8-2023

Investigation of the Philosophical Foundations and Use of Culturally Responsive Evaluation

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INVESTIGATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND USE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION

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Western Michigan University, 2023

This three-study dissertation investigated the various aspects of culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) from the perspectives of scholars and practitioners.

The first study investigated CRE scholars' philosophical stance on CRE through one-on-one interviews. The 14 scholars shared how their lived experiences motivated them to write about CRE. They noted the flexibility of CRE as a complement to other evaluation approaches. The interviewees reported several essential qualities of CRE practitioners. This study highlights the scholars' commitment to serving marginalized communities as their ontological superordinate theme.

The second study investigated how practitioners applied the CRE lens in their practice. This study confirmed the importance of understanding and integrating elements of community culture and context while conducting evaluation. In this study, 16 evaluators shared their insights through one-on-one interviews. They shared their rationale for practicing CRE, and its successes and challenges while practicing evaluation. The practitioners chose CRE to promote social justice to serve marginalized communities and mend distrust between evaluators and the

communities within which they work. The interviewees hoped their CRE practice would encourage other evaluators to investigate power and culture in their practices.

The third study focused on if and how the authors of evaluation reports integrated the nine components of Kirkhart's (2013) *Culture Checklist.* This study used a document review technique to identify the presence of the *Culture Checklist's* nine components from evaluation reports. While this study indicated that it is possible to follow the components of the *Culture Checklist* in evaluation reports, the checklist is more suitable as a practice guide. Additional findings also indicated that the checklist could be updated or truncated into categories as most of the nine components are related to one another.

The findings of the first and second studies are not generalizable since there is no way to interview every CRE scholar and practitioner. The third study is an exploratory study investigating if the *Culture Checklist* is a viable checklist to guide evaluation report writing. However, similar to the first two studies, the third study also had a small sample size, requiring further investigation.

INVESTIGATION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND USE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION

by

Ouen Czing Hunter

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation
Western Michigan University
August 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to my dissertation committee members; David Hartmann, Leslie Goodyear, Brandon Youker, and Chris Coryn (past). Like most Ph.D. students, this journey is filled with challenges.

Thank you, Brandon, for being a mentor. You have been supporting me since my journey as a social work student. Thank you for introducing me to the evaluation field. You played a significant role in my career, and I cannot thank you enough for everything you have done for me. I am happy that my first-ever publication is with you and fellow social workers. Thank you for being one of the best mentors. I appreciate all the advice and support you provided me.

Leslie, thank you for dropping everything when I needed someone. I am incredibly grateful for you to take on more work to be part of my dissertation committee. I also appreciate your knowledge and the wonderful conversations that we have had. Initially, I did not want to attend the *"Meet with the AEA President"* session, and I am so glad I did! I would not have known so much about Culturally Responsive Evaluation without you. Thank you for sharing your insights with me and for all the conversations.

Dr. Hartmann, I am not sure how to express my gratitude. You have done so much for many Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation (IDPE) students during a challenging time. You agreed to be part of this dissertation committee with little knowledge of who I am. Your

guidance has helped me tremendously, and you are always generous with your compliments. I learned how to be a better writer from you and how to set clear work-life boundaries. I look forward to continuing to learn from you. Thank you again for adding me to your full responsibilities at Western Michigan University.

Chris, thank you for your mentorship. It was a privilege to be your teaching assistant. Thank you for giving me opportunities to work on so many projects. Your recommendation to work on some projects led to my current position at YWCA Kalamazoo. At times it feels like you are *still* looking out for me. The foundation you laid out for many of your students is lifelong. Thank you for all that you have done for me. I am proud to say that I was your student and teaching assistant.

Mary Ramlow, you are amazing at what you do! Thank you for guiding me through this Ph.D. life. Your guidance and advice made this experience memorable. I do not believe any Ph.D. student could have navigated the journey without your constant guidance and cheer. Thank you!

I would also like to thank Sharon Miller, my first psychology professor at Lorain County Community College (LCCC). Your support meant a lot to me when I was at LCCC. I wish I

could celebrate my accomplishments with you. Thank you for being a fantastic professor and friend.

Thank you to all the participating evaluators for spending time with me and sharing your stories. Your knowledge and insights made this dissertation possible. I look forward to meeting you in person to show my gratitude.

