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## Imagining the Future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation: New(er) Directions and What Comes Next

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# Imagining the future of LGBTQ+ evaluation: New(er) directions and what comes next

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## Abstract

We close this issue of *New Directions for Evaluation* by looking towards the future. In this chapter, the perspectives of 10 LGBTQ+ Evaluators whose voices and insights were not otherwise featured in this issue provide their critical insights on what LGBTQ+ Evaluation means to them, what it looks like in practice, and where they hope to see it grow in the future, including how the work of this issue of *New Directions for Evaluation* can be expanded and built upon. In closing the issue on a critical, futures-oriented note, we reaffirm

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our assertion that this is neither the first, nor the final word on LGBTQ+ Evaluation, and we invite all evaluators to join in the process of articulating and exploring what LGBTQ+ Evaluation is, and can be.

## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

As we have sought to emphasize in this special issue, this body of work is neither the first word in the story of LGBTQ+ evaluation, nor is it the last. Rather, it is a long-overdue opportunity for the work of LGBTQ+ evaluation to be given the platform it deserves. What comes next, as the principles, ideas, and practices articulated in this special issue are received, critiqued, embodied, pulled apart, and reconstituted, is just as vital. The work of LGBTQ+ evaluation is not ours alone, but ours together.

In this spirit, we close our special issue by beginning the process of “what comes next” in visioning and creating the future of LGBTQ+ evaluation for our field. This final piece presents the perspectives of ten evaluators from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, bound by a common belief in the value of LGBTQ+ Evaluation.

Each of the ten evaluators whose perspectives are included in this piece, and who are credited here as co-authors, participated in a 30-minute interview with Ms. Felt, which covered four broad topics: (1) interviewees’ evaluation practices; (2) interviewees’ understandings of LGBTQ+ evaluation in both theory and practice, including challenges and successes with implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation in practice; (3) interviewees’ reflections on the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the Eight Principles of LGBTQ+ Evaluation (Chapter 1); and (4) interviewees’ hopes for the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation.

Interviewees were selected through voluntary interest. Our team reached out to the LGBT Issues Topical Interest Group (TIG) of the American Evaluation Association (AEA), and to the personal networks of special issue authors, to identify volunteers. Any individual who expressed interest in participating in an interview, and who responded to follow-up requests for scheduling, was included as an interviewee and offered a position as co-author. The final group of interviewee-authors consists of individuals from academia, consulting, philanthropy, and private industry, with a diversity of content foci.

Interviews were recorded, and then reviewed by the co-first authors. A draft of the piece was then shared with all authors, who had the opportunity to correct or modify the language included in their own quotes, comment on the validity of the themes identified, and provide critical review and feedback on the piece overall. All interviewee-authors gave permission for the quotes included in this piece to be presented and attributed as they appear in their published form. The final product therefore represents the collaborative work of our entire authorship team.

The original intention of this piece was to publish a summary of themes which arose from our conversations, however, in reviewing the recordings of interviews, the co-first authors realized that interviewees had offered such a broad and nuanced range of insights, that to collapse these into broader themes ran the risk of flattening critical perspectives. We felt that this ran directly contrary to the ethos of this piece, and therefore made the decision to present a summary of each interview, by interviewee, which we felt better communicated each person’s perspective. Interviews have been lightly edited for concision and clarity, while preserving the meaning of all insights and the specific language of any quote where possible.

## AN AMBITIOUS, NECESSARY VISION

Eric Barela

“I hope [LGBTQ+ Evaluation] is seen as an approach that helps us answer questions that need to be answered, so that organizations can better support who they’re trying to support.”

Eric Barela is the Director of Measurement and Evaluation for Salesforce, where he focuses on measuring social impact within the context of a global for-profit technology company. He is highly experienced in the field and has served as an internal evaluator in nonprofit and education sectors prior to moving into his current role.

### Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

To Eric, LGBTQ+ Evaluation represents a “*nascent, growing approach to conducting evaluation.*” Historically, he says, LGBTQ+ Evaluation just meant that an LGBTQ+ person was conducting an evaluation, and it’s exciting to see the concept developing beyond this definition. The development of a body of knowledge around the idea of LGBTQ+ Evaluation is exciting to Eric, as he notes that “*I don’t do much LGBTQ+ Evaluation currently, but I know with the way things are going in the tech and corporate sectors [with respect to principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion] that I’m going to be asked to do more of it.*”

One of the main challenges Eric has faced in his work is that LGBTQ+ Evaluation feels ‘foreign’ to many people in his industry, and he finds himself having to explain not only the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusion, but also “*what evaluation even is.*” While he characterizes this challenge as showing that his sector has a long way to go, he also points out the critical success that “*people are starting to ask these questions more,*” as a burgeoning understanding of the importance of evaluation broadly, and LGBTQ+ Evaluation specifically, starts to take hold. This has allowed him to begin to advocate for more resources and attention directed to this space.

### Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

The principle of **valuing lived experience** stood out to Eric when he first encountered the principles, because he saw the principle as crystallizing “*the convergence between LGBTQ+ Evaluation and LGBTQ+ community.*” Eric notes that we as LGBTQ+ people value lived experience highly because “*it helps us to understand ourselves and our place in this world,*” and says focusing on lived experience as a valued source of knowledge “*will help to give voice to those who are not only marginalized in society, but marginalized in their programs.*”

While Eric didn’t note that he would change any of the principles, he did say that he views the principle of **de-centering whiteness** as ambitious and worth aspiring to. “*I just think about Evaluation over the years, and how it has privileged white people. It’s going to take some effort to move us to actually de-centering whiteness, and authentically including all types of voices.*” Eric’s own worst experiences of discrimination, as a gay man of color, often came at the hands of gay white men. These experiences have informed his perspective on the difficulty of moving the needle on de-centering whiteness, as he notes: “*when I see this,*

*I have to remember who is doing the evaluation. I think it's going to take work to move us to a place where we are truly de-centering whiteness."*

## Hopes for the future

*"I hope LGBTQ+ Evaluation is seen as an approach with just as much validity and value as Utilization-focused Evaluation, Empowerment Evaluation, or Fourth-Generation Evaluation"* says Eric, when asked about his vision for the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation. Such approaches as those he cites are *"pretty ingrained in the canon of Evaluation,"* but society has changed from when they were created, Eric notes. Thus, *"we need to be able to evolve our approaches to better serve who we want to serve."* Eric sees the LGBTQ+ Evaluation approach as part of what will help the field evolve in that direction. He hopes that people of all sexual orientations, all genders, all backgrounds, see this approach and want to adopt it. He wants LGBTQ+ Evaluation to be seen among evaluators, not just as a LGBTQ+ Evaluators' approach, but as part of a shared future of inclusivity and efficacy for the field.

