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**Understanding Cross-Cultural Evaluation: Making Sense of Theory and Practice**

By

Jill Anne Chouinard

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Faculty of Education

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## **Understanding Cross-Cultural Evaluation: Making Sense of Theory and Practice**

### **Abstract**

As a fairly new and emergent construct, there remain many gaps in our knowledge about how to integrate notions of culture and cultural context into evaluation theory and practice, as well as gaps in our knowledge about how to conduct and implement evaluations in immigrant and indigenous communities. This research explores how culture influences the evaluation and the program setting, and how it mediates the relationship between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders. Through an interconnected three-phase study (a comprehensive literature review, interviews with scholars and practitioners and focus groups with community-based program managers), this research develops a six dimensional framework (relational, ecological, methodological, organizational, political, and personal) depicting the inter-related dimensions and components that surface in interactions between evaluators and community-based stakeholders in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts. The findings suggest that culture and cultural context influence *every* dimension of the evaluation, including the relationships we develop with stakeholders, the evaluation and program context, the methodologies and methods that we select, the politics and power dimensions surrounding the program and evaluation setting, the organizational constraints, and the evaluator's personal values and biases. The findings also suggest that relationships have far-reaching consequences, particularly given the predominant use of participatory and collaborative approaches in cross-cultural settings. While the findings also suggest that a participatory approach to evaluation cannot alter the broader social, economic, political and cultural systems that continue to create and sustain inequities in

our society, understanding the dynamic, unfolding and ongoing connections and relations between evaluators and stakeholders is essential.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

*What we need, it seems, are not enormous ideas, nor the abandonment of synthesizing notions altogether. What we need are ways of thinking that are responsive to particularities, to individualities, oddities, discontinuities, contrasts, and singularities, responsive to what Charles Taylor has called “deep diversity,” a plurality of ways of belonging and being, and that yet can draw from them—from it—a sense of connectedness...*

*Geertz (2000)*

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

Program evaluation is concerned with understanding and improving social programs so that they are ultimately more responsive to program participant needs. At a very fundamental level, program evaluation is a socio-political process (J. Greene, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989) intrinsically related to decisions about societal priorities and resource allocations, as decisions are made concerning program worth and merit. Within this backdrop, there is increasing awareness that these social programs are embedded within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts, all of which profoundly impact program development, implementation and outcomes. Evaluations are thus far from being value-free and culture-free (SenGupta, Hopson, & Thompson-Robinson, 2004), as culture and values permeate all facets of social programs and their evaluations. Whose voices get heard? Whose interests dominate? Who asks the questions? Whose knowledge is of most worth? Within the context of an evaluation, these questions and associated discourses become paramount, not simply as methodological considerations, but as theoretical and normative constructs guiding evaluative practice.

To explore these questions, my initial research began by looking more broadly at how culture is conceptualized within the evaluative program setting and how culture is thought to impact the evaluation, the program and the context. While my initial research

was limited to a synthesis study of the empirical research on evaluations in the context of Aboriginal communities (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007), it nonetheless provided the opportunity to explore the dynamics of culture and evaluation and to understand the complexities and interconnections between culture, context and the evaluative endeavour in culturally diverse and distinct communities. I began by posing fairly broad and open questions about evaluations within Aboriginal and cross-cultural program contexts: 1) What is culturally competent evaluation? 2) What are the benefits to such practices? (Why bother?) 3) Why and how does culture matter? 4) What does a culturally responsive evaluation in Aboriginal communities look like? What are the relevant findings? 5) What methodological practices have been found to be culturally relevant in Aboriginal communities? What evaluation approaches have been found to be most effective? 6) What is missing in the literature? What gaps remain to be addressed?

From the cross-cultural evaluation literature in Aboriginal communities, it became clear to me that evaluations that are responsive to contextual and cultural specificity are increasing in frequency, particularly as growing disparities amidst multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts globally are creating a heightened awareness and need for this type of evaluation. As a fairly new and emergent construct, there nonetheless remain a number of methodological issues that warrant further research. For one thing, all of the studies that I reviewed adopted participatory or collaborative approaches in conducting evaluations in cross-cultural contexts. While these approaches have significant merit in cross-cultural settings, there was much in the literature that was under-reported, and thus left unanswered. For example, I was left wondering about the tension between the evaluation needs of diverse stakeholders (from community members to government

fundings) and outside evaluators and between cross-cultural evaluation and accountability-driven models that focus primarily on evaluation as a way of judging program merit, worth and significance (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007). This led me to question the role of culture in mediating these relationships, both in the field and during the evaluation process. I was also left wondering how power differentials among evaluators and community stakeholders, particularly given the collaborative approaches to evaluation, influence the knowledge that is created in the field. In other words, how do relationships among divergent people and potentially divergent interests shape the process of evaluation itself and the outcomes that are generated?

## **1.2 Guiding Research Questions**

Specifically, my study will explore the following broad questions:

- 1) How is culture conceptualized in the cross-cultural program context?
- 2) How does culture (and differing conceptions of culture) influence the cross-cultural evaluative setting?
- 3) What role does culture play in mediating the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in cross-cultural evaluation contexts?
- 4) How do relationships among evaluators and stakeholders shape evaluation processes and consequences?

## **1.3 Relevance of this Research**

As one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse countries in the world, Canada has approximately 260,000 immigrants arriving each year from developing countries (Statistics Canada, 2008). Despite the fact that many immigrants are coming to Canada as skilled workers with university degrees (Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2007), more

than 47 percent of recent immigrants live in poverty, a figure that is more than double the national average (Picot & Hou, 2003). As a result, many new immigrants, the majority from racialized groups, are living in large urban centres in poor neighbourhoods without the benefit of employment opportunities afforded their Canadian counterparts. To assist recent immigrants, numerous community-based programs have been created that provide the skills, assistance and resources necessary to help them find adequate housing and access to social, health, educational and employment services. It is against this socio-political backdrop that the discussion of evaluation, and of cross-cultural evaluation begins.

Although researchers and evaluators have been working in diverse communities for many years, the specific focus on culture and cultural context in evaluation is nonetheless a more recent phenomenon. Thus despite the fact that there is significant interest in culturally responsive evaluation, and the knowledge base is indeed growing, there is still much work to be done in terms of addressing the recognized lack of critically engaged discussion about research on culturally responsive evaluation (Endo, Joh & Cao Yu, 2003; Hopson, 2003; SenGupta et al., 2004). At this point, there remain significant gaps in our knowledge about how to integrate notions of cultural context into evaluation theory and practice (Thompson-Robinson, Hopson, & SenGupta, 2004), as well as gaps in our knowledge about how to conduct and implement cross-cultural evaluations (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007).

While the primary purpose of my research is to explore the role of culture in mediating the relationship between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders, the results will contribute to the literature on evaluation in culturally diverse program

contexts by providing an increased understanding of how differing notions of multi-cultural and ethno-cultural differences influence the local program context. The fundamental purpose of my research is to understand how differing conceptions of culture play out in the context of an evaluation and how relationships between stakeholders and evaluators shape evaluation decisions and outcomes.

#### **1.4 Defining Key Constructs**

The following provides a clarification of key terms used throughout this dissertation:

**Program Evaluation.** The number of different definitions of evaluation and the lack of overall consensus illustrates the diversity of approaches to evaluation practice and theory. Some definitions of evaluation focus on function (e.g., making judgements), others look at purpose (e.g., providing information), others reflect method use (e.g., participatory evaluation), and still others include theoretical orientation (e.g., Fourth Generation Evaluation) (Mark, J. Greene, & Shaw, 2006). For the purposes of this study, I define evaluation as “systematic inquiry leading to judgements about program merit, worth and significance, and support for program decision making and knowledge production” (Cousins, 2003; Weaver & Cousins, 2004). This definition clearly situates evaluation as a systematic process guided by social science inquiry methods. It also establishes the essential judgemental nature of evaluation which, as a domain of inquiry, sets it apart from other forms of research. Evaluation is thus used to make a “judgement,” (comparing findings against established goals or some other standard) about program worth, to supply information for organizational or program decision making, and ultimately to create new knowledge that may or may not be useful beyond

the local program context. Though necessarily broad, it is noteworthy that there is nothing explicit in this definition about the program or program context, including the program community and intended program beneficiaries. Thus lurking behind this rather stark definition of evaluation are epistemological, ontological and normative questions that ultimately guide methodological choices and method selection, as well as frame the role of the evaluator within the evaluative setting.

**Culture.** Culture is a contested concept and the subject of much theorizing and writing in numerous academic fields, including sociology, anthropology, education, management studies, and communications. Despite the volume of writing on the subject, there remains no agreed upon, universally accepted definition of culture, though certain ideas have endured for centuries. In order to provide a comprehensive description of culture and to impart a sense of its historical evolution, I will provide four characterizations of culture, ranging from the aesthetic, ethnographic, symbolic, and ecologic, all of which should be borne in mind throughout this study.

The *aesthetic* definition, introduced around the eighteenth century, associates culture with the arts and is characterized by instances of “high” culture, sophistication and refinement. The notion of high culture is distinctly class-based, with the implication that only the wealthy could be bearers of such elite qualities of heightened sensibility (Bocock, 1992; Edles, 2002). The *ethnographic* or anthropologic definition includes shared meanings, knowledge, beliefs, morals, and customs (Bocock, 1992; Edles, 2002), all of which is transmitted from one generation to the next (Guzmán, 2003; Hughes, Seidman & Williams, 1993). These two characterizations, the aesthetic and ethnographic, both describe what culture is, understood as qualities in individuals, or

collectively in terms of the contents of a culture (Bocock, 1992). The *symbolic* definition is from social anthropology and characterizes culture as a system of shared meanings (Geertz, 1973) that are “historically linked to specific social groups at specific moments, intertwined in complex ways with other societal dimensions” (Edles, 2002, p. 6). Culture is portrayed as a social practice linked to specific groups, fundamentally grounded in language and in the production of meaning (Bocock, 1992). This definition focuses on what culture does, rather than what it is, and is associated with the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, whose members sought to shift the conception of culture from a literary-moral definition to one based in sociology and the study of meaning (During, 1993; Seidman, 2004). The *ecologic* description embeds culture within a larger, fundamentally interconnected social system that is composed of a “hierarchy of social forces” (Guzmán, 2003, p. 174). The ecologic definition thus depicts the location of culture, as well as the context in which it is to be understood. It provides, in essence, a conceptual bridge between culture and context, two terms that have significance in the cross-cultural literature.

While these characterizations are illustrative of the varied meanings ascribed to culture, there are a number of characteristics worth noting and explicating from the above: all individuals develop within a culture (Hughes et al., 1993); cultures are passed down from one generation to the next (Guzmán, 2003); cultures are learned (Rosaldo, 1989); cultures are socially constructed through historical and political processes (Rosaldo, 1989); cultures are not static but dynamic (Willging, Helitzer & Thompson, 2006); cultures are related to language and meaning and the production of knowledge (Gordon, Miller & Rollock, 1990); culture is implicated in the politics of power and

privilege (Seidman, 2004). These descriptions help move culture beyond a mere demographic descriptor of communities, to a socially, politically and historically vibrant and embedded construct that is fundamentally constitutive of the values and norms that govern our society. At the same time, this characterization of culture underscores the fact that epistemological questions are bound up and implicated in social, political and cultural assumptions that have symbolic and very real material expressions. My goal is not to attempt to reconcile these four perspectives of culture, but merely to highlight the multifaceted, evolving and dynamic nature of culture, the varied lenses in which culture is understood historically, as well as across disciplines. Through my research, I would like to develop an organic definition of culture, one that resonates in community-based program contexts and that is inclusive of the multiple and broad conceptualizations of culture that currently exist across diverse disciplines.

**Cross-Cultural Evaluation.** Evaluations that endeavour to be responsive to culture and cultural context are often referred to by evaluators as ‘culturally competent’, ‘culturally responsive’, ‘culturally consistent’, ‘transformative’, ‘culturally sensitive’, ‘culturally anchored’, ‘values-based’, ‘multicultural’, or ‘cross-cultural’. For the purposes of this paper, the term cross-cultural evaluation will be used as it highlights the social relations among stakeholders in evaluation (Abma, 2002), and acknowledges that program evaluators do not always (or often) share cultural similarities (i.e., ethnicity, gender, social class) with members of the program community, including program participants (Yarborough, Shulha, & Caruthers, 2004), though they do work collaboratively toward common ends. More importantly, the term cross-cultural conveys the sense of interaction between two or more cultures (Merryfield, 1985), highlighting the

fact that the evaluator him or herself also has a culture that is itself worth exploring (SenGupta et al., 2004), perhaps in relation to some “other” (Hall, 1992), and thus requiring that we critically examine our own cultural values, assumptions and biases (Nelson-Barber, LaFrance, Turnbull, & Abruto, 2005; SenGupta et al., 2004), in order to more fully appreciate and apprehend the dynamic cultural context in which evaluation takes place.

**Context.** The conceptualization of context, the parameters and dimensions considered relevant within an evaluation setting, vary across types of evaluation and fundamentally differentiate evaluation approaches (Mathison, 2005). This point is particularly salient in the cross-cultural setting, as many of the methodologies and approaches adopted for use in this type of evaluation are specifically designed to attend to contextual factors (Johnson, 2005). The variation in theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as the diversity of programs and cultural settings, illustrates the complexity of context within evaluation. In the *Evaluation Encyclopaedia* (Mathison, 2005), context is described as a multi-layered and intertwined construct composed of demographic characteristics, material and economic qualities, institutional or organizational dimensions of funders or evaluators, interpersonal and interactive components, and political dimensions, including power, influence and privilege. This characterization of context provides a sense of the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of a program’s context which, in cross-cultural evaluation becomes all the more significant (SenGupta et al., 2004), as the context itself becomes the site of confluence where program, culture, and community connect. The dynamic interaction between diverse stakeholders in marginalized cultural communities thus becomes important, as the

contextual dimension of the larger society and the more local community, along with the challenges of diversity in terms of linguistic and cultural characteristics, have an impact on social relations and program outcomes (Clayson, Castaneda, Sanchez, & Brindis, 2002).

### **1.5 Guiding Theoretical Frames**

One of the principal theoretical constructs guiding this research is based on the conception of evaluation as a relational endeavour (Abma & Widdershoven, 2008; J. Greene, 2005; Levin-Rozalis, 2003; Ryan & Destefano, 2001) that is fundamentally grounded in social relations (Symonette, 2004). Within this relationship, epistemologically, the evaluator and the diverse stakeholders are inter-connected, influencing each other, as together they co-construct evaluation findings (Rebien, 1996). Evaluators are thus not considered passive purveyors of methodology but active co-constructors working with diverse stakeholders amidst a rich cultural program and community context (J. Greene, 2005). At the same time, stakeholders are not considered as “passive recipients of intervention, but active participants who possess information and strategize” (Long, 1992, p. 21). From a relational perspective, both evaluators and stakeholders are considered as active social agents who together influence practice and the construction of the social and ethnographic text (Long, 1992). Long (1992) uses the concept of “interface” to convey a sense of a face-to-face encounter between people who possess different interests, resources and power, and to depict the emergent forms of struggles and interactions that take place between social actors as knowledge is created and co-created anew. The production and creation of knowledge is thus conceived as dynamic, unfolding and ongoing, giving shape to the interface between evaluators and

stakeholders, while at the same time being shaped by these same face-to-face encounters (Villarreal, 1992). The significant point is that we co-create meaning, and in so doing we transform the very meanings that we seek to understand. Relationships thus play a dual role within the evaluative encounter, as they help to shape the knowledge created and they impart important norms and values that guide the evaluation (Abma & Widdershoven, 2008).

The other key construct guiding this research is based on the notion that evaluations are contextually embedded within a program setting, as well as intertwined and immersed in specific cultural, social and institutional structures and practices (House & Howe, 2000), what I refer to as the ecological perspective. This perspective situates the cultural context of the program and its evaluation within a broader and more interactive historical, political and social framework. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) renowned ecological model, composed of concentric circles depicting differing layers of context, provides a sense of the interconnectivity and depth of the cultural milieu. Taking the ecological theory a little further, Kelly's (2006) ecological approach to community psychology, based on social constructionist principles, emphasizes both the relational and the ecological components of community development, with a special focus on the research relationship as a key consideration in community intervention and development (Espino & Trickett, 2008). These two theoretical constructs, the relational and the ecological, thus become significantly intertwined and enmeshed in the cross-cultural program setting, as evaluators and stakeholders engage in complex interactions within and across diverse cultural contexts. As such, they provide a sense of the relational nature of culture and of human interaction, where cultural processes are involved in

complex and multidimensional relations among different aspects of a community's functioning (Rogoff, 2003). The relational and ecological perspectives thus provide an overarching framework in which to understand culture, context and social relations involved in the evaluative encounter, all particularly salient concepts within the cross-cultural setting.

## **1.6 Outline of the Dissertation**

The chapters in this dissertation reflect the three-phased approach I adopted to explore my research questions. *Chapter 2, Situating the Literature*, provides a brief history of cross-cultural evaluation and an elaboration of the theoretical lenses that inform my research and this dissertation. *Chapter 3, Methodology*, provides a description of the qualitative approach used herein, as well as a description of the three inter-related empirical studies in terms of data collection, data sources and analysis involved in my research. I also discuss my position as a research and the trustworthiness of my study. *Chapter 4, Phase One – Findings from a Survey of the Empirical Literature*, introduces the findings that were the result of an extensive synthesis and integration of an exhaustive sample of original empirical studies on cross-cultural program evaluation. *Chapter 5, Phase Two – Findings from Interviews with Evaluation Scholars and practitioners*, describes the findings that were based on telephone interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners. The findings are presented using a five-dimensional framework that I developed based on the synthesis of empirical studies and on my analysis of the interview data. *Chapter 6, Phase Three – Findings from Focus Groups with Community-Based Program Managers*, presents the findings that were based on focus groups I conducted with members of a community-

based program community. The findings are presented using the framework from Chapter 5, which I subsequently revised after the analysis of my focus groups. **Chapter 7, Discussion and Summary of Findings** begins with a summary of my key research findings and a discussion of the influence of culture and cultural context in evaluation. The main focus of this chapter is on three cross-cutting themes (perspective, engagement and accommodation) that emerged from the interconnections within the six dimensional framework. **Chapter 8, Conclusion and Agenda for Research** sets out a working conclusion of my research, the contribution to research and evaluation as a result of my study, and the potential limitations of my research. This chapter concludes with a summary of reflections for further research and implications for practice.

## Chapter 2 Situating the Literature

*Postmodernism, poststructuralism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, critical theory: The labels ought not matter. What matters is an affirmation of a social world accepting of tension and conflict. What matters is an affirmation of energy and the passion of reflection in a renewed hope of common action, of face-to-face encounters among friends and strangers, striving for meaning, striving for understanding.*

*M. Greene (1994)*

The focus of this dissertation is on understanding culture and cultural context within community-based program evaluations, with specific attention given to relationships between evaluators and stakeholders within cross-cultural program settings. As such, the literature informing my research is necessarily wide-ranging and multidisciplinary, drawing upon areas of cultural sociology, feminism, postmodernism, social constructivism, philosophical hermeneutics, and social science and evaluation methodologies (such as participatory and collaborative approaches to research and evaluation). In this chapter, I provide a brief history and outline of the social and political context of cross-cultural program evaluation, followed by a description of the theoretical positions that guide and frame my research. One of the themes that runs through much of the cross-cultural evaluation literature is the need to develop inclusive approaches to evaluation that accommodate alternative ways of knowing and that respect the plurality of voices in the field (LaFrance, 2004; Mertens, 1999; SenGupta et al., 2004). One of the principal aims of this chapter is thus to reconcile my theoretical positioning with the literature on cross-cultural program evaluation, arguing for the need to develop alternative theoretical frameworks in order to advance our understanding of what it means to do cross-cultural evaluation work.

## 2.1 A Brief History of Cross-Cultural Evaluation

Although researchers and evaluators have been working in diverse communities for many years, the specific focus on culture and cultural context in evaluation is more recent. While this approach to evaluation has been largely influenced by cross-cultural evaluations in international settings (Hopson, 2003), growing disparities and increasingly multiethnic contexts in Canada and the United States are creating an increased need for this type of evaluation. Historically, we can trace the beginning of this type of evaluation to a small group of African American researchers and evaluators who, from the 1930's to 1950's, utilized evaluation methods that were responsive and sensitive to African American experiences during racial segregation (Hood, 2009). More recently, in a 1985 edition of *New Directions for Program Evaluation* (edited by Patton), evaluators for the first time explicitly questioned the impact of culture and cultural context on program evaluation (Hopson, 2003). Almost a decade later, Kirkhart's presidential address at the 1994 American Evaluation Association conference challenged attendees to explore the multicultural influences on their work as evaluators. And in 1998, Hood presented a paper at the Robert Stake Retirement Symposium that further extended the core dimensions of responsive evaluation to include culture and cultural context (Ryan, Chandler, & Samuels, 2007). More recently, the American Evaluation Association formed a Task Force to review the *Program Evaluation Standards* of the Joint Committee from a culturally competent standpoint. After significant input, recommendations were approved for future revisions to the *Program Evaluation Standards* (American Evaluation Association, Diversity Committee, 2004). Along with these recent developments in evaluation, cross-cultural research continue to benefit from

the important work on cultural competence and cultural diversity in public and mental health and in social work (Lum, 2003; Sue & Sue, 1999).

One of the key assumptions behind the cross-cultural approach is the idea that culture is an integral part of the context of evaluation, “not only in the contexts in which programs are implemented but also in the designs of these programs and the approach, stance, or methods evaluators choose to use in their work” (SenGupta et al., 2004, p. 6). As Hopson (2003) points out, it is important to recognize that “cultural differences are not merely surface variations in style, preference and behaviour, *but fundamental differences in how people experience social life, evaluate information, decide what is true, attribute causes to social phenomena and understand their place in the world*” (Hopson, 2003, emphasis in original, p. 2). Fundamental is the understanding that contextual factors and cultural considerations include not only demographic descriptions of communities and programs, but also more importantly, diversity in values and the less vocalized issues of power, racism, and economic, class and gender issues that continue to define our society (Senese, 2005; SenGupta et al., 2004).

A more recent development in the literature has been a shift from the focus on culture in terms of program context, to the cultural competency of evaluators themselves (SenGupta et al., 2004), a move that positions culture as something that not only “others” possess, but as something that we all possess as well. Symonette (2004) refers to cultural competency as “much more about one’s orientation toward diversity than facts and figures about diverse places, spaces, and peoples” (p. 100). Cultural competency is not considered a static state (Mertens, 2009), but rather a journey to understanding the self (perhaps as outsider), but certainly as privileged, within the evaluative setting. It requires

what Symonette (2004) refers to as “multilateral self-awareness” (p. 100), awareness of one’s own culture, the culture of others, and of our role as evaluators in the cross-cultural setting. In a recent edition of *New Directions for Evaluation*, SenGupta et al. (2004) in chapter 1, defined cultural competency as:

...a systematic, responsive inquiry that is actively cognizant, understanding, and appreciative of the cultural context in which the evaluation takes place; that frames and articulates the epistemology of the evaluative endeavour; that employs culturally and contextually appropriate methodology; and that uses stakeholder-generated, interpretive means to arrive at the results and further use of the findings (p. 13).

While this definition of cultural competence in evaluation encompasses both theory and practice, emphasizing responsiveness to the cultural context, methodological and epistemological considerations, and enhanced stakeholder roles, at the same time it assumes the critical role of the evaluator in the cross-cultural context. Although brief, this history of cross-cultural evaluation provides a sense of the growth of research in the area. In what follows, I locate cross-cultural evaluation within the broader field of evaluation, situating it within an oftentimes dissonant social, political and structural context.

## **2.2 Situating Cross-Cultural Evaluation within a Larger Context**

Cross-cultural evaluation is an explicit approach to evaluation that considers culture as a key consideration in the evaluation of programs, leading to the search for methodological practices that are commensurate with the culture, context and values of the program community. This approach, most often rooted in a concern for social justice

and empowerment, thus seeks evaluator and stakeholder engagement along with the inclusion of the program community in the process of evaluation. This collaborative and culturally resonant approach to evaluation, however, exists amidst a public climate (often referred to as the New Public Management), where the current gold standard of program evaluation is defined as impartial, objective, and evidence-based (J. Greene, 2005). By way of example, in 2009 the Canadian government revised the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) policy and guidelines on evaluation, articulating a clear vision of evaluation as an evidence-based, neutral and objective instrument designed to provide outcome and results-based information on program performance and spending. The contrast between cross-cultural evaluation as it is envisioned in theory and practice, and accountability driven models that currently prevail in the public sector, is stark. The prevalent vision of evaluation provides the foundation and climate for the reception and use of evaluation within government, and thus falls far short of capturing the range of local perspectives, contextualized meanings and culturally relevant perspectives that cross-cultural evaluations are intended to capture.

The TBS's revised policy of evaluation makes it clear that evaluation is intended to serve an instrumental role, as a management tool designed to serve accountability and decision making purposes. Evaluation is thus valued for its perceived scientific authority, as a way to legitimate government activities and decision making (House, 1993). Schwandt (2003) makes the important distinction between evaluation considered as a "technical undertaking", as a set of tools that if used correctly has the potential to improve practice and generate answers, and evaluation as serving a conceptual function to generate dialogue and facilitate learning. Evaluation can thus be conceptualized as a

“pedagogical undertaking” (Schwandt, 2003) that seeks to understand the interpretation of results and decision making within particular socio-cultural and historical contexts.

The distinction between these two approaches to evaluation, as technical and conceptual processes, highlights four significant points that are relevant to my research and to the study of cross-cultural evaluation: 1) Social science practices (including evaluation) reflect ideological positions, practices and attitudes (Packwood & Sikes, 1996). Evaluation, in other words, is a political undertaking (House, 1993), reflecting such questions as whose interests are included, whose interests are not, and how they are represented; 2) In a society that values objective, value-neutral and evidence based evaluation, evaluations that are inclusive, collaborative and *not* value-neutral may be marginalized or given short shrift; 3) Objectified knowledge claims structure relationships in the field (Smith, 1990) and constrain and delimit our methodological choices; 4) Knowledge generation cannot be a neutral activity, as it is reflective of the values and relations of power and privilege within which it takes place (J. Greene, 2002). Taken together, these four points position evaluation within a particular authority structure and cultural context (House, 1993), thus underscoring the need to take a critical approach in understanding the research methodologies that we adopt and practice in the field, and the knowledge that we generate as we collect, analyze and disseminate our findings. In the following section, I position evaluation within a postmodern frame, as a way to recognize evaluation as a highly culturally and contextualized practice.

### **2.3 Postmodernism and the Process of Social Inquiry**

As a researcher studying relationships within cross-cultural evaluation and program contexts, a postmodern approach allows me to consciously and conscientiously

acknowledge the plurality of voices in the field and to question the taken-for-granted assumptions that continue to guide social science inquiry methods. As Kinchloe and McLaren (1998) explain, “the thrust [of postmodernism’s] critique is aimed at deconstructing Western metanarratives of truth and the ethnocentrism implicit in the European view of history and the unilinear progress of universal reason” (p. 271). In rejecting the belief in a single, monolithic criterion of truth that is applicable in all contexts and at all times, postmodernism opens up the possibility of a culturally relevant approach to social inquiry that does not privilege one perspective over others, and that recognizes the contextual and localized nature of knowledge construction, thus giving priority to the inclusion of diverse voices in the field. As Bauman (1992) explains:

The main feature ascribed to ‘postmodernity’ is thus the permanent and irreducible *pluralism* of cultures, communal traditions, ideologies, ‘forms of life’ or ‘language games’ (choice of items which are ‘plural’ varies with theoretical allegiance)...No knowledge can be assessed outside the context of the culture, tradition, language game, etc. which makes it possible and endows it with meaning (p. 102).

The recognition of multiple, localized and partial truths (over one universal meta-truth) thus means that no one group has a monopoly on the truth (Howe, 1994), and that knowledge (and its construction) can be understood and appraised within its own cultural and social context, all very important considerations in the study of relationships within cross-cultural program contexts.

Postmodernism thus moves research towards a less reductionist and more pluralistic conception, towards participatory methods of social inquiry (Lincoln, 1994;

Reason, 1988), and towards the recognition that knowledge can only be defined by the plurality of perspectives and the multiplicity of subject positions (Agger, 1991). As Howe (1994) points out, “the full participation of all those involved in decisions about what is going on and what should be done is the only way to determine non-oppressive, culturally pertinent truths and working, practical judgments” (p. 525). Thus, in acknowledging the multiplicity of voices, postmodernism helps to make visible the many and varied social, political and cultural forces that guide our social inquiry methods and practices (Giroux, 2005).

In denying the possibility of a value-free and objective social science (Schwandt, 1997), a postmodernist approach remains very much attuned to the political nature of our research methods and to the underlying social, cultural and political discourses that saturate our social inquiry processes. Postmodernism thus helps us question the “universalizing presumptions” (Harvey, 1989) of our research methods and helps in decentering the cultural authority of our Westernized methods of social inquiry (Schwandt, 1996). In disputing the “apolitical illusion” (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004) and belief in objective, neutral and universal social inquiry methods, a postmodernist perspective provides a way for us to look at how we *create* truth, rather than merely providing a method that serves to *reveal* truth (Everitt, 1996).