Jeremy, my spouse, and soul mate, thank you for EVERYTHING. You have been the best supporter. I could not have completed this journey without you. You showed me what unconditional love meant, and I am forever grateful to have you as a life partner. Now that this dissertation is over, let us travel the world and celebrate! Wo ai ni/sarang-ye!

Ouen Czing Hunter

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Culturally responsive evaluation (CRE) is a culture-focused approach rooted in educational settings. Evaluation practitioners who apply a CRE framework intend to be responsive, respectful, and sensitive to a specific culture and context (Hood et al., 2015). Therefore, one of CRE's central grounds is ensuring evaluation activities stem from a lens of cultural sensitivity and responsiveness. According to Hood et al., CRE evaluators should be aware of and attentive to language, community beliefs, and program participants' behaviors. Although they suggest most CRE evaluation activities are similar to general program evaluation strategies, CRE concentrates on cultural knowledge and awareness as part of each evaluation activity. In addition, CRE is consistent with the American Evaluation Association's statement on cultural competence (American Evaluation Association, 2011) and Guiding Principles for Evaluators (American Evaluation Association, 2018).

CRE is an evaluation lens that emphasizes culture and how evaluators respond to diverse evaluation contexts such as history, language, and community needs (Hood, 1998; Kirkhart, 2010; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Thomas, 2004). While it is important to understand the demographics of the population of a program before conducting an evaluation, looking beyond the descriptive nature of people is also equally important. Hood at el. (2015) state that considering people's values, beliefs, and context is the foundation in CRE. House (2016),

Fetterman (2017), and Waapalaneexkweew and Dodge-Francis (2018) support the argument by Hood et al., stating that it is crucial to consider and respect the community's established cultures and values.

In addition to values, CRE is a lens that focuses on the importance and integration of culture in all evaluation activities (Frierson et al., 2010; Hood et al., 2015; & Hopson, 2009. According to Clearly (2013), when conducting research, it is essential to "think through cross-cultural research methodology to heal wounds and to meet local as well as knowledge-based needs" (p. 1). Clearly is consistent with the fundamental concepts of CRE, which in the words of one of the interviewees for this study, said, "CRE is the only way to do good evaluation." CRE specifically prompts and expects evaluators to recognize "race, gender, ethnicity, class and other factors that might be dismissed though they are central elements of individuals' lived experiences and realities" (Frierson et al., 2010, p. 93). Although there are many evaluation approaches in the field, CRE is vital because of its systematic insistence on an explicit focus on culture. Since Hood (1998) introduced the term CRE during the Stake symposium celebrating Stake's contributions to evaluation, key terms relating to CRE have been growing in evaluation literature (Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Hanberger, 2010; Hood et al., 2015).

Explanation of the Dissertation

This dissertation includes three studies relating to the investigation of CRE. The first study (Chapter 2) investigates how CRE scholars define CRE's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The second study (Chapter 3) consists of conversations with CRE practitioners on how they practice, specifically seeking similarities in practices, challenges, and successes. The third

study (Chapter 4) investigates the viability of using the *Culture Checklist* (Kirkhart, 2013) as a reference tool to investigate if the nine checklist components are present in the evaluation reports.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of three studies, where each focus on various aspects of CRE. Chapter 2 (study 1) identifies the philosophical groundings of CRE based on CRE scholars' perspectives. Chapter 3 (study 2) describes how CRE scholars implement CRE in their evaluation practice and identifies common practices that could guide other CRE evaluators. Chapter 4 (study 3) examines how CRE evaluators report their evaluations by comparing their reports to the *Culture Checklist* proposed by Kirkhart (2013). All three chapters include a problem statement, methods, findings, and discussion sections. The last chapter describes the implications of the three studies and the future direction of CRE. Consistent with qualitative reflections and reporting, moving forward, "I" is used to indicate the lead author's perception, and whenever "we" is used, it indicates a collaborative agreement of all the authors.

Hypotheses and Purpose

Study 1

The goal of this study is to assess how CRE scholars view the philosophical groundings of CRE. Specifically, I tried to identify the implicit and explicit dimensions of their perspectives on CRE's ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Study 2

This study aims to investigate and describe how CRE evaluators use the CRE lens. There are two questions of interest: (1) how do CRE practitioners practice CRE? and (2) what are the positive outcomes and challenges of CRE practice?