## OUR INTENTIONS GUIDE OUR ADVOCACY

Nicole Cundiff

*"Just thinking on being intentional and appreciative of the communities you work with... I'm reflecting on this idea that LGBTQ Evaluation is doing this for another group that has been historically disenfranchised and abused in a variety of ways."*

Nicole Cundiff is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Management at Boise State University. Outside of her work in academia, Nicole runs a consulting practice with her partner, stemming from their community-engaged work. Through data collection, surveys, and training and development, they work together to assist the community-at-large to be more open and receptive to LGBTQ+ communities.

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Nicole teaches us that LGBTQ+ Evaluation means practicing intentionality and appreciation towards the communities that we as evaluators work with. When partnering with historically disenfranchised and abused groups, we must act in intentional ways to achieve inclusivity, rather than default into tokenization or assumption-making in evaluation practice.

When asked about how her LGBTQ+ Evaluation looks in practice, Nicole was clear that advocacy is a centerpiece in her work. *"Bringing in tools and a common understanding to create equality and a community"* has presented both challenges and successes, she says. She understands LGBTQ+ Evaluation as comprised of an abundance of elements of LGBTQ+ communities and life, one of those being an ever-evolving lexicon. She notes that language is both a hub and bridge to achieve common understanding inter-communally and intra-communally, but that such common understanding requires self-reflection, including *"not making assumptions, not tokenizing – actually understand-*

*ing your communities when you're actively involved in evaluation practice.*" Intercommunal understandings of language that pertain to LGBTQ+ identity between those that belong to the LGBTQ+ community, and those that do not, pose a challenge for evaluators. However, with evolution also comes greater understandings. Nicole describes these successes as *aha!* moments comprised of changes in programs, general acceptance levels, among other shifts in organizational structures.

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

In terms of the proposed principles that aspire to guide our LGBTQ+ Evaluation, Nicole extended appreciation towards the bridging between theory and practice. By providing explicit examples of application, readers can then employ the principles "*in their own sphere.*" In this way, the guiding principles are not provided in isolation; rather, they are presented as active in their ability to be applied per context. On a separate note, she challenges us to think about the framing of principle #6 – that LGBTQ+ Evaluation requires **representation in leadership**. "*I guess I felt like something was missing there...I felt like we are seeing people from our community in leadership, and they are powerful, and they are making movements.*" She emphasizes that although it is important to point out the absence of LGBTQ+ representation in leadership, it is equally crucial to honor those who are representing us, and have been representing us in various forms of leadership. Advocating for representation in leadership is extremely salient in our combined efforts, but we must find the balance in dually recognizing that we are seeing people in our community come into leadership positions, and celebrating the impact these leaders have.

## Hopes for the future

As for hopes for the future, Nicole's vision is of an ideal world where inclusion is automatic, and our belonging inherent. "*The end goal would be that we would no longer have to have these conversations, have these special topics, have journals reflecting on these issues, because we've solved those problems and now we are all celebrated and working together and valuing each other in an equitable manner.*" Her heart guides her in envisioning a perfect world, grounded in equity and justice.

## DIGNITY INFORMS OUR FUTURE

Radaya Ellis

"We take a dignity approach... we see the person. We center the voice, we center the identity, we center the historical ideology of communities."

Radaya Ellis is a Research and Evaluation Strategist at Ubuntu Research and Evaluation. Her background in field research and hard science research led to her pursuing a career in Public Health, where she is able to center her evaluation approaches in the idea that, "*the data is in the people.*"

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Radaya leads us through the abounding paths that dignity can offer us through LGBTQ+ Evaluation. She reminds us that LGBTQ+ Evaluation positions itself as a feminist evaluation approach, by way of recognizing that within the history of LGBTQ+ resistance, many movements hold feminist roots. She tells us that queerness encapsulates identity, and, affirms that identity is not a singular plane. In this way, she teaches us that LGBTQ+ Evaluation is not a binary construct. And, by working within an organization that honors Black feminism in its research and evaluation work, lived experience is most certainly centered. Through centering lived experience, dignity is also at the heart of her work. *“The data is in the people,”* she reminds us, and the dignity of all people is paramount.

When we asked Radaya to tell us about challenges and successes in her evaluation work, she illuminated the pressure held within the expectation to either be LGBTQ+ or Black, but not both. Further challenges are presented when there is an expectation to communicate to non-LGBTQ+ folks what LGBTQ+ identity means to them. However, by using a dignity approach, Radaya teaches us that navigating tensions when it comes to identity can also be a success. The dignity approach allows us to grapple with the roots of an obstacle: *“it allows us to communicate, you’re not treating me well – why?”* A common understanding must be a part of the foundation when approaching difficult conversations, and dignity can lead us to that. She expands upon this point, saying *“dignity doesn’t situate itself around shame, blame, pride, or ego. So, a common ground has to be obtained.”*

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

When asked about the guiding principles, history, allyship, and questions about priority arose.

Radaya views the need to **de-center whiteness** as *“spot on,”* and also notes the value of **demanding community** ownership, while cautioning that community can mean many things. Radaya then reflects on how **history** informs our present and future, which is a particularly crucial element of the guiding principles. However, when we aren’t explicit about the history that we are speaking of, we risk ignoring the nuances of said history- she urges us to be *“explicit about the historical factors that push and propel us.”* Without specificity, she cautions that we risk silencing communities in our history who have historically, and thus cyclically, been censored.