Questioning the taken-for-granted assumptions about a neutral, objective and detached social science has significant methodological implications (Agger, 1991). As Smith (1990) points out, “objectified forms of knowledge structure the relation between knower and known” (p. 63), shifting the construction of knowledge to somewhere outside of the locally situated context and social relations. Postmodernism thus provides

researchers with the discursive space in which to seriously challenge dominant frameworks for understanding how knowledge is constructed and maintained in our society. Foucault (1980) uses the concept of genealogy to describe how dominant discourses structure reality, shape and normalize personal identities and regulate society. By returning more traditionally subjugated knowledge into his concept of genealogy, Foucault means to disturb and interrupt the more accepted, and dominant forms of knowledge. As Best and Kellner (1997) argue, Foucault uses genealogy to “liberate suppressed voices and struggles in history from the dominant narratives that reduce them to silence” (p. 273). As Foucault (1980) clarifies, “there is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (p. 27). It is subjugated knowledge, the silenced voices of the least powerful that is concealed and that must be raised above the historical din of the more dominant voices in our society.

A postmodern frame can thus help capture the plurality and complexity of research participant voices, as well as help evaluators better understand their own embeddedness in the research process. Abandoning false notions of objectivity thus enables a critical reflection on self as researcher, on what Guba and Lincoln (1981) refer to as the “human as instrument” (p. 210), and on the multiple, fluid and changing roles that we assume in the field (Adler & Adler, 1987). As Dwyer and Buckle (2005) point out “postmodernism emphasizes the importance of understanding the researcher’s context (gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) as part of narrative interpretation” (p. 55). From this perspective, research is considered very much a dialogical process that involves the interaction of both the researcher and participants who together co-construct the narrative

text (Fontana, 2002; Packwood & Sikes, 1996). Postmodernism thus moves research towards participatory methods of social inquiry (Lincoln, 1994; Reason, 1988), towards a recognition that knowledge can only be defined by the plurality of perspectives and the multiplicity of subject positions (Agger, 1991). Thus by acknowledging the multiplicity of voices, postmodernism helps bring to light the many and varied social, political and cultural forces that are implicated in the construction of knowledge.

#### **2.4 Representation within a Postmodernist Frame**

In program evaluation (and other social inquiry research practices), we collect our data using specific methods that are aligned with specific methodological approaches, and we analyze and report on our findings to the broad stakeholder community. How we represent our findings is rarely questioned, so long as they are clearly written and well articulated and make sense to the program community. In fact, how we report on our findings is thought to follow from the methods that we use to collect our data; methods and reporting are considered inseparable. A postmodernist perspective on social inquiry, however, questions this assumption (Kincheloe, 1997), thus opening up the possibility of taking a closer look at how we represent our data and our findings, how we represent others' voices, and how we locate ourselves (how we are represented) within the text (as either outsiders or insiders) (Merriam et al., 2001). Postmodernism enables us to see ourselves within the text, writing from a particular context, reflexively (Richardson, 1994). As Denzin (1998) argues, "representation is always self-presentation" (p.319).

The choices that we make as we write - - how and for whom (whose voice(s) will be heard? How their story will be told?), is reflective of the issue that all knowledge is socially constructed (Foucault, 1980; Richardson, 1990). As Richardson (1990) explains,

“writing is not simply a true representation of an objective reality, out there, waiting to be seen...writing creates a particular view of reality” (p. 9). The language that we use to represent our findings thus helps to shape the reality and the perception of reality that we attempt to describe (Said, 1979), underscoring that point that meaning is itself produced, rather than merely reflected within language (Weedon, 1997).

How we represent our findings and how we understand the voices of others and ourselves in the text, while posing fundamental questions in any qualitative social science inquiry, becomes even more critical in cross-cultural research and evaluation. How do we represent cultures other than our own? How do we understand them and ensure that our re-presentation resonates? What methodological approach might we adopt and how might we present our findings to a diverse audience? Are the methods that we use to collect our data valid in the cultural context within which we conduct our research? Where are we (as outsiders or insiders or both) within the text? Where are our communities? In the following section, I begin to explore what it means to understand others and ourselves within the research context, problematizing the nature of identity and self-identity, as we begin to make sense of the multiple and often conflicting identities and categories of being that we confront both within ourselves and among our research participants in the field.

## **2.5 Identity and Self-Identity in the Field**

My study is framed by an understanding of social inquiry as a highly contextualized process that is contingent upon the multiple perspectives and voices of researchers and of those being researched. Of particular interest is the relationship between evaluators (researchers) and communities (participants), in what is spoken and

not spoken, what is assumed and taken-for-granted, and what we as evaluators bring to the table, and how it is transformed within and out of the interactions that ensue. Fine (1998) refers to this as “*working the hyphen*” (p. 135), where researchers explore the margins of their social location where both self identities and “others” come together, merge and separate. How do researchers work this hyphen? How do we represent others? Whose stories do we tell? Where are we located in the telling of this story?

The notion of identity, of who we are and of how we are positioned and categorized, is of fundamental concern in cross-cultural research, as we make assumptions about self and others that guide our decisions as evaluators in the field. Do we pair evaluators and research participants along gender, ethnic or other identity lines? How do we determine which parameters and definitions of identity are important within a specific context? There is no one category or single all-encompassing label that can capture the essence of participants and researchers, particularly if we consider the notion of identity as a “production” that is in a constant state of change, being transformed within the specific historical and cultural discourses of the time (Hall, 1990). Identity is not considered a fixed, static essence, but a positioning (Hall, 1990), a situational performance (Goffman, 1958) that is never complete.

Adding further complexity is the idea that we are all composed of numerous identities (such as gender, ethnicity, class), that co-mingle, interact and ‘intersect’ to shape the multiple dimensions of what constitutes our selves. The notion of ‘intersectionality’ is thus used to refer to the interaction between gender, ethnicity and other categories of potential identity, and to understand how they are mutually constructed and produced, reproduced and experienced in everyday life (Collins, 1998;

Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005). While intersectionality does provide a more heterogeneous depiction of identity (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008), and it does resonate with my own conception of myself as an evaluator who is female, privileged and white, I understand it as a very fluid concept that occupies what Ibrahim (2008) refers to as a “third space” that is both historically situated and unconsciously articulated. We move in and out of this “in-between-ness” (Ibrahim, 2008), as we occupy and shift out of social spaces and research contexts that can create connections and disconnections between our self and others.

As a researcher and an evaluator, the issue seems to be precisely that there is no single, all-defining category that can capture or that can be used to define a community’s identity (or a person’s). Thus, while there is tremendous merit in understanding the complexity of intersectionality in the creation of identity, particularly if we consider the challenges we encounter in our work as evaluators in diverse communities, how do we make sense of intersectionality in our work? How do we determine what factors of identity are important in a given context? In many ways, we are left with only a very limited language in which to try to make sense of what intersectionality means, and of how it might possibly influence and impact the research setting.

While Bannerji (1995) argues that if we explore gender, race and class as separate oppressions we create a homogenized abstraction that is left decontextualized and dehistoricized, the notion of “strategic essentializing” (Spivak, 1987), might nonetheless provide a way in which to explore the different categories and dimensions of identity and their inter-relationships. Although we may perceive identities simultaneously, particularly if we consider their intersectionality, we must acknowledge that the

categories do not necessarily co-mingle equally, depending upon the context at hand (Collins, 1998). Are there categories that are more important in one context than another? How do the categories themselves intermesh and change from one context or social space to another? How do community members think of themselves? What defines heterogeneity within that community? Homogeneity? While there remain many questions about how to apply the concept of intersectionality (Davis, 2008), as well as what it means ethnographically as we work in diverse communities (Ibrahim, 2008), thinking about the multiple and intersecting categories at play does enrich our understanding of the contextual and discursive conditions that together create the multiple identities that define our social, political and cultural existence. How were my interactions with research participants influenced by my social location and by my identity as a graduate student who is White, female and privileged? How might this have influenced my telephone interviews and my focus groups (which were face-to-face)?

## **2.6 The Hermeneutical Frame for Understanding**

In rejecting the “legitimacy” of grand narratives and abandoning the universal tendency to adjudicate questions of truth, postmodernism thus shifts the problem from an attempt to globalize dominant cultural forms to one which attempts to improve communication and mutual understanding cross-culturally (Bauman, 1992). Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is particularly pertinent here, as it shifts the focus to understanding, listening and interpreting within the context of social inquiry (Klemm, 1986), to how we interact and make meaning together, all essential concerns in cross-cultural research and program contexts.

Within hermeneutics, understanding (and listening) are conceptualized dialogically and reflexively, requiring that we open ourselves not only to what others have to say, but to ourselves, to our own biases and prejudices (Klemm, 1986). As Garrison (1996) explains, “hermeneutic listening requires us to risk the prejudices and prejudgments that constitute our identity” (p. 438). This is not to suggest that our biases can necessarily be simply effaced – they are part of us – but rather that understanding others requires that we also understand our selves (Schwandt, 2000). As Garrison (1996) explains, “the point is not to free ourselves of all prejudice but to examine our historically inherited and unreflectively held prejudices, and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others, and ourselves” (p. 434). This understanding, conceptualized as an active dialogic process, a “constructive performance” (Klemm, 1986), thus requires us to engage with our pre-judgements and biases, in order that we may grow. Dialoguing across and/or between cultural contexts, the point where we come together and are open to understanding self and other, is precisely the hermeneutic tension that creates the opportunity to produce new knowledge and understanding (Kimball & Garrison, 1996). For Gadamer (1975), this hermeneutic tension gives rise to a “fusion of horizons”, where prejudices blend to create something new, a new horizon or a new vantage point, or a new multicultural understanding (Garrison, 1996; Kimball & Garrison, 1996). As Garrison (1996) explains, “one of the great advantages of ontological hermeneutics is that it acknowledges differences in the historical situatedness between two genders, races, or ethnicity, and uses the resulting tensions *creatively* to produce new understanding” (p. 437). It is precisely within this hermeneutic tension, as we engage with our differences, that we co-create new meaning and new understanding across what are often diverse

cultural contexts. In the remaining section, I further explore the sense of situated meaning and understanding across cultural boundaries, as I position the process of social inquiry itself, as a cultural act.

## **2.7 Social Inquiry as a Cultural Product**

As researchers and evaluators working in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic contexts, it becomes incumbent upon us to understand the underlying epistemological and normative assumptions that saturate our social inquiry methods and practices. There is no disinterested social inquiry, “no neutral research” (Lather, 1991), no universal social rules (Geertz, 1993), no culture-free epistemology (Scheurich & Young, 2002), and no unbiased “truths”. As Stanfield (1993) reminds us, “logics of inquiry are cultural and political constructs” (p. 33), the exploration of which requires enhanced understanding of what it means to conduct research in cross-cultural settings. We need to see ourselves not only as “situated in the action of our research” (Rupp, 1983, as cited in Anderson, 1993), but also as purveyors of Westernized inquiry methodologies that might not advance our understanding of diverse cultural lives and experiences. As conscientious social researchers working in cross-cultural settings, we must acknowledge that our research and evaluation methods continue to reflect Western European perspectives (Cannella & Lincoln, 2004; Conner, 1985), raising the question of whether these methods can ever accurately reflect and describe the experiences of the communities we seek to study. According to Smith (1999), our Westernized research methods “are underpinned by a cultural system of classification and representation, by views about human nature, human morality and virtue, by conceptions of space and time, by conceptions about gender and

race” (Smith, 1999, p. 44), all of which serves to potentially misrepresent the very communities that we seek to understand.

Social inquiry is not culture-free and the production of knowledge is not neutral (Mertens, 1999), but is historically, culturally, economically, and politically mediated and bound. As Gordon et al. (1990) explain, “knowledge in the social sciences is greatly influenced by experiences of a hegemonic culture, which is insufficiently sensitive to culture, ethnicity and general diversity” (p. 17). Reagan (1996) makes a further distinction between two qualitatively different types of biases, one that functions at the more micro subjective level of the researcher and the other at the more macro level of the research paradigm. According to Reagan (1996), ethnocentrism, which he understands as “the practice of using one’s own society and sociocultural practices as the “norms” by which other societies are viewed, measured and evaluated” (p. 4), has both cultural and epistemological forms. “Cultural ethnocentrism” refers to the individual assumptions and biases of researchers (such as racism and sexism), and “epistemological ethnocentrism” as the assumptions and biases of a field (produced as a paradigm) (Reagan, 1996, p. 4). The distinction between types of ethnocentrism underscores the point that knowledge is a contestable construct that is mediated by social, political and cultural influences, all of which is brought to bear in the practice and process of social inquiry.

Similarly, Scheurich and Young (2002) look at bias and ethnocentrism from a race-based perspective, subdividing it into five increasingly embedded contextual categories, from the individual and social levels, to the civilizational level. Scheurich and Young (2002) argue that “civilizational racism” represents “the deepest most primary assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the ways of knowing that reality

(epistemology), and the disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values (axiology)” (p. 56). This form of racism is unconscious and perceived as normative or natural, rather than as an “historically evolved social construction” (Scheurich & Young, 2002, p. 58), resulting in the mistaken belief that our more dominant paradigms are somehow outside of history and, therefore, not socially constructed. Reagan (2002) also makes the point that “epistemological ethnocentrism” is more difficult to detect (and hence be conscious of) as it “establishes the parameters within which “legitimate” discourse may take place” (p. 4). As social researchers, the real danger is that the legitimacy of our more privileged position acts as blinders, shielding us from questioning the universality of our research concepts and methodologies, and from thinking about our privileged cultural position as a social construction. As Sue and Sue (1999) explain:

While we tend to view prejudice, discrimination, racism, and sexism as overt and intentional acts of unfairness and violence, it is the unintentional and covert forms of bias that may be the great enemy because they are unseen and more pervasive (p. 30).

This “invisible veil” (Katz, 1985, as cited in Sue & Sue, 1999), prevents us from seeing that our social science methodologies and processes are socially constructed and, in fact, highly contestable and contested.

## **2.8 Summary**

My approach to social science inquiry is based on a multidisciplinary perspective that I believe enhances my understanding of the research context (broadly conceived). In this chapter I provide background on the multiple theoretical positions that helped to frame my research, including cultural sociology, feminism, post modernism, social

constructivism, hermeneutics, as well as social science and evaluation methodologies. I also provided a brief history and outline of the social context of cross-cultural evaluation, positioning it within the larger context of evaluation as it is currently conceptualized within what I refer to as the era of New Public Management. This positioning underscores the need to look critically at the research methodologies that we adopt and practice in the field, as well as their commensurability with current approaches.

I thus argue for the need to adopt a post modern perspective in the study of cross-cultural evaluation, both as a way to acknowledge the plurality and diversity of voices we encounter, as well as a way to question the assumptions behind our social science inquiry methods. I also discuss the need to problematize notions of identity and intersectionality if we are to understand what is salient within a given context. I also provided a brief discussion of hermeneutics as a way to shift the focus to understanding, listening and interpretation, on how we make meaning together within the cross-cultural program context. The emphasis is on the dialogical process of inquiry across contexts and within cross-cultural settings. The chapter concludes with a look at social inquiry as a cultural product, underscoring the need to understand underlying epistemological and normative assumptions that guide our research and inquiry practices.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

*...forms of investigation have to be understood as forms of social organization- they do not happen outside of our institutions, our social relations, our politics and economics...these organizational contexts are not necessarily natural homes for methodological enquiry, or even, perhaps, for taking risks in pursuit, for example, of social justice.*

*Kushner, 2000*

### 3.1 Overall Research Design

The purpose of this research is to understand how culture is conceptualized within the cross-cultural program context and to understand the role of culture in mediating the relationship between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders. As cross-cultural evaluation is still a fairly new and evolving construct with a dearth of knowledge about integrating culture into the evaluation of social programs (Hopson, 2003), I have used an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002) to provide a comprehensive description of the practice of cross-cultural evaluation in multiple program contexts and to gain a better understanding about the contextual factors that shape evaluation practices and consequences in the cross-cultural setting.

My research was designed as an interconnected three-phase study, with results of each phase adding to the knowledge base and informing the next, enabling understanding to develop iteratively as the overall inquiry unfolded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first phase of my study is a *comprehensive and critical review* of an exhaustive sample of studies that were based on empirical research of evaluations conducted in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community contexts. Although there is a paucity of studies, the field is sufficiently mature to warrant this synthesis. Several researchers have noted that empirical research is essential to the advancement of evaluation as a field (Cousins, 2004;

Mark, 2008; Smith, 1993), a point that is particularly relevant in a relatively new, yet rapidly growing area of inquiry such as evaluation in cross-cultural contexts. This phase helped refine and focus my research questions and helped inform the next phase, *one-on-one telephone interviews* with evaluation scholars and practitioners. These interviews were intended to capture the empirical work done in cross-cultural evaluation in the field that has not been published in either peer reviewed journals or other scholarly publications, to develop deeper first hand interpretations of cross-cultural evaluation, and to develop a conceptual framework that illustrates the multiple and varied dimensions at play within the cross-cultural program context. This phase helped inform the third phase of my research, a *series of focus groups* with community-based program consultants and managers. This research was designed to discuss the broad themes, issues and challenges identified in my interviews with scholars and practitioners in the second part of my research, as a way to better understand the community perspective within the cross-cultural program context. Given the three distinct phases of my research, what follows is a description of methods used in each of the three phases of my dissertation.

### **3.2 Phase One: A Survey of the Empirical Literature**

The purpose of the comprehensive literature review was to map the territory of cross-cultural program evaluation, to learn from experiences in the field and from the diverse communities of practice, and inform the second phase of my research. The following questions provided an initial focus to guide this review:

1. How is culture conceptualized within the evaluative program setting?
2. How is culture thought to impact the evaluation, the program and the context?
3. What rationale is given for the inclusion of culture in the evaluative strategy?

4. What methods/approaches are used to operationalize culture in the community program setting?
5. What challenges do evaluators face in conducting cross-cultural evaluation?

### ***3.2.1. Sample Selection***

The search criteria were limited to studies of community-based program evaluations and evaluations that considered culture as a key variable to be included in methodological processes in cross-cultural program contexts (including within-group contexts) and that were based on original empirical research, often reported in the form of a critical or reflective narrative. I considered culture a key construct in studies that included a culturally-specific rationale or evaluation focus, or in those that highlighted culturally-based findings or lessons learned. The research was understood to include not only traditional social sciences methods (e.g., case studies, mixed-method inquiry), but reflective narratives based on participant experiences with one or more program contexts. Reflective narratives were considered empirical, insofar as they were based on the observations made as a direct result of experiences working on specific programs and evaluations. Search terms or key words for this phase of my research included “cross/cultural evaluation,” “culturally responsive evaluation,” “cultural context,” “culturally competent evaluation,” and “anthropological evaluation.” Since I intended the literature search to be broad and far-reaching, I searched a number of key databases, including Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), PsychINFO, Social Work Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts and Medline. While every effort was made to extend my sample beyond the North American context, the majority of the articles (dating from 1991 to 2008) were nonetheless located in the following peer-reviewed

journals: *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *American Journal of Evaluation*, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *Evaluation*, *Evaluation and the Health Professions*, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, *the Journal of Primary Prevention*, *New Directions for Evaluation*, and *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. As a measure of quality assurance, the vast majority of the articles came from peer-reviewed journals, although I also included a few book chapters and foundation reports that involved community-based program evaluations with a specific focus on culture and cultural context that I believed would expand my analysis further. I also followed up bibliographies of recently published work in order to locate otherwise undetected articles and studies.

### ***3.2.2 Sample Characteristics***

Through my review of the literature, I conducted an exhaustive search and ultimately located 52 empirical studies, taking the form of articles, book chapters and foundation reports, written between 1991 and 2008. These studies are summarized below in Table 1.

A majority of the studies were reflective narratives of single, multiple or comparative case studies highlighting evaluator experiences, challenges and lessons learned. A number of these case studies involved an analysis of a specific intervention or program across multiple communities, while others focused more specifically on the qualitative components of a single case in specific cultural contexts. Only a few of the studies involved single or collective reflections across a range of programs and contexts. Thirty-five of the articles were published in the last five years, between 2003 and 2008,

eight were published between 2000-2002, and the remaining nine articles were published in the 1990s. Given the dearth of cross-cultural evaluation articles published in countries outside of the North American context, 41 of the articles I located were based on evaluations in the United States, four in Canada, three in New Zealand, one in each of Brazil, Australia, India and Papua New Guinea. The program practice contexts included in my sample of articles fall roughly into four primary categories, health (n=16), education (n=24), social services (n=5), community (n=6) and one national symposium.

All of the programs described in the articles were designed to ameliorate inequalities or to provide specific targeted assistance to improve educational, health or social issues in the following program areas: violence prevention, HIV prevention, drug and substance abuse, improving possibilities for at risk students, enhancing developmental outcomes, and increasing under-representation. Target populations for programs include Native American/First Nations and Inuit (n=25)<sup>1</sup>, African American (n=12), Hispanic/Latino/Latina (n=12), Cambodian, Brazilian, Maori, East Indian, Asian American, and Hmong, with some overlap in targeted populations. Most of the studies provided implications for research or evaluation practice and/or ‘lessons learned’, reported on challenges and strategies, provided guiding principles, and raised questions about evaluators’ experiences working in cross-cultural program and community settings.

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<sup>1</sup> The over-representation of Native American/First Nations and Inuit populations in this sample may be due to the fact that research in these communities is considered highly political, a fact that likely translates into an increase in articles for publication. As a result, my search criteria resulted in a disproportionate number of articles that discuss the evaluation of programs in Native American/First Nations and Inuit communities.

**Table 1**  
**Summary Description of Research Studies on Cross-Cultural Evaluations**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Context (Program and Population)</b>	<b>Focus</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Theoretical Orientation</b>	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Relevant Findings/Challenges</b>
1 Aktan (1999)	USA Substance abuse prevention program for African American families	Evaluation used to make the program more reflective of African American norms	Cultural consistency approach, mixed method, process and outcome (pre and post) done by independent consultant	None specified	Cultural consistency	Cultural modifications had positive effect on program, with participants more engaged and more likely to complete program. Cultural consistency approach thus effective in enhancing program outcomes.
2 Alkon et al (2001)	USA Violence prevention education program for childcare staff and Hispanic parents	To describe challenges encountered	Randomized experimental study, mixed method surveys, interviews, observation	None specified	Need to use culturally sensitive methods to evaluate programs that include ethnically diverse populations	Challenge finding data collection instruments that were validated with ethnically diverse population as no linguistic, conceptual or measurement equivalence was established making interpretation difficult, merely translating instrument unhelpful, need identified to elicit more information about cultural values in research tools, difference in communication styles between interviewers and interviewees added to difficulty.
3 Anderson-Draper (2006)	Canada A family violence prevention program in an immigrant community	Guiding questions what activities reflect cultural competence? What lessons can be drawn that will contribute to knowledge base?	Social cognitive theory (precede-proceed planning and evaluation model), data collected through monthly focus groups (looking at both process and outcomes)	Participatory	The role of culture is evaluation can shape how we view and understand an issue	Identified the need to spend time building trusting relationships and providing training and support so that participants can be meaningfully involved, process of collaboration as important as outcomes, learning occurs both ways, evaluator's need to develop facilitation skills, cultural competencies and interpersonal skills, participatory approach enables evaluators with different backgrounds than participants to conduct cross cultural evaluations
4 Baizerman and Compton (1992)	USA State policies for at risk high school students	To report on a policy evaluation used to create ongoing dialogue with community stakeholders	Methodologically diverse so as to learn from participants and be more sensitive to deep cultural and social class difference	Evaluation as ethical and political	Moral obligation to hear the voices of the targeted population, sensitive to cultural and social differences	Evaluation as highly political (purposeful, sponsored and judgmental), all of which implies power differences, also a moral enterprise, used dialogical perspective to transform technical activities into possibilities flowing from relationships and true dialogue

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
5 Barnes (2000)	New Zealand Alcohol-related road traffic prevention program for Maori	To examine the partnership between two indigenous communities and researchers	Collaborative, naturalistic, utilization-focused	Participatory based on community action	Need to develop based on Maori social structures, delivery systems and cultural context, ownership and empowerment	Although time consuming, the building of alliances seen as important and lasting, possible to implement program where research knowledge is not overriding concern but a negotiated component
6 Berends & Roberts (2003)	Australia Twenty indigenous alcohol and drug programs	To apply the AES guidelines and the AEA standards to look at an indigenous evaluation	Extensive consultation, mixed method, used steering committee	None specified	Historical and current status of indigenous population requires careful consideration in designing evaluation	Establishing trust led to increased Koori involvement, established informal arrangement with noted Koori leaders who acted as guardians of the process
7 Bevan-Brown (2001)	New Zealand Two projects Special education resources and best practices for Maori children with special needs and new special education policy	Challenges encountered and strategies used	Culturally-sensitive approach, mixed method	None specified	Validity and reliability of data, program effectiveness	For accuracy of research data must consider 6 "Rs" the right person must ask the right questions of the right people in the right way at the right place and time, should use someone from same ethnic group or else someone with cultural competence, must be aware of different cultural norms
8 Butty, Reid and LaPoint (2004)	USA CRESPAR program Urban school-to-career intervention program for at risk middle school students mostly of African American background	Explore the successes and challenges of using this approach with an emphasis on implementation rather than on findings	Culturally responsive approach, mixed method	Evaluation as political and value-laden	To ensure evaluation validity (methodological, cultural, interpersonal, and consequential), ultimately leading to increased advocacy, social betterment and justice	Three main process challenges engaging stakeholders, culture and cultural relevance and triangulation Challenges also included the labour intensive nature, lack of people to do the work and the requirement of having people perform multiple tasks and roles The respect for cultural context nonetheless allowed for greater collaboration, higher engagement and useful and valid evaluation results
9 Caldwell et al (2005)	USA American Indian Research and Program Evaluation Methodology National Symposium	Collective experience to provide lessons learned and guiding principles	Community-based, collaborative, PAR, "culturally anchored methodology", re-traditionalisation (return cultural norms)	Empowerment, participatory, cross-cultural	Cultural respect and understanding of special circumstances, validity, empowerment	Understanding of postcolonial stress, relational research, authentic partnerships, community involvement in data interpretation, research codes of ethics, tribal, cultural and linguistic diversity, strengths and cultural protective factors, locally meaningful constructs, training and employment of community members as evaluation project staff, capacity building

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
10 Cervantes and Pena (1998)	USA High risk Hispanic/Latino youth and families (alcohol and drug treatment and prevention)	To provide guidelines for the development and implementation of culturally competent evaluation practices	Culturally competent evaluation strategy, process and outcome evaluation, quantitative	Cultural competence	The need to understand the role culture plays in the development of drug and alcohol use, misuse and abuse Failure to do so may result in inappropriate conclusions about program effectiveness	Need to hire qualified, bicultural/bilingual Hispanic/Latino evaluators or culturally competent evaluators, train staff on cultural issues, community sensitivity (social and demographic characteristics), recognize heterogeneity within population, assess non-traditional characteristics, consider language, create community advisory group for communication purposes, develop scientific pre and post-test rigour, involve evaluators in information dissemination
11 Christie and Barela (2005)	USA Student-centred outreach program to increase UCLA admission of underrepresented groups	To provide an example of the Delphi technique as a means to a more inclusive approach to evaluation	Delphi technique used to develop consensus	Social justice and empowerment	More accurate understanding of the social benefits of the program, stakeholders best placed to assess program, develop strength-based program model	Delphi technique provided a means to successfully involve minority stakeholders and it eliminated power imbalances, worked in developing consensus and in considering all stakeholder views and giving weight to all, Delphi technique thus successful in promoting social justice evaluations and increasing participation
12 Clayson, Castenada, Sanchez and Brindis (2002)	USA Three low-income, Latino community initiatives aimed at building community, strengthening leadership and enhancing civic engagement at the grassroots level	To discuss interactions between major stakeholder groups (funders, community-based organization staff, community members, and evaluators)	Participatory, context-sensitive lens	Critical theory, constructivist, theory of change, evaluation as political	Provides a more complete analysis, acknowledgement that role of evaluator occurs within a particular context and within a larger political and economic environment	Evaluation seen as highly political with power distribution among stakeholders instrumental in shaping findings, dynamic interaction among stakeholders shaped by contextual dimensions and the challenges of diversity (culturally and linguistically), challenges funders locked in concepts they regarded as relevant across all contexts, consensus among stakeholder difficult given unequal power relationships
13 Conner (2004)	USA HIV prevention program in two Latino communities	To describe five factors that fostered a culturally sensitive evaluation	Multicultural validity, culturally sensitive approach	Cultural sensitivity	To more meaningfully assess and engage programs, multicultural validity, program understanding	Five facilitating factors involving participants for increased understanding, speaking literal and figurative language of participants, working collaboratively during implementation, sharing benefits with participants