Study 3

This study investigates the presence of the *Culture Checklist* (Kirkhart, 2013) in publicly accessible evaluation reports. Using the *Culture Checklist* as a coding structure, the checklist includes nine elements: (1) history, (2) location, (3) power distribution, (4) relationships between community and leaders, (5) the community voices, (6) speed or evaluation, (7) return on investment, (8) the plasticity of evaluation, and (9) reflexivity throughout the evaluation.

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CHAPTER II

STUDY 1: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION SCHOLARS AND THEIR VIEWS ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION

CRE is a distinctive evaluation lens because it focuses on culture, and many evaluation practitioners seek to learn more about CRE. One of the reasons practitioners want to learn more about CRE is due to the need for more specificity in understanding the distinctive nature of cultures and subcultures within a society, making it a daunting task to provide a specific CRE framework for a given context. An evaluation method that works well in one situation may not work in another. Understanding various cultures and subcultures of multiple groups is a life-long endeavor that requires extensive time and effort (Abma & Stake, 2001; Aponte-Soto et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2011; Thomas, 2004).

CRE's emphasis on the integration of culture is exemplified in the work of Hood (1998), who specifically acknowledged the works of forgotten African American evaluators. Waapalaneexkweew (2018) shined the light on Indigenous principles in evaluation, Chouinard and Cousins (2007) discussed how to evaluate the programs for Aboriginal communities, Cram et al. (2018) furthered the understanding of the Kaupapa Māori impact in evaluation, and Guajardo et al. (2020) highlighted Latin perspectives in the field of evaluation. Waapalaneexkweew (2018) and Wehipeihana (2019) also mentioned that it is essential to integrate Indigenous evaluation into modern evaluation by sharing evaluative power with

Indigenous people in the evaluation processes. Additionally, Hood et al. (2015) exemplified the diversity of authors they invited to write about the theoretical and historical legacies of CRE, dissecting practitioners' journeys in evaluation, discussing CRE's application in global and indigenous school contexts and concentrating on culturally specific methods and ecologies in CRE. The evolution of CRE provides more reasons to establish a CRE philosophical grounding.

As noted in previous paragraphs, CRE is a practice-focused evaluation lens concentrating on social justice. Each author cited above has their interpretation of what CRE is (Waapalaneexkweew, 2018; Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Guajardo et al., 2020). Although scholars wrote about CRE, they wrote using their firsthand experiences and philosophical understanding of CRE. To advance the practice, value, and understanding of CRE, it is essential to systematically investigate the combined views of multiple scholars on CRE's philosophical positioning as an evaluation lens, specifically on CRE's ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Articulating these elements highlights the value of CRE and thus could further the implementation and development of CRE.

Philosophy Definitions

This study focused on three philosophical terms: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The combinations of the three terms provide a further understanding of the evaluation theory's purpose, knowledge origin, and values. Evaluation theorists explore the roots of evaluation theories using these concepts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens & Wilson, 2019; Schwandt, 2015; Shadish et al., 1991). Aristotle called ontology the "first philosophy," and other philosophers tended to use "metaphysics" as a synonym for ontology (Smith, 2003). The ontological argument has a lengthy history among philosophers. Smith (2003) summarized the various definitions from early philosophers of ontology as "goal or focus" (p. 2) of an entity with descriptions and

taxonomy. Blackburn's conception of ontology is simply the "existence of an issue" (p. 340). Epistemology is also one of the main branches of philosophy. Like ontology, Aristotle hinted at epistemology, arguing that the world is filled with unknowns, explicitly questioning how people know what they know (Martinich & Avrum, 2017). Martinich and Avrum summarize epistemology succinctly as the nature of knowledge. Blackburn (2016) defines epistemology as the "origin or experience in the generation or origin of knowledge" (p. 158), where the origin of knowledge or experiences is seen as functions that form the knowledge of the knower, which is consistent with the works of evaluators like Guba and Lincoln (1994), Mertens and Wilson (2012), and Schwandt (2015). In general, axiology is a valuation theory on identifying what and why an object is good or bad (Schroeder, 2021). Blackburn (2016) defines axiology as the "study of values to account in decision making" (p. 42), where the goal is to identify the values that play a role in making decisions.