Next, Radaya hones in on how the guiding principles use the term **“allyship.”** Specifically, she advises caution around how this word is used and understood, as allyship can be interpreted as saviorism. She encourages people to think critically about what it means *“to not have an ally there, or to have the victims [of historical oppression] leading us.”* Overall, her reflections emphasize the challenge of bringing the broad framework of these principles into a specific practice, as she states: *“All the headings are A+ [but] if I were to read [beyond the headings], I could pinpoint some things that are lacking.”* Lastly, Radaya prompted us to consider priority, and whether certain principles require more urgency than others. We let this note on priority lead us into the hopes for the future: who must be prioritized, and how.

## Hopes for the future

Radaya’s vision for the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation is that it is Black-centered, led, and lived. She emphasizes that when we address the livelihood of Black folks, we improve



the livelihood of others. We must center Black LGBTQ+ folks because when we center Black LGBTQ+ folks, everyone can benefit. She leaves us with this final note: “*When you position yourself around the most marginalized population, it’s the most equitable approach.*”

## **THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: EVALUATION IS INTEGRATED INTO ALL THAT WE DO**

LaShaune Johnson

“There’s an opportunity here for people to become better evaluators...the fact that [as LGBTQ Evaluators] you’re able to think more deeply about a person and their experiences makes you a better evaluator.”

LaShaune Johnson is an Associate Professor of Clinical Research and Public Health, and medical sociologist by training. She has a background as a community consultant, with a central focus on health – primarily focusing on underserved communities – using participatory and Culturally Responsive Evaluation approaches. LaShaune is invested in spotlighting voices of those who are most impacted by the issues she’s examining.

### **Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation**

LaShaune opens our conversation by reflecting on how she worked through a lens of deficit around LGBTQ+ representation. “*If you asked me a few years ago, I would say LGBTQ+ Evaluation is talking about how we aren’t in the data.*” As she has grown as an evaluator and a queer person, and embraced a culturally responsive evaluation framework, she now sees our unique assets and power more clearly. “*There’s something about our lens and our experience that can help any kind of evaluator,*” she says. Though it is applicable across contexts, LGBTQ+ Evaluation is not a disembodied phenomenon; it strives to be holistic in its approach. This is similar to what LaShaune says about how the whole person is integral to what we do in evaluation. She emphasizes that evaluation is not simply drawing attention to deficits; it’s about presence, too. The role and the strength of LGBTQ+ Evaluation is that it pushes evaluators to critically reflect on context – involving history, culture, and our political atmospheres that inform our lives and work.

In LaShaune’s LGBTQ+ Evaluation work, our relationships and connections are crucial. First, having conversations with those who we work with, and second, establishing connections with folks who are doing the important work, are two areas that she emphasizes. Additionally, finding LGBTQ+ spaces is of utmost importance. However, we must be conscious of how “outness” may inform the type of evaluation that we do in this particular space – how do we advocate for other folks in our LGBTQ+ community who may not have the platform and power that we do? LaShaune reflects on the exchange between individual LGBTQ+ evaluators and LGBTQ+ community as being central to her approach – “*how can I both give to and learn from the community?*”

As many authors have noted, LaShaune also emphasizes how intercommunal interactions between LGBTQ+ evaluators and non-LGBTQ+ evaluators can be a challenge, particularly when discussing language and terminology. Embedded within this, is dialogue about decolonization – “*unlearning the Western ways to describe things*” and how Western bias impacts how we understand our identities, and the language we use to describe

ourselves and others. On a related note, LaShaune also describes how geography plays a role in making challenges such as these more formidable. Situated in an area that has less queer *and* BIPOC visibility and representation presents the following challenges: building capacity in the community, repairing harm that has been done to queer people by their peers with academic power, and the resistance against tokenization in the face of a lack of representation.

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

After reading through the guiding principles, LaShaune notes several strengths: **decentering whiteness**, and emphasizes on **history**, **self-reflexivity**, and **lived experience**. Our conversation in particular highlights how decentering whiteness has material implications for evaluation; because of a history of settler-colonial violence, whiteness has touched, and continues to touch, all corners of evaluation, including knowledge creation, representation, and visibility. She shared how she has witnessed privileging of white experience and white, Western ways of knowing and knowledge creation in many conversations around LGBTQ+ inclusion, noting how “[white] folks who have been lifted up in our community have also been oppressive to our community.” In light of this context, LaShaune uplifts the idea that white evaluators hold a responsibility to betray the functions of whiteness, and emphasizes that other perspectives need to be valued and given their space. It is imperative to be reflexive towards our lived experiences and our histories. Through honest reflection, we become better evaluators.

## Hopes for the future

Looking towards the future, LaShaune hopes to see larger spaces for LGBTQ+ Evaluation at evaluation conferences such as CREA. She tells us, that “*the LGBTQ+ community and evaluation reminds evaluators as a whole, that we always, as a field, have to be growing.*” There are opportunities here to embark on journeys to become better evaluators – and to embrace LGBTQ+ evaluation along the way, such that LGBTQ+ evaluation is not seen or practiced as a separate phenomenon – it’s integrated into all that we do.

## IN PURSUIT OF SOLIDARITY

Nick Metcalf

“There’s this idea [of the LGBTQ+ community], but nobody has cohesively pulled it together.”

Nick – Nicholas Metcalf is a Two-Spirit evaluator, activist, and PhD candidate, and an enrolled member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe – Sicangu Oyate – Burnt Thigh Nation, who describes how they sit at a “*beautiful, frustrating, exciting nexus*” of many intersections. She has been involved with evaluation since the early 1990s through her connection to HIV/AIDS work and activism, though she now focuses in child welfare. Nick has a particular emphasis on stakeholder engagement and involvement in his evaluation practice.