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
14 Cooper and Christie (2005)	USA University-sponsored parent education program for low income Latino mothers	Use of social justice approach to enhance understanding and promote educational equity	Began with responsive evaluation approach and later switched to a social justice approach to emphasize underrepresented voices, qualitative case study	Social justice, empowerment	Inclusive of least powerful, social justice, prevent stakeholder bias	Recognized importance of addressing culture, class and gender issues, need for evaluator flexibility, could not be objective nor value-free, theory as useful guide to practice but methodological choices made in a social and political context
15 Copeland - Carson (2005)	USA Community revitalization project for African American population	To explore how anthropology can contribute to evaluation design of community initiative	Theory-based anthropological evaluation, collaborative	Collaborative, based on anthropological models of social change, Giddens and individual agency focus, Bourdieu and Foucault on power and knowledge	To better address the complexity of community initiatives	Bringing diverse stakeholders together, along with the realities of the economic and political environment resulted in a dynamic organizational cultural for the project,, leading to the positioning of the community's ethnicity as a resource rather than a barrier, qualitative and quantitative data seen as cultural constructions, relied upon "community consultants" for knowledge and feedback, lots of time and costs associated with using this type of evaluation
16 Coppens, Page and Chan Thou (2006)	USA Cambodian youth dance program	To explore importance of clear communication, cultural awareness, tailoring evaluation and meaningful participation	Collaborative, culturally sensitive, used multiple methods	Collaborative	To conduct culturally sensitive, community-based research and evaluation	Dynamics of diversity influenced several dimensions of evaluation, effects of cultural influences on dynamic of group, challenges involved in generating findings using standardized procedures and measures required by funding agency, noted differences in communication and perceptions, context critical to communication
17 Fetterman (2005)	USA A project designed to bridge the digital divide between 18 American Indian tribes and two African-American communities	To describe the insider perspective through the use of stories	Combination of empowerment evaluation and ethnographic evaluation	Collaborative, empowerment	To foster self-determination and improvement	Communities using these types of evaluation to plan, implement, assess and improve and refine their efforts, many examples of reflexivity demonstrated during the project

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
18 Fisher and Ball (2002)	USA Indian family wellness project	To describe the Tribal Participatory Process (TPR)	Tribal participatory research model based on tribal cultural and social values, evaluation was culturally specific and developed by a working group, used a multiple-baseline design, data collected at multiple intervals	Participatory, cross-cultural, empowerment	To meet the needs of the community and build on specific strengths, include historical context and use evaluation as an instrument of empowerment and social change	In developing tribal-specific models of well-being - consider historical context in evaluation, multiple baseline design, language changed to reflect local norms, domains measured include participation in cultural events, connectedness with extended family, tribe, and community, use of storytelling, assessment emphasizes pro-social domains such as respectful behaviour and social competence
19 Garaway (1996)	India A literacy acquisition project	To describe the evaluation approach utilizing two levels of analysis	Cross-cultural evaluation using a multiple case, replication design, mixed method	Cross-cultural, evaluation as political, limited participation	To provide for the broader perspective within the complex linguistic and cultural milieu of India and to promote fairness	The approach provided overarching cross-case answers while maintaining sensitivity to each specific cultural setting, cross-cultural evaluations in developing countries presents extreme challenges in terms of uncontrolled-for variables, cross-cultural evaluations are particularly complex politically Evaluators take on many different roles during the course of an evaluation, roles intersected with other personal identities and subject positions and affected how they understood the program and negotiated roles, roles as inherently relational
20 Harklau & Norwood (2005)	USA A summer college readiness program for African Americans, Asian Americans and Anglo youth	To look at the researcher role and reflexivity	Ethnographic evaluation, participatory	Postmodern, participatory	To illuminate the role of evaluators (looking at power dimension and subjectivities)	Ethnographic methods provide a dynamic, flexible and iterative process for evaluating the development of the intervention and ensuring cultural relevance, strengths are that they built the evaluation into the program pilot phase, developed a systematic strategy throughout, evaluation team and implementation team worked closely together Limitations include the sheer volume of data generated created time issues, difficult to collect information in natural setting and could not collect data on comparison group due to time and resource constraints
21 Hong et al (2005)	USA HIV prevention program targeting African American injection drug users	To look at a process evaluation during the pilot stage using ethnographic methods	Ethnographic process evaluation, data collection through observation, interviews	Critically informed evaluation, limited participation	Cultural relevance-to understand behaviour in context	Ethnographic methods provide a dynamic, flexible and iterative process for evaluating the development of the intervention and ensuring cultural relevance, strengths are that they built the evaluation into the program pilot phase, developed a systematic strategy throughout, evaluation team and implementation team worked closely together Limitations include the sheer volume of data generated created time issues, difficult to collect information in natural setting and could not collect data on comparison group due to time and resource constraints

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
22 Jay, Eatmon and Frierson (2005)	USA Summer Pre-Graduate Research Experience Program involving African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Rican Populations	To look at the significance of cultural context and cultural influences on the experiences of program participants	Culturally Responsive Evaluation, qualitative	Cultural responsiveness	To protect the evaluation from being seriously flawed or skewed, validity	Cultural responsiveness played a key role in all phases, provides additional measures for assessing program worth beyond the success of implementation and achievement of program goals
23 Johnson (2005)	USA Program designed to increase participation of minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education	To address how to develop evaluation strategies that are culturally responsive	Culturally relevant evaluation, participatory, purposeful sample of eight experienced evaluators	Participatory, cultural sensitivity	Need to include contextual factors in evaluation	Challenges in conducting culturally and contextually relevant evaluations include social pressures and psychometric/design concerns, political underpinnings of policy, research and practice are real yet often left unexamined
24 King, Nielson and Colby (2004)	USA Four multicultural education initiatives addressing curriculum and individual needs	To recast critical incidents as dilemmas and to highlight challenges	Participatory evaluation, culturally competent evaluation, use of multiple methods	Participatory, multicultural education and cultural competence frame for study	Participatory approach recognizes complexity and varied worldviews	Dilemmas suggest limitations 1) evaluation framing issue, 2) role of evaluation in supporting implementation, 3) evaluation use, points to need to explicitly identify stakeholder values and interests, conflict between propriety issues and feasibility and utility concerns, tension between social action and utility and feasibility concerns
25 LaFrance (2004)	USA Experiences conducting evaluations in Indian Country	To provide indigenous epistemology as a cultural foundation and to discuss methodological practices	Culturally responsive evaluation, participatory, formative evaluation	Indigenous epistemology, participatory	To establish new evaluation processes that are broad enough to accommodate and value different ways of knowing, build ownership and sense of community and contribute to high quality programs, validity and reliability	Importance of formative evaluation and the need to be evaluated within own context, value of building conceptual models with stakeholders, importance of participatory practices and evaluation capacity, challenges in doing comparative research, evaluation as knowledge creation

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
26 Laperriere (2006)	Brazil HIV prevention program for sex workers	To illustrate challenges involved in conducting evaluations in cross-cultural and highly unpredictable environments	Ethnographic and community-based approach with participation of local actors, goal-free evaluation, qualitative research framework	Participatory	Creating an evaluation relationship as a means of learning	Context imposed limits to predictability making evaluation more difficult within a western-based scientific framework, challenges included translating evaluator's intentions in a way that made sense to participants-participation necessary, cultural variations of unpredictability, noted relations of institutionalized influences and field information
27 LaPoint and Jackson (2004)	USA Family, school and community partnership program for Black students in a low-income urban high school	To discuss challenges working with community members that are marginalized by institutional barriers	Practical participatory evaluation, co-construction and evidence-based practice, PAR, followed the talent development evaluation strategy, participant observation of a case study	Participatory, empowerment	To validate soundness or trustworthiness of findings, responsiveness, cultural and contextual relevance	Significance of program activities from perspective of disenfranchised participants, tried to build on similarities between evaluators and participants in terms of race/ethnicity, experiences with cultural group, personal family background, evaluators need to obtain experience in training and professional development programs for working with marginalized groups, contextually and culturally responsive evaluation follows asset-based approach
28 Letiecq and Bailey (2004)	USA American Indian youth-based initiative to improve the quality and quantity of comprehensive, community-based programs for children, youth, and families	To conduct a culturally sensitive and appropriate cross-cultural evaluation and explore "outsider" perspective	Tribal Participatory Research models (fisher & Ball, 2002)	Social class, culture, ethnicity and race-based perspective, cross-cultural	Need to put interaction of social class, culture, ethnicity, and race at the core to minimize the effects of social inequality and oppression, outsiders must consider their place and perspective	Challenges power differentials, resistance to evaluation and buy-in, measurement considerations-who determines what is valid, reliable and accurate, ways of knowing differ, confidentiality, logical constraints, lessons learned included the need to focus on relationships, evaluation approaches don't always fit with western scientific methodology

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
29 Maciak et al (1999)	USA Partnership to prevent intimate violence against Latina women	To address the need for greater understanding of the formative stages of locally based partnerships	Community-Based Participatory Research, formative approach	Collaborative, empowerment, ecological perspective	Strengthen the ability of communities to address health concerns	Challenges in the development of partnerships included maintaining ownership in the community, lacking trust and respect, striking a balance between research and action, lacking knowledge about cultural differences, lacking funding for development activities, lessons learned included maintaining ownership and local control, developing strong and stable leadership within community, need long-term commitment, community involvement can help with understanding of history and cultural context, ensure cultural competence
30 McKenzie (1997)	Canada Child and family services programs in eight First Nations communities	To develop culturally appropriate child and family service standards in First Nations communities and to define and assess the evaluation process	Community-Based Participatory Research, focus groups followed by feedback and consultations	Participatory, empowerment, evaluation as catalyst for change, cross-cultural	Use participatory approach that recognizes importance of culture and promote mutual learning, to contribute to community empowerment	Focus groups particularly effective in eliciting meaningful dialogue and participation, culture recognized as essential, emphasis on traditional practices, time consuming process, limited resources, connection between theory and practice difficult to achieve
31 Mertens and Hopson (2006)	USA Increase participation of under-represented groups at multiple levels in science and engineering fields	Examine implications of using transformative lens and cultural competency to increase understanding of how evaluation contributes to improving outcomes	Culturally responsive evaluation and cultural competency approach	Transformative (rooted in diversity, privilege and power),	Services perceived as legitimate, acts as a pro-social change agent, shows genuine respect and is active process of becoming aware	Transformative paradigm useful theoretical construct to explore philosophical assumptions and to guide methodological choices for approach to evaluation that are inclusive, human-rights-based, democratic, constructivist, and responsive, enables looking beyond mandate of scientifically-based research
32 Nagai (2001)	Papua New Guinea Curriculum project in an elementary school in a Maiwala community	To examine the experiences of an expatriate attempting to share ownership of the research and to develop community ownership	Participatory Action research, ethnography	Collaborative	To help the community reclaim its cultural identity	She realized that the community's initial dependence upon her meant it was too radical for them to see themselves as equal and she would have to change in order to breakdown their view of her as superior, she made sure not to introduce western ideas but let them discover local principles of assessment and evaluation that made sense to them

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
33 Nelson-Barber, LaFrance, Trumbull, Aburto (2005)	USA Community-based programs in indigenous communities and educational programs in multicultural/multiethnic urban settings	To explore how cultural competence contributes to the reliability and validity of program evaluation	Culturally competent evaluation	Cross-cultural, participatory	Validity, ethical	Culture and cultural diversity impact all contexts and thus need to surface culture-based assumptions, evaluators need increased awareness of external and internal factors affecting program goals and understanding of broad political and historical context, participatory and empowerment evaluation lends itself more readily to cultural responsiveness, American mainstream practices considered baseline, power differences make it hard for members of non-dominant group to participate, need to consciously address power
34 Novins, King and Son Stone (2004)	USA Mental health services program for American Indian/Alaska Natives	To create culturally appropriate outcome measurement plans	Participatory, grantees selected own assessment approaches (measurement, informants, timelines, specific measures)	Participatory, cross-cultural	Mainstream approaches inappropriate, need to develop culturally and programmatically relevant approaches to measuring outcomes	Need to focus on strengths, need to select own outcomes, the more funders specify the use of specific outcome measures the less communities will pursue innovative approaches to measurement, importance of community level outcomes, relationship between funders and community and difficulty balancing dual evaluation needs, plan demonstrates the power funders have in shaping entire discussion (continue to mandate their own outcome measurement plans)
35 Peter et al (2003)	USA Preschool immersion program for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma	To develop a culturally responsive evaluation of a preschool language program	Culturally responsive evaluation, combination of fourth generation evaluation and empowerment evaluation	Critical theory, naturalistic inquiry, constructivist, participatory and emancipatory, cross-cultural	To be more responsive to the claims, concerns, and issues of stakeholders, more appropriate because more respectful and allows for full participation, parity and control	Enables legitimacy and helps surface diverse cultural values and perspectives, develops autonomy and ownership-makes the process uniquely Cherokee

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
36 Prilleltensky, Nelson and Valdes (2000)	Canada Smoking prevention program for Latin American immigrants	To discuss findings and implications of approach	Approach based on participatory community planning, sensitivity to cultural diversity and holistic philosophy of health, informed by PAR	Values-based approach, participatory	To help marginalized people experience personal and political empowerment, build buy-in to develop commitment to use data, foster community development	Partnership established between university researchers and community helped facilitate the evaluation, value-based partnership enabled the various partners to contribute different strengths to the project, no one party held absolute power to dictate values and principles
37 Richmond, Peterson, Betts (2008)	USA Promoting healthy relationships project for American Indian Youth	To describe how evaluation plan changed and factors influencing this change	Tribal Participatory research Model	Participatory, cross cultural, empowerment	Important to know the cultural context and recognize unique strengths of each partner b	Evaluation of American Indian programs need to be inward focused, hard for evaluators and funders to let go of preconceptions about what constitutes good research, experience was a reciprocal learning experience with all partners bringing different skills and areas of expertise, evaluator plays dual role-sometimes conflicting and ambiguous
38 Robertson, Jorgensen and Garrow (2004)	USA Community-based law enforcement program for the Oglala Lakota Nation	To describe the evaluation process as a means to mirror Lakota approach to evaluation and research	PAR, empowerment evaluation, local researchers designed and implemented evaluation	Cross-cultural, attempt to mirror Lakota approach to research and evaluation	To make the evaluation as useful as possible to the Lakota and to mirror their approach to research and evaluation (Lakota methodologies)	Situating evaluation in community builds cultural resonance and creates possibility of new data generation, process enabled community members to deepen understanding and work collectively for change, used variety of approaches to share findings, challenges included not overburdening limited capacity of community, not building funding dependency, difficulty measuring linear-based outcomes, raised possibility of social and institutional change
39 Running Wolf et al (2002)	USA Community mental health for American Indian/Alaska Native children and their families in eight tribal communities	To describe challenges and successes of tribal community in research and evaluation and the influence of historical, cultural and other factors on evaluation findings	Four primary components system level assessment, description of children served by program, assessment of service experience and longitudinal outcomes, assessment of services	Not cross-cultural, historical and cultural influences	More in line with value structure and worldviews of participants, make services more culturally appropriate	Need to understand extended family system, "wraparound process", all communities different, to help build community empowerment in evaluation, used community-based advisory committees and established a collaborative skill-building relationship with evaluation team, challenge protecting confidentiality in small communities

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
40 Ryan, Chandler and Samuels (2007)	USA Culturally responsive school-based initiatives involving four schools considered "at risk" with Native American, Latino or African-American populations	Identify and examine challenges with culturally responsive school-based evaluation	Instrumental, mixed methods case study, interviews, focus groups and quantitative document and video analysis	Culturally responsive, values-based, grounded theory	Honour cultural context in which program takes place, values diverse needs and interests and social justice, ensure power imbalances don't impact evaluation	Schools moved from a more superficial understanding of culture to a more nuanced understanding, a fact that resulted in their looking at data differently, strong on capacity building for both evaluation and culture, constraints included time and difficulties in operationalizing culture
41 Senese (2005)	USA Dine' Wellness Centre bilingual/bicultural lifelong learning program at Little Singer School	To raise questions about the relationship between evaluation and research and questions of race, culture and social class	Identified community stakeholders to understand how wellness concept framed connections with traditional Navajo spirituality, used interviews and focus groups	Cross-cultural	To create the educational experience to make the community stronger and more culturally competent	Cultural awareness necessary but not sufficient, relationship between cultural relevance and silence in evaluation concerning race in education and the culture of social class in post-industrial capitalism (see it as contradiction), confusion around notion of culture as applied to traditional ways of knowing and living and effects after a history of state-directed dispossession
42 Slaughter (1991)	USA Hawaiian language immersion program	To demonstrate the need to include cultural members on the evaluation team	Qualitative-ethnographic	Cultural sensitivity	To ensure validity, credibility and fairness	The inclusion of cultural informants can strengthen an evaluation that mediates power differences between various cultural perspectives and groups, a researcher from same cultural group brings valuable knowledge of the program context, establishes credibility and receptivity, also guards against ethnocentrism of external evaluators
43 Small, Tiwari and Huser (2006)	USA Community partnership with Hmong families with early adolescent children to enhance developmental outcomes	To explore the dynamics and challenges that non-Hmong academic evaluators experienced in cross-cultural context	Collaborative, evaluation sub-committee, mixed methods	Collaborative	To be culturally sensitive, respectful, collaborative, open-minded and flexible	In writing article realized how their privileged status led to power differences, thought they were being collaborative but their insistence on specific scientific procedures allowed for little input, also required by program funder to use an instrument that didn't fit culturally and didn't meet the standards of multicultural validity, not successful at gaining local ownership because evaluation driven externally

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
44 Stockdill, Duhon-Sells, Olson and Patton (1992)	USA Multicultural, community-based education program called Supporting Diversity in Schools	To share lessons learned about involving communities of colour in evaluation	Developmental approach	Culturally and contextually sensitive	For one of the evaluators the rationale was that evaluations of multicultural programs should model diversity themselves	Lessons learned were developed, shared and discussed and used by program staff and school partnerships for learning, lessons included need for mutual commitment for healthy partnerships, need to share a vision among partners, need stability in partnership team
45 Thomas (2004)	USA Talent Development evaluation model of school reform for students who are most often placed at risk for academic failure low-income, minority students in urban public schools	To discuss themes and conceptual framework of Talent Development evaluation model	Incorporated major tenets of participatory, responsive, deliberative, culturally competent, multicultural and inclusive	Social justice and critical perspectives,	Responsiveness to context	Four central and overlapping themes engaging stakeholders-complex and labour intensive but can minimize problems related to unequal distribution of power and status, co-construction-develop partnerships so can be more responsive to context and also involves a redistribution of power and assumption of equality among stakeholders, cultural and contextual relevance-culturally competent research best done by qualified representatives of the culture being served and if unavailable then need to find people who are understanding of culture and open to self-reflection
46 Thomas and Bellefeuille (2006)	Canada Mental health program for Aboriginal Peoples who were in residential schools	To report on findings of evaluation that utilized Aboriginal methodology	Aboriginal methodology, grounded theory, cross-cultural, qualitative interviews and focus groups to assess Aboriginal healing circle and psychotherapy technique of "focusing"	Cross-cultural, Aboriginal, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria used to assess quality of research (as cross-cultural)	Cross-cultural approach so that Aboriginal Peoples can define their own programs and interventions based on their own experiences, cultural sensitivity	Communities to decide research priorities, mental health considered within wider context of health and well-being, healing and wellness must draw on the culture for inspiration, work must reflect a commitment to social justice, a critical pedagogy of decolonialisation and a strength-based philosophy of personal, community and cultural capacity building, recognize disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal conceptions of research methodologies

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
47 Thurman, Allen & Deters (2004)	USA Mental health service model for American Indian/Alaska native children and their families	To report on evaluation process and lessons learned	Participatory evaluation, created two technical assistance teams to enable mutual learning	Cultural relevance	Lots of diversity in each community so need to develop solutions specific to local needs and that are culturally relevant	Tribes were able to put evaluation methods into more culturally relevant contexts (e.g. healing circles rather than focus groups), the more culturally relevant, the more engagement and buy-in they got, lots of information sharing across sites, planning integrated with evaluation, recognition of difference valued more than compromise, evaluation must be understood within broader framework
48 Uhl et al (2004)	USA HIV prevention intervention program for African American women	To describes challenges and benefits of involving the community in the evaluation	Collaborative process drawing from empowerment evaluation and utilization-focused evaluation, randomized control trial	Tenets from community psychology and ecological perspective, collaborative	Increase relevance and appropriateness of evaluation, respecting culture, history and local context, increase cultural sensitivity, community acceptance and relevance of project	Challenges to involving the community included time and resources, benefits included the fact that it improved the quality of the study and the value of the intervention and the evaluation, buy-in, helped build community capacity, improved participant recruitment and retention, more resources would have led to the implementation of more community suggestions
49 Voyle & Simmons (1999)	New Zealand Community development partnership with Maori population for health promotion	To discuss the formative and process evaluation	Collaborative, formative and process evaluation, committee led process	Collaborative, empowerment, self-determination	To build a partnership, empowerment, enable the right to self-determination	Key issues were trust, prioritization of health and finding appropriate research paradigms, devolution of power is essential aspect of building a successful partnership, need to find appropriate roles, need to work with cultural advisors familiar with the local community
50 White and Hermes (2005)	USA Evaluation of Hopi teachers for Hopi schools project	To use jazz as a metaphor for understanding spaces between traditional western ways and Hopi ways of knowing	Collaborative Participatory Action Research, critical race theory, qualitative approach, methodological bricolage, e.g. focus groups, reflexive autoethnography, story telling, testimonies	Cross-cultural, critical and interpretive paradigm, explore own positionality	To develop more descriptive information about how Native American evaluations are playing out	Self-reflective throughout evaluation asking questions about cultural appropriateness, methodological and epistemological humility required

Study	Context (Program and Population)	Focus	Approach	Theoretical Orientation	Rationale	Relevant Findings/Challenges
51 Willging, Helitzer and Thompson (2006)	USA Curriculum-based diabetes prevention program for urban American Indian women	To assess the cultural appropriateness of intervention and provide lessons learned	Participatory, focus groups for pilot testing	Participatory, critical self-examination of own biases and position	Given call for cultural competence-need to incorporate culture in everyday practice	Must account for broader social context, operationalization of concept of culture requires considerable flexibility to accommodate differing values, beliefs and practices, intra-cultural variation is the norm, constituent-involving strategies do not necessarily mean that it will be culturally appropriate (due to difference with intended audience), focus on culture as dynamic process and as situated within a broader social and physical context, need to assess own biases
52 Zulh and Frierson (2004)	USA Outward Bound program for African Americans	To focus on aspects of evaluation that examined the perceived influence on program effectiveness of the cultural and economic similarity of staff and program participants	Culturally responsive evaluation	Cultural responsiveness	To better take account of cultural context	The similarity of backgrounds ensures cultural competency and enables staff to relate to the students in a way that others may not have the capacity to do, program culture and climate have enormous impact on program success

### ***3.2.3 Review Strategy and Analysis***

After identifying the 52 articles selected for this study, I read each article closely several times as a way to acquire a sense of the overall literature and experiences of evaluative practice, and as a way to ascertain what I believed meaningful in the data. I prepared a one-page summary of each article, outlining program and population context, focus, approach and theoretical orientation, rationale, and findings and challenges. I then reduced each one-page summary in a matrix format (see Table 1), an exercise which facilitated a descriptive cross-case analysis and the identification of patterns, themes and atypical findings. Through my subsequent analysis and synthesis of the empirical literature and guided by my initial research questions, I was able to identify seven broad themes or categories that capture strategies, consequences, and organizing conditions and influences. Having identified emerging categories, I returned to the articles for comparative and clarification purposes, what Creswell (1998) refers to as the constant-comparative method, as a way to further refine my initial categories and validate my preliminary findings. My analysis was further guided by my conception of evaluation as a relational endeavour, as well as an ecologically situated practice. This meant that I looked specifically for inter-relationships among evaluators and stakeholders, collaborative knowledge constructions, and culturally and contextually embedded program and community interactions. The theoretical literature on culture and cultural context in evaluation further complemented my analysis.

### **3.3 Phase Two: Interviews with Scholars and Practitioners**

The second phase of my research consisted of interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners who have done substantial work in cross-cultural program evaluation.

Given that there is not a substantial literature on cross-cultural evaluation, I made the decision to interview people who have experience writing and theorizing about cross-cultural evaluation, and/or practical experience working in the field, as a way to develop a more focused and in-depth understanding of evaluation in cross-cultural contexts, to capture the empirical work done in cross-cultural evaluation in the field that has not been published in either peer reviewed journals or other scholarly publications, to develop deeper first hand interpretations of cross-cultural evaluation, and to develop a conceptual framework that illustrates the multiple and varied dimensions at play within the cross-cultural program context. Others in the field of evaluation, such as Christina Christie (2003), have also interviewed evaluation scholars in their doctoral work, as a way to foster dialogue among “experts” in the academic community and ultimately to inform the theory and practice of evaluation.

My research was designed as an emergent study intended to capture and build upon the themes and findings identified in the first phase of my study. Specifically, findings from Phase One led to the following guiding questions for this phase of my research:

1. How is culture conceptualized in the cross-cultural program context?
2. How does culture influence the cross-cultural evaluative setting?
3. What role does culture play in mediating the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in cross-cultural evaluation contexts?
4. How do relationships among evaluators and stakeholders shape evaluation processes and consequences?

### ***3.3.1 Sample Selection and Characteristics***

The evaluation scholars and practitioners who participated in the second phase of my study were selected precisely because they have published in the field and have significant experience working on evaluations in cross-cultural settings. Given the qualitative nature of my study, this purposeful sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of cross-cultural evaluators thus provided what Patton (1997) refers to as “*information-rich cases for study in depth*” (p. 169, emphasis in original). Potential participants were identified in a number of ways: through their past publications in the field, their active involvement on American Evaluation Association sub-committees (International and Cross-Cultural Evaluation or Multiethnic Issues in Evaluation) and on the Diversity Committee, and by recommendation. In total, 42 potential participants were sent an initial recruitment email and subsequent follow-up email outlining my research and defining the parameters of their involvement (see Appendix A). Email invitations were followed up by an endorsement from Professor B. Cousins. In the end, 15 evaluation scholars and practitioners from either Canada or the United States ultimately agreed to participate in a telephone interview.

While the majority of participants were university professors, others work as evaluation consultants or with Foundations or government agencies. Participants have between 15-30 years of experience working as evaluators, both nationally and internationally. A profile of participants in this phase of my study further indicates that while they were all educated professionals and many were academics, their other cultural characteristics were significantly diverse. In terms of gender, there were five men and 10

women who participated as interview participants in my study. Of these, six were White, five were African American, two were Native American, one was Hispanic, and one was East Indian. While there are likely other sides or aspects to their identities that I could not appreciate given the fact that interviews were conducted over the telephone, my sample of participants nonetheless illustrates the complexity and many intersections of identity.

### ***3.3.2 Data Collection***

To further my understanding of evaluation and of the relationships between evaluators and stakeholders in cross-cultural community-based contexts, my study consisted of interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners (see Appendix B). The initial interview data for this study was collected through one-on-one telephone interviews with 15 evaluation scholars and practitioners over a four month period, from December 2008 to March 2009. The interviews were based on in-depth, semi-structured, and open-ended questions, and lasted approximately one hour. The interview protocol was based on issues and outstanding questions identified through the comprehensive review of the empirical literature (phase one). While questions were specified ahead of time, in the spirit of qualitative research, the interviews were conversational in tone, thus enabling me to follow-up on emerging themes, categories and hunches with each subsequent interview. The interviews were audio-taped with the permission of participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

### ***3.3.3 Data Analysis***

As my study was based on an emergent design, data analysis was carried out inductively throughout the interview phase of my research. As Patton (2002) points out,

“ the fluid and emergent nature of naturalistic inquiry makes the distinction between data gathering and analysis far less absolute” (p. 436). Thus, during the transcription of each interview (which I did within two days of the scheduled interview), I made preliminary notes, and looked for “sensitizing concepts” (van den Hoonaard; 1997) as a way to focus my analysis and provide initial direction for each subsequent interview. This process of simultaneous data collection and analysis enabled me to follow-up on hunches and ideas generated in preceding interviews, and to develop tentative categories and themes for later analysis.

Once all of my interviews were completed and transcribed, my analysis consisted of reading through each transcript, making marginal notes, and identifying any reoccurring themes or emergent categories. While I initially developed a significant number of categories across all of my data, this process of analysis led me to explore relationships among and within categories, ultimately leading to the development of the five-dimensional framework as a way to sort (and make sense of) the multiple categories that I had identified. Each of the dimensions thus has associated components, or sub-themes, all of which illustrate (and provide instances of) the substantive dimension under which it is placed. Thus, guided by my initial research questions and the findings from my comprehensive literature review, my analysis of the interview data led to the development of a five-dimensional framework that illuminates the multiple interconnected dimensions that inform the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in the cross-cultural evaluation context and that influence the evaluation process from planning through to dissemination. The purpose of this framework is to provide an organizing schematic in which to illustrate the multiple dimensions and

variables involved in the cross-cultural context as a way to further our understanding of the cross-cultural approach to evaluation.