When referencing philosophical terms, evaluation theorists often refer to definitions established by philosophers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Schwandt, 2015; Shadish et al., 1991). This study focuses on referencing the definitions by philosophers, specifically the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy,* edited by Blackburn (2016), for definitions. Ontology identifies the purpose, importance, and foundation of knowledge or reality of CRE. Identifying CRE's epistemology provides further understanding of where the knowledge occurred and how the acquired knowledge influenced CRE scholars to write about CRE. Lastly, the goal of identifying the axiology of CRE is to investigate the value of CRE and what makes practicing CRE different from other evaluation approaches (see Table 1.1). This study systematically and empirically attempts to identify CRE scholars' perceived ontology,

epistemology, and axiology. To our knowledge, no similar study to this has been published in evaluation.

Table 1.1

Definitions Used for this Study

Term	***Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (2016) Definition**	**Objectives (from the perspectives of CRE scholars)**
Ontology	"the existence of an issue" (p. 340)	Identify the purpose and foundation of CRE.
Epistemology	"origin or experience in the generation or origin of knowledge" (p. 158)	Identify factors that influenced scholars' involvement in CRE and how they developed the knowledge relating to CRE.
Axiology	"study of values to account for in decision making" (p. 42)	Identify how decisions are made and what is unique about CRE.

Study Objective and Question Investigated

The study 's primary objective was to investigate the implicit and explicit philosophical aspects of ontology, epistemology, and axiology from the perspectives of CRE scholars.

Methods

Design

This Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) exempted this study and portion of this doctoral dissertation, which used a qualitative design via one-on-one interviews to investigate the focal research question. The interview approach allows the participants to express themselves more freely. It allows the participants to provide clarification and examples of their philosophical stances, allowing the researcher to understand the participants' constructs

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The semi-structured interview (see Appendix A) allowed the participants to digress, elaborate, and return to previous topics or questions. I analyzed the findings using a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning to identify themes (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016).

I conducted, analyzed, and reported the study independently with the approval and support of their dissertation committee members, who are also included as co-authors. The co-authors reviewed the work before finalizing this study.

Sample

The sample was based on purposive and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015) to identify and recruit participants. Purposive sampling aims to identify a specific population based on subject interest. Snowball sampling is a way to identify more participants to enroll in the study through the initial set of invited scholars. The selection of purposive sampling is to focus on experts in the field of CRE and investigate their philosophical thoughts on how they perceive CRE. Snowball sampling is to increase the sample size of this study.

The expert purposive sampling method (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015) included identifying scholars who published a peer-reviewed journal article or book chapter on CRE between 1998, when Hood introduced CRE, and 2020, the end of the data collection period. I identified CRE scholars through a bibliographic search using Google Scholar and the Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA) website. Two textbooks aided the search: *The Role of Culture and Cultural Context* (Hood et al., 2005) and *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice* (Hood et al., 2015).

The second sampling method was snowball sampling to expand the sample size of this study by asking scholars who participated to share the study's recruitment email with prospective interviewees. Another goal of including this sampling method is to increase the diverse views of various CRE scholars. Overall, I contacted 34 CRE scholars, and 14 agreed to participate in the study. Of the 14 participants, I recruited 11 scholars via purposive sampling and three from snowball sampling. Figure 2.1 illustrates the sample selection process.

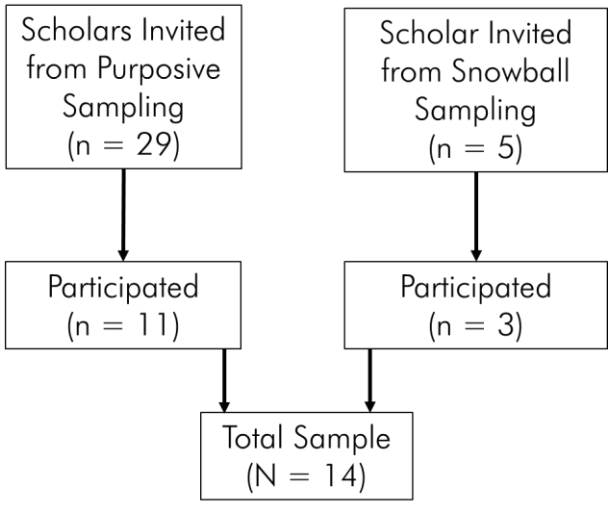

Figure 2.1. Sample selection process

The following scholars participated in the study:

1. Arthur Hernandez
2. Donna Mertens
3. Fiona Cram
4. Hazel Symonette
5. Jill Chouinard
6. Karen Kirkhart

7. Lisa Aponte-Soto
8. Martha Brown
9. Melvin Hall
10. Nicole Bowman / Waapalaneexkweew
11. Stafford Hood
12. Rodney Hopson
13. Veronica Thomas
14. *Blake

Note: *One scholar requested to have their name excluded, and I gave the interviewee a unisex pseudonym, Blake.