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

The first thing Nick has to say about LGBTQ+ Evaluation is: “*it’s big.*” Although LGBTQ+ people are lumped together as a monolithic acronym, we are often, in fact, highly fragmented. Nick references their own history of work to illustrate this, noting how the community objectives of cis, white gay men have not always aligned with the community objectives of LGBTQ+ communities of color, trans women, and young LGBTQ+ people who Nick has worked with. Victories such as the legal recognition of same-sex marriage have been of less importance in Nick’s communities, where people are still focused on addressing access to employment and stable housing, and remain engaged in underground survival economies. Nick notes how this is particularly true for LGBTQ+ people of color, who are often left behind by organizations or individuals who claim to serve the entire LGBTQ+ community, but in practice leave many of our most marginalized family members behind. “*There’s this real feeling of isolation, and of being unheard*” among many multiply-marginalized LGBTQ+ individuals.

This reality has also defined the challenges and successes Nick has had in her LGBTQ+ evaluation work. “The challenge is always agreeing on the outcome. What are we measuring, and how are we defining it? Success is when we get that agreement. It’s like herding cats! Consensus is hard and complicated.”

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

One of the principles that Nick found most meaningful was that of **meaningful inclusion**, saying that “*I think we’re oftentimes invited to the table just to fill a quota.*” He then critiques a lack of clarity in other principles, such as **critical self-reflection**, noting how because this is vital, we need to have a clear understanding of what it means so that it can be meaningfully employed. Moreover, Nick also challenges the degree to which we should be situating ourselves within existing systems, which perpetuate oppression through misogyny, colonialism, racism, transphobia, homo/biphobia, and ableism, among other forms of violence, as opposed to reimagining those systems. Reflection is a great starting point, they note, but moving beyond reflection into action is more important. Nick also reminds us that, in **learning from history**, we must also learn about opportunities for solidarity among LGBTQ+ people, not only our pain.

## Hopes for the future

Nick hopes that as LGBTQ+ Evaluation grows, we can develop common understandings and become less fragmented. He draws on his dissertation to build on this idea, sharing how “*in Indigenous Evaluation, there are all of these ideas, and it feels very formative. We haven’t really figured out what our own texture is, or come to a common understanding*” and pointing out that LGBTQ+ Evaluation is at a similar stage of development.

For LGBTQ+ Evaluation, part of finding that texture to Nick means embracing nuance and moving beyond the limitations of our own thinking. Nick uses their personal experience to illustrate this point, saying: “*I don’t have to be identified as male or female. I can exist outside of this system, and I can hold that complexity. But trying to situate myself in certain LGBTQ+ communities becomes hard, because many people have so much oppressive thinking ...*” She emphasizes that “*If you’re involved in our lives, you have to situate*

*yourself around our lives. Not the other way around.*” LGBTQ+ people are often brought together by pain, illness, and politicization, but we can be brought together by solidarity, too. A common understanding can make all of our work more powerful, and help it be in better service to all within our communities.

## RECKONING WITH THE WHOLE OF OUR HISTORY

Travis Robert Moore

“‘LGBTQ+ Evaluation’ is almost contradictory, because evaluation – the field itself – has a very long history of colonialism, white professionalism, and systemic oppression enacted through evaluation projects. To pair that with LGBTQ+... there is a lot of unpacking to do there.”

Travis Robert Moore is a Postdoctoral Researcher at Tufts University, studying how community coalitions improve child health and education outcomes by changing local policies, systems, and environments. Broadly, his evaluation work focuses within the spheres of public health and education. Travis’s education evaluation work includes partnering with community coalitions, some of which are dedicated to serving LGBTQ+ communities, to evaluate programs aimed at increasing healthy eating, active living, and socioemotional learning among youth.

### Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Travis begins our conversation by sharing that “*Whenever I hear LGBTQ+ Evaluation, it triggers a lot of different things for me.*” He notes that in one sense, the phrase “LGBTQ+ Evaluation” is almost contradictory, because of the field’s history of oppressive tactics and its role as a tool of oppression. In his own work, he finds himself asking “*how do we reconcile working with and empowering LGBTQ+ youth, adolescents, and adults, while working from a historically entrenched tradition in Evaluation of whiteness and colonialism? What do we do when we’re bringing that with us, especially when we don’t know that we’re bringing it with us?*” Practically, he says, LGBTQ+ Evaluation is in one way about working with a specific population, including how his evaluation work uplifts LGBTQ+ communities. In his current roles, that often means bringing a focus on empowering LGBTQ+ students to achieve better educational outcomes.

In another sense, however, he sees LGBTQ+ Evaluation not as who his team works with, but “*the way we work*” and “*the lens through which we see the world.*” Travis believes that LGBTQ+ Evaluation has a lot to do with how the evaluator understands themselves within a larger ecosystem, saying: “*If you’re an LGBTQ+ evaluator, or you do evaluation to try to empower LGBTQ+ communities, then you’re really trying to engage in a type of reflexivity that goes beyond just how you as the evaluator impact the evaluation, but also how the institution of evaluation impacts the evaluation.*” To Travis, this includes considering powerful stakeholders such as universities or other funders, and their interests within that evaluation ecosystem.

This ecosystem is also where Travis has found his greatest successes and challenges, which he describes as being “*two sides of the same coin.*” Specifically, he shares how successful relationship building, including between the evaluator and stakeholders, as well as between stakeholders themselves, is incredibly rewarding, but is also extremely

challenging, because LGBTQ+ evaluators need to navigate both individual and interpersonal context as well as sociopolitical context in order to relationship build successfully. Here, he draws on his own experience as a gay man to uplift the value of lived experience within LGBTQ+ communities in understanding these complex dynamics more quickly or intuitively than he might otherwise.

