

Sharon Brisolaro, Denise Seigart, & Saumitra SenGupta (Eds.). (2014). *Feminist Evaluation and Research: Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. 368 pages. Available in paperback (ISBN: 978-1-4625-1520-2) and hardcover (ISBN: 978-1-4625-1530-1).

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Evaluators have been exposed to a recent litany of guidance documents offering advice on incorporating gender and human rights into the evaluation function, including contributions from the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and UN Women. Internationally, the linkage between gender/human rights and evaluation is becoming more pronounced in its visibility and importance, and not just in sectors that impact women. Brisolaro and Seigart's earlier conception of feminist evaluation (2007) as an "engaged praxis, imbued with theory but pragmatic in implementation" permeates this collection and will appeal to a wide audience. With an increasingly diverse Canadian society, a need to ensure equitable representation in programming and reporting on its effects is a necessary condition of the evaluation landscape. Finally, a comprehensive resource has arrived that helps to contextualize both the theoretical and the practical applications of gender/human rights-focused research and evaluation work. This collection builds on and refines the editors' earlier contributions to a 2002 special edition of *Feminist Evaluation* offered by New Directions for Evaluation.

The editors' most recent contribution, *Feminist Evaluation and Research: Theory and Practice*, is a comprehensive collection from noted feminist researchers, evaluators, and scholars, reflecting on movement and thinking of the last decade in this area. The 368-page collection is divided into three sections that include theories of feminist research and evaluation with offerings by Brisolaro, Mathison, Whitmore, Mertens, and Podems; reflections on the evaluative application of feminist theory and methods in a variety of contexts including works by Sielbeck-Mathese and Selove, Nicols, Hay, and Mulder and Amariles; and practical examples of feminist research by Seigart, Gailiè, and Dietsch, that are, in the editors' own words, "less easily categorized as evaluation" (pg. xi). Approximately one third of the collection focuses on feminist theory and its implications for feminist research and evaluation, and the remainder on examples from a variety of sectors and geographic locations. Editors offer insights at the conclusion of each section, concisely synthesizing offerings of the preceding section and providing insights into the following section that makes this resource very accessible to its readership.

In the first section, a helpful introduction to various feminist theories is outlined, arriving at an updated set of conceptual principles articulated for

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feminist researchers and evaluators. Grounded in concepts related to the nature of knowledge, the nature of inquiry, and social justice, these principles centre what feminists hold to be of the utmost value no matter the application of method or context. Evaluation and research differences and similarities are articulated early in the first section. This is critical to reviewing the latter two sections of the collection, as editors distinguish between evaluation and research undertakings. These principles are used to situate the multiple roles assumed by researchers/evaluators in feminist social inquiry, covering facilitator, educator, collaborator, technical advisor, and activist/advocate. This first section also touches on the importance of using both qualitative and quantitative data to examine methodological, epistemological, and ontological practices.

Readers begin to see the importance and variety of ways in which evaluators may challenge dominant discourses and paradigms in the case studies that follow. These studies also serve as a reminder about challenges that emerge with the adoption of feminist approaches in evaluation undertakings in the collection's section. These challenges begin with using "feminist" to position social inquiry, the variety of feminist approaches to draw from and, perhaps most importantly, the difficulty of including associated dimensions of diversity that emerged in the theoretical section. These intersections of diversity include race, class, culture, and ability and, as the authors emphasize throughout this section, cannot be isolated from gender variables alone. If these interlocking systems of oppression are disregarded, they serve to perpetuate systemic barriers. This is perhaps the most valuable feminist contribution from this collection that evaluators should consider in undertaking efforts with vulnerable and traditionally marginalized populations. For those who prefer to avoid explicit challenges in undertaking feminist evaluation or research and labelling it as such, this section also explores the differences between gender-based approaches and feminist evaluation.

Transitioning to the final section in this collection, the reader is reminded that action should result from social inquiry as part of a social justice agenda. Gender justice and gender equity are critical components of this backdrop that forces consideration of political, social, and economic contexts. This is evident in the authors' attention to the case studies highlighted in the remaining three chapters, containing detailed accounts of how feminist methods are applied in each of the international cases presented. Although each individual project employs different methods dissected in detail by authors, it is consistently demonstrated that adopting a gendered lens in conjunction with demographic and cultural cues allows for nuanced discussions, effectively illustrating disparate impacts in marginalized communities for individuals from nondominant cultural groups. Particular attention is paid to rigour, validity, choice of methods, and dimensions associated with use as participatory and empowerment methods engage international projects in examining contextual power and privilege dynamics in situ.

Feminist Evaluation and Research: Theory and Practice offers another mechanism by which to add to the evaluator's toolbelt for its social justice goals and

thoughtful consideration of important dimensions of gender, culture, power, and privilege. Prescribed methods and approaches are avoided in feminist scholarship, research, and evaluation, which may leave some readers questioning whether this is a tool that can be easily employed in the field. In response, the book concludes with insights offered by Greene on the relevance, relationships, and responsibilities associated with feminist social inquiry. She notes that “[a] volume on feminist approaches to social research and evaluation remains timely and important, even urgent, in the face of continuing radical gender inequities and unconscionably limited life chances” (pg. 334). The collection provides a valuable contribution to the literature through its theoretical and practical applications regarding the necessity of including gender and other dimensions of diversity in challenging power, privilege, and dominant paradigms.

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