### **3.4 Phase Three: Focus Groups with Community-Based Program Managers**

The third phase of my thesis was initially designed as a case study of a community-based program evaluation, as at the time I felt that focus and analysis on a single case would further my understanding of culture and its conceptualization, as well as an understanding of relationships within the cross-cultural program context. With Phase Two well underway, I realized that to truly understand the relational side of evaluations within a cross-cultural program context, focus groups with community-based program people would provide a more complete understanding of the community perspective and would allow me to share the five-dimensional framework that was slowly emerging from my analysis of interview data. Phase Three of my research thus shifted from a case study to a focus group with program managers from community-based health and social sector organizations. While interviews in Phase Two highlighted the relational aspect of program evaluation from the perspective of the evaluator, missing was the contextual piece, the perspective of the program and the community as well as their role in the program context. My idea was to build a bridge between the evaluator and the community organization in order to better understand relationships and the factors that help and hinder cross-cultural understanding within the cross-cultural program setting. The purpose of Phase Three was thus to provide a forum for the discussion of the findings from Phase Two, as a way to better understand the community perspective within the cross-cultural program context. The following questions guided the focus groups with community-based program managers:

1. Do the dimensions and components identified in the five dimensional framework make sense?
2. Is the community perspective captured? Is there anything missing?

#### ***3.4.1 Sample Selection and Characteristics***

The community-based program managers who participated in this phase of my research were selected because of their work in community-based social or health services organizations and because they are responsible for managing or working on programs that involve diverse cultural communities. Potential participants were identified and recruited using snowball sampling (Rubin & Babbie, 2001), where previously identified community-based people suggested potential participants for the focus groups. I followed-up each lead (37 in total) with a detailed email (see Appendix C) outlining my research and offering various alternative dates, with the focus group to be held over lunch as an added incentive. In total, I held four small focus groups with a total of 16 participants. Three of the focus groups were held on the university campus, and one was held in the personal residence of one of the participants.

All of the participants in this phase of my study were university educated as well as active members in their communities. While the majority of participants were female, a number were also recent immigrants of Somali, Iraqi and Chinese origin, as well as First Nations. With the exception of the focus group composed of First Nations women, all three other focus groups held a mix of people along gender and ethnic lines.

#### ***3.4.2 Data Collection***

To further my understanding of relationships within cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts, I held a total of four separate focus groups (see Appendix D) with a

total of 16 community-based health and social sector program managers in September 2009. The focus groups were designed to better understand the community perspective within the cross-cultural program context and to facilitate a discussion about the five-dimensional framework that I had previously developed in during Phase Two of my research. With the permission of participants, focus groups were audio-taped and subsequently selectively transcribed by me. I also invited a first-year university student in Conflict Studies and Human Rights to take notes and provide me with her impressions of the focus group discussions. As such, her role was that of outside observer and note taker. Her observations are included in my analysis.

### ***3.4.3 Data Analysis***

As with Phase Two, data collection and analysis in Phase Three occurred concurrently, as each focus group led me to explore new ideas and emergent concepts. Before selectively transcribing my four focus groups, I listened to each audio-taped session a number of times, so as to develop a sense of the flow of the conversation and a sense of the content for greater clarity and understanding. As I listened, I took notes on impressions, hunches and possible themes, looking for convergence across all four focus groups (Patton, 2002). After selectively transcribing my focus groups, I read through all of the transcripts looking for common themes, as well as for contradictory or complementary observations that might add to the development of my five-dimensional framework of cultural context. While I did identify a few areas of overlap and some common themes emerged across all four focus groups, my analysis of the transcriptions led to the creation of a sixth dimension in my framework. The final framework thus

consists of six dimensions and is the result of the three interconnected phases of my research.

### **3.5 My Location as a Researcher**

In a qualitative study, the researcher is very much an integral part of all aspects of the research process, from research design through to interpretation and analysis. As Wolcott (1994) points out, “qualitative research has brought researchers back into the research setting” (p. 352). It thus becomes essential to acknowledge that as qualitative researchers, we come to the table with specific biases that circumscribe our understanding (Rogers, 2002) and limit what we see and how we see it. In what follows, I will briefly describe what draws me to cross-cultural evaluation, not theoretically (see Chapter 2), but more personally, as a woman living a privileged life in a privileged Western country.

I have long believed that despite our constitutional rights and laws, we continue to live in a systemically unequal and unjust society. This inequality and injustice takes many forms, economic, ethnic, gender, educational, sexual orientation, able/disabled, however “difference” might be categorized and defined. As such, I have been a feminist, as well as a social and political activist for all of my adult life, fighting battles far from home and those of my closer neighbours in the communities in which I live. It was only after I began graduate school that I realized the extent to which so much of our current popular and academic discourse is governed by a white, Western and male worldview. In other words, I never realized the extent to which knowledge and its subsequent construction is itself a cultural, political and social manifestation. So although I am a white, Western and educated woman, what many would consider an “outsider”, I believe

strongly that we all need to work cross-culturally, across our differences, if we are to ever build a humane and just future together.

### **3.6 Ensuring Data Quality**

As an interpretive qualitative study, I have relied upon four key strategies to address the credibility and quality of my data collection and the interpretation of my results: triangulating methods and data sources, peer review, collecting rich data, identifying researcher's position, and creating an audit trail. In what follows, I provide a brief description of each of the strategies adopted to strengthen the quality of my findings.

*Triangulation* has to do with the use of multiple data sources and methods as a way to reduce the risk of systemic biases through the use of a specific method, and as a way to provide a more complete understanding of the research issues (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005). In this three-phase study, I used multiple methods to collect my data, including a comprehensive review of the literature, interviews and focus groups. I also collected data from a range of individuals, including evaluation scholars and practitioners and program managers from community-based health and social sector organizations. In fact, program managers in Phase Three were asked to respond specifically to the five-dimensional framework of cultural context that I had developed in Phase Two, thus helping to provide validation of these prior findings.

*Rich data* has to do with the quality of the data collected, as well as well as with the use of multiple corroborating data sources (Maxwell, 2005). My study consisted of 15 hour-long telephone interviews with scholars and practitioners that were subsequently transcribed verbatim to allow for more in-depth analysis. I followed up the interviews

with four separate focus groups with 16 community-based program managers as a way to test my hypothesis and selected findings.

*Audit trail* provides for transparency in how decisions are made throughout the study, in terms of the selection of methods and the analysis of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Merriam, 2002). To capture the decisions made during the course of my research, I kept a detailed log of my ideas about data collection and analysis, conversations with colleagues that influenced changes in my thinking, as well as process decisions I made along the way. I also captured impressions and thoughts immediately after each interview and focus group. Detailing my research study in this way enabled me to keep track of why I had arrived at particular decisions, and to better understand the challenges that I experienced, all of which enabled me to better plan the next steps of my study.

*Peer review* provides an external check on the researcher to help ensure that findings are congruent with the data, to test hypothesis, and to check potential researcher biases and clarify interpretations (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Between the second and third phases of my research, I made numerous presentations (both formal and informal) to colleagues within and outside of the university of Ottawa, sharing my data collection strategy, findings and initial conceptual framework. As a result of these discussions, I clarified my conceptual framework and revised my five-dimensional framework and associated components. I also engaged a first year university student during the third phase of my research, to observe my focus groups, take notes, and provide me with a written account of her impressions about what had transpired and what participants said. After each focus group, we discussed in detail participant responses to my questions, and shared our reflections about the content of the participant discussions.

### **3.7 Summary**

In this chapter I set out the research design for all three of the emergent and interconnected phases that make up this dissertation. Phase One is a comprehensive review and analysis of the empirical research on evaluations conducted in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts. The purpose of this review is to begin mapping the territory of cross-cultural program evaluation and to learn from experiences in the field and from the diverse communities of practice. Phase Two consists of telephone interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners who have done work in cross-cultural evaluation. The purpose of this study is to develop a more focused and in-depth understanding of evaluation in cross-cultural contexts and to specifically address the themes and findings identified in Phase One. Phase Three is based on focus groups with program managers from community-based program health and social sector organizations. The purpose of phase three is to provide a forum for a discussion of my five dimensional framework developed in phase two and to better understand the community perspective in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts. The chapter concludes with a discussion of where I locate myself as a researcher.

## **Chapter 4 *Phase One* – Findings from a Survey of the Empirical Literature**

The purpose of phase one is to provide a descriptive review of the empirical literature on culture in evaluation and to learn from experiences in the field and from the diverse communities of practice and, through my analysis, further my understanding of the theory and practice of cross-cultural program evaluation. The following questions provided an initial focus to guide this review:

1. How is culture conceptualized within the evaluative program setting?
2. How is culture thought to impact the evaluation, the program and the context?
3. What rationale is given for the inclusion of culture in the evaluative strategy?
4. What methods/approaches are used to operationalize culture in the community program setting?
5. What challenges do evaluators face in conducting cross-cultural evaluation?

### **4.1 Review and Synthesis**

#### ***4.1.1 Descriptive Analysis***

While all of the studies included in this review focus on the cultural context of the evaluation, I was nonetheless able to identify over 38 different designations reflecting the specific focus of each evaluation and the role of the evaluator (e.g., cultural consistency approach, culturally sensitive approach, culturally responsive approach, culturally competent approach). At the same time, over 43 different rationales for the use of the cross-cultural approach were identified (e.g., moral and ethical obligations, validity, empowerment, utility) with many studies citing numerous, overlapping rationales. Theoretical orientations reflected the need to adopt methodologically diverse approaches (e.g., naturalistic, emancipatory, social justice, critical theory, constructivist,

anthropological, and ethnographic) to better understand the community context or to satisfy external requirements. Despite the lack of consistent terminology or evaluative approach, studies are predominantly qualitative or mixed-method, and many are what might be termed reflective case narratives of evaluator and/or stakeholder experiences with cross-cultural evaluation.

#### ***4.1.2 Research Synthesis***

Through my analysis and synthesis of the empirical literature and guided by my initial questions, I was able to identify seven broad themes or categories that capture strategies, consequences, and organizing conditions and influences. Having identified emerging categories, I used the constant-comparative method (Cresswell, 1998) to further refine my initial categories and validate my preliminary findings. The seven broad categories are: 1) use of participatory and collaborative approaches; 2) developing culturally-specific measures; 3) emergent cultural conceptualizations; 4) focus on evaluator-stakeholder relationships; 5) evaluator perspective and roles; 6) facilitating cultural understanding; and 7) methodological dissonance. While there is some overlap across categories, I believe these themes to be sufficiently unique so as to merit specific attention.

**1) Use of participatory and collaborative approaches.** Despite myriad rationales and motivations for collaboration cited in the literature (e.g., empowerment, moral obligation, reliability and validity concerns, mutual learning, and meeting community needs), I note significant variation in practice across cultural contexts. In terms of collaboration and participation, studies can be distinguished by the level and nature of stakeholder involvement, from inclusion primarily as data sources, to a deeper

form of participation in all aspects of the program evaluation. A number of studies (e.g., Fisher & Ball, 2002; LaFrance, 2004; LaPoint & Jackson, 2004; Peter et al., 2003) describe community consultation prior to the start of the evaluation as a way to build trusting relationships, discuss evaluation planning and goals, develop evaluation teams, identify community needs, verify program understanding (theory of change), and establish community ‘buy-in’. Other studies (e.g., Baizerman & Compton, 1992; Berends & Roberts, 2003) defined collaboration as a consultative process, as a way to confirm program and community understanding throughout the evaluation. Still others involved stakeholders more actively in framing questions (Butty, Reid, & LaPoint, 2004), defining the issues to be evaluated, establishing performance benchmarks and developing conclusions (Copeland-Carson, 2005), deciding upon reporting, planning and sharing of results (Peter et al., 2003), and designing evaluation instruments, collecting data, analysing and disseminating results (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Valdes, 2000; Thurman, Allen, & Deters, 2004).

A number of studies developed culturally-specific collaborative methodologies to better meet community needs and build on community strengths within historically situated contexts. For example, Fisher and Ball (2002) developed what they termed Tribal Participatory Research (TPR) designed specifically for American Indian communities. Based on the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research, TPR is focused on tribal culture and social values, and on developing a collaborative process between researchers and community members. The four principles involved in TPR-- establishing tribal oversight of the project, the use of a cultural facilitator, training and hiring community members as project staff, and using a culturally specific intervention

and assessment (Fisher & Ball, 2002; Letiecq & Bailey, 2004; Richmond, Peterson, & Betts, 2008)--are based on a “community-up” approach, with a strong focus on relationship building. Other studies (e.g. Caldwell et al., 2005; LaPoint & Jackson, 2004; Nagai, 2001; Richmond et al., 2008) used Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches to more fully situate the evaluation within the context of the community and to actively encourage community involvement and participation in the evaluation. The widespread use of collaborative approaches to advance cross-cultural evaluation found in the literature illustrates the tremendous variability across diverse cultural and community contexts.

**2) Developing culturally-specific measures.** While the use of participatory and collaborative approaches does provide the opportunity for community input on the cultural validity of instrumentation, the focus on instrument development itself is often assumed, and thus remains under-described. A number of studies (e.g., Alkon, Tschann, Ruane, Wolff, & Hittner, 2001; Butty et al., 2004; Coppens, Page, & Chan Thou, 2006; Small, Tiwari, & Huser, 2006) underscored the need to ensure that data collection instruments had been validated with a specific population, as standardized instruments do not necessarily have conceptual or measurement equivalence, making it difficult to interpret the data for specific ethnic groups (Alkon et al., 2001). While a number of authors described engaging in extensive consultations with the community or hiring cultural translators as a way to ensure culturally validated instruments (e.g., Bevan-Brown, 2001; Letiecq & Bailey, 2004), others described the process of creating instruments to capture both the informal and conversational style of participants

(Prilleltensky et al., 2000), and some focused on developing culturally appropriate form, language and content (Butty et al., 2004).

A number of studies also noted that culturally-validated measures extend beyond the language and the words, to include communication styles, local norms, and local context (Clayson et al., 2002; Coppens et al., 2006; Fisher and Ball, 2002). Alkon et al. (2002), for example, initially developed criteria for selecting instruments and for validating instruments through consultations with diverse research staff and community members. It was only after they had hired translators for the instruments that they realized that merely translating instruments does not ensure conceptual equivalence. Similarly, Coppens et al. (2006) describe the process of revising the main instruments so that they would be more culturally sound, only to discover during the evaluation that the concepts and terminology were not perceived in the same way by everyone. As Clayson et al. (2002) succinctly conclude, “translation without contextualization can lead to miscommunication” (p. 39). Other studies noted similar problems with the use of standardized measures and procedures required by funding agencies across all program contexts (Clayson et al., 2002; Coppens et al., 2006; Small et al., 2006). In addition to frustration experienced by evaluators, the use of standardized measures and instruments was thought to have a deleterious impact on the quality and validity of the data, as well as relationships between evaluators and the program community, ultimately making it more difficult to build local ownership (Small et al., 2006).

**3) Emergent cultural conceptualizations.** While many of the studies did not define culture as a specific concept, all did describe culture from the emic perspective, drawing upon the community of interest to define and describe locally meaningful

constructs and interpretations of findings (e.g., Jay, Eatmon, & Frierson, 2005; LaFrance, 2004; Robertson, Jorgensen, & Garrow, 2004). Many of these studies limited their description of culture to the program community, with evaluative efforts focused on involving the community in asset-based approaches to building community capacity. As such, there was considerable discussion about the program and the program context within the cultural milieu, all of which enabled a vibrant description of the culture and cultural context of the program and the evaluation.

Over half of the studies considered culture from a much broader social and political perspective, requiring that evaluators develop increased awareness of both internal and external factors that potentially impact program goals (e.g., Cervantes & Pena, 1998; Thomas & Bellefeuille, 2006; Willging et al., 2006). Within these studies, the cultural context of the program is conceptualized as the “totality of the environment in which a program takes place” (Butty et al., 2004, p. 38), an environment that includes geographic location, timing, political and social climate, and economic conditions. Other studies, particularly those conducted within Aboriginal communities, require an understanding of the specific community as well as an appreciation of the historical interconnectivity with the broader community, specifically in terms of the history of exploitation and colonialization between Aboriginal communities and the dominant culture (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007). As Letiecq and Bailey (2004) note, outside researchers “must consider their place and perspective when conducting cross-cultural evaluation research with tribal nations” (p. 344), a point that is particularly salient in communities where the historical, social and political factors that created the original conditions persist.

Over half of the studies also considered culture as something that evaluators themselves possess and that is worth exploring, both in terms of their own cultural and social predispositions, and in terms of the biases of their research and the evaluative methodologies that they use in the field (e.g., Copeland-Carson, 2005; Harklau & Norwood, 2005; Mertens & Hopson, 2006; Nagai, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Voyle & Simmons, 1999). Many thus explicitly recognize that as social researchers, we come to the table with specific biases that operate “as both windows and blinders, giving us different perspectives, while simultaneously obscuring our ability to perceive in terms other than our own” (Caldwell et al., 2005, p. 2). In one of the studies, it was the process of writing the research paper itself that made the authors aware of their own privileged status and led them to a better understanding of how these differences played out in the field (Small et al., 2006).

Slightly more than half of the studies also noted that culture informs the traditional processes and practices of academic knowledge, as it typically emerges from a white, western and male worldview (Small et al., 2006), what others have referred to as the “master’s tools” (White & Hermes, 2005). As Mertens and Hopson (2006) ask, “what is hidden in the mandate of scientifically-based research and use of ‘reliable’ and ‘valid’ standardized tests” (p. 43)? While many of these studies were specifically concerned with the application of culturally appropriate measurement instruments (e.g., Cervantes & Pena, 1998; Fisher & Ball, 2002; Robertson et al., 2004), others, noting House (1993), understood evaluation as a form of cultural authority itself, with its own agenda and associated values (Garaway, 1996). The literature thus provides a significant range and breadth of perspectives about the concepts of culture and cultural context, from

those that limit culture to an understanding of the program and participants, to others that situate the program and its context within a broad cultural, political and social framework that informs the evaluator and the methodological choices.

**4) Focus on evaluator-stakeholder relationships.** The majority of the studies included in my review discussed the need to spend time building relationships and authentic partnerships with community members as a way to build trust and mutual understanding (Alkon et al., 2001; Caldwell et al., 2005), to be more responsive to cultural context (Jay et al., 2005), and attend to the multifaceted challenges of diversity (Thomas, 2004). A participatory approach, with evaluators working jointly with diverse stakeholders, was thus seen as a way to address these issues and give everyone a voice (King, Nielson & Colby, 2004), encourage dialogue (Nagai, 2001), mitigate power differences (Thomas, 2004), and ultimately address fundamental differences among participants (Johnson, 2005). While acknowledging the difficulty in such an endeavour, researchers felt that their position as outside researchers necessitated spending the time to build relationships, as it could determine the success or failure of the evaluation (Leticq & Bailey, 2004; Prilleltensky et al., 2000). Others felt that active relationships among evaluators and stakeholders would promote skill-building (Running Wolf et al., 2002) and mutual learning (Anderson-Draper, 2006; McKenzie, 1997; Richmond et al., 2008). Others observed that partnerships would facilitate the evaluation and enable the various partners to contribute different strengths, thus ensuring that no one person would hold the absolute power to dictate values and principles (Prilleltensky et al., 2000). Some researchers thus felt that inclusion could help mitigate the challenges associated with

unequal distributions of power and privilege (Nelson-Barber et al., 2005; Small et al., 2006; Voyle & Simmons, 1999).

One of the more common challenges cited in building relationships within a cross-cultural setting was the labour-intensive and time-consuming nature of the task, as epistemological, communication, cultural and power differences continued to surface (Alkon et al., 2001; Ryan et al., 2007; Thomas, 2004). As Letiecq and Bailey (2004) further explain:

Perhaps because of one's outsider position, cross-cultural evaluation work demands allotting significant amounts of time up front to developing trust, relationships and feelings of safety regarding knowledge exchange. Such work also requires time to understand the dynamics of difference that emerge when the non-native evaluator and native colleagues share different cultural ways of knowing, which can lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. (p. 353)

To mitigate misunderstandings and to become more familiar with the cultural context of the community, a number of studies (Running Wolf et al., 2002; Thomas, 2004) noted the need to spend informal time in the community, attending events and getting involved in the life of the community. A number of studies also discussed the difficulty of building trusting relationships between people who do not share similar positions of power, status, and privilege (e.g. Baizerman & Compton, 1992; Harklau & Norwood, 2005; Novins, King, & Son Stone, 2004; Ryan et al., 2007; Voyle & Simmons, 1999), a fact that becomes particularly significant in diverse communities or communities with a history of exploitation and disempowerment. As Small et al. (2006) explain, "it may not be comfortable or easy for indigenous staff to assure a relational style that requires them to

be assertive and act as equals with people they perceive to be of higher social status” (p. 362). A number of studies also noted further challenges balancing the needs of program funders and the program community (Novins et al., 2004; Richmond et al., 2008).

**5) Evaluator perspective and roles.** The vast majority of the studies that discussed relationships between evaluators and stakeholders also discussed the role of the evaluator in the cross-cultural encounter. The characterization of role in the literature, beyond a general descriptions of activities and process functions (such as facilitator, coach, educator, and critical friend), involves a more contextualized and relational approach to the ‘performance’ of evaluation. Some noted that their roles as evaluators were shaped within the parameters of a particular historical and cultural context (Clayson et al., 2002), while others noted how their roles as evaluators were intertwined with relations of power involving societal and political discourses (Harklau & Norwood, 2005). A number of studies further described the need to find a balance between more than one role (Anderson-Draper, 2006), a feat requiring negotiation (Barnes, 2000; Harklau & Norwood, 2005) and flexibility (Butty et al., 2004; Cooper & Christie, 2005), as roles are constantly being reshaped and transformed throughout the evaluative process (Clayson et al., 2002; Harklau & Norwood, 2005).

**6) Facilitating cultural understanding.** More than half of all studies included in my review created boundary spanning<sup>2</sup> roles to provide a “bridge” between external evaluators and the community in order to facilitate cultural and contextual understanding. Though roles differed significantly across contexts, I observed in the boundary spanning

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<sup>2</sup> The term “boundary spanning” is used in organizational psychology and organizational sociology to refer to the process of engagement between two or more cultural settings, with people filling intermediary roles between two cultural groups, across cultural boundaries, in order to bridge cultural or language differences between diverse settings (Heskin & Heffner, 1987; Kelly, Azelton, Burzette, & Mock, 1994).

any person or group who plays an intermediary bridging function, including cultural facilitators, trained research assistants from the community, evaluators who share similar ethnicity with program participants, and advisory committees. Boundary spanning processes were used as a way to increase cultural sensitivity (Prilleltensky et al., 2000), provide access to the community (Fisher & Ball, 2002), and strengthen the relationship between external evaluators and community-based stakeholders (Running Wolf et al., 2002). A number of studies (e.g. Letiecq & Bailey, 2004; Richmond et al., 2008; Slaughter, 1991) hired “cultural facilitators” or “community consultants” to play an intermediary function between external evaluators and the community to ensure more complete social and historical knowledge of the context and of the program. As Slaughter (1991) explains, “the inclusion of cultural informants on the evaluation team strengthens an evaluation that must mediate concerns and power between various cultural perspectives and groups” (p. 149). Slaughter (1991) further argues that use of a cultural informant helps guard against ethnocentrism and increases the validity and credibility of the evaluation. Copeland-Carson (2005) likened the use of cultural facilitators to the adoption of key informants in anthropology who provide field workers with valuable information about the local cultural context.

A number of other studies argued that ‘culturally competent’ evaluation is best done by evaluators who share the same ethnic and cultural identity as community members (e.g., Bevan-Brown, 2001; Zulli & Frierson, 2004). As Prilleltensky et al. (2000) explain:

The matching of the background of the investigator and the participants meant that they shared a common language and some common cultural experiences and

values. A person from outside of this community would need to go through a much more prolonged period of entry to gain the trust of this community...[as such] the principle investigator was able to serve a “bridging function”. (p. 110)

Other studies have argued that hiring evaluators from similar ethnic groups lessens the possibility of misinterpretation and miscommunication (Bevan-Brown, 2001), provides increased sensitivity and awareness to the reality of community members (Butty et al., 2004), ensures cultural competency and enables greater understanding between stakeholders (Zulli & Frierson, 2004), and ensures that evaluators would “truly hear and understand what [is] being said” (Jay et al., 2005, p. 206). It was noted, however, that ethnic group membership aside, their roles as university researchers compromised their insider status (Nagai, 2001; White & Hermes, 2005).

I observed in some studies (e.g., Alkon et al., 2001; Caldwell et al., 2005; Prilleltensky et al., 2000; Uhl, Robinson, Westover, Bockting, & Cherry-Porter, 2004) that evaluators hired and trained local community members in evaluation and data gathering techniques, as they believed it would increase acceptance of evaluation findings, improve the quality and practical value of the research, build community capacity and development, and help with understanding cultural norms. Still others (e.g., Fisher & Ball, 2002; King et al. 2004; Maciak et al., 1999; McKenzie, 1997) created advisory or steering committees composed of diverse stakeholder groups to build an active partnership based on joint construction of findings and to increase cultural relevancy.

**7) Methodological dissonance.** A number of the studies in my sample discussed the difficulty of using predetermined or standardized measures, outcome indicators and

instruments to evaluate programs in culturally diverse communities, as they can conflict with localized community and culturally-specific practices. The 21 studies located in Aboriginal/Indigenous communities, for example, all underscore the need to build culturally specific and locally meaningful constructs (Caldwell et al., 2005) that are based on indigenous epistemology and methodologies and that are firmly grounded in the community. While localized cultural specificity is a hallmark of cross-cultural evaluation, however, it can nonetheless fundamentally challenge Western-based notions about what is accurate, valid and reliable evaluation research (Letiecq & Bailey, 2004).

A number of studies (e.g., Clayson et al., 2002; Coppens et al., 2006; Novins et al., 2004; Small et al., 2006) thus describe the challenges they experienced in developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches and strategies to accommodate diverse stakeholder values, beliefs and practices. As Clayson et al., (2002) explain, “often funders were locked into particular concepts that they regarded as relevant for all contexts and communities; and it was difficult to convince them otherwise” (p. 39). Small et al. (2006) also describe a similar challenge, where they were required to adopt the use of a culturally inappropriate evaluation instrument. Although negotiations with the federal funder ultimately led to the modification of a few questions, the instrument nonetheless failed to meet the standards of multicultural validity (Kirkhart, 1995). Other studies noted the need to find a balance between science-based methodological perspectives and more politicized approaches (Thomas, 2004), going so far as to translate anthropological and empowerment concepts into language that the funder could understand (Copeland-Carson, 2005). Still others (White & Hermes, 2005), out of a concern for approaching evaluation with the “master’s tools” and the words of a “father’s

tongue”, for example, approached evaluation with a jazz metaphor as a way to negotiate and create a space between Western and indigenous ways of knowing.

## **4.2 Summary**

In this chapter I provided a descriptive review of the empirical literature on culture in evaluation, as a way to learn from experiences in the field and from the diverse communities of practice, and to ultimately inform phase two. Through my analysis and synthesis of the 52 articles, I identified seven broad themes or categories that I believe capture strategies, consequences, and organizing conditions and influences: 1) use of participatory and collaborative approaches; 2) developing culturally-specific measures; 3) emergent cultural conceptualizations; 4) focus on evaluator-stakeholder relationships; 5) evaluator perspective and roles; 6) facilitating cultural understanding; and 7) methodological dissonance. While some overlap exists among themes, each of them together capture the dynamic range and multiple manifestations of culture in the cross-cultural evaluation literature selected for review. At the same time, each of the themes foreshadow potential areas of further study and exploration, while highlighting areas that may require further conceptual clarity. For example, what does it mean to conduct a collaborative or participatory evaluation in typically disempowered communities? Moreover, given the range of definitions of culture found in the literature, how do these definitions of culture influence evaluation practices? Ultimately, how does culture matter when conducting evaluations in diverse cultural communities?

## Chapter 5 *Phase Two* – Findings from Interviews with Evaluation Scholars and Practitioners

The purpose of this chapter is to set out the findings from the telephone interviews that I conducted with evaluation scholars and practitioners. Through the analysis of my findings (from the literature review and interviews with scholars and practitioners) a five-dimensional framework emerged that illuminates the multiple interconnected dimensions that my findings suggest inform the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in the cross-cultural evaluation context, and that influence the evaluation process from planning through to dissemination. This five-dimensional framework will be used as a way to organize and re-present my findings throughout this chapter.

The dimensions of cross-cultural context (relational, ecological, methodological, organizational, and personal) identified in this framework can be visualized as multi-textual, intersecting and overlapping circles that interweave throughout the evaluation and that are constantly at work (and in flux), creating boundaries, positions and possibilities within the cross-cultural program and evaluation context.