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

In reflecting on these principles, Travis returns to his point on unpacking the relationship between the terms “LGBTQ+” as a signifier of a politically oppressed community, and the field of “Evaluation” as an often politically oppressive tool, emphasizing that *“that’s what a lot of these principles really miss. They don’t address how the evaluation field itself can be problematic.”* Travis, too, notes the limitations of any theory or framework for LGBTQ+ Evaluation which, intentionally or not, treats LGBTQ+ communities as monolithic, and emphasizes that there would be a great deal of value in expanding on the nuanced ways in which each principle can be practically or theoretically applied in work with diverse LGBTQ+ communities. This necessary expansion, he says, would strengthen already strong principles, such as **valuing lived experience** and **community ownership** even further.

Travis also notes other areas for expansion of the principles, sharing how *“these touch a bit on things like colonialism, but don’t for example really touch on capitalism, or how capitalism is linked to gender, or things of that nature.”* As another example, he shares: *“Let’s take the first principle of being **informed by history** – that’s an amazing point to make right off the bat, but I think it currently misses that LGBTQ+ Evaluation is also informed by the history of the Evaluation field itself.”* History, Travis states, is complex, and our understanding of history needs to reach beyond LGBTQ+ political history into organizational, collaborative, and other aspects of relevant history in order to effectively inform our work and ensure we can maintain equitable partnerships and avoid feeding into oppressive systems.

While he stresses the vital nature of **prioritizing allyship, not neutrality or objectivity**, he also notes how prioritizing allyship is extraordinarily difficult in practice, in part due to the oppressive structures which persist in the evaluation field, such as the failure of current funding structures to offer funds for effective (or any) relationship building. Moreover, he also notes the importance of intra-LGBTQ+ community allyship, emphasizing the power differentials that exist within LGBTQ+ communities, and calling on cisgender, white, gay men to align themselves more fully with BIPOC, trans, and other marginalized LGBTQ+ groups.

## Hopes for the future

Travis’s vision for the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation is one of strength in diversity and nuance. *“My hope is that we can create this bridge between sectors and stakeholders, and acknowledge the strength that is the uniqueness of different stakeholder perspectives”* says Travis, while advocating for the development of not just meaningful stakeholder partnerships, but also meaningful individual relationships. Equitable and empowering relationship building must be the way forward, he stresses, as *“this is the part evaluation has a problem with in general.”* His hope is that LGBTQ+ Evaluation can be a powerful part of moving evaluation forward in this arena.

## EMBRACING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Ash Philliber

“LGBTQ+ Evaluation is how we have to approach projects moving forward. Not just the ones specific to this community, but all of them. Unless your project is specifically designed for cis/het individuals, someone LGBTQ+ is in your project, and you need to be responsible for that.”

Ash Philliber runs Philliber Research and Evaluation, and is an adjunct professor at the University of Denver, where they teach program evaluation. They have been a full-time evaluator since 2007. Their company supports human services work as defined in the broadest sense, and they are grateful to have been able to work on several LGBTQ+ focused evaluation projects during this time.

### Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Ash characterizes LGBTQ+ Evaluation in a multifaceted manner which reflects its reflexive, iterative and contextual nature, as “*helping to serve particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, communities, and groups, but also approaching [the work] in a way where you’re aware of the history of LGBTQ+ Evaluation, and of the special needs this population has, and how to address those so that your evaluation is not only inclusive, but also responsive.*” Ash notes that an iterative approach is particularly important because there is no one way to do LGBTQ+ evaluation, and that “*how you need evaluation to approach you and understand you*” differs by context, and the evaluation process needs to be able to adapt accordingly.

Ash also discusses challenges to successful LGBTQ+ Evaluation in their work associated with how certain individuals may not embrace LGBTQ+ people fully – to put it euphemistically. To combat this, Ash employs an appeal to professional obligation, emphasizing that regardless of a person’s standpoint in relation to the politicization of LGBTQ+ people, “*if we’re not asking questions in appropriate ways, if we’re not reflecting individual experiences in appropriate ways ... we’re not doing our jobs, at the end of the day ... if you cannot be respectful of the people you’re serving, you are not doing your job.*” This approach has been successful: previously hesitant colleagues have begun sharing survey questions and other materials with them for review to ensure respectful language and meaningful data for the evaluation at hand, because these colleagues now understand the benefits of these approaches to rigorous, effective evaluation.

### Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

The principle that stuck out most to Ash from this special issue was the importance of **being informed by history**. Citing their experience teaching about the harms of research, such as the Tuskegee Study in which Black men with Syphilis were deliberately left untreated, Ash describes their appreciation for a principle which grounds LGBTQ+ Evaluation in history, but simultaneously notes that the principle falls short due to a lack of specificity. “*Because evaluators have so much power, we need to acknowledge the **specific** things we’ve done with that power that we need to never do again.*” They note that this is important even for evaluators who are LGBTQ+ ourselves, saying how “*even if I’m part of the community, I still have way more power because at the end, knowledge is power and that’s what evaluation*

is.” Ash also found themselves challenged positively by principles which promoted **allyship and liberation over objectivity**. Although the idea of forfeiting objectivity challenged them at first, they ended up connecting it to their own emphasis on allyship as a professional responsibility, saying that “*being objective is what makes us allies.*” These principles offered a way for Ash to integrate their own moral/ethical code into their pursuit of rigor and efficacy in evaluation.

## Hopes for the Future

“*In my ideal world, I hope we don’t need it,*” says Ash of LGBTQ+ Evaluation’s future, as they express their hope for evaluation to grow beyond needing a specific framework for LGBTQ+ inclusion. Though they are clear that there is a long way to go before we reach this point, they believe our field can grow to a point where LGBTQ+ liberation is a core part of all our work.

## CENTERING LGBTQ+ SCHOLARS OF COLOR THROUGH AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

Jeffrey Poirier

“How do we have a longer-term vision around the bench of evaluators in the field, and its scholarship?”

Jeff Poirier is a Senior Researcher at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. He is also an adjunct professorial lecturer and teaches program evaluation in the School of Public Affairs, Department of Public Administration and Policy at American University. Much of his research and evaluation work focuses on youth and young adults across disciplines (e.g., child welfare, education). He has supported and led training, technical assistance, and research on LGBTQ+ youth and young adults across his career.