Instrumentation

I developed a semi-structured interview protocol using a table of specifications categorizing the questions according to ontology, epistemology, and axiology (see Appendix A). Then, the committee members recommended some changes in the protocol verbiage. Without using these terms, I developed relevant questions about ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The reason for using open-ended interview questions was to elicit scholars' perceptions regarding the purposes of CRE, their motivation to write about CRE, the perceived value of CRE, and their thoughts on the future of CRE.

I pilot-tested the initial interview protocol with three evaluation scholars via Zoom, an online web conferencing system. I modified the protocol to improve the clarity of a few interview questions. For example, an additional recommendation was to provide the participants

with the interviewer's phone number at the beginning of the Zoom interview in case of a lost connection.

Procedures

The study began with reviewing selected articles and textbooks to find CRE scholars. I identified names and email addresses through their publications or university affiliations. After that, I sent the scholars an initial invitation for recruitment, followed by two additional reminders, each at a two-week interval. All interviews were conducted in English using Zoom, all scholars consented to the interview and agreed to audio recording, and most activated their cameras. The audio recordings were sent to a fee-based transcription service after each interview. I edited the transcripts to correct spelling errors and missed or confused words. Then I sent the edited transcripts back to participants for member-checking, where they could add to, edit, or redact any statements made during the interview. Moreover, I asked the participants whether they were comfortable with being named in the manuscript. On average, interviews lasted 85.5 minutes (minimum = 58 minutes, maximum = 120 minutes).

Data Analysis and Processing

This reflection section provides the reader with data analysis context and how we, the authors, reached their conclusions.

Following the processes suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Smith et al. (2013), I read the interviewee-approved transcripts thoroughly. I took notes on paper during the second read, identifying some emergent themes. After the second read, I uploaded all the transcripts to *MAXQDA* before re-reading the transcripts and started creating some preliminary themes using

the highlight function on *MAXQDA*. The overarching themes included ontology, epistemology, and axiology. After identifying consistent statements with the major themes, I re-read the highlighted passages and then identified the emergent themes inductively. For example, some emergent themes coded under ontology were social justice, at-risk community, and doing good for the people.

After taking a break from the analysis, my dissertation chair asked me to re-read the transcripts and write down all the new themes on paper without referring to the previously coded themes. Writing the words on paper formed a detailed picture of the themes. The commonality among the scholars was that they wanted to ensure that their community, often a marginalized community, became the focus of their ontological perspectives. The interviewees' common objective was to serve marginalized people and acknowledge the successes and needs of marginalized communities via evaluation. I identified the epistemology and axiology themes using the same process. My chair and I discussed the lack of structure within the axiology theme. Every aspect of CRE seemed valuable to the interviewees. We agreed that the interviewees valued the activities they implemented in their evaluation practice, which resulted in the axiological prerequisites that the scholars believed made practicing CRE distinctive.

The committee members read and re-read the draft of the results section numerous times and provided feedback. During this time, a new doctoral graduate also provided insights, and their feedback was primarily grammatical and stylistic. The co-authors then asked for more explanations of various philosophical terms used in the article. At the same time, one of the co-authors suggested removing any identifying information from the quotes to further protect the participants. The rest of the co-authors agreed. However, we still wanted to acknowledge their contributions to this study, so we kept their names within the sample section. There were no

additional significant changes, and the results section reflects the outcome of several months of analysis and writing.