*Table 2. Five Dimensions of Cultural Context*

Relational	Ecological	Methodological	Organizational	Personal (Evaluator)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identity (insider/outsider)</li> <li>• roles</li> <li>• understanding &amp; listening</li> <li>• boundary spanning</li> <li>• long term engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural &amp; contextual clarity</li> <li>• community history &amp; culture</li> <li>• broad social &amp; historical climate</li> <li>• prior community experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• validity</li> <li>• inclusion</li> <li>• method &amp; instrument selection</li> <li>• cultural in/commensurability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time &amp; resources</li> <li>• information &amp; program needs</li> <li>• policies &amp; agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-awareness &amp; reflexivity</li> <li>• values</li> <li>• openness &amp; learning</li> <li>• evaluator culture &amp; social location</li> </ul>

It should be noted that the five dimensional framework is the result of Phase One (a comprehensive literature review) as well as from the analysis of the findings from Phase Two, telephone interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners. As such, the framework is intended to address four primary research questions:

- 1) How is culture conceptualized in the cross-cultural program context?
- 2) How does culture (and differing conceptions of culture) influence the cross-cultural evaluative setting?
- 3) What role does culture play in mediating the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in cross-cultural evaluation contexts?
- 4) How do relationships among evaluators and stakeholders shape evaluation processes and consequences?

To address these questions, the five-dimensions of cultural context described in this chapter are intended to be considered as an inter-related whole. The *relational* dimension depicts the components that emerge in the interaction between evaluators and stakeholders. The *ecological* dimension takes into account the interaction between the cultural, historical and social climate surrounding the specific program and community cultural context. The *methodological* dimension refers to the theories that inform the program and the evaluation, guiding evaluators in their work and influencing the methods and instruments selected to collect data and analyze results. The *organizational* dimension refers to the parameters imposed on the program and evaluation (and subsequently on relationships between evaluators and stakeholders) by program sponsors or funding agencies. The *personal* dimension depicts the more subjective qualities that inform evaluators and help guide their work. In what follows, I will provide a brief

descriptive overview of each dimension of the cross-cultural context, including related criteria associated with each dimension, followed by the selected findings from my interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners. The five-dimensional framework will thus provide an organizing framework in which to relate my telephone interview findings.

### **5.1 Relational: Ongoing Interactions and Enactments**

The relational dimension<sup>3</sup> is grounded in a social constructivist epistemology, where the knowledge that emerges through the evaluation process is itself considered a product of the interaction between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The other critical component of this dimension comes from a hermeneutical approach to understanding that is participative and dialogic (Schwandt, 2000; Widdershoven, 2001), requiring that we are open and willing to engage in what Gadamer (1989) refers to as a “fusion of horizons”, where our differences are seen not as an obstacle but as a path to greater understanding. Role, self and identity are all relational constructs that are discursively enacted throughout the evaluator and stakeholder encounter (Schwandt, 2002). In the cross-cultural program evaluation context, this encounter occurs across cultural, class, gender and racial divides and across political, economic and social histories that are saturated with unequal status, power and privilege. Boundary spanning thus provides a “bridge” between the evaluator and the stakeholder community as a way to facilitate cultural and contextual understanding. Understanding and listening are also considered key relational dimensions in cross-cultural contexts, as evaluators strive to move towards more trusting, respectful and open relationships. Relationships are also

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<sup>3</sup> This dimension is intended as distinct from the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders, as it is intended to describe the characteristics that are created within the relationship itself, which in turn inform the interaction between evaluators and stakeholders.

influenced by any prior history between the research community and the cultural community itself, a history of exploitation that can be partially mitigated by spending time becoming acquainted with, and learning about the community of interest (Israel et al., 1998; Trickett & Espino, 2004).

The relational dimension, along with its associated criteria, is intended to provide a sense of continued dialogue between self and others (evaluator and stakeholders), between who we are as we enter the field, and who we become through our dynamic relational engagement in the field. This dialogic process of coming to know self and others becomes fundamental to our understanding of what it means to build relationships over time in cross-cultural settings. A key variable within the relational dimension is *identity* (and *insider/outsider* status), as findings from my telephone interviews suggest that the insider/outsider binary neglects the interactive process involved in the creation of identities, thus challenging the fixed categories that we create in the field. As interview participants argued, it is not always self-evident who is in or out, as it depends not only on how you see yourself, and how others see you, but also on how you think others see you as well. According to one of the participants:

I see myself as a member of this cultural group, so in some cases there could be a clearer definition of who's a member and who's not, and in other cases more of a sense of acceptance by a group of people that you're a member of that group without any real consideration of what it takes to become a member of that group.

For many participants, the insider/outsider concept was conceptualized along a continuum of cultural dimensions (rather than as a dichotomy), highlighting the multifaceted and shifting nature of identity over time, as relationships are developed and

sustained within the cross-cultural program context. Others noted that the heterogeneity and intra-cultural variability within groups obfuscates the insider/outsider binary, a point that further challenges assumptions that we might make in the field. As one of the interview participants relates:

...there were so many groups within a Black culture that we couldn't even call it African American, because you had people from the West Indies, people from Ghana, there was a huge Rwandan population in there, it was just insane, and so people don't think about that about Black culture, that it cuts across so many areas...

Participants also noted the multi-layered complexity of identity, as factors such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, etc., intersect, shift and evolve over time. For one of the participants, identity is a powerfully nuanced and provocative concept:

I see [identity] as very multifaceted and colourful. I picture it as very colourful, with shades and nuances of meaning taken from different intersections, and where a particular identification itself, like we may be both heterosexual but it takes on different meaning depending upon what's next to it. If you're heterosexual but your brother is gay, you're going to take it different than a heterosexual from a fundamentalist Christian perspective...

Others remarked upon identity as a concept that is not fixed and etched in time, but as mutable and can shift depending upon the context. As one participant explained:

...the whole idea that each of us is majority minority in respect to something and that these identifications change too. You can use age, for example, you know we

are all going to move through it, and at any one point we may be in a minority or a majority age group, and with different meanings depending upon how that intersects others. Or social class may change certainly up or down...

While these findings raise important questions about the construction of identity and about our pre-conceptions about cultural communities, they also highlight the contextual dimension of culture and the formation of identity. As one participant explained, “part of the challenge is figuring out when something is salient in the evaluation context, so when is it meaningful, and then what do you call it? Because often it’s social-economic rather than racial or ethnic, often it’s gender rather than racial or ethnic”.

Others noted that despite shared ethnicity, other cultural identities or markers were of greater importance in the program context. According to one of the [African American] participants:

...we went to Trenton and we said, okay, everyone is African American, so we ought to be fine. Well we just had so many issues. We had to backtrack a little because my colleague and I had never spent much time in Trenton, and there’s a whole Trentonian culture, and then there was socio-economic status, and then there was the Jersey culture, and the central Jersey culture. I mean, it just went on and on and on, and we just went, we weren’t any more connected to that group than anybody else was because we just didn’t share, once they started cutting it across things, we didn’t share anything. Absolutely nothing.

Another participant, concerned that she did not share an ethnic background with participants, noted that:

...when I began my work in Arizona, I was very concerned that I didn't speak Spanish and this was a bilingual program...it was interesting to me what they considered a match that bonded them with me. They were at first very skeptical about me because my by-line said I was from New York, but when they found out that I was actually from...California, and I said to them that I grew up just down the road from you...and then they were like, oh okay, so now we get you because you're really not one of those East Coast persons, you're a West Coast person like us.

The experiences that these participants shared underscore the need to be mindful of assumptions that we might make and to clarify which factors of identity, which cultural markers are important within a particular context or setting, and which will influence how we approach our work within a particular community. One of the participants used the following analogy to describe the contextualized meaning of identity:

Back in the day, we used IBM selectric typewriters, and the way the IBM selectric worked was that there was this little ball that had all the letters of the alphabet and all the characters that one would use, and when you hit a key, the ball would spin to the appropriate place and strike the page, and that's how the letters were made. And so what I describe for my students is that our identities are like that ball on that typewriter, and sometimes different aspects of our identity are pulled to the front because that's what happens to be what is important or salient in that particular environment. So sometimes I'm more aware of my maleness,

sometimes I'm more aware of my ethnicity, other times I'm more aware of my age, other times more aware of my social economic standing. So the setting that I'm in causes me to focus on and respond from a different aspect of my identity.

The notion of interlocking and intersecting identities, of determining what is salient within a specific context, leads to questions about who we are in the field, and to what our *role* as evaluator is or can be within diverse community settings. My findings suggest that an evaluator's role in the cross-cultural setting is contextual, dynamic, multiple, and engaged, helping to shape relationships and build understanding among stakeholders (including both program sponsors and communities) as the evaluation unfolds. Participants described the need to sort through different relationships among the different people and between stakeholder groups (and between evaluation teams and communities) within the cross-cultural evaluative setting in order to determine their role within that specific setting. As one of the participants noted, "evaluators end up having to suss out what the relationships are among the stakeholders, who they are, what their cultures are, how they interact with what the power relationships are." For others, the navigation among multiple (and often competing) stakeholders was characterized as "a difficult dance".

Participants thus described their role as multifaceted, requiring that they act as both advocates for the process and for the communities, and as educators to build program, evaluation and cultural understanding among stakeholder groups. According to one of the participants:

The word that I use most frequently to describe the role of the evaluator in relationship is provocateur, someone who raises questions, who challenges the

status quo...you want to make sure that there is fair representation and participation amongst all of the important stakeholders.

Others describe their role as educators, requiring that they play multiple, often conflicting roles with sponsors and communities as a way to ensure mutual understanding. For one of the participants, the evaluator's role requires finding a middle ground so that both sponsors and community members get what they need out of the evaluation. Another participant describes the evaluator as working across cultural boundaries, in a role that requires "mediation of a lot of misunderstandings and helping people to understand what the assumptions are and all of that kind of stuff". As another participant commented, "you have to make sure that everybody is on the same page...about the purpose of the evaluation and what they hope to get from the evaluation...you have to navigate both sides of the fence". Evaluators thus play a dual, and often conflicting role depending upon the complexity of the program setting, educating sponsors and community members and ensuring mutual understanding, what some refer to as a "juggling act" and "schizophrenic".

While participants noted the need to advocate for, and educate the community in terms of evaluation processes and client needs, others put more direct emphasis on "schooling the client" in the cultural mores of the community and on "being more sensitive to what culturally responsive evaluation requires". As one of the participants explained:

I have found that the major role of the evaluator is to try to help the funder understand. You're almost like a cultural liaison between the funder and the project director of the funding organization and then the community itself,

because misunderstandings occur...then the evaluator has to walk a tightrope of gathering data that the funder requires and also looking for the outcomes that the community is more interested in.

Another participant argued:

...part of the process could be to educate the sponsor in the sense of saying that I can report to you how the program looks through the lens that you use, or I can report to you how the program looks through the people that are supposed to benefit from the program, or I can give you a sense of both. So negotiate with the sponsor, helping them understand that there are these different viewpoints and vantage points...

Another participant also stated that:

I think you also have to have an approach where you help [the client] understand what you bring to the table and the tools and give them ideas for different ways of thinking about things that might not fit with their current cultural thinking...

The evaluator's role thus becomes one of education and facilitation to ensure cultural understanding, as well as advocacy for the cultural responsiveness of the evaluation approach within the specific cultural context.

Other participants used metaphors to describe their roles in the cross-cultural program setting. According to one participant:

...doing evaluation is like painting a picture, a picture that everyone sees something of themselves and what's important there. And you keep revising the picture until the people all around you say is this it, and until you find that they say yeah, that's kind of it.

Another participant described their role as “a storyteller for folks...being able to accurately tell the story...[and] to tell the story that matters to the community itself”. Within cross-cultural program settings, the role of the evaluator, beyond descriptive statements (such as advocate, teacher, facilitator, devil’s advocate, critical friend), assumes a more engaged and contextually-based performance, where developing relationships and engendering understanding among stakeholders becomes paramount to the evaluation process, and to the information that is collected and disseminated to the broader program community. As one of the participant’s concluded:

I don’t think we have a role other than that we walk into a situation that has culture in it, multiple cultures in it, we have culture ourselves and we need to sort through all those things. Our role is to be sensitive and to understand how this has some sort of influence where we’re asked to be an evaluator in and how that influence should influence our way of thinking about how we’re going to do that evaluation.

The other key components within the relational dimension, *understanding and listening*, are tied to the evaluator role(s) and involve bridging understanding between self and stakeholders and amongst stakeholders themselves, all essential skills within cross-cultural program settings. Participants discussed that as evaluators working within diverse cultural and community contexts, understanding and listening is essential, not only relationally in terms of establishing mutual respect, but also in terms of the evaluation itself, as it provides contextual and cultural grounding as to what is salient

within a particular setting. As one of the participants noted:

...you'll see more and have a deeper understanding, you won't miss things as much. You'll be open to different ideas, different approaches, and ultimately different results. I think what it does is makes you very practical in the sense that you really have to be a good listener, you have to be open to what people are saying and try to see things that will broaden your perspective.

Participants argue that how we enter a community, and how we listen, sets the stage for the evaluation itself. As one of the participants explained:

What I recommend is that evaluators enter the setting more gently, with the idea that they need to understand what the setting is, and not to assume that they know. And by doing that they make fewer mistakes and turn fewer people off, and have a better chance of actually seeing things from the perspective of the people who are actually living it every day.

Another participant introduced the idea of “front loading”, where you do a lot of work upfront in terms of learning about the culture, talking to people and getting to know the community, before you actually begin the evaluation.

My findings also suggest that participants engage with what they term “cultural facilitators” or “cultural translators” as a way to build a bridge between themselves and the program community, what I have termed “*boundary spanning*” (see Chapter 4). Evaluators working in cross-cultural contexts recognize that they do not have all of the necessary knowledge or understanding to work effectively within diverse settings without developing relationships with someone (or others) from within the community. As one of

the participants explained:

You need those cultural translators. You really do because it's kind of like I've used the example on occasion that sometimes you can be in a setting in a room and notice that something is going on and information is being translated and you just don't know what it is. And the issue is that as evaluators or researchers oftentimes, we're too afraid to ask somebody. What did I miss?

Another participant pointed out:

I think that the main thing is to know what they consider important, what would they consider to be indicative of program success, how would they know the program is working. I think in most of those cultures you really need to have elders involved, that you would run things by them and get their input and it may not even sound as if you're getting it there, may not even seem as if you're on the same topic, but it eventually comes around to that.

A number of participants also noted that despite the fact that they themselves might share similar ethnicity with the community, they still do not possess the contextual understanding about the community and about the program setting. As one of the participants admitted:

Even though I am Black, I would not presume to know, to be able to go into a Caribbean country or environment and be able to understand all of the cultural nuances there. No way. Yes, you know looking like, say if I went to Jamaica, looking like folks there would open doors for me, but I would still need help in navigating all that, and being able to understand what I'm seeing. So I would look at culturally responsive evaluation as a way of saying there are several different

layers here that you may not be able to understand, but together we may be able to understand them.

There is also the issue of which cultural facilitators to engage with, who speaks for whom within the community. As one of the participants explained:

There are leaders in the community who have been leaders for a long time and then they are assimilated, they are successful, and they often act as the voice of the Hispanic community...but they don't really represent the immigrants, the newcomers. I mean, what does it mean to be the same ethnicity but they've had very different experiences...how do you know that you've got the right person, how do you figure that out?

Others noted the need to identify more than one cultural facilitator so as to get a range of perspectives about what is going on in the community, while others expressed concern with power issues that might arise if only one key informant were used throughout the evaluation. A number of participants discussed the use of advisory boards as a way to ensure the diversity of the community (and different voices) would be represented in the evaluation.

Many interview participants also discussed the need to spend time in the community, building relationships with community members and developing a level of comfort and familiarity as a way to engender trust and openness, what many refer to as *long term engagement*. For many, the need to build relationships with community members is paramount in cross-cultural contexts, as it helps develop understanding and

ultimately ensures more valid and accurate findings. As one of the participants explained:

If you have not spent time, and that's why I always talk about shared lived experience, for you to understand what those reference points mean, what those cultural signals are, then how can you expect to accurately capture if something is working or not, or why.

Another participant bemoaned that she “always felt too far removed from the community to get it right and to have a feeling that [she] was actually in touch with what their issues were”. As she explained, she doesn't believe that “you can build the relationships you need quickly no matter who you are, so [she] doesn't like to parachute in as an evaluator”.

Participants thus made a distinction between evaluations where evaluators “fly in and fly out” of a community, gather their findings and quickly leave, without building the requisite relationships, and those evaluations where evaluators enter a community and over time develop relationships with people in the community, what one participant referred to as “dating before marriage”. As this same participant explained:

In the Chinese Korean community we were brought together by a woman who is a leader of a coalition of Asian Pacific Islanders...[she] actually pulled us together for a meeting to get to know each other and we, for three years, actually went through what I call the dating process. We got to know each other just personally, and then I got to know more about what they were doing and they got to know more about what my team was doing.

For many participants, long term engagement and relationship building means being present in the community beyond when the evaluation takes place. When asked at what point they leave the community, one of the participants responded:

I don't leave, that's the point. One of the issues is that I make a commitment to that community, to that setting...And so, I'm not going away. So that's fundamental. If we're talking about the notion of as soon as the evaluation project is over then I'm not likely going to be there, well I think that, in terms of the kinds of work we're talking about, you can't do that.

As one of the other participants explained:

...if you keep showing up and you attend things in the community besides things directly related to the grant, then they just see you around at the local restaurant and you can chat informally with people and they start to get used to you and you start to build a relationship, to ask about their children or about their grandmother, and you can share with them about your grandmother or whatever it is.

Another participant first develops connections with community groups or with someone in the community, helping them write grants for program funding, so that once the evaluation begins, they already know who she is and know that they can trust her.

Another participant moved her office into the middle of the community, so that they could see her, get to know her, and approach her if the need arose.

## **5.2 Ecological: Multiple Contextual and Cultural Inter-Connections**

The ecological dimension highlights the levels and types of interactions and influencing factors as a way to understand the specificities of the relational connections, contextual conditions and circumstances found in the community. All communities are

considered to have multi-layered and multi-textual cultural characteristics and dynamics, a local ecology (Kelly, 2006) that necessarily informs our understanding of the complexity and patterns of human relations within a particular context. The ecological dimension thus reflects the diverse characteristics and dynamics of culture and of the community, embedding culture within a larger, fundamentally interconnected social system that is composed of a “hierarchy of social forces” (Guzman, 2003, p. 174). These social forces interweave throughout the evaluation, highlighting the multiple levels of influence, from the local to the social, historical and political influences within the community.

Cross-cultural research and evaluation requires a contextualized understanding of the multiple factors that shape the program and the community in which the evaluation occurs. The ecological dimension depicts the location of culture, as well as the context in which it is to be understood, thus providing, in essence, a conceptual bridge between culture and context, two terms that have particular significance in the cross-cultural literature. The ecological perspective frames the evaluation setting as inter-related cultural and contextual components, underscoring the need for an understanding of the various cultural and contextual dimensions within a particular setting. One of the key components of the ecological dimension is *cultural and contextual clarity*, as the need to determine what is salient within a particular context, which cultural aspects are relevant, provides evaluators with an understanding of how to approach evaluation within a specific context, how to make correct inferences and take action based on those inferences.

One of the interview participants began by questioning the notion of community, whether it has borders and is a geographic entity, or whether with globalization and information technologies, community is an amorphous construct that is culturally defined yet continues to remain temporally indistinct. What defines a community, and where do its boundaries begin and end? Defining the boundaries of a community within the context of either a program or an evaluation is paramount, as it determines the parameters of the program intervention and of the evaluation. Another participant explores context and community through a cultural lens, arguing that all knowledge is culturally embedded. As she explained:

For me, it's about understanding what cultural dimensions of diversity are relevant to grounding knowledge in that particular setting, whether those are dimensions of individual diversity and personal identity, or whether they are at the community level, collective definition of culture, or organizational level in terms of *esprit* and group think, and what are accepted norms for how we do business in a particular situation.

Other participants, noting the multiple dimensions of culture at play within each setting, emphasized the need to disentangle the potential cultural dimensions in order to understand the specific context of the evaluation. According to one of the participants, "culture is context dependent in a lot of ways...cultures vary from context to context, and I think people take things that they have and they adapt them to whatever situation that they're in". Another participant added that "I see culture as, I guess I'd say, the context in which all evaluation is embedded".

The notion of context, and the relevant characteristics and parameters within a given program and community, varies considerably from setting to setting, requiring that evaluators sort through which dimensions of culture are salient within a particular context, and which are not. As one of the participants describes, “it’s understanding issues of community, the program setting, the program staff, and the type of population they are working within, and sorting through where culture plays a role in all of those elements”. According to one of the participants:

I think you have to kind of begin, if you want to be culturally responsive, by defining in each setting how you’re dealing with each culture that you will be working with, how you are going to define it as maybe the defining one that influences how you’re going to work with this evaluation...in a sense you’ve gotta get your context sorted out for the way in which you see culture as important in it.

Another participant described the concept of sorting as a way of making sense of the different “overlays” of culture within each setting. As she described:

There’s first of all the program has a culture. Look at the program in its context and so if the program is in a school, what is the school’s context? And you want to look at it in terms of the culture of that school, culture of their population within that school, and probably in relation to the community. And what are the factors that are gonna be most important to consider in this program’s evaluation to help the evaluation be as effective as possible.

For these participants, cultural clarity means understanding the different layers of cultural diversity and embeddedness within a given contextual situation, and understanding what

dimensions of diversity are relevant to grounding knowledge in a particular setting. For some participants, this meant that despite holding a fairly inclusive view of culture, the practicalities of the evaluative situation meant focusing only on addressing one aspect of culture, while continuing to reflect on how it fits into the larger picture.

For others, sorting involved understanding the multiple and layered relationships within the setting, highlighting the relational complexity of the program context. As one of the participants described:

...like what are relationships among different persons or groups or organizations that are going to be what we typically label stakeholders...and then you have relationships if there's an evaluation team, then you've got to look at that whole side, and the relationships among the team members, whether they have a history, or if there's a sponsor or a funder involved, what is the relationship between them...and then you've got the whole cross-over piece about what happens when this evaluation group and its relationships seek to relate to, let's say, this program or community group and all of its complex relationships.

Another participant described the embeddedness of relationships within the context, envisioning them as concentric circles. As she explained:

The larger circle being the connection that we all have to the program or the program participants, the funder, the program staff, they all have something in common, and that's their belief or connection to the larger program. But within that there are those smaller circles, you have the funders who are in one circle, you have the program staff who are in another circle, and the program participants who are in another circle, and even within those groups there are even smaller

groups...and so being able to understand or acknowledge that there are these different relationships, and to try to figure out how they all play together to make the program what it is.

Other participants described a more nuanced approach to understanding the cultural context of the community, arguing for the need to pay attention to how people see things and how they approach things and understand things within a given setting. As one of the participants explained:

If you approach it from the perspective of how people make meaning out of what's happening in a situation, then you have the opportunity of viewing it as being more nuanced than a monolithic community that has the same values and the same perspective.

The need for cultural and contextual clarity thus enables evaluators to begin to make sense of the complexity of the setting, of understanding the relevant cultural dimensions within a specific context, as a way to ground the evaluation and its findings within its local environment.

In addition to understanding and clarifying the relevant cultural and contextual aspects of the program community, my findings also suggest another key variable within the ecological dimension, developing a solid understanding of the *community history and culture*, and how it may potentially influence ongoing community and evaluator interactions and evaluation efforts. Participants described very complex and nuanced cultural understandings specific to each cultural group and community context, extending beyond mere verbal or overt cues to “very non-verbal, historical kinds of relationships, sense of family, extended family...historical kinds of references, how you grew up, the

cultural kinds of messages that are communicated through relationships, types of dress, language”. As one of the participants explained:

See, I think we get caught up in the whole what was said, what was written, and that’s not where all the information is, that’s not where it is. It’s in the body language, it’s the intonation in conversation, there’s all those things that are carrying information.

It thus becomes essential that evaluators develop some familiarity as to what the rules are, rapport, rules of protocol in terms of who can speak and in what order, and what the necessary protocols are for communicating, entering the community and developing relationships.

Other participants noted the need to understand where people and communities come from within the broader cultural diaspora. As one of the participants explained:

If you look at immigrant groups, it’s so important to know where they came from, what were the circumstances that they left. If they’ve come from war, if they’ve come from a place where if you express your opinion you could be tortured or killed, you treat them much differently than someone who has come over for whatever other reasons. And so your expectations, your process, it all needs to be adjusted to where people come from, what their experiences are, why they’re here.

Another participant noted a distinction between the perspective of immigrants and the perspective of the indigenous population. As she explained: “I think the immigrants have chosen to be here, they have great hope. There are certain issues around trauma that surface for them later...but our indigenous community, a lot of the people, they have lost

hope”. The point here is that each cultural community has a unique cultural and social history that participants argue must be taken into consideration throughout the evaluation; each cultural community has a specific context. In many cases, understanding means being aware of the values and norms within a community, while at the same time remaining cognizant that communities are not homogenous and that there are multiple dimensions within any cultural group, and thus there will be many inter-cultural and intra-cultural variations that will continue to surface.

Interview participants also described the need to be aware of *prior community experiences* that might influence the evaluation and the relationships among stakeholders within the evaluative setting. Some participants, for example, found themselves in the middle of a pre-existing conflict, making it difficult to navigate and develop a constructive context for evaluation. As one of the participants described:

When I went to my first meeting at the school, there were television trucks and a big mob out of the gates of the school, and one of the parents was passing out fliers and telling the parents that they should take their kids out of the school because the principal was racist and the school was not effectively guaranteeing the safety of their kids. Now that was going to throw a chill on any kind of knowledge one might hope to gain of that school. That school was immediately transformed into a different thing, and it would take a while before it would ever settle down.

Other participants found themselves in the middle of interpersonal conflicts that, perhaps not so recent, clearly set the tone for the evaluation. As one of the participants explained:

...these two men were at each others throats. One was a retired professor who was a goat fancier and raised prized goats, herding all of his goats. The other was an Episcopal priest who lived in a trailer and had a bunch of goats, but they wandered around the countryside breeding with whoever came along. They were just totally different in how they saw the world.

For others, there are pre-existing relationships that stem from prior generations but continue to influence and impact any work that evaluators might attempt in a given community. While participants argue for the need to understand these complex inter-relational contexts, as one participant concluded, “it should really fortify us in saying that if I ignored all of this, I’d really be blowing it, but because I’m paying attention to it doesn’t mean that I’m getting all of it”.

The other key variable within the ecological dimension is the *broad social and historical climate* that continues to shape the community’s cultural context and the relationships that develop between evaluators and stakeholders, making it a challenge to gain access to these communities and to conduct research and evaluation. According to participants, people in marginalized communities have been “studied to death” and as a result have become increasingly sensitive to the intrusion of outside researchers. As one of the participants explains:

Over the years [communities] have just been abused by research types, but you try to get access to the folks in that community and it’s incredibly difficult because they are just sick of it. You know, I call it data rape. People go in and take the data and the people never benefit from it. It doesn’t get used to change their lives.

It makes some academic get an article, get promoted, and they're sick of it, and so it's very tough.

Another participant describes the experiences she has had attempting to conduct an evaluation with street youth. According to this participant:

When we started we decided to do a survey with our own team members doing the questioning and it just bombed. They've been surveyed so much they just made up the answers. So we had to recognize part way through that the data we got was just crap.

Some communities, in particular Aboriginal communities, have developed their own research protocols as a way to ensure that they maintain ownership of, and control over the research data. As one of the participants explained:

In Indian country there is a lot of sensitivity around [who owns the data], there are sovereignty issues involved, and so there is negotiating ownership if you need to...they are sensitive about how their community is represented and where the data is eventually kept or what's done with it.

Many of these Aboriginal communities have now developed their own ethical review boards and other processes as a way to control what is done with the research.

### **5.3 Methodological: Strategic Cultural and Contextual Considerations**

The methodological dimension refers to the evaluation approaches (such as inclusive approaches) that guide evaluators in their work and that influence the methods and instruments selected to collect data and analyse results. The important point to consider within this dimension is that there is not just one theory, but multiple, even conflicting theories that illuminate specific process components (while omitting others)

and that contain underlying values and biases (Kirkhart, 2005), what I refer to as cultural in/commensurability. Reagan (1996) describes “epistemological ethnocentrism” as the assumptions and biases of a field, underscoring the point that knowledge is a contestable construct that is mediated by social, political and cultural influences, all of which is brought to bear in the practice and process of social inquiry. The other key feature of this dimension is the notion of validity, where methodological choices (such as the use of a participatory or collaborative approach) in cross-cultural settings, can enhance the quality of the research data, and thereby help to increase the validity of the findings (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). Kirkhart (1995) explores the notion of “multicultural validity”, a construct designed to assess the accuracy, soundness and appropriateness of our understanding across cultural contexts. Relating the notion of multicultural validity to evaluation theory, measurement principles, knowledge, findings, stakeholder relations and evaluator perspectives, helps locate the “truth” of data and findings in the cultural community and in the co-construction of meaning between evaluators and stakeholders.

Interview participants argued that a better understanding of culture and of the cultural context of the program community is essential for ensuring the *validity* and accuracy of program findings and subsequent evaluative inferences. As one of the participants explained:

For me, culture imbues just about everything that people do, the way they react to things, the things they pursue, the things they consider of value. So for me, culture is just the norm that you have to consider if you want to tell a story as accurately as you possible can.