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

In Jeff’s words, Evaluation for and with LGBTQ+ people means “*keeping communities at the center of evaluative practice, from planning stage to implementation to data collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination.*” It is both the process and content of evaluation, which lifts up LGBTQ+ communities, particularly those of color, in all stages of evaluation from the evaluation questions to analyses, reporting, and sharing of findings and recommendations.

Jeff shared how we should keep in mind important considerations to effectively carry out evaluation for and with LGBTQ+ people. He notes how, as evaluators, we strive to be authentically engaged in all stages of evaluation in an equitable fashion. However, navigating equity as a general principle in evaluation presents challenges to many when confronted with the work required for effective relationships and trust building. Furthermore, Jeff emphasizes that responding to an evolving landscape of both identity and language is an important consideration. Similarly, he notes that the definitions that we often rely on in evaluation evolve. As such, any work in pursuit of equity and inclusion will need to attend to harmonizing between audiences – and even work with the best of intentions can fall short. “*Finding a place to start [in regards to] what it means to be inclusive is a*

*challenge but also an opportunity for the field. Even within our community – you can be gay, and cisgender, but does that automatically make you knowledgeable enough to partner effectively with gender diverse communities as part of an evaluation? Or you can be a white trans person, but how do you build trust and connection with LGBTQ+ communities of color?* At times, he notes that the field of evaluation and LGBTQ+ communities define inclusion differently. Here, it can then be a challenge to navigate relationships, and build trust, but in that same breath, Jeff reminds us that navigating relationships and building trust is a fertile ground for deeply meaningful success. He further notes that aspiring towards being an authentically engaged evaluator, and embracing that journey, should be celebrated.

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

In reflecting on the principles, Jeff in particular uplifted how **designing evaluation to ensure authentic participation of communities of color** is an important, yet often forgotten principle in evaluation. Unfortunately, in both LGBTQ+ Evaluation and larger Evaluation as a discipline, race and ethnicity are often not adequately attended to as part of the design and analyses. By engaging communities of color in evaluation practice and ensuring they are decision makers and shapers of evaluation questions, we begin to reverse harmful practices that often have defined communities of color as only the recipients of evaluation findings and recommendations. Jeff notes too that we should also aspire to conduct evaluation in ways that engage communities of color, acknowledging that evaluators are not the sole owners of evaluative practice. Instead, we should embrace that evaluation is a practice led by the evaluand, here being LGBTQ+ communities of color. This idea immediately resonated because of Jeff's grounding in equitable evaluation, and he noted its value in resisting common challenges, sharing how *"so often in the LGBTQ+ advocacy space, and any scholarship, we tend to forget to bring up those other aspects of identity, and how it impacts the ways people experience bias and oppression."*

While Jeff notes that he felt all of the principles resonated with him, despite some areas of overlap and opportunities to restructure for greater conceptual clarity, he also shared how he was challenged by the idea of **de-prioritizing 'objectivity.'** In his experience, objectivity along with equity and inclusion are ideas that have always gone hand in hand, and he problematized the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy – reflecting: *"is objectivity truly an opposition to efforts to center our work around being inclusive, and our work towards equity?"* In fact, Jeff conceptualized the relationship dialectically, positioning subjectivity as a path to objectivity by noting how we as evaluators *"can never be truly bias free; objectivity is a bit of a misnomer. It's about being reflective enough to understand what your biases are, and to bring that to the work, and to do your own growth,"* which is reflected in the principles that express the importance of **self-reflexivity.**

As a final reflection, Jeff returned to the idea of intra-community diversity and evaluator authenticity. The idea that even those of us from within the community do not know everything was central, and to Jeff, is vital to emphasize throughout a framework for evaluation that illuminates LGBTQ+ issues. *"You can be a part of the LGBTQ+ community, but you aren't exempt from these principles,"* and we are all on our own journeys of growth.

## Hopes for the future

When looking towards the future, Jeff reminds us that we are building the pipeline of LGBTQ+ evaluators, especially future LGBTQ+ evaluators of color and youth evaluators



who will carry this field forward. “*We need allies – we all need to be part of this journey now – but we need to be intentional when we think about building this pipeline. Fostering a more inclusive evaluation workforce requires thoughtful strategies and approaches, and funders have a role in supporting this.*” Jeff’s reminder is a call to action that we must stay focused on closing the gaps and biases to ensure that this future is achieved. It is important now more than ever to be intentional about recruitment into graduate programs, how funders can be intentional about reaching out to LGBTQ+ evaluators, and generating networks to foster relationship building, share opportunities, and become connected to funding opportunities. Jeff closes with a specific recommendation: we need more sharing of lessons learned and recommended practices from evaluations of policies, programs, and practices that are intended to improve the well-being of LGBTQ+ communities of color.

## HONORING EVERY VOICE

Sarah Daniel Rasher

“A lot of those principles need to be looked at in terms of making sure they are also serving young and very young people who are growing to understand and define themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community. We need to develop priorities that help us recognize those who are further marginalized by an inability to articulate their own experience or identity.”

Sarah Daniel Rasher is a Senior Research Associate at OER Associates LLC., an independent consulting firm and family business. Sarah Daniel’s firm specializes in education, and the majority of the participants they engage with in their evaluations are 18 or younger. They employ a partnership evaluation model which prioritizes relationship-building to meet client needs.

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Sarah Daniel opens our conversations by describing the approach to LGBTQ+ Evaluation which their field necessitates: “*I feel like in a lot of fields, LGBTQ+ Evaluation means evaluating programs that are specifically targeted towards LGBTQ+ populations, but in education, that very seldom happens.*” However, they say, “*what that also means is that every population we’re working with, we assume has a certain number of LGBTQ+ people.*” Sarah Daniel notes that in their field, LGBTQ+ Evaluation also means recognizing that many of the youth they serve are forming or exploring LGBTQ+ identities for the first time. Sarah Daniel notes that their own LGBTQ+ Evaluation approach has allowed them to uplift meaningful stories of young children in periods of identity exploration which otherwise may have gone untold.

