Feminist Evaluation; An Initial Conversation

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Conversational Items

- Introductions
- Key Terms and Concepts
- A Case Study Example
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Introductions

- Please tell us a little bit about yourself
  - Your name and your area of practice
  - Your experience with feminist evaluation
  - What brought you here today
Key Terms and Concepts

“Feminism” is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issue of gender difference, that advocate equality for women, and that campaign for women's rights and interests. (Wikipedia, 2008)

A “feminist” is someone who believes in advocating for women’s rights on the grounds of sexual inequality (Podems, 2007)
Key Terms and Concepts (Cont’d)

- Gender is a socio-cultural variable that refers to the comparative, relational, or differential roles, responsibilities, and activities of females and males.
- Sex is biologically determined; Gender is socially constructed and defined. (Fort, 2008)
Key Terms and Concepts (Cont’d)

Seilbeck–Bowen, Brisolara, Seigart, Tischler, and Whitmore (2002) identify six ideas which are central to their collective conception of feminist evaluation

1. Feminist evaluation has as a central focus the gender inequities that lead to social injustice.

2. Discrimination or inequality based on gender is systemic and structural.
3. Evaluation is a political activity; the contexts in which evaluation operates are politicized; and the personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics evaluators bring to evaluations (and with which we interact) lead to a particular political stance.

4. Knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose. Knowledge should be a resource of and for the people who create, hold, and share it. Consequently, the evaluation or research process can lead to significant negative or positive effects on the people involved in the evaluation/research.
5. Knowledge and values are culturally, socially, and temporally contingent. Knowledge is also filtered through the knower.

6. There are multiple ways of knowing; some ways are privileged over others.
Case Study Example

Reflections on a Job Done: Well? (Ward, 2002)

- What insights, questions, concerns did you have after reading this example of feminist evaluation in practice?
Through Other Lenses

Based on Michael Quinn Patton’s article, “Feminist, Yes, but is it evaluation?”

Most common critique – Feminist evaluation is not really evaluation.
- Feminist evaluation is an anathema to the traditional research framework (i.e., objectivity, evaluator independence, neutrality, and minimal investigator bias) and will therefore hurt the credibility of the entire evaluation profession.

It’s not evaluation because it intentionally and actively attempts to bring about social justice.
- While feminist evaluation has constructivist underpinnings (valuing multiple perspectives and truths), many constructivist evaluators would be uncomfortable with the explicit activism and advocacy of feminist evaluation.
There are commonalities between FE and other types of evaluations / frameworks, e.g.,
- the artistic and evocative framework
- the pragmatic and utilitarian evaluation
- critical change framework
- emancipatory evaluation (Mertens, Farley, Madison and Singleton, 1994)

The different frameworks or criteria for critiquing evaluations can also expand the possibilities for undertaking them.
Part of an evaluation might be participatory and another part utilize traditional scientific criteria.

Feminist evaluation does not have to be all encompassing or pure – it may be one part of a multi-perspective or multi-element evaluation design offering a form of evaluation triangulation.
In Our Own Words

- Have you ever conducted an evaluation using a feminist approach, even if you did not label it as such, and how did it work? What difference did using it make?
- Or is there an evaluation in which you could have or would like to use a feminist approach, and what difference would it have made/make?
Many of us believe that, if it accomplishes nothing else, feminist evaluation must address the gender inequities that lead to social injustice and that, to be a committed feminist evaluator, you must examine every evaluation opportunity for the possibility of reversing gender inequities. We have far too much to do, and far too little has been done.” (Sielbeck–Bowen et al, 2002)
Sources


Sources


Sources (Cont’d)


Sources (Cont’d)
