workers out of jobs. They would suffer, but the larger society benefited—greatest good for the greatest number—but without regard for how benefits and suffering were distributed within society. Rawls said this was unfair. We should attend to those less advantaged as a moral duty.

Later critics of Rawls said those left out of decision processes should also have some voice in making decisions that affect them. They could not always rely on decision makers to make the right decisions without being included in discussions. Deliberative democratic advocates recommended inclusion, discussion, and deliberation of stakeholders in decision making and evaluation (House & Howe, 1999). Karlsson's (1996) work in Sweden, finding ways to give voice to children, was a practical precursor.

However, this approach alone doesn't seem potent enough in a society so unequal. Evaluators should take stronger actions to protect the interests of those less advantaged. One way is to act as moral fiduciaries. Instead of trying to balance equally the interests of different stakeholders, evaluators might give priority to those who need help most. Acting as a moral fiduciary is more a professional ethic than an evaluation approach. It might work with most approaches. An evaluator could conduct a culturally responsive evaluation, an advocacy evaluation, a democratic evaluation, a realist evaluation or any type of evaluation and still act as a moral fiduciary within that approach (Greene, 2015; Hood, Hopson, & Frierson, 2005). The situation is analogous to financial fiduciaries advocating different financial strategies even while protecting the interests of the client.

Mitigate Inequality

Many key sources of inequality, like tax and distribution policies and corporate power arrangements, are outside the realm of evaluators (Saez & Zucman, 2020; Stiglitz, 2018). Corporations use their influence with legislators to pass laws that increase their wealth and power (Gilens, 2012; Mayer, 2016; McLean, 2017). The result has been the enhanced power of corporations versus workers and consumers. In more equal societies like the Scandinavian, 70% of workers are unionized and act as a counter to corporate power. In the U.S., unionized workers are less than 10% of the workforce. Degree of unionization is one of the highest negative correlates with economic inequality (Waldman, 2019).

Here evaluators might assume the role of critic. They might critique evaluative processes that engender inequality. For example, a major factor contributing directly to inequality is rocketing CEO compensation. CEOs appoint colleagues, friends, and family to their governing boards, controlling the board that determines their compensation. The board determines CEO pay, and the CEO pays board members. As an evaluative process, this is ludicrous. CEOs receive such a large portion of corporate income that the amount is noteworthy in international comparisons (Krugman, 2017; Piketty, 2014).

Similarly, when Clinton deregulated banks, bankers found huge profits in subprime mortgages. Bond experts rating the quality of mortgages, a key evaluative process, were pressured by conflicts of interest, such as loss of other banking business. The biased ratings contributed directly to the financial collapse when highly rated securities failed (House, 2013; Tooze, 2018). Hundreds of thousands of mortgage holders lost their homes, their primary asset.

Bankers who perpetrated the scheme made large sums of money, even while forging mortgage documents. Homeowners lost most of what they had. No banker was indicted for fraud; inept banks were bailed out. These events became issues in the rise of the Tea Party, which saw the government acting to enrich the wealthy (Judis, 2016; Tooze, 2018). Society abounds in evaluative activities badly done, places where evaluators might apply their expertise. Just as epidemiologists call out practices that spread viruses, evaluators might call out injurious evaluation practices.

Another critical role for evaluators is to critique other evaluations. Evaluations should not be beyond professional scrutiny. It may be that the encroachments of distrust, inequality,

and corruption seriously affect evaluations. They may become so commercialized that they are ineffective as evaluations. It's the obligation of professional evaluators to monitor uses and abuses of evaluation, just as medical experts might critique the abuse of medications.

Yet another role might be to investigate the effects of inequality and the mechanisms through which inequality works. Negative effects include lower life expectancies, increasing health and social problems, higher homicide rates, and polarized politics. Relative socio-economic status affects people's health, politics, conceptions of self, and how they think (Payne, 2017). Lower status often leads to riskier behavior and short-term thinking. A child in a more unequal state like Texas will engage in more risky behavior than one in Iowa, states with similar mean incomes. A child in Iowa will have better health. Higher status often leads to better opportunities, superior self-image, a sense of entitlement, and sometimes a disregard of others (Payne, 2017). The connections between inequality, programs and effects should be explored. There are good measures of inequality, and evaluators could develop others suited to particular situations or programs.

A simple idea is to include the context of programs in evaluation reports. In a study of those evicted from their homes, Desmond (2016) documented the pernicious effects of eviction on parents and children and connected them to the rental and eviction policies and laws that facilitated such outcomes.

Status differentials operate within small groups, programs, and evaluations. Evaluators might be alert for the inequality and its effects. For example, it's difficult to collect information from lower status individuals, partly because they don't trust authority figures and believe their views don't matter. Evaluators collect data mostly from those in higher status tiers. Differences in status result in information lacunas among the tiers of the program and evaluation. Those at one level misjudge what those at other levels are doing (House, 2019). Such processes are worth investigating.

Do the Right Thing

Can evaluators do these things? Evaluators can implement some of the practices I've suggested within most evaluation approaches. These practices could enhance the potency of evaluations. My idea of making changes in evaluation overall has been to figure out the best way to evaluate and convince others. Otherwise, if we always follow the status quo, there would be no improvement, no qualitative studies, no social justice studies, no meta-analyses, no realist studies. Of course, such changes are for the professional community as a whole to consider.

Sometimes people know the right thing to do, but don't do it. The right thing is usually the moral thing to do, to take other people's welfare into serious consideration. Some may be impeded by fear of loss to career, reputation, or material interest. They fear it might cost them something. Professionals center their lives around their careers. Enhancing and defending careers is a natural instinct.

But enhancing careers is not always the right thing to do. The notorious lobbyist, Jack Abramoff, who served time in prison, said his best line to persuade Congressional aides to do what he wanted was, "When you are done working for the Congressman, you should come work for me at my firm…." "With that," Abramoff said, 'I would own him…." (Abramoff, 2011, p. 95; Lessig, 2018.). The allure of a career in a K Street lobbying firm induced many to commit illegal acts.

We should consider careers in the context of benefits to society. We don't need more professionals who sell their services to the highest bidder. That increases distrust and inequality, just as we don't need investment advisors who put their interests above those of clients. A higher moral standard is required.

In the long run, you never know how future events might turn out. Those of us who were young in 1960 never imagined that American society would be the way it is now. That's the point. The best thing to do in uncertain times is to make moral choices. I'm not suggesting that such behavior will reform the entire society. But a part of it will be better. Shakespeare's Marc Antony was only half right

when he said the evil that men do lives after them. So does the good, if you do it.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sharon Rallis, Tom Schwandt, Gene Glass, Marv Alkin, Robert Stake, Ton Grayson, George Julnes, Stafford Hood, Ove Vestman, Nigel Norris, and Gerald Elsworth for insightful comments.

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