Another participant recounted how he was motivated to go into evaluation after working on a minority student recruitment program at a university in the 1970s, and observing the failure of evaluators to consider the culture and cultural context of the program. As he explained:

When the evaluator looked at our special admissions program, they only wanted to count people who graduated from college as being successes. I realized that being from the community, that these kids didn't meet the entrance requirements for college, so it was just a coup that they were in college, so we should count the program successful if minority student recruitment program at a university in the 1970s they finish two or three years, not just if they graduate. And so that was sort of an initial indicator that there were people out there doing evaluation and making judgements that just didn't have a clue as to what was really important.

Validity as a methodological variable within the cross-cultural program context thus brings the focus on the accuracy of our cultural and contextual understanding, as well as on the validity of our evaluative judgements. For some participants, this understanding requires building relationships with the community and developing a sense of what matters within a particular cultural context. For others, building relationships with the community leads to better data and a more complete sense of the program and its impact on the community.

A number of participants also discussed the choice of methodology and its influence on the validity of the evaluation findings. As one of the participants described, "the use of surveys in a South Vietnamese community has no meaning... What do you do with the information? You do nothing, it's useless because the scales have no meaning to

them”. Another participant provided an illustrative example of an evaluation that, despite the attempt to be culturally responsive, provided invalid data for two years. As she described:

A colleague of mine who was working with Somali women hired somebody to facilitate the focus groups because she didn't speak their language. And she hired a man because he was the only person she could find. Well it turns out in Somali culture women would never tell a man negative information, they simply wouldn't do that, and so for two years they thought the program was doing fine because they were getting bad information. And then during the third year she found out that little detail and that the program was not meeting their needs at all.

Still other participants argue that involving community members will increase the likelihood of collecting valid data.

All interview participants argue for the adoption of participatory or collaborative approaches to evaluation in cross-cultural settings, what I refer to as *inclusion* within the methodological dimension, as a way to understand local socio-cultural contexts and incorporate evaluation strategies that include alternative ways of knowing. For many participants, inclusion, though necessary (they argue) for cultural understanding, is a very complex endeavour that cannot be put on a continuum (from higher to lower levels of participation) as it is culturally and contextually specific. As one of the participants remarked:

The whole issue of participation is extremely complicated...more is not always better, it's a two-edged issue. In the spirit of supporting validity one would hope

for more genuine engagement and participation, but then you've got to come full circle and examine the assumption and say, yes, but whose agenda is this?

Another participant argued that "because one is using a participatory approach does not guarantee that there is participation. Often we've built these so-called participatory approaches...and they're devoid of any input from the culture that is supposed to be participating".

Participation is itself culturally and contextually-dependent, and will vary from one community to the other. As one of the participant explained:

If I'm using a social justice approach, and I go into the international community and say I'm using social justice, the reaction I will get will not be what I expected. Some people reported on using a feminist perspective for evaluation in an African country and the response they got back was don't bring us that stuff, that's not the way we look at things. Feminism is viewed as a middle class White issue or concept.

Other participants provided examples of participatory approaches that called for town hall style meetings in communities where community members are disinclined to talk about strengths and weakness in such an open forum. In another community that had actually requested a participatory approach to evaluation, the approach was not at all what the evaluator had expected. According to this participant, when she arrived in the community and tried to set-up interviews, she was told that "if you want to learn about us, come and walk with us. It's called *como-verse*-so you walk with us and you learn about us that way". As one of the participants observed, "participation is defined

differently not only in terms of the concept, but in terms of the strategies that one uses to get participation”.

While participants did discuss specific accommodations that are required to engage stakeholders in the evaluation process, as well as challenges around legitimate representation and power differences, most argued for the need to include local knowledge and develop a transparent process. In order to include people who might not otherwise have a voice at the table, either as a result of language or other barriers, participants described the need to determine what kinds of support they will require to legitimately include people in the evaluation. One of the participants describes the process she used in order to include a specific group of deaf and heard of hearing, one of whom was deaf and blind, one who was very poorly educated and did not use American sign language but understood mostly individual signs and pantomimes, and others who were less educated. As she explained:

In order to do that focus group, we had to have someone who could sign into the hand of the deaf and blind person, we had to have a deaf person who watched the American sign language interpreter and translated the signs into a pantomime of what was being asked.

Another participant described creating off-site discussion groups with students as a way to bring their voices to the evaluation table that was composed of parents, teachers and school administrators. Others discussed the need for written and oral translation, providing childcare, meal and transportation expenses as a way to ensure the inclusion of other voices.

For others, inclusion has to do with creating a transparent process as a way to demystify evaluation and communicate to stakeholders how the information will be used, and for what purposes. As one of the participants explained:

There's a need to convey that what the people are giving you will be used in a way that is meant to benefit them and their community, so that they understand that we're not just asking these questions to put them into a report, but we're asking these questions because...we can't really understand what goes on unless we understand from you.

Another participant described participatory as being not only transparent with the program, but also in terms of being open about how you work and negotiating how they can become engaged in the evaluation process. As another participant describes, "that's what participatory does, you sit down and you negotiate with people about what the expectations are and what the boundaries are and what the parameters are...". The process of inclusion is thus seen as "an open negotiation", where evaluators and stakeholders discuss their respective roles and expectations in the process.

One of the participants envisions the participatory component as being initially transparent so that stakeholders can then understand your role as a partner to their program. As she explained:

I can eventually get over the hurdle of being seen as the evaluator to...that person we enjoy who comes up and helps us facilitate meetings and helps us think about what we're doing. They understand that they are part of the evaluation process itself.

A number of other participants also argue that one of the key benefits to inclusion is the partnership that is developed between evaluators and stakeholders, as each bring their unique and necessary focus to the evaluation.

For other participants, inclusion and partnering with stakeholders provides a way to ameliorate potential power imbalances and ultimately move towards democratizing the evaluation process. As one of the participants explained:

It's never going to be equal, but it is a way that we as evaluators give up some of our power in the process, because it's not all about what we think and how we want to do it, but it's really about listening to and attending to other perspectives and really reflecting on that and trying to make it part of your process.

Others view inclusion as a way to better balance power issues and as a way to recognize that everyone brings a unique contribution to the program and to the evaluation. While a number of participants did acknowledge their power as evaluators and as purveyors of Western methodology, they also discussed the conscious efforts they made not to use their power. Others noted the potential risk for exploitation within the evaluative setting, particularly considering the level of marginalization of some of the communities involved. As one of the participants queried, "who really holds the power in a group, and who gets to talk, and who may be at the table but have their ideas somewhat dismissed or not fully honoured, or just not carrying much weight"?

Participants also noted that the active inclusion of stakeholders in the evaluative process, from selecting evaluation questions, data collection, and analysis, fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment. As one of the participants explained, "we have seen that eliciting people from marginalized groups as partners in the evaluation process,

sometimes you have these unintended outcomes, and they become more confident and more outspoken in other areas”. The process of evaluation, as one of the participants put it, is thus often more important than the evaluation itself.

The other key variable within the methodological dimension is *method and instrument selection*, as participants described the need to identify culturally and contextually congruent methods and instruments within each specific setting. For many, the selection of method requires knowledge and sensitivity about how to interview in a particular setting, how to organize people for interviewing, whether it should be one-on-one or a focus group, or whether it should be more conversational versus directed questions. As one of the participants concluded, “it’s very hard to go into a community cold and interview people”. As another participant explained:

I’ve heard a lot of stories from some focus groups that we did...they hired all their Indian students in their area to go do it, and they quickly realized that they had to change their time frames because you don’t just walk into a house and start asking questions. You have to go through the protocol of visiting, eating, chatting and then getting to your business.

While thinking about the culture of the community is essential in selecting the appropriate methods, others note the need to consider the cultural context of the community as well. To illustrate this point, one of the participants described the difference between working with Hispanic doctoral students and Hispanics in other circumstances, and the different methodological choices that would follow. As she

explained:

I can assume maybe that an online survey may be possible to do because [the doctoral students] are doing online work. Now I may go into a Hispanic community in Eastern Washington and that's the last thing I'm going to do is an online survey. So being Hispanic in and of itself doesn't define the methodology, as much as the context of the program or setting.

One of the other participants described an HIV prevention program and evaluation that he did with Spanish-speaking migrant workers who lived in isolated camps. Given the fact that these men lived communally, the intervention was focused on groups and not individuals. He also used an icon matching approach to evaluation that was read aloud, so that their level of literacy would not prevent them from participating. As one of the participants explained, "you really have to pay attention to the specific context that you're working in and that you're going to be doing your evaluation in, and try to understand how people see things, how they approach things...and it's very practical".

Other participants noted that while it is important to be culturally and contextually responsive in selecting methods and developing instruments, evaluators must also be flexible in trying things that might not seem culturally congruent. As one of the participants explained, "so having an understanding and getting to know [that culture] is important, but also not letting that stop you from doing some of the evaluation techniques that you've tried in the past and seeing if they might work with that group". As one of the participants expressed, "sometimes you just have to really take the time and think that through and to discover that for that particular group, and sometimes you're surprised".

Interview participants also acknowledged the potential *cultural in/commensurability* between Western methodological approaches and other cultural epistemologies, recognizing that the methods that we use are not neutral, but rather are “predicated on a lot of assumptions”. One of the participants used the word “methodolotry” as a way to make the point that “we honour our methods so much and so often that they make us blind to the cultural perspectives that are embedded in them”. Despite attempts to be culturally responsible and to work with programs that address issues impacting marginalized populations, Western-based perspectives continue to dominate the evaluative landscape. According to one of the participants, “you know classically we have walked in with our models, and said here’s the way you do evaluation, and you slap that on a very complex cross-cultural situation, and it doesn’t work”.

Others noted the need to find a balance between the uncritical application of Western methodologies and what people find important within their own communities. As one of the participants explained, “it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have Western practices in it, but they’ve been defined in a way that makes sense within that cultural framing”. As one of the participants elaborated, the mainstream culture is so strong that it is part of the evaluative process and part of the cultural process whether we want it to be or not.

#### **5.4 Organizational: The Interplay of Diverse Information Needs**

The organizational dimension refers to the parameters imposed on the program and evaluation (and subsequently on relationships between evaluators and stakeholders) by program funding agencies. A common challenge, particularly in evaluations

involving diverse communities, is insufficient time or resources provided to developing the kinds of relationships and understanding between evaluators and program stakeholders necessary to conducting evaluations in cross-cultural contexts. This tension can be further exacerbated by federal partners who support evaluation as an exercise in accountability and control (used predominantly as a management and decision making tool), over community needs that value local knowledge and community participation. Thus one of the key difficulties evaluators face, particularly with government funding agencies, is finding a balance between what are often conflicting needs and priorities of community stakeholders and agency funders (Trickett & Espino, 2004).

The organizational dimension is intended to convey a sense of the interplay between community and program funder information needs, between what can be incompatible requirements and agendas within the cross-cultural program context. Interview participants described the *lack of time and resources* allotted by funders to set up and conduct evaluations and develop relationships with stakeholders in culturally diverse contexts. As one of the participants explained:

...it takes time, and I think this is one of the things that I hear from mainstream programs that are short of funds, that they feel as if they can't afford to work with native communities because they just take so much more time.

Others noted the length of time required to understand the community and its context, and to develop the relationships necessary to accurately capture the required information, and to determine whether or not the program is working, and why. As one of the

participants added:

I know there are cases where everything is done quickly and more and more faster, but I think it's one of the reasons why we often have problems with the evaluations. We haven't developed the relationships, and when the going gets tough, we can't make the necessary judgements, adjustments and changes.

Another participant described the need to determine what is important, as there is little time and resources available to "go through some of the sorting process to understand how, as an evaluator, you are going to work with this construct called culture".

For other participants, the challenge in cross-cultural program contexts is to balance the often disparate *information and program needs* of program funders and other stakeholders. As one of the participants added, "you have to be very clear about why you are doing the evaluation, and whether it be for the funder or whether it be for the program staff...you have to be very clear about the purpose of the evaluation". For others, the fundamental question is determining whom they are responsible for and for whom the evaluation should serve. As one of the participants explained:

From my perspective, when working in a community of culture, the evaluator has to serve the community. And that means sometimes being in conflict with what the funder may be asking... what I've had to do on occasion is to do two evaluations. Because if the work that you do does not serve the community, does not serve what they have viewed to be important, then I have not done my job....now the second evaluation comes out of your hide.

From a more pragmatic perspective , another participant acknowledged that he can meet some of the stakeholders needs in the process of the evaluation, and the sponsors needs in the final report.

For others, the question of information needs comes down to navigating the differences between how program funders and other stakeholders measure program success. As one of the participants explained:

So if the community says we'll know that this program is successful when the young people start singing the old songs and start participating in their culture, and then the funder will ask about how many people are drinking, how many drinks in the last thirty days...[the community] is looking for how people live their lives and how people walk their paths, you know, not numerical.

When asked further how she evaluates these two seemingly conflicting conceptual notions, she replied that “we’re doing the darn surveys and things like that, but I’m also doing focus groups and also doing a community-based instrument that was developed by and for the indigenous people”. For others, satisfying the needs of the funder and fulfilling their requirements often means that they might not necessarily meet the needs of the program community. As one of the participants described:

We do a lot of compiling of data because a certain administrator...uses data to make decisions...[so] we’re addressing that expectation that he has of us by collecting that data, when at the same time different types of data would be more helpful for our program staff.

The difficulty of meeting the diverse needs of stakeholders carries over into the third organizational variable, *policies and agendas*, where despite attempts to be

culturally responsive and to work with programs that address issues impacting marginalized populations, Western-based perspectives continue to dominate the evaluative landscape. As one of the participants explained:

I think evidence-based practice is one of these big issues that is being more and more required that programs implement, that grantees implement programs that have evidence of effectiveness according to the Western model and they...might not really meet the needs [of the community] at all.

Other participants also discussed the fact that international evaluations often require inappropriate methodological approaches, such as randomized control trials (RCTs), that again might not meet the needs of the population. As one of the participants expressed, the people of Africa are getting angry because “once again, they are having Western imperialism forced down their throats”. Another participant pointed out that “classically we have walked in with our models, and said here’s the way you do evaluation, and you slap that on a very complex cross-cultural situation, and it doesn’t work”. As an example, one of the participants discussed the Canadian International Development Agency’s (CIDA) expectations around gender and women’s roles in the international community. As she explained:

You walk into cultures that have very different views of gender, and CIDA says no, we’re going to emphasize women’s roles, which is fine, I totally agree with that, but it’s a very delicate dance when you go to cultures that have very different views about women’s roles...[They] can be insensitive to where other people are coming from and sometimes make matters worse.

Another participant also noted that the kinds of collaborative evaluation that they like to do is often not funded, as funding agencies “want science and proof, and my work would be touchy feely and not yield usable information in their minds”. As a result, she sells participatory evaluation under another name, as capacity building, something that she says funders are currently expressing interest in.

### **5.5 Personal (Evaluator): Understanding Multiple Dimensions of Self**

The personal dimension refers to the need for evaluators to take note that their subjectivity as researchers is always with them during the research process (Peshkin, 1988), requiring them to develop a more heightened “critical subjectivity” (Reason, 1981), not only of themselves and their subject positions, but also of the epistemological and ontological assumptions and biases that guide their work. As Rogoff (2003) explained:

*To learn from and about communities other than our own, we need to go beyond the ethnocentric assumptions from which we each begin. Often, the first and most difficult step is to recognize that our original views are generally a function of our own cultural experiences, rather than the only right or possible way. (p. 24)*

Symonette (2004) describes the need to cultivate multilateral self-awareness, understanding self within a particular context and self as a pivotal instrument. Self-knowledge is thus understood, not merely in terms of understanding ourselves as cultural beings within a specific cultural context, but of understanding ourselves as researchers positioned within a dominant Western and privileged paradigm. Reflexivity requires that we look inwards to self-critically examine our own personal beliefs, potential biases and assumptions (Schwandt, 2002), enabling us to better engage the ethical complexities

involved in our relationships with stakeholders within the cross-cultural program context. Openness and learning are also essential personal attributes, as evaluators enter unfamiliar contexts outside of their own cultural backgrounds.

One of the key components of the personal dimension is *self-awareness and reflexivity*, as evaluators critically examine themselves and their assumptions, what they bring into the setting, their backgrounds, and who they are, as they navigate relationships within the cross-cultural program context. As one of the interview participants argued, although self-reflection is an essential trait, it remains “an under-emphasized component of the whole cultural piece in advance of any evaluation”. Another participant noted that although there are an increasing number of evaluators who are beginning to recognize the importance of self-reflection, it is still very early in this whole endeavour. A number of participants also argued that understanding requires not only understanding of others but understanding of self as well. As one of the participants noted, “we need to understand our own cultures first, because we are not walking in with a blank slate”.

For many, self-awareness and reflexivity refers to the awareness of one’s own cultural norms, biases, assumptions or expectations. As one of the participants noted, “we’re taught to be objective, so we don’t have a culture, we don’t have a bias, we have this wonderfully objective methodology that takes us out of it”. Another participant explained:

Evaluators need to pay attention to their own cultures first, because they’re walking in with this measurement mindset, researchy, methodsy way of looking at the world, and that can be incredibly problematic. And so I do think that’s

something evaluators need to pay attention to and are guilty of, the old “I don’t have a culture”.

For others, working in diverse communities requires self-awareness as a reflection on practice and on the values that guide their work. As one of the participants explained, “we are challenged to be much more self-reflective and think about how we inform, how our own values, judgements, prejudices for or against, play into that process”. Another participant asks, “what are the lenses that you are bringing to that, and how does it impact how you view that particular group or particular program?” Self-awareness thus means reflecting on where you come from as an evaluator or a researcher, and on what you bring into the setting, all of which influences positions and relationships during the evaluation.

Participants also discussed the *values* that they bring into the cross-cultural setting, and on how they may potentially inform their practice. According to one of the participants, “my view of evaluation is very action-oriented and is grounded in social justice...and I would have to say that those assumptions are really fundamental to my work”. Another participant added:

I really think that evaluators...have to reflect about what are your values, what do you want, what are you willing to stand behind? Those are like the late night conversations that I might have with myself...if I get hit by a bus and I end up at the pearly gates, how would I defend the work that I did, how would I defend my life? For me, it’s what do I stand for, and evaluation is simply a job that I do that represents myself. So I wouldn’t say I am what I do, I would say that I do what I am.

Participants also pointed out that they are quite selective of the projects that they work on, opting to only take on projects that are resonant with their values and with their social justice agendas. One of the other participants considers herself a “venture socialist”, as she helps communities obtain initial program funding and provides assistance with the evaluative component. As a result of her work on selective projects, she explains that she makes a lot less money than other researchers. Another participant approaches cross-cultural evaluation as a mission, arguing that “disparities unfortunately tend to be cultural in [the USA]”.

Other participants stressed the need for openness and learning within the cross-cultural program context, arguing that “we bring who we are to the setting and the recognition that we have to be open to learn”, “it’s the mutual back and forth”. Others noted that entering a community with humility and with an openness to learn requires setting aside any preconceptions and assumptions that might prevent understanding of the culture and of the program and community context. Within cross-cultural program contexts, participants were clear that they do not have all of the answers and that they must be open to learning and listening in order to understand the cultural context of the community and of the program. As one of the participants explained:

I think one of the biggest problems is when people come in assuming that they already have all of the expertise that they need. They know something about evaluation, but they don’t have the expertise about the context. So there’s just kind of entering it with a bit of humility about learning.

Another participant pointed out that one of the first things he does is to assume that he knows nothing, which he argues is a very difficult transition for him as he comes from a

psychological discipline that has a very quantitative methods oriented culture. In the end, the sense of mutual learning, where both evaluators and stakeholders each bring something to the setting, where learning becomes a "two-way street", is essential in the cross-cultural context.

For others, cross-cultural learning is considered "ever-evolving", and not something that one is ever going to become proficient in. As one of the participants added, I don't think cultural competency is something you ever really reach, you don't ever reach it as a state of being". Another participant explained:

Culturally competent evaluation...is a continual process of awareness, continuing to grow yourself as an evaluator...it's not something that you take a class on or you go to a pre-conference workshop on at the American Evaluation Association Conference, and you're culturally responsive right now. No, it's a continuous process and you have to continually grow and continually develop.

As one of the participants concluded, "I mean God, this is a lifelong journey that we're talking about. This isn't anything that you're ever going to become an expert in".

The other variable of interest within the personal dimension is *evaluator culture and social location*, which considers the influence of an evaluator's cultural background (broadly conceptualized as either ethnicity, gender, social position, etc.) on the evaluation process. As one of the participants explains, "we bring who we are to the table. There's no such thing as anyone who is truly objective. We are human and you can't send in the computers to do that kind of work....You cannot leave yourself at home". As another participant describes, "what has been one's background and experiences if you will, and how that has shaped how they perceive themselves maybe and how they think others

perceive them and how they go about perceiving others too”. As such, participants argue that it becomes important to understand their cultural proximity to community stakeholders, what they share in common, and where there are differences. According to one of the participants:

I think it is important for evaluators to understand sort of their distance to the community and to the program being evaluated, not in a structural sense, as in the traditional internal external, but in the sense of cultural dimensions.

For many participants, their social location or class, their gender and their ethnicity continues to play a large role within the evaluative program context. As one of the participants explained, “then add the gender thing, a female evaluator in the Texas example has a whole other set of baggage to carry...the first time I went there I was told I couldn’t talk to the men as a woman alone”.

For one of the participants, the evaluator’s cultural positioning influences the evaluation in two subtly distinct ways, as vantage point and viewpoint. As he explained:

Vantage point means from what position does the evaluator look at the evaluand, and culture has a lot to do with that. The culture of the evaluator places them in a particular vantage point vis-à-vis the culture of those who are participating in the program, so that’s the first part. And the second part is that from that vantage point or thinking about their own cultural history and predispositions and so forth, that becomes sort of a lens through which the evaluator looks at whatever is being evaluated. And then finally at a sort of core level, the cultural background and orientation of the evaluator helps to shape their worldview, which becomes the lens through which their viewpoint on the evaluation is filtered.

Reflecting on one's cultural position, one's vantage point and viewpoint, underscores the complexity of relationships in the cross-cultural program context, as well as the possibilities for what can and cannot be accomplished.

## **5.6 Summary**

In this Chapter, I described the five dimensions of cultural context (relational, ecological, methodological, organizational and personal) that I developed through the analysis of my findings (from the literature review and interviews with scholars and practitioners) to describe the multiple dimensions involved in relationships between evaluators and stakeholders. The relational dimension highlights the interactions of self and others, of the roles we play and the identities we assume across cultural, class, gender and racial divides, as we negotiate our diverse political, economic and social histories. The ecological dimension describes the multi-layered historical, cultural and social characteristics of the local community and program context. The methodological dimension depicts the underlying theories and evaluation approaches that inform the evaluation program context and that guide evaluation in terms of method and instrument selection. The organizational dimension refers to the demands made by program sponsors or funding agencies on the program and on the evaluation. The personal dimension refers to the subjective qualities that influence and inform evaluators and their work. Most importantly, the framework describes the interconnected dimensions that influence the evaluation process from the initial planning stages through to the reporting and dissemination of findings. These dimensions provide a sense of how culture is made manifest in evaluations, and how it is thus implicated in our constructions of knowledge and in the relationships that we build in the field. The question about how culture matters

in evaluation thus takes on a more tangible meaning, as the layers of culture and context inter-weave throughout the evaluation process. In turning next to community-based program managers, my understanding of the program and evaluation in cross-cultural contexts is rendered more complete, as a key relational perspective is added to the voice of evaluation scholars and practitioners.

## **Chapter 6: *Phase Three* – Findings from Focus Groups with Community-Based Program Managers**

In Chapter Six, I present the findings from the third phase of my research, focus groups conducted with program managers from community-based health and social sector organizations. The purpose of the focus groups was to discuss the broad themes identified in my interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners, as well as to obtain their input on the five-dimensional framework of cultural context. Interviews in the second phase of my research highlighted the relational aspect of program evaluation from the perspective of the evaluator; missing was the contextual piece, the perspective of the program community, including their role in the program context. My idea was to build a conceptual bridge between evaluators and the community, to better understand relationships as well as the factors that help and hinder cross-cultural understanding within the cross-cultural program context. Thus, while I was interested in community and program-level experiences, particularly in terms of the cultural and relational aspects of evaluation and their relationships with external evaluators, the primary purpose of the focus groups was to obtain feedback on the five dimensional framework. I was interested in knowing whether the dimensions made sense, whether the dimensions resonated with their experiences at the community level, and whether there were any specific omissions in my representation of cultural context. Thus, it is important to note that the focus groups with community program managers are not intended merely as a way to triangulate the data collected in phase two, but rather as a way to bring the community's voice into the cross-cultural program context. The two primary research questions guiding this phase of my research are:

1. Do the dimensions and related components identified in the five dimensional framework in Phase Two make sense?
2. Is the community perspective captured? Is there anything missing?

While findings from the focus groups relate to all of the five dimensions, the only substantive addition to the framework concern what community program managers consider a key part of the relationship between themselves (and their communities) and program sponsors, the political dimension. As a result, the focus group discussions with community program managers has led to the revision of the framework to include a sixth dimension, the political dimension (see Table 3 below).

*Table 3. Six Dimensions of Cultural Context*

Relational	Ecological	Methodological	Political	Organizational	Personal (Evaluator)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identity (insider/outsider)</li> <li>• roles</li> <li>• understanding &amp; listening</li> <li>• boundary spanning</li> <li>• long term engagement</li> <li>• <b>trust &amp; respect</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural &amp; contextual clarity</li> <li>• community history &amp; culture</li> <li>• broad social &amp; historical climate</li> <li>• prior community experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• validity</li> <li>• inclusion</li> <li>• method &amp; instrument selection</li> <li>• cultural in/commensurability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>power</b></li> <li>• <b>values &amp; worldviews</b></li> <li>• <b>evaluation purpose</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• time &amp; resources</li> <li>• information &amp; program needs</li> <li>• state policies &amp; agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-awareness &amp; reflexivity</li> <li>• values</li> <li>• openness &amp; learning</li> <li>• evaluator culture &amp; social location</li> </ul>

\* Bolded text indicates focus group input

Focus group participants also helped to contextualize the other five dimensions of cultural context, providing descriptive text highlighting specific additional components (see bolded text) and contextualizing other established components. In what follows, the findings will be presented as they relate to each dimension, with a special focus on the political dimension. I first begin with a discussion of the initial focus group responses to

my five-dimensional framework, all of which ultimately led to the addition of the six dimension (political).

### **6.1 Initial Focus Group Responses: The Addition of a Sixth Dimension**

Despite the diversity in the composition of the four focus groups (one group was composed of Aboriginal women, one was composed of program managers from community health centres, one was a mixed group that included health centre managers and other immigrant service organizations, and one was primarily composed of program managers who provide mental health services to children and their families), there was nonetheless consensus about the relevance of the framework dimensions across all four groups. While there was agreement that the framework captured the dimensions of cultural context well, it did provoke discussion in a number of areas, and as a result helped to further contextualize the framework dimensions. The discussions focused on the salience of specific components, how they fit together, whether they were under the correct dimension, whether they needed more elaboration and should be given more prominence. The discussion also touched upon the expression of culture in diverse and changing community-based contexts and about the foreign nature of evaluation for many people from non-Western cultures. This conversation led to a discussion about different value systems and cultural norms (i.e. collective values versus Western values of individuality) and the challenges of adopting Western-based values to “judge” community-based programs.

While focus groups discussions did help to further contextualize the framework, the principle addition to the framework was related to the relationship between participants (and their communities) and program sponsors, a discussion which ultimately

led to the creation of the sixth dimension of the framework. While I pointed out that the political dimension was included in the methodological dimension (under cultural in/commensurability) and in the organizational dimension (under state policies and agenda), focus group participants felt strongly that the political side of evaluation was nonetheless lost amidst other components of the framework, and that its importance within the cross-cultural evaluation and program context required that it be accorded its own dimension. As one of the participants expressed, “in our communities, political is very much stronger than that. We’re political by the colour of our skin and by the fact that we’re Aboriginal”. Thus, inclusion of the political dimension, while generally accepted as a key feature of evaluation (Greene, 2003; House, 1990; Weis, 1993), further adds a sense of the relational complexities in the cross-cultural program and evaluation context. At the same time, it provides the perspective of the community program managers, one of the other voices in the cross-cultural program context

## **6.2 Political: Interactions and Interpretations in the Program Context**

The *political* dimension takes into account the multiple connections between evaluation and politics (Cronbach, 1980; House, 1993; Weiss, 1993), from evaluation as part of the fabric of political decision making, to the politics surrounding the relationships within an evaluation (between evaluators and stakeholders and between stakeholders themselves). Evaluation thus enters the political realm at the level of policy, where decisions are made about which programs to evaluate and why, whether for decision making purposes, accountability or program improvement. Evaluation, according to House (1993), has its own cultural authority, its own “practices [that] are firmly embedded in and intrinsically tied to particular social and institutional structures and

practices” (House & Howe, 2000, p. 3). Relationships within the evaluative setting, particularly within diverse cultural contexts, are thus imbued with politics, as evaluators possessing significant “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1977) enter communities that have a history of exploitation and disempowerment.