A common problem Sarah Daniel encounters is related to data collection, where they must navigate different expectations related to the relevance or purpose of LGBTQ+ data collection, and where evaluators must also be cautious about imposing their own assumptions about LGBTQ+ identity or experiences onto young people who may be in crucial, formative stages of identity exploration. “*For example,*” says Sarah Daniel, “*a lot of research now is in Social Emotional Learning, and I often hear gendered assumptions about behavior – such as boys (or children perceived as boys), having ‘worse behavior,’ and I have to really continually challenge that, sometimes even having to put asterisks on instruments to point out their gendered assumptions.*”

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

There were three principles which Sarah Daniel felt were particularly portable to their own work with younger children in educational systems: **de-centering whiteness**, **valuing lived experience**, and **emphasizing a commitment to liberation**. Education is a field, Sarah Daniel says, where assumptions about achievement and access have presumed whiteness in ways that are deeply entrenched. Work at the intersections of LGBTQ+ Evaluation and anti-racist evaluation offers a valuable approach to them. Meanwhile, Sarah Daniel feels that valuing people's lived experience, and incorporating it into research, would help evaluators in their field become better at "*meeting people where they are, and letting research tell us how people learn, rather than imposing our assumptions about how people learn.*" A liberatory focus, they note, allows people to act both within institutions in the immediate term, while working towards reimagining those institutions in the long term.

Regarding opportunities to improve the principles of this special issue, Sarah Daniel points out that many of the principles were highly focused on working within communities and integrating community members into leadership structures, but that those would not necessarily translate well into their work in evaluation for early childhood education, given the young age of so many of their stakeholders. Sarah Daniel also notes that a disability justice lens would help to strengthen these principles' applicability for all people.

## Hopes for the future

*"What I really hope for is to see principles of equity for gender and sexuality built into research and language surrounding education and evaluation of education. I think a lot of hesitancy about this is due to the ongoing discomfort of acknowledging that these are concerns for many children from a young age."* Avoiding these topics, Sarah Daniel says, creates more problems than it solves and keeps cis-hetero-sexist assumptions baked in in education. Sarah Daniel hopes LGBTQ+ Evaluation can be a tool which helps to normalize this perspective in their field, and takes the pressure off of their shoulders to be one of the sole voices raising these concerns.

Not everything about that role is bad, though. As one of the most visibly LGBTQ+ people in many groups and as a white person, they often feel a responsibility, not only to how they advocate for their own community, but also to finding opportunities for solidarity with groups advancing liberation for other marginalized communities. Sarah Daniel hopes that LGBTQ+ Evaluation can also be a platform for such solidarity between groups in their field.

## THE CENTER IS WHAT BRINGS US CLOSER TO FULL CIRCLE

Cindy Rizzo

"I would hope that, if we are going to put people at the center who are usually pushed to the margins, who are usually disenfranchised, that we would figure out ways to be able to have those folks really understand how to engage in evaluation."

Cindy Rizzo is the Vice President of the Social Justice Program at the Arcus Foundation, which funds both in the US and internationally, with one major area of

work being LGBTQ+ people and communities. Cindy's background, broadly, is in the area of grantmaking, Health and Human Services, and the human rights of LGBTQ+ communities – which encompasses acceptance, inclusion, policy protections, and safety.

## Conceptualizing and implementing LGBTQ+ evaluation

Cindy explains that LGBTQ+ evaluation is focused on what she describes as “*the center*,” and that part of this framing is that those who are at the center of LGBTQ+ evaluation are, and must be, those who have been pushed to the margins, particularly trans communities and queer communities of color. In her specific area of evaluation, she aims to “*center those folks in our grantmaking. Our LGBT evaluation puts those communities at the center, and we really try to understand how we are helping those communities advance their lived experience in the areas of safety, protections, inclusion, and acceptance.*”

The challenge with this particular approach to grant-making, where funding is invested in uplifting those who we place at the center, is evaluating it. Cindy's team has prioritized funding general operating support, and not tailoring grants to specific projects, as they see this as a vital part of centering and empowering those who have often been marginalized. Thus, there are not always clear project scopes or metrics to rely on for evaluation. “*No one has found the magic idea or process, so we do the best we can, based on what the grantees tell us and what we can learn from external data and information sources.*” The most effective grant making doesn't always set up the most traditional of evaluations.

However, the successes with this approach are equally unique. The evaluation work that Cindy is engaged in means learning and understanding whether strategies are working in a flexible way. “*It gives the grantees themselves the ability to respond to new challenges and new opportunities – and that's where we want to put that agency, not with us [the funder].*” There are also opportunities to look at the underlying assumptions in the program's funding strategy, to assess whether what the foundation assumed would bring about social change was borne out through implementation.

## Reflecting on the principles of this special issue

When reflecting on the guiding principles, Cindy points to **decentering whiteness, valuing lived experience, community ownership, and representation in leadership** as being particularly relevant to her evaluation work. While there are other pieces that are not directly relevant to her work, such as **prioritizing allyship over neutrality and objectivity**, she still sees these as vital. She especially emphasizes how lived experience is a central organizing principle for her approach to grantmaking, noting how “*Policy change is not always dispositive of improving people's lived experience, so any kind of nondiscrimination policy might be desirable, but what that does for people's experience is not automatic.*” Therefore, listening to people's stories and perspectives on the material conditions of their own lives is essential. Cindy ties this to the overall goal of **liberation**, noting that in her view, “*people's lived experience is really about their liberation,*” and drawing on lived experience is a valuable tool in liberatory work.

## Hopes for the future

In terms of hopes for the future, Cindy brings us full circle – back to the center. When centering disenfranchised folks, we must ensure that evaluation is accessible and manageable. Evaluation is valuable, but as a discipline, is susceptible to the negative consequences associated with how much weight is placed upon a narrow convention of professionalism and professional requirements. “*I think Evaluation is very valuable ... but I don't think everyone feels like they can do it. I feel like they think they need a PhD.*” In other words, evaluation can seem far removed from the lived, daily realities of the communities we purport to serve, and it is our challenge to help make it relevant and applicable.

## SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

This perspectives piece is a window into the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation. As this framework diffuses within the field, it will change and grow as we do the work necessary to build our common understanding. Principles may be added, or removed, and those which remain may change. Our authors give us an exciting insight into what is to come with that change.

Though we opted to organize this article by person, rather than by theme, it is also important to highlight the themes which did emerge through insights shared by multiple participants. For example, many interviewees raised concerns that, where the principles of LGBTQ+ evaluation fell short of specificity, there existed a risk of people defaulting into the harms which the principles were aiming to prevent. Many interviewees also discussed the importance of activities like relationship building, the necessity of de-centering whiteness in LGBTQ+ Evaluation, and the challenge, but necessity, of working towards solidary and common, shared understandings. Moreover, many interviewees focused on bringing history into the present acknowledging that our understanding of history and our present work exist dialectically and inform one another, rather than the relationship being unidirectional.

This Perspectives Piece is the first part of what comes next. The themes that have emerged here, and the insights offered by this authorship team, must be explored further. In particular, we highlight the urgency of the following areas of inquiry:

1. Work which expands on each of the existing principles of LGBTQ+ Evaluation, and offers specific guidance, where possible, including specific guidance on how to implement each one, and adapt to context;
2. The articulation of new principles which may need to be added to those we have proposed in order for the framework of LGBTQ+ Evaluation to be as strong as possible;
3. Immediate changes to the principles and competencies set out by AEA and other professional evaluation organizations which uplift LGBTQ+ perspectives and LGBTQ+ Evaluation principles;
4. Development of LGBTQ+ Evaluation competencies and coursework in evaluator education programs;
5. Scholarship led by members of LGBTQ+ sub-populations to tailor the ideas of LGBTQ+ Evaluation as a broad framework to be specific to community needs, with an emphasis on work led by individuals from oft-erased or multiply-marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities, transgender, non-binary, intersex bisexual, disabled, older, and youth LGBTQ+ groups, among others;

6. Further integration of LGBTQ+ Evaluation principles with liberatory bodies of theory, including frameworks of abolition, intersectionality, disability justice, Black feminism, critical race theory, and other justice-oriented theory; and
7. Publication of further case studies which reflect on the integration of LGBTQ+ Evaluation principles into evaluations using a broad variety of frameworks or theories already established and accepted as standard practice in the field.

While our team will continue our theory-building work in LGBTQ+ Evaluation, we offer this chapter as an invitation, to all of you in the field, to take an active role in responding to these priorities, or identifying, and responding to, your own.

## CONCLUSION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The editors of this issue would like to take the time to thank the many individuals who helped bring this project to life.

First, and most importantly, we thank the authors who contributed their time, insights, and expertise to each of the chapters in this issue. Without you, this NDE issue does not exist. We are humbled and honored that each of you trusted us to be caretakers of your work, and chose to have it included here.

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To all members of the Evaluation, Data Integration, and Technical Assistance (EDIT) team, where our editors are based, we are eternally grateful for your collaboration, support, and consistently extraordinary work, which makes everything our team does possible.

Thank you to our Evaluation co-conspirators, many of whom are featured in this special issue. We remain, as ever, humbled to be working alongside you in pursuit of a more loving and just future for our field.

Finally, to you, reader, we thank you for the time you have invested in reading this issue, and in getting to know the authors of this work through the successes, challenges, and insights they have shared with you. Now, it is your turn to offer your perspective, and to join the process of articulating LGBTQ+ Evaluation in our field. Consider these questions:

**What does LGBTQ+ Evaluation mean to you?**

**What do you still need to learn?**

**How will you learn it?**

**What strengths do you see in the principles of LGBTQ+ Evaluation we have put forward?**

**What opportunities for change or growth or development for these principles stick out to you?**

**How might you be part of that change and growth?**

**What are your hopes for the future of LGBTQ+ Evaluation?**

**What role will you have in imagining or realizing that future?**

Take the time to think, and when you are ready, we invite you to step into the process of envisioning, articulating, and embodying a new framework of LGBTQ+ Evaluation.

We look forward to building this new paradigm, together.

In solidarity,

Dylan, Esrea, Erik, and Gregory

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ms. Dylan Felt and Mx. Esrea Perez-Bill shared primary responsibility for the conceptualization and authorship of this chapter and should be understood to be equal co-first authors of this chapter. Ordering of first author names in the byline of this chapter was done alphabetically by last name. We wish to thank our co-authors Eric Barela, Nicole Cundiff, Radaya Ellis, LaShaune Johnson, Nicholas Metcalf, Travis Robert Moore, Ash Philliber, Jeffrey Poirier, Sarah Daniel Rasher, and Cindy Rizzo for their generosity in sharing with us, and for their trust in us with their words and insights. They should be understood to be equal co-second authors of this chapter. Ordering of second author names in the byline of this chapter was done alphabetically by last name. We also wish to thank our co-editors and co-authors, Dr. Gregory Phillips II and Mr. Erik Elías Glenn, for their support and insights throughout the development and drafting process of this chapter. They should be understood to be equal co-senior authors of this chapter. Ordering of senior author names in the byline of this chapter was done alphabetically by last name. We thank the members of our professional networks, particularly the AEA LGBT Issues TIG, for their assistance in linking us to the individuals who provided the perspectives from which this chapter derives its name and nature. Finally, we thank the editors of *New Directions for Evaluation*, Drs. Leslie Fierro and Todd Franke, for their assistance in the initial conceptualization of this chapter.

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**Bios for co-second authors are included in-text.**

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ning to improve health outcomes among Black gay, bisexual, and same gender loving men. Throughout his public health career, Erik has worked to improve the long-term health outcomes of LGBTQ+ BIPOC through Chicago-based HIV elimination initiatives such as Getting to Zero Illinois, Black Treatment Advocates Network, and Chicago Area HIV Integrated Services Council.

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