The following narrative, provided by the first-year university student who sat in on the focus groups as an observer, imparts a sense of the political perspective that she felt was communicated by participants during the focus groups. According to the student observer<sup>4</sup>:

These focus groups really made me see that funders have one set of priorities and the program has another. The point being that the funders are the ones with the money, or power, and therefore if they want something to be done, and you want to keep their money, then you have to do it; whether it benefits the participants or not. This really changes how a program could work because you have all these mandatory questions to ask, or provisions to take, which can be the difference between getting the results you need and the ones your funder wants. These steps you have to follow can make it difficult to develop a trust with the participants and give them the help they need; this being the whole point of the program in the first place.

The political dimension thus involves issues of conflicting priorities and unequal power arrangements between stakeholders, making it challenging to develop relationships across diverse cultural and program contexts. When asked specifically about relationships

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<sup>4</sup> The student observer, a first-year university student in Conflict Studies and Human Rights, took notes during the focus groups as a way to capture what she considered significant or interesting. After each focus group, she reflected on what she had heard in the focus group session. This quote is based on one such reflection.

within the evaluation context, some of the focus group participants argued that relationships are really not very important, as the funder holds all of the *power*, the power to dictate evaluation terms of reference and what goes into the final report. According to one of the participants:

In reality, it's not relational, because they want you to interpret or corrupt your own report to make it what they want. So it doesn't matter what you...if there is a relationship between the evaluator and the community, because in the end their voice doesn't count...it's the voice of the funder.

For others, power manifests itself through the use of inappropriate methods to collect evaluation data, despite which approach might be best suited for the community. As one of the participants explained, "we are forced to put certain questions in our evaluation that the client would feel is not related to them, but it is something that we need to do because the funder requires it". Another participant also noted that "the funder asks for all kinds of indicators that we have no use for, and as you know, the organization can't challenge the funder".

For others, evaluation is political precisely because it often involves evaluators and stakeholders with differing *values and worldviews*. Focus group participants note that evaluation is itself a "foreign concept" that is replete with Western values that differ significantly from other ethno-cultural perspectives. As one of the participants noted, "back home, nothing needs to be evaluated, and so it makes it hard for the [ethno-cultural community] to understand why they need to talk about the program". Participants also noted that community members that come from communist counties will have issues about openness and confidentiality, making it difficult to encourage discussions about

program experiences. Other focus group participants discussed the differences between Western individualism and their country's sense of collective values, noting the challenges involved in evaluating from such disparate positions.

The other key variable within the political dimension is *evaluation purpose*, as participants questioned the motivation behind the evaluation and the use of results. As one of the focus group participants pointed out:

I wish people would just tell you. We want this funding to...and not everybody is willing to do that. Like we need this document to show that, in fact, this is going ahead. We need to further fund this or increase funding, and so as the person who is involved in the evaluation, it's also my thing, do I agree with it or not?

Another participant asked, "why do you need [the evaluation]? You have no idea. It might be...the Director General's job is on the line and she's the only one using this program to be evaluated to show how great things underneath her are". Other focus group participants questioned the purpose of the evaluation and why the government would bother with evaluating programs at all.

The following discussion between focus group participants provides a sense of the frustration and cynicism that can surround what some feel is an imposed and artificial process:

Participant 1: Do you think the community actually wants to be evaluated? Do you think they are saying, oh great, an opportunity for an evaluation of how I spent my \$10,000. Come in, I need to know because it matters.

Participant 3: We want to be left alone.

Participant 1: Leave me alone because I have so much work to do and people are dying here, here, and here, and that my mom just had a baby that died of SIDS and that woman's daughter just committed suicide...

Participant 2: ...because she's grieving.

Participant 1: Yeah, grieving. And you, evaluate us, please. Why are these things being evaluated? Is it for the taxpayer?

Participant 2: We have to show accountability.

Participant 3: It is a Conservative government.

Participant 2: When that Accountability Act\* came in, that just wreaked havoc on communities and on Aboriginal organizations.

For other focus group participants, the lack of clarity about evaluation purpose led to questions about the integrity of the final report. As one of the participant's noted, "they fiddled and diddled with the report [and] I just felt that the report that was finally submitted was not even in my own words". Another participant concluded, "it seems like in the end, the evaluation doesn't represent the true reality of those using the program." When asked further how they deal with this situation, one of the participants admitted that:

Community members are smart and they'll often tweak their reports to be sent to the funder because it's the way they want it to, but then when the funding comes in, they don't necessarily spend the funds the way the funder wants them to, they spend the funds the way they need to be spent to help the community.

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\* See Chapter Two – Section 2.2 for a discussion of the Canadian TBS policy on evaluation.

Another participant added that there are often two reports that are completed, one that reflects the reality of the community and the other that is considered the “official report” and that “will always be disconnected [from the unofficial report] if the government person has another agenda”. Another focus group participant concluded that “you have to work on that fine line all the time”, between addressing the needs and objectives of the program sponsor or funder, and meeting the actual needs of the community.

### **6.3 Input on Relational Dimension: Trust and Respect**

Focus group participants felt strongly that *trust and respect* should be added as key components in the relational dimension, arguing that they make the difference between obtaining accurate and honest information from the community versus “being told what they think you want to hear”. As one of the participants explained, “I think trust is a big thing for the ethno-cultural community, because sometimes it is hard for them to tell what’s inside or what they think about the program to somebody else. Trust is a big issue for them”. Others pointed out that without building trusting relationships, evaluators will be unable to engage the community in developing the kinds of programs and interventions that will ultimately meet their needs. Others see trust as a comfort and safety issue, arguing that in some communities evaluators and researchers have brought in gifting as a way to make vulnerable communities feel cared for and to help rebuild a level of safety and comfort. For others, respect is a key function of relationships between evaluators and community stakeholders, providing a bridge between what many perceive as a cultural chasm. Focus groups participants noted that respect can take many forms, from being open and listening to what others have to say and spending time getting to know them. As one of the participants expressed:

I think the biggest thing is that they don't take the time to learn your culture...I see it again and again where you work in partnership [with the federal government] on a research project or whatever and they just don't take the time. They don't take the time because they think that it doesn't matter.

The lack of time spent listening to others and developing relationships with community stakeholders, experienced as a feeling of disrespect for the community's cultural context, led focus group participants to note the need for greater sensitivity as a key to building trusting relationships at the community level.

### **6.3.1 Insiders or Outsiders: Contextual Concerns**

Focus group participants noted that the decision to use community insiders or outsiders as a way to potentially bridge the cultural divide should not always be assumed, as cultural proximity is not always beneficial. As one of the participants explained:

Let's take the example of homosexuality. Most people notice that I am wearing a hijab and I'm Iraqi, and if they are Muslim also, they might not be frank with me and tell me their views because they might think that I will judge them...so a Western evaluator will make much better with them than me.

Although the focus group participant comes from the same culture and speaks the same language as the program community, what is important to consider is the nature of the program and the issues being discussed. In the above case, someone from outside of the culture would have been better able to collect more accurate data. There are program contexts, however, where it would make sense to use cultural insiders, in terms of language, openness and cultural understanding. In discussing the abuse of women, one of

the participants explained:

Within the culture when I'm speaking with them, they'll tell me the truth which is, in their opinion, sometimes they don't look at it as women abuse because she lived all her life with her mom and her dad and then she got married to a man and it was an arranged marriage. But in her life she saw her dad hit her mom, so for her this is the norm...so she doesn't feel like it is abusive. But if you are a foreigner and you are coming in and you are telling them about that they will be very defensive, saying, oh no, we don't have any women abuse, in our culture we respect women.

The decision to use a cultural insider or outsider thus depends as much on the program and community context, as on the cultural context of the program community.

#### **6.4 Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the findings from the third phase of my research, focus groups that I conducted with program managers from four community-based health and social sector organizations. While the primary purpose of the focus groups was to better understand the community perspective (and thus better understand the relational dimension of the cross-cultural evaluation context), they were also intended to obtain input on the five-dimensional framework that I had developed as a result of the first two phases of my research. Although there was considerable discussion about the framework, the most substantive input was the addition of the political dimension, a dimension whose components had previously been subsumed (or lost) inside other framework dimensions. The addition of the political dimension thus captures the relational complexities between

community stakeholders and program sponsors, as well as the dynamics of power in defining evaluation and program parameters despite differences (e.g., in terms of needs, beliefs and values) among program and evaluation stakeholders.

## Chapter 7 Discussion and Summary of Findings

*The ecological, political, social and personal crisis we confront at this time need no rehearsing here; fundamental to all these crisis is the way we think and how the way we think separates us from our experience, from each other, and from the rhythms and patterns of the natural world.*

*Reason (1981)*

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to understand how differing conceptions of culture play out in the context of an evaluation and how relationships between stakeholders and evaluators shape evaluation decisions and outcomes. I started out with four overarching research questions that I used to focus and frame each of my three inter-related studies. In the first phase of my research, I completed a comprehensive and critical review of the empirical literature on evaluations conducted in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts. Through this review, I identified seven broad, inter-related themes: 1) use of participatory and collaborative approaches; 2) developing culturally-specific measures; 3) emergent cultural conceptualizations; 4) focus on evaluator-stakeholder relationships; 5) evaluator perspective and roles; 6) facilitating cultural understanding; and 7) methodological dissonance. This review and subsequent thematic analysis informed the questions and helped to focus the second phase of my research, one-on-one telephone interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners. As a result of the first two phases of my research, I subsequently developed a five-dimensional framework intended to depict the inter-related dimensions of cultural context (relational, ecological, methodological, organizational, and personal) that my findings suggest influence the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders, as well as the evaluation process, in cross-cultural program settings. This phase provided the rationale and impetus for the third phase of my research, a series of focus groups with community-

based program managers. In this third phase, I obtained feedback on the five-dimensional framework, a discussion which ultimately led to the addition of a sixth component, the political dimension.

While the three inter-related studies provided an initial interpretation of my research findings through the development of themes and dimensions, a more complete understanding of my overarching research questions necessitates a discussion that moves beyond looking at the six dimensions of the framework as discrete, stand-alone categories. In this chapter, I will explore the dynamic interconnections within the six dimensional framework, with particular attention given to those components that influence and interactively inform the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders as the evaluation unfolds. Before moving to a discussion of the inter-relationship between the six dimensions of cultural context, I first summarize the main findings of my research, paying particular attention to the implications for thinking about the concept of culture itself.

### **7.1 Research Summary: Key Findings**

The three interconnected studies have each provided a different lens in which to explore the multiple dimensions of evaluation in culturally diverse program contexts and in which to further explore what culture means within cross-cultural evaluation and program contexts. In the first phase of my research, my focus was on researching the empirical literature to look at how culture is conceptualized within program settings, and how it is thought to impact the evaluation and the program context. I was also interested in the rationale for cultural inclusion in the evaluation and on how these methods might be operationalized at the level of practice. My findings suggest that there is incredible

variability in how culture is conceptualized (from narrow to broad concepts) and on how it is thought to influence evaluation and program contexts. A key finding of this phase was the focus given to building relationships and partnerships with community members as a way to build understanding, trust and a more responsive cultural context. As a result, the use of participatory and collaborative methodologies was adopted in all but one of the empirical studies selected. I also found that the predominance of collaborative methodologies influences the role of the evaluator, requiring a more contextualized and relational approach, as well as the use of intermediaries, what I have called “boundary spanners” to bridge the conceptual and practical divide between evaluators and the community. I also noted numerous challenges in the use of standardized measures and instruments, requiring the need to build culturally specific and locally meaningful constructs that are firmly grounded in the cultural context of the community.

In the second phase of my research, my focus was on further exploring how culture is conceptualized in the program context and on how these different conceptions influence the cross-cultural evaluation setting. Given the strong focus on collaborative and participatory methods identified in the first phase, interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners in this phase were largely focused on the role evaluators play and on the relationships that they build in ultimately shaping evaluation processes within the cross-cultural and program context. My findings suggest that conceptualizations of culture (again from broad to narrow) influence relationships between evaluators and stakeholders and impact the evaluation process itself. One of the key findings of this study is the importance of the relational aspect of evaluation, its omnipresence throughout the evaluation, as links are made to validity and data accuracy through a

dialogic process that leads to knowledge of self and others. The five dimensions of cultural context that resulted from the analysis of my findings (in both phase one and phase two) is intended to depict the key components that inform relationships and influence the evaluation in the cross-cultural program context. The relational dimension emerges through interactions between evaluators and stakeholders; the ecological dimension describes the interaction between the cultural, historical and social climate that surrounds the program and the program community; the methodological dimension represents the theories and practices that inform the program and the evaluation, and that influences the methods and instruments selected; the organizational dimension depicts the parameters (conceived as limits and constraints) that are imposed by sponsors and funding agencies on the evaluation, context and community; the personal dimension describes the individual qualities (consciously or unconsciously) that inform evaluators and guide their work. These five dimensions bring the focus on the multiple and complex cultural aspects of evaluation and on the relational aspect of evaluation in cross-cultural program contexts.

In the third phase of my research, the primary focus was on exploring the community perspective related to the five dimensional framework identified in the previous study. One of the key findings of this phase was the political nature of evaluation as perceived by the community-based program managers. This finding led to the addition of the political dimension to my framework. This new dimension highlights the connection between evaluation and politics, bringing the focus to the relationship between evaluators, the community and the funding agency, as each have different histories, perspectives and information needs. Before moving to a thematic discussion of

the inter-relationship between dimensions, I first turn to a discussion of culture and its conceptualization and influence in the cross-cultural evaluation and program context across all three phases of my research.

## **7.2 Culture: Moving Beyond Theory to Practice**

For the purposes of my research, I began with a comprehensive and fairly inclusive definition of culture (see Chapter 1.4) that was intended to help guide my exploration of culture as both a theoretical and methodological construct in evaluation. Each successive phase of my research thus led me to reconceptualize my understanding of culture and evaluation, ultimately leading, in Phase Three of my research, to the development of a six dimensional framework of cultural context. Thus, while I envisioned culture as a very broad concept initially, I continued to think of it racially, as a dimension primarily of ethnicity. In fact, it was during conversations with participants in Phase Two of my study, that I began to develop a more nuanced sense of culture that includes not only dimensions of ethnicity, but gender, socio-economic status, national, organizational, etc., that is dependent not only upon context for understanding, but upon other ‘intersecting’ dimensions as well. In what follows, I will discuss my findings as they relate specifically to culture and to the evolution of my thinking around how it is conceptualized and how it ultimately impacts the program setting and evaluation.

In Phase One of my study (a comprehensive review of the literature), I noted that definitions of culture ranged from those that considered culture primarily as a demographic marker of a specific community requiring cultural awareness and “situational responsiveness” (Patton, 1985), to others that moved beyond the localized program context to include the broader social, political and historical contexts that

continue to define social and cultural inequities in our society. Others considered culture as something that they too possessed (Rogoff, 2003), and as something that circumscribes understanding and limits what they see and how they see it (Caldwell et al., 2005).

Others considered the influence of culture on the research methodologies applied in the field, noting that social inquiry is not culture-free and the production of knowledge is not neutral (Mertens, 1999), but is historically, culturally, economically, and politically mediated and bounded. The range of definitions and views of culture that I found across my 52 studies illustrates the continued contestability of culture as a concept within our society, as well as the immense difficulty in defining what remains a stubbornly ambiguous, contradictory and elastic term (Barth, 1994; Williams, 1981).

In Phase Two of my study (telephone interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners), participants described culture from a very broad perspective that is inclusive of qualities beyond ethnicity, and as a contextually embedded construct that exists at the individual, community, organizational or state levels. Thus, while my findings from both Phase One and Phase Two suggest that culture and cultural context influence *every* aspect and dimension of the evaluation (including the relationships we develop with stakeholders, the evaluation and program context, the methodologies and methods that we select, the organizational constraints, and the evaluator's personal values and biases), what needs to be made more explicit are the underlying cultural processes that are constantly at work (and in flux), creating boundaries, positions and possibilities within the cultural context .

Barth (1994) provides a conceptualization of three interpenetrating forces, the micro, median and macro, that I understand as underlying and informing the depiction of

the cultural context. The micro level refers to the individual and social processes involved in the formation of identity; the median level depicts the processes at play in establishing stereotypes and in creating communities; the macro level functions to establish state policies and rights and fashion ideologies and a sense of nationalism. These three distinct levels of culture are constantly in motion and can be understood as an underlying dimension of my framework, providing an understanding of how culture works at the levels of both action and symbolization (Barth, 1994).

In Phase Three of my study (focus groups with community-based program managers), participants described their experiences with culture, referring either to their own culture or to the culture of their client population, as a political construct that is highly dependent upon the context of the program community and of the evaluators themselves. The notion of culture as political thus moved it beyond a merely symbolic and descriptive notion, to a complex and socially enmeshed construct that is continuously ideologically and structurally produced and reproduced (Giroux, 1992). In listening to focus group participants, I was struck by the complexity of understanding culture, of understanding which elements of culture might be indigenous or native, and which elements might have been developed in response to relationships with the dominant culture (Popkewitz, 1988). The notion of culture is thus conceptualized as a relationally and ecologically complex concept that arises out of, through and among the social, historical and political interactions between groups, and between their differing perspectives and ideas.

Throughout the three successive phases of my research, my concept of culture became more multi-faced, influencing so many different aspects of the research and

evaluation process. The six dimensional framework of cultural context thus depicts, what is for me, the complexity of that cultural context. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of the inter-relationships of the six dimensions from a thematic perspective.

### 7.3 Emergent Themes: Bridging the Space Between

I have identified three cross-cutting themes that have emerged from the analysis in the three phases of my research that I conducted, themes that underscore the dynamic and vibrant interconnections within the six dimensions of cultural context and that help bring my research findings to life. Table 4 provides an overview of the three emergent themes and consequent elucidation.

*Table 4. Emergent Themes*

<p><b>Perspective:</b> <i>position and location</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social location</li> <li>• location of self/others</li> <li>• proximity to community</li> </ul>
<p><b>Engagement:</b> <i>reflections and intersections</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• connections with others</li> <li>• connections with self</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accommodation:</b> <i>representation and responsiveness</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• power/politics</li> <li>• inclusion</li> <li>• methodology</li> </ul>

Each of the themes denote movement of some sort, or a bridging of space between evaluators and stakeholders or between cultural beings, highlighting that the “space between us” (Ross, 2002) is never transparent or completely knowable, but is always in a process of negotiated understanding, what Bateson (2000) refers to as a state of “dynamic dissonance” (p. 30). For many, these “spaces” or “hyphens” constitute a position and a

place where power and knowledge are brought to the fore, where identities are made and differences realized. For others, these spaces are considered border crossings that co-mingle and at times clash, as cultures, identities, histories, and sexualities are brought together, made, and ultimately transformed (Giroux. 2005). Whatever the metaphor that is used to depict the relational complexities involved in evaluator/stakeholder relationships, my findings from all three phases of my research suggest that these spaces between provide an opening for the intersection and co-mingling of self and others, of politics and location, and of cultures and multiple cultures, throughout the process of evaluation. Building and nurturing relationships thus becomes a fundamental path necessary to overcoming the space between us (Josselson, 1992).

#### **7.4 Perspective: Position and Location**

The theme of *perspective* represents the ecological connection of self and others to social, political, historical and cultural locations, as we move from being outsiders to insiders (or vice versa), and as our proximity to the community and to ourselves shifts and changes over time. My findings suggest that the awareness of self as a cultural being and as an evaluator led significantly to an internal dialogue about identity and about the social categories that we assume throughout the research encounter, identities that are not fixed but mutable and transformed through our inter-relationships with others. Identity was thus experienced as a “production” and as a “positioning” that is always in process and never completed (Hall, 1990), leading to a multi-dimensional notion of identity that is created and recreated through discursive practices (Hall, 1996) and concomitant

patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Gilroy, 1990). As Hall (1990) describes:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they [identities] undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the name we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (p. 70).

These overlapping and intertwining notions of identity thus occur across cultural, class, gender and racial divides, and across political, economic and social histories that are saturated with unequal status, power and privilege. The many points of inclusion and exclusion, of being a part of and being outside, underscores the very complexity of our relationships with self and others in the research encounter. As Cockburn (1998) points out, “the social formation and the moment certainly shape the range of identities in play” (p. 213). Relationships between evaluators and the stakeholder community, between notions of personal identity and the identity of others, thus influence the opportunities and limitations within the evaluative context, circumscribing the program and the co/construction of knowledge as the evaluation unfolds (Abma, 2006).

Intersections of identity were particularly marked for those who considered themselves as both cultural insiders and academic or privileged outsiders (Brayboy, 2000; Thapar-Bjorkert, 1999), both uneasy dualities considering the multiplicity of roles and identities potentially enacted throughout the evaluative and research encounter. Rosaldo

(1989) refers to this duality as one of “danc[ing] on the edge of a paradox” (p. 180), simultaneously living positions both of colonized and colonizer (Brayboy, 2000). The insider/outsider binary thus underscores the difficulty of ascribing fixed notions of identity, as it neglects the interactive process in the creation of identities (Naples, 1997) and it belies the complexity of the cross-cultural encounter. The search for the right cultural informants and the use of evaluators from similar ethnic backgrounds as program participants may thus prove problematic, as it tends to reify cultural traits by oversimplifying the factors that create identity (Schick, 2002). At the same time, it does not account for the heterogeneity among cultural members nor intra-cultural variables, and confuses issues of power, knowledge and exclusion with finding the right informants (Schick, 2002). The use of boundary spanners and the interactions and inter-relationships between evaluators and stakeholders thus raises important questions about the construction of identity, and about the multiplicity of often overlapping and intersecting identities (tied to concepts of gender, race or class) that abound in the cross-cultural program context.

Globalization ensures that cultures are no longer insular (Bandura, 2002), as they are constantly being constructed and remade through the processes of migration and acculturation (Guarnaccia & Rodriguez, 1996). Identities are thus created discursively, constructed in specific historical and political contexts (Hall, 1996), in relation to others (McRobbie, 1992), and through continuous struggle, as they are constructed and reconstructed over time. Given the complexity of culture and the formation of identity, it thus becomes necessary to challenge the epistemological status of our definitions of what constitutes a social category and the terms of inclusion (Rogoff, 2003; Schick, 2002),

making decisions concerning who's in and who's out, as a way of bridging the cultural chasm. As Moharty (1987, as cited in Pickering, 2008) explains, "the experience of being a woman can create an illusory unity, for it is not the experience of being a woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class, and age at various moments that is of strategic significance" (p. 39). The sense of "illusory unity" based on shifting categories of identity, of ascribed status (Merton, 1972) whether of woman, ethnicity, class, age (etc.), can lead to a sense of privileged access to social and cultural truths (Merton, 1972). While my research findings and associated literature (Brayboy, 2000; Bridges, 2001; Howarth, 2002), underscore the complexity of the insider/outsider conundrum, they also raise key epistemological questions about the social construction of knowledge, assertions of truth, and about who has privileged access to, and has the right to speak, for others.

While I appreciate the historic, social and political role of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, 1987), the point is not to view insiders and outsiders as dichotomist positions, but rather, as complementary. As Merton (1972) suggests:

We no longer need to ask whether it is the insider or the outsider who has monopolistic or privileged access to social truth; instead, we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking...the essential point is that...the process of intellectual exchange takes place precisely because the conflicting groups are in interaction (p. 36/38).

While the complexity of identity and the philosophical and empirical problems associated with creating fixed categories in terms of who is in and who is out are significant, it fails to address the significance of research relationships (and "interactive roles") and the

influence of community and program context in shaping research outcomes (Schick, 2002). As the theme of perspective and location of self and others implies, it is our coming together as evaluators and stakeholders that creates the very possibility of change. As Merton (1972) concludes, “insiders and outsiders in the domain of knowledge, unite: you have nothing to lose but your claims. You have a world of understanding to win” (p. 44).

### **7.5 Engagement: Reflections and Intersections**

The theme of *engagement* represents the connections that we have with others and with ourselves in the cross-cultural encounter, as we come together and, through dialogue, develop a new understanding of where we come from and who we are in relationship in the program and evaluation setting. My findings suggest that understanding of self and others provides contextual and cultural grounding, as the roles we assume reflect the dynamic and multifaceted identities that we play in the field. The relationship between self and others, the connections and intersections between who we are and who we become through our engagement with others, is fundamental to understanding in a cross-cultural context. At the same time, this engaged stance reflects the changes in how we view evaluation, from a disinterested social science defined by its neutrality, objectivity and dispassionate observation, to one of engagement and richly textured and interpretive inter-relationships (Ryan & Schwandt, 2002).

The contextualized and relational approach to our role as evaluators is also reflective of a new conceptual understanding of evaluation (Abma et al., 2001; King & Stevahn, 2002). Some researchers thus abandon the traditional conception of role altogether, as they argue that it fails to accurately capture the personal and political

relationships that are embedded in evaluation and that are considered paramount in the cross-cultural evaluation and program context (King & Stavahn, 2002). Mathison (1994) describes a shift in the role of the evaluator, from expert to one of collaborative partnership, that emphasizes the ongoing and relational aspect of evaluator role. For J. Greene (2000), the influence of context and multiple relationships on our roles (as evaluators in the field) is conceptualized as “evaluator-as-engaged person”, a stance that reflects how we are present in our work, our engagement with moral and ethical complexity, as well as our engagement from the perspective of various positions and locations within society (where we come from). Schwandt (2002) also sees role as a relational concept, but he draws a distinction between role as something that is part of our core, stable self, and as something that can be put on and taken off at will, and role as a praxis-oriented concept that is discursively constructed, tied to notions of identity, and continuously enacted and re-enacted in practice. Abma and Widdershoven (2008) also note three distinctive evaluator roles that include evaluator as social science expert and judge (signifying relational distance), evaluator as provocateur who challenges societal power and social relations, and evaluator as someone who understands the inter-relational aspect of evaluation as fundamental to the very process of evaluation itself. This latter view is based on a hermeneutic and constructivist perspective that, as Abma and Widdershoven (2008) explain, is premised on the belief that “understanding our socially constructed world can only be generated by developing a relation and dialogue with and between the inhabitants of this world” (p. 211). The role of evaluator thus influences and is influenced by relations among and between evaluators and stakeholders (Abma, 2006).

The role of the evaluator is thus characterized as situationally and contextually complex, as well as relationally, interactionally and discursively enacted (through our relations to self and others), within the evaluation and program context. Conceptualizing the evaluator role from a relational, socially constructed and performative perspective, recasts relationships within the cross-cultural evaluative context as an asset rather than as something that needs to be overcome (Hopson, 2002), and brings the focus to an understanding of diverse stakeholder needs, interests and program goals. The point is that we bring who we are to the evaluation, including our values, preferences, aspirations, biases, and what I have referred to previously as our identities, from the questions we pose, to the stakeholders we include or exclude, and to what we envision evaluation to be. The role of the evaluator, much like identity, is thus deeply embedded and shaped by the local program and community context, as well as by the broader social, historical and political forces that influence the local program setting (Hopson, 2003). The traditional characterization of role thus underplays the dynamic aspect of our connections with others and with ourselves (Schwandt, 2002), both critical components to understanding within the cross-cultural program and evaluation context.

My findings also position understanding as a key relational construct that helps to ground our knowledge in the cultural context of the community. Understanding, particularly within a hermeneutic tradition, is located dialogically between the self and others (Saukko, 2005), within and between the interactions of evaluators and stakeholders in relationship with each other. Understanding is thus relational, requiring an openness and a willingness to engage with others, as well as an active awareness of how we ourselves are implicated in the research process (Hertz, 1997). As Kirkhart (2005)

argues, “evaluators’ personal characteristics, orientations and identifications, life histories, academic training, and cultural experiences are inescapably woven into the theoretical understandings that they put forth for consideration” (p. 25). The notion of a “politics of location” (Rich, 1987) thus situates the researcher within his or her own personal biographical and sociological location, as well as within a broader ecological and socio-political location. As Garrison (1996) points out, we need to see that we are “conditioned by historical circumstances... that condition the needs, desires, perceptions, beliefs, and so on that constitute our identity” (p. 434). Self-understanding thus requires what Symonette (2004) refers to as “multilateral self-awareness” (p. 100), awareness of one’s own culture, the culture of others, and of our role as evaluators in the cross-cultural program setting.

While we unavoidably bring ourselves and our multiple, shifting identities to the field, through dialogue we also create and actively re-construct ourselves in the field (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hertz, 1997). As Burbles and Rice (1991) argue, “dialogue requires us to re-examine our own presuppositions and to compare them against quite different ones; to make us less dogmatic about the belief that the way the world appears to us is necessarily the way the world is” (p. 405). Understanding, according to Schwandt (2000), is thus participative, conversational and dialogic” (p. 195), requiring open engagement with others as a precondition to learning and growth. As Gadamer (1989) explains:

To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being

transformed into a communication in which we do not remain what we were (p. 379).

Understanding is thus not merely seen as a way of knowing, but as a dialogical activity (Klemm, 1986) that produces new understandings between evaluators and stakeholders in cross-cultural and program settings.

### **7.6 Accommodation: Representation and Responsiveness**

The theme of *accommodation* represents the myriad political, social and cultural implications behind our methodological selections and choice of methods, as evaluators and stakeholders together construct and co-construct the knowledge that is created throughout the process of evaluation. My findings suggest that in an effort to conduct culturally responsive evaluation in culturally distinct communities, evaluation is seen as a form of collaboration and partnership between evaluators and community members, designed to increase understanding of unique socio-cultural characteristics, processes and perspectives, and to incorporate strategies that acknowledge diverse ways of knowing. At the same time, the use of participatory approaches should not obscure the complexity of the collaboration between evaluators, program managers and community members, as significant, daunting and persistent challenges remain. While some of the challenges result from the dynamics of the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders (e.g., power differentials, community and community member voice), other challenges relate to the political and social history of the community *vis-à-vis* the dominant society, as well as concomitant levels of trust and respect.

Despite the widespread use of collaborative approaches to evaluation, I nonetheless discerned significant variation in practice, from low participation to high

stakeholder input, across multiple cultural and program contexts. The use of collaborative approaches can be distinguished based on the rationale and goals of the evaluation, with three distinct justifications (political, philosophic, and pragmatic) used to advance inclusion in evaluation. A discussion of these three justifications for collaboration will shed light on the complex and multi-dimensional nature of participation across local, diverse contexts and help to elucidate the centrality of the collaborative relationship and the preference for participative approaches in cross-cultural settings. The *political* or *ideological* justification for collaborative inquiry is rooted in concerns for social justice and is based on a moral and normative sense of obligation involving the ideals of democratic inclusion, empowerment, and emancipation (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Equity concerns seek to include the voices of the least powerful and more disadvantaged in our society, enabling evaluators to better support community stakeholder interests (Levin, 1993). This rationale highlights the need to look at the dynamics of collaboration as well as its preconditions, noting that it often occurs among people with different histories and varying levels of power (Trickett & Espino, 2004). The *philosophic* or *epistemological* justification is motivated by social constructivist notions concerning the importance of context and the inclusion of multiple participants in the co-construction of knowledge. The inclusion of stakeholder perspectives is based on democratic principles of fairness and equity (Greene, 2000) and is thought to increase the validity of the data and the knowledge generated (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). Attention in this justification is thus given to the relational context of the knowledge generated (Trickett & Espino, 2004). The *pragmatic* justification is based upon a practical rationale, where increased participation is thought to produce more useful results that

better support program and organizational decision making (Patton, 1998) and enhance organizational learning and use of findings (Cousins & Earl, 1995; Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). The pragmatic justification underscores the importance of local knowledge to community-based work but leaves unanswered how the knowledge is gathered, assessed and integrated with the professional knowledge of the evaluator (Trickett & Espino, 2004).

While none of these three justifications are intended as empirically distinct, there is overlap, they do serve to underscore the many different motivations to collaboration, and they do provide a bridge between theory and practice. Of interest are terms such as “empowerment” and its converse “power”, “emancipation”, “democracy”, “co-construction of knowledge”, “local knowledge”, and “organizational learning”. In theory, these terms provide strong impetus for advancing inclusion, dialogue and use of evaluation findings. In evaluation practice, however, these concepts assume more muted and contentious forms. While the collaboration between stakeholders and evaluators in cross-cultural contexts has been found to increase the validity of the data, the co-construction of knowledge and meaning between diverse stakeholders and evaluators is not uncontested, particularly given that one of the most difficult and vexing issues, as well as one of the biggest threats to genuine community inclusion is precisely the imbalance of power (House & Howe, 2000), particularly in communities with a history of exploitation and marginalization.

While collaborative approaches may provide a more inclusive and participatory context and may in fact help mitigate some power differentials, merely inviting everyone

to the table is not enough. As Schick (2002) explains:

Power, rather than principles of logic and evidence, denies particular groups (women and members of racially “marginal” groups) legitimacy and authority to define their own experiences, needs, and priorities and to offer authoritative interpretations of broader social processes and structures” (p. 646).

What is thus required, as many evaluation scholars have argued, is the need to overtly and consciously address power differentials, and to understand the relationship between power and participation in the evaluative setting (Gregory, 2000; Nelson-Barber et al., 2005; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003), particularly as they influence and impact the collaborative relationships that we build in the field. As Symonette (2004) explains, “evaluators need enhanced understandings of related systemic processes of asymmetric power relations and privilege, not simply awareness and knowledge of difference and diversity” (p. 108).

While evaluators who work in cross-cultural program settings acknowledge the challenges of conducting evaluations and building collaborative relationships amidst unequal power and status, my findings suggest that it remains under-reported in both the literature and empirical findings. As a relational and productive concept (Foucault, 1979), power informs both the relationships between evaluators and stakeholders, as well as the broader socio-political level, what Gaventa & Cornwall (2006) refer to respectively as the “micro-political relationships of power” and the “macro-political relationships of power” (p. 73). As Gaventa and Cornwall (2006) explain, “power affects actors at every level of organizational and institutional relationships, not just those who are at the bottom of such relationships” (p. 73). Power is thus not conceptualised as something that is

possessed by any one individual, state or higher authority, but as something that circulates and structures knowledge and its social constructions (Foucault, 1980). In this way, power can be conceptualised as a “network of social boundaries “ (Hayword, 1998, p. 2), that includes laws, norms, institutional structures, and identities, that delimit what can and cannot be done. This relational view of power thus draws attention to how relations of power (and powerlessness) are socially and politically shaped, and how they influence relationships between evaluators and stakeholders in the field.

To explore the interplay between knowledge and power, as well as to further explore the social and political context of our methodological approaches in cross-cultural contexts, Foucault’s notion of discourse helps to elucidate these complexities further. As Foucault (1980) explains:

In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse (p. 93).

Discourses thus enable an understanding of how power and knowledge are interlaced, and how they are articulated and given “reality” through our social constructions.

Discourses thus do more than simply structure “reality” and what is considered “real” knowledge, as they actually legitimate and create it (Foucault, 1972). As Hall (1992) describes:

Discourse is a way of talking about or representing something. It produces knowledge that shapes perceptions and practice. It is part of the way in which

power operates. Therefore, it has consequences for both those who employ it and those who are 'subjected' to it (p. 318).

An understanding of discourse thus provides the opportunity to identify and explore power relations and the limitations given to definitions of knowledge, where knowledge is regarded as dominant, while other forms of knowledge are "subjugated" to the margins of history.

The point to consider is that the use of collaborative methodologies and culturally resonant methods should not mask evaluation's inherent cultural authority (House, 1993), nor obscure its power to define the parameters of what constitutes legitimate discourse and knowledge in the social sciences (Reagan, 1996). As Danziger (quoted in Kushner, 2000) explains, "forms of investigation have to be understood as forms of social organization-they do not happen outside of our institutions, our social relations, our politics, and economics" (p. 16). Danziger (1990) thus draws a clear distinction between the actual methodologies that we use and the actual discourses that circulate about the methods and approaches that we adopt for use in the field. Thus, reliance on methodology through the use of stakeholder agreement or terms of reference (for example), is insufficient, particularly if one considers the broader social, cultural and political conditions within which programs are embedded. As Schick (2002) points out, "it is naïve to think that a history of exclusion can be overcome by "including" individuals already identified and selected because they are disempowered by those very structures" (p. 647). It thus becomes essential that evaluators themselves develop cultural fluency, not only about themselves and about the program and the people being evaluated, but about the wider cultural systems within which we are all enmeshed.

A key point is that despite the multiple challenges and dilemmas evaluators encounter in conducting evaluations in cross-cultural contexts, including implementing participatory methodologies amidst significant power imbalances, I found little to suggest any tension between localized conceptions (i.e., indigenous ways of knowing) and conceptions of evaluation as a Western, American construct (Conner, 1985). To help understand the dichotomy between Western-based epistemological research approaches and non-Western approaches, there is merit in considering the significant differences between Western and Aboriginal epistemological constructions, in “ways of knowing” (Smylie et al., 2003). To illustrate this dichotomy, Indigenous knowledge systems have been described as “ecologic, holistic, relational, pluralistic, experiential, timeless, infinite, communal, oral, and narrative-based” (Smylie et al., 2003, p. 141). Western-based research, on the other hand, has been described as “reductionist, linear, objective, hierarchical, empirical, static, temporal, singular, specialized, and written” (Smylie et al., 2003, p. 141). To be culturally relevant in Indigenous communities thus requires significant sensitivity to Indigenous “ways of knowing” and awareness of Western-based cultural research practices. It thus becomes essential that as social researchers working in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural contexts, we explore questions of epistemology and explore what knowledge is, how we create it, what we do with it, how it circulates, and how it is transformed. These questions have the potential to take us beyond the simple theory/practice polarity to more specific interrogations of the structures that shape our experiences and our understanding of the complexities of social and cultural life.

## **7.7 Summary**

The six dimensions of the framework of cultural context are not discrete, stand-alone categories. In this discussion chapter I explored the dynamic nature of the framework, with a specific focus on the components of cultural context that interactively inform the relationship between evaluators and community stakeholders in cross-cultural evaluation contexts. I identified three themes that cut across the dimensions and that help to bring my research findings to life: perspective, engagement and accommodation. These three themes illustrate the position and social location of the evaluator in terms of self and others, the mutable identities and roles evaluators assume at various points during the evaluation, the dialogues that encourage understanding of others and of self, and the methods used to advance inclusion that paradoxically can mitigate and conceal power inequities in the field.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion and Agenda for Future Research

*To break a cycle of repetition, it becomes necessary at some point to go past the edge of the familiar and enter a place that is truly unknown...in the absence of the willingness to risk relationship-the experience of really hearing and taking the other's voice into oneself-the talking just goes on and on, because in the absence of relationship, change is impossible.*

*Taylor, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1995*

I began my research by posing fairly broad questions about culture in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts, what it means, its influence, as well as the role it plays in mediating relationships between evaluators and community stakeholders, and how these relationships themselves potentially shape evaluation processes and consequences. In this final chapter, I will discuss tentative conclusions that I can draw from my research and that point to future research in the area of cross-cultural evaluation. I will also specify the contributions I feel my research has made in the field of evaluation, the limitations of my current study, as well as implications for practice.

### 8.1 Putting it All Together

At the outset, I was concerned with understanding broadly how culture influences the cross-cultural evaluation context and the role of relationships in shaping evaluation processes and outcomes. Through an interconnected three-part study (a comprehensive literature review, interviews with scholars and practitioners and focus groups with community-based program managers), I developed a six dimensional framework depicting the inter-related cultural dimensions and components that surface in interactions between evaluators and community-based stakeholders in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts. In my discussion chapter, I further developed the key dynamic components of the framework that cut across all six dimensions and interweave throughout the evaluation.

I also began my research conceptualizing the process of evaluation as a relational and ecological endeavour, positioning the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders as paramount within cross-cultural evaluation. My findings provide further support that these relationships have far-reaching consequences, particularly given the predominant use of participatory and collaborative approaches in cross-cultural settings. While my findings also suggest that a participatory approach to evaluation cannot alter the broader social, economic, political and cultural systems that continue to create and sustain inequities in our society, understanding the dynamic, unfolding and ongoing connections and relations between evaluators and stakeholders is essential (Emirbayer, 1997). An important point is that we must acknowledge and embrace our differences, our plurality, not as something to be overcome through forced consensus or through deep social change, but as something that can be leveraged in our relations around the evaluation table. Acknowledging our interconnectivity and our differences enables us to negotiate and not negate the cultural distances that can separate us (Ross, 2003). Evaluators need to be aware that consensus does not address the experiences of diversity in our society (Stake, 1991), but rather, that it can easily result in the negating of differences and the neglect of the voices of the marginalized (Abma et al., 2001).

Ross's (2002/2003) concept of "relational theorizing" provides a provocative reading of the complexity of cross-cultural relationships, particularly in terms of the differences that evaluators confront as they strive to understand and co-construct knowledge and meaning in their evaluations. For Ross (2003), difference is not something that can or should be overcome, but something that she envisions as a "bridge to relationality" (p. 4), a means to renegotiate and reconceptualize conceptions of

difference and interconnectivity. According to Ross (2003), we need to stop negating our differences, and accept that we can never fully efface that which makes us culturally and socially distinct. As J. Greene (2005) explains:

...in this relational view of the practice of evaluation, the very knowledge that is generated in evaluation-our results, our findings, our judgements of program quality-are understood to be generated within and by a particular set of evaluation relationships and interactions, and thus, to a significant degree, are actually constituted by these relationships and interactions (p. 14).

A relational stance towards evaluation and towards collaboration, enables reconceptualising the relationship between stakeholders and evaluators, reconceptualising what evaluation is and what it can be. Most import, this view of evaluation, and relational theorizing itself, provides the language to help us see beyond our differences and to actively embrace the plurality within which we all live.

## **8.2 Contributions to Research on Evaluation: Lessons From a Three-Part**

### **Interconnected Study**

My current study makes four contributions to research in evaluation. To begin with, I adopted a multidisciplinary approach to studying evaluation in cross-cultural contexts, drawing upon critical, feminist and postmodern perspectives as a way to better understand and capture the complexity of the cross-cultural program and evaluation context. I firmly believe that if we wish to advance empirical and theoretical work in this area of evaluation and culture, it is essential that we critically examine our own methodological approaches, what they represent, where they come from, and who they speak to and for. In so doing, this critical subjectivist stance can enable us to examine

our potential complicity in maintaining research methodologies that are no longer culturally valid nor ethically supportable. However, in a field such as evaluation, where the gold standard continues to be defined in an objective, neutral and detached language that in itself structures and defines relationships among evaluators and community stakeholders (Smith, 1990), the use of critical and postmodern methodological approaches is perceived as lacking the rigour that the field requires. My use of a multidisciplinary approach thus provides further evidence that innovative approaches have the potential to provide a new lens in which to appreciate complex social, cultural and political phenomenon.

Second, the six dimensional framework of cultural context that emerged out of my three interconnected studies (a comprehensive review of the literature, interviews with scholars and practitioners, and focus groups with community-based program managers) provides a comprehensive picture of how pervasive culture is in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts. Culture is present in our relationships with stakeholders (and among stakeholders themselves), in terms of the ecological context of the community's social and political history, in our methodologies and research methods, in the politics of the context as power and privilege interweave throughout the setting, through the organizational norms that structure the evaluation, and in the personal biases and traits of the evaluator him or herself. The six dimensional framework thus provides an understanding of how culture influences the context of the evaluation, the relationships within the setting, and the evaluation process and consequences that are ultimately developed. Thus, given the dearth of knowledge about what it means to incorporate culture in evaluation, the framework adds to the existing knowledge base by

providing an inclusive and comprehensive depiction of the six dimensions of cultural context that play out in the context of an evaluation. As such, the six dimensional framework can provide evaluators working in cross-cultural contexts with a better sense of how culture influences multiple dimensions within the evaluative context, an influence that extends beyond mere surface variations in style, language or dress.

Third, given the widespread use of participatory and collaborative approaches in cross-cultural program and evaluation contexts, one of the primary focuses of my research was on the relationships that are created and sustained between evaluators and stakeholders in the field. While relational approaches in evaluation are uncommon (likely due to the strict adherence to neutral and objective methods), in the cross-cultural evaluation field, they have the potential to provide insight into the epistemological, cultural and social underpinnings of knowledge construction in the evaluation context. In positioning the evaluator and community stakeholders as active co-constructors in the creation of evaluation knowledge, the relational perspective also draws attention to the long term engagement necessary to build the kinds of relationships that ultimately lead to increased understanding, learning and more valid and accurate research and evaluation findings. The framework, moreover, also sheds light on the multiple and overlapping dimensions and components that influence the relationships that we build in the field.

Fourth, one of the challenges in conducting evaluations in diverse community contexts is finding evaluators or researchers who have knowledge of the community and its culture, language and history. Does the solution lie in ethnic pairing of evaluator and community? Will a cultural translator from the community suffice? While this continues to be a contested area of research and practice, my research findings suggest that as

identity is a multifaceted and fluid concept, it is thus difficult to accurately determine the insider or outsider status based on a simple, one-dimensional notion of identity. The fact that one can be both an insider and an outsider (at one and the same time), further obfuscates initial assumptions that we might make based on gender, ethnicity, education, age, etc. The important point worth underscoring for both funders and evaluators is the continued need to be mindful of which cultural dimensions are salient within a particular context or setting. The emphasis should be on developing relationships that will provide contextual and cultural understanding about what is salient, and what is not, in a particular setting.

### **8.3 Research Limitations**

I have identified two main limitations of my research, both of which are related to the composition of my selected samples. The first limitation has to do with the fact that I could locate very few studies (seven out of a total of 52) for phase one of my research that were based in contexts outside of North America, thus preventing a more comprehensive perspective of evaluations conducted cross-culturally around the world. The second limitation is related to the composition of my focus groups and the use of snowball sampling as a way to identify potential participants. While this form of sampling provided me with participants who were interested and invested in cross-cultural program evaluation, it also meant that there was less internal variety within my sample in terms of interests, experiences working with evaluators, and positions within the community-based organization.

#### **8.4 Future Research: Where Do We Go From Here?**

The complexity of the cross-cultural program and evaluation setting and of the multiple relationships within the cultural context requires innovative, multidisciplinary and creative ways in which to explore what it means to conduct evaluations in these dynamic settings. In what follows, I identify priority issues and questions for further study, some of which are based on the six dimensional framework and others that push the current methods of inquiry and have the potential to further understanding of evaluation in cross-cultural settings.

- 1. Understanding multiple relationships.** There are many different relationships within the evaluative setting that need to be sorted out, among community stakeholders themselves, between community stakeholders and external stakeholders (such as funders), and between all of these diverse stakeholders and the evaluators themselves. How do these multiple relationships influence the evaluation process and consequences? Do the dimensions of the framework hold up outside of the evaluator-stakeholder relationship? Beyond the community-based program managers, are community members represented in this framework?
- 2. Alternative narrative research methods.** This study was based on a comprehensive literature review, interviews with scholars and practitioners, and focus groups with community-based program people. To advance the knowledge base and encourage a deeper understanding of cross-cultural evaluation and of the relationships that play a key role in influencing the evaluation process and outcomes, I would suggest a reflective case narrative to include the voices of both

the evaluator and other cultural community members as narrators of the story.

This would thus provide for a more nuanced sense of the interconnectedness and cross-cultural dynamics of knowledge creation as the evaluation unfolds. How do we include the voices of others (and other ways of knowing) into our evaluation practices? Who tells the story and whose story is the one being told?

3. **Exploring identity as a key influencing variable.** Identity and the concept of insider/outsider status were found to be key components in the six dimensional framework, influencing relationships to self and others, understanding, methodological approaches and power/politics. At the same time, notions of identity were often reduced to ethnicity as a key marker of difference and methodological relevance. What is the research identity (tied to notions of insider/outsider positionality), and how does it change over time throughout the research or evaluation encounter? As a very multifaceted and shifting concept, how does identity influence our approach to research and to evaluation? How do we determine what is salient (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, class, etc.) within an evaluation context and how does it impact our methodological decisions and evaluation outcomes?
4. **Participatory approaches in cross-cultural contexts.** The widespread use of participatory approaches to evaluation in cross-cultural contexts underscored the complexity of the relationship between evaluators and community stakeholders, as well as the difficulty involved in conducting collaborative evaluations where power and privilege is unequally distributed among the evaluator and other stakeholder groups. What does participation (itself a Western concept) mean in

such diverse cultural contexts, and how can we ever meaningfully and respectfully interact with diverse stakeholders in a setting that often lacks the resources and the time needed to work collaboratively? Given power, privilege, and status differences among evaluators and stakeholders (and among stakeholders themselves), what does it mean to conduct participatory evaluation in these contexts? What does participation look like? What role do relationships play in mitigating power and privilege issues within the cross-cultural evaluative setting?

5. **Methodological selection.** In my study, I noted strong arguments in support of qualitative approaches as a means of giving primacy to the local context, as well as equally persuasive arguments in favour of methodological pluralism to ensure a more thorough rendering of the program and its context. In cross-cultural program and evaluation settings, is one methodological approach preferable over another? Is there significant added value in mixing multiple methods? Can quantitative approaches help evaluators engage culture? If so, which (if any) approaches would be consistent with cross-cultural evaluation (e.g. comparative studies)? Which approaches would further cross-cultural evaluation?
6. **Broadening the geographical scope of the study.** My current study focused primarily upon evaluation scholars and practitioners who were based in either the United States or in Canada, and who were for the most part involved in projects situated in North American communities. The inclusion of international evaluators or North American evaluators who work in international settings would provide a more comprehensive picture of what it means to conduct cross-cultural

evaluations in non-Western settings outside of the national context. What do relationships between evaluators, communities and funders look like in the international milieu? What role do evaluators play in this setting? What types of questions, challenges, issues and constraints are evaluators facing as they attempt to evaluate programs in non-Western contexts? Does the six dimensional framework make sense in non-North American settings?

7. **A textual and cultural analysis of the research findings.** All of the research participants in the second phase of my study came from different cultural locations, some (for example) are African American, female and in academia, while others are Hispanic, male and working in programs and evaluation at the community level. How do their cultural locations influence their narrative responses? Does their dialogue reveal anything about the cultural intersections from which they come? Do their locations influence their perspectives about evaluation and about cross-cultural evaluation?

In the end, it is my hope that my research study and the six dimensional framework helps to expand our thinking about how we conduct evaluations in cross-cultural contexts while at the same time, stimulating debate and discussion for ongoing inquiry.

### **8.5 Implications for Practice: Clarifying and Describing Cultural Dimensions**

Beyond providing potential areas of future research, the six dimensional framework depicting interconnected dimensions of cultural context also suggests implications for practice in cross-cultural evaluation and program contexts. To begin with, there is a dearth of knowledge about how to conduct evaluations in cross-cultural contexts and what it means to do evaluations in these settings. There still remain

significant gaps about how to integrate cultural context into evaluation practice, as well as gaps in how to conduct and implement cross-cultural evaluation. My dissertation provides a comprehensive review of the literature on culture in evaluation as well as a framework to facilitate understanding concerning the complexity and multidimensionality of evaluation within cross-cultural contexts. The framework organizes the six dimensions of cultural context (and accompanying components) in a table format to provide evaluators with an accessible and easy-to-read format for understanding the multiple dimensions of cultural context.

While the six dimensions (and accompanying components) should not be used as a checklist, the framework would be useful in terms of evaluator pre-service and in-service training, as well as for the development of evaluator competencies and subsequent revisions to the Canadian Evaluation Society - Joint Committee Standards, with emphasis on the cultural dimension of evaluation. The framework would also be useful to help guide ongoing evaluation practice that is conducted in cross-cultural community and program contexts.

## **8.6 A Final Note**

This dissertation has explored how culture influences the evaluation and the program setting, and how it mediates the relationship between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders. As my research unfolded, so too did my understanding of culture and its influence in the evaluation and program setting. The literature that informed my research was multidisciplinary, and drew upon a wide-range of theoretical orientations that are often considered antithetical to good evaluation practice (i.e. postmodernism). At the same time, the relational perspective enabled me to explore the

complexity of the relationships within the cross-cultural evaluation and program setting (i.e. between evaluators and community stakeholders, between evaluators and program sponsors/funders, between community stakeholders) and to appreciate more fully that the creation of a more just and humane world requires that we all embrace the plurality and the diversity that continues to define our communities.

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Text – Phase Two (Cross-Cultural Evaluation Scholars and Practitioners)

November 26, 2008

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a PhD (Education) student working under the supervision of Professor Brad Cousins at the University of Ottawa. My thesis research is on cross-cultural program evaluation and I am conducting three integrated studies. With this email, I am seeking your participation for study two of my thesis, a 45-60 minute telephone interview with evaluation scholars and/or practitioners who have published in the field and who do work in cross-cultural evaluation.

My proposed research is designed to explore the role of culture in mediating the relationship between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders and to understand how differing conceptions of culture play out in the context of an evaluation and how relationships between stakeholders and evaluators shape evaluation decisions and outcomes. The results of my study will contribute to the literature on evaluation in culturally diverse program contexts by providing an increased understanding of how differing notions of multi-cultural and ethno-cultural differences play out in the local program context.

Your involvement would entail participation in an audio-taped 45-60 minute telephone interview. The questions for the interview will be designed to capture your experiences working in the cross-cultural program evaluation context. I would like to assure you that all information you provide will remain strictly confidential and that your identity will be withheld from reports arising from the research. I will use pseudonyms for the names of people, organizations and places.

If you would like more information, please feel free to contact me  
or, if you prefer, contact Professor Brad Cousins, Faculty of  
Education, University of Ottawa Please  
let me know by email if you are willing and able to participate in my study. I would like to set up the telephone interview over the next two months and therefore would need your preference for a date and time for the 45 min. telephone interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jill Anne Chouinard

p.s. If you agree to participate, I will send you a formal letter of informed consent in compliance with the University of Ottawa Ethics Review Board policy

## Appendix B

### Phase Two - Interview Questions

1. Could you briefly describe some of the work that you have done in the cross-cultural evaluation program context?  
e.g. Do you practice it? Conduct research on it? Teach it? Length of time?
2. In your opinion, what does it mean to do cross-cultural evaluation?  
e.g. What does it mean to address culture within the evaluative context? How does a better understanding of culture improve evaluation practice? What assumptions are made? What benefits? What considerations might you make relative to the specific context?
3. How would you define culture within the cross-cultural program context? What is the relationship between culture and evaluation?
4. What impact do you think culture has on evaluation?  
e.g. How does culture influence the choice of methodology?
5. What does participation mean in more diverse cultural contexts?  
e.g. How is inclusion addressed? How are power issues addressed? What are limits of participation? Possibilities?
6. If we conceptualize evaluation as a relational construct, how would you describe relationships in the cross-cultural context?  
e.g. Between evaluators and stakeholders? Between stakeholders?
7. What role do you think the evaluator plays in the cross-cultural encounter?  
e.g. identity, agency, reflexivity
8. Relationally, what kinds of issues surfaced? How were they accommodated for?
9. Can you think of anything else to add that I may not have addressed specifically in my questions?

## Appendix C

### Recruitment Text – Phase Three (Community-Based Program Managers)

Hello,

[ ] has given me your name. I am a doctoral student (Education) at the University of Ottawa working under the supervision of Professor Brad Cousins. My research is on cross-cultural program evaluation, with a specific focus on exploring the role of culture in mediating relationships between evaluators and diverse community stakeholders, understanding how differing conceptions of culture play out in the context of an evaluation, and understanding how relationships between evaluators and stakeholders shape evaluation decisions and outcomes.

***What am I looking for--*** I am looking for practitioners to take part in a 90-minute focus group with other service providers from community-based health and social sector organizations to tap into the community perspective on relationships and factors that help or hinder cross-cultural understanding within the program setting.

I have recently conducted an extensive literature review of empirical research in cross-cultural program evaluation and have completed interviews with evaluation scholars and practitioners who work in the area of cross-cultural evaluation. As a result of this research, I have developed a framework that details the inter-connected dimensions that inform the relationship between evaluators and stakeholders in the cross-cultural evaluation context, and that influence the evaluation process from planning through to dissemination. This framework, however, does not yet include community-based/practitioner input, a perspective that is necessary to understanding the cultural and relational program evaluation context.

***What's in it for you--***The focus group will provide you with the opportunity to meet with colleagues in other health and social service organizations to discuss program evaluation in cross-cultural community contexts. I will also share the cross-cultural program framework that I have developed to help evaluators and community sector organizations better understand the program and evaluation contexts, as well as the literature review of 52 articles, book chapters and foundation reports based on empirical studies of cross-cultural program evaluations. I will also be providing lunch in a relaxed and collegial setting for all focus group participants.

***When--***To provide some flexibility, I will be scheduling two possible dates for the 90-minute focus group, September 8 and September 10, 2009, from 11:30 – 1pm.

***Where--***I will be holding the focus group (and lunch) at the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services, University of Ottawa, 34 Stewart Street. If you would like more information (and directions) the web address is: <http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/crecs/eng/>

If you would like more information about my research, please feel free to contact me or by email . Lastly, if you can think of any community, health or social service providers to recommend, who you think would be interested in, or who would benefit from participating, please let me know.

I look forward to hearing from you and I thank you in advance for your interest.

Sincerely,  
Jill Anne Chouinard

## Appendix D

### Focus Group Questions – Phase Three

*Participants will be provided with an analysis of broad themes identified in Study Two and will be asked to provide input and feedback. Themes were developed by the researcher and based on a review of the literature and telephone interviews with Study Two participants.*

1. To begin, could you please describe some of the programs that you involved in and the kinds of work that you do?
2. Could you please describe your experiences working with evaluators and any experiences that you may have had conducting cross-cultural evaluations? (Recruiting evaluators, identifying evaluation questions, process and stakeholder input).
3. How would you describe your experiences in working in the cross-cultural program evaluation context? What does it mean to address culture within the evaluative context? In your opinion, how does a better understanding of culture improve evaluation (and hence program) practice?

*Provide briefing on five dimensional framework*

4. In thinking about your experiences in working with evaluators in the cross-cultural evaluation setting, do these dimensions and themes I have identified make sense to you?
5. Can you think of any other issues or challenges that stand out or are missing and that you yourself have experienced in your work?
6. Can you think of anything else that you think is important in terms of the cross-cultural evaluation setting that we have not had the opportunity to discuss?