Results

Here we present the results according to the three philosophical categories, (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, and (3) axiology, is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

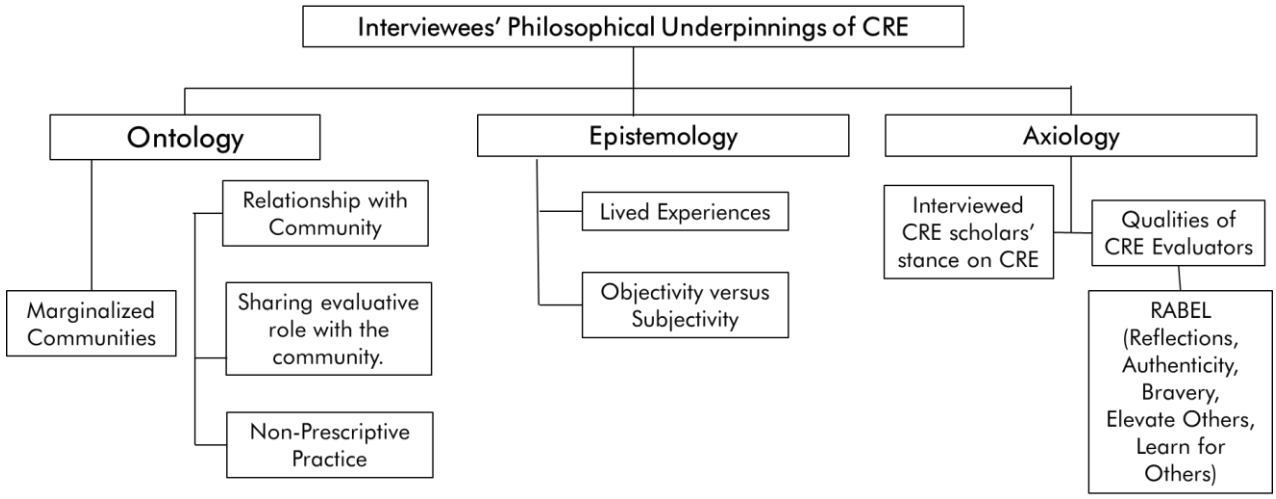

Figure 2.2. Superordinate and subordinate themes

Ontology of CRE

The scholars said that CRE's purpose is grounded in social justice. This is not a surprise nor novel to CRE. The scholars shared that CRE is rooted in addressing injustices in the communities. One scholar noted that the focus of CRE is to "ensure what the people need and want, not the funder or strategy." Another scholar believes CRE is a person-centered approach where the evaluators should commit to "hearing more from communities." The exciting notion was that the scholars expanded on what they meant by social justice during the analysis. Three

main subordinate themes are identified in Table 2.1, arranged from most prominent to least prominent.

Table 2.1

Definitions of Subordinate Ontology Themes

Subordinate Theme	**Meaning**
Relationship with the community	Enhance relationships between the community members and evaluators.
Sharing evaluative role with the community.	Minimize the power dynamics between evaluators and the community.
Non-prescriptive practice	CRE is a practice lens that is grounded in contexts and culture.

Relationship with the community. This theme should not be surprising since CRE is anchored in building relationships. When asked how the scholars build relationships with the community, they shared that the relationship between scholars and the community should be genuine and cultivated from trust between the two parties. One scholar said this relationship-building process requires trust by "understanding the history of the community you are serving." Each community is unique. Thus, evaluators should do their "homework and get to know the landscape of the community." This could mean collaborating with community members to identify previously experienced evaluation hurdles.

A scholar said that evaluators must provide a safe space for participants to ensure that "we do no harm … and that [the communities] do not have to strip off who they are and what [they] value to gain access" to services. Establishing a genuine relationship allows the evaluators to "tell other people's story authentically." CRE's inclusivity can serve as a bridge between the

community and the evaluators. It is essential to include the community in all evaluation activities with "humility." One scholar shared that a way to integrate the community in evaluation is to gather their knowledge by paying attention to "our language and the way we phrase our questions." Evaluation without incorporating the community tends to be less personalized and less powerful. For instance, one scholar hinted at the importance of doing good by including the community in every evaluation activity: "We try to bring each other up to the next greatest level. That's our job."

Sharing evaluative role with the community. While creating a meaningful relationship with the community is essential for CRE, sharing the power of being an evaluator with the community we are evaluating is essential. For instance, a scholar said, "Power is something that [evaluators] perceived to have, is something others perceived [evaluators] as having" and continued by saying this perceived power dynamic "is part of the structure." Evaluators have power over participants, and this power as an evaluator should be "recognized by evaluators … otherwise, it becomes nullified." Minimizing the evaluators' "power and privilege" means that evaluators recognize the advantage of the system over the community. One scholar said, "Those who hold the pen have the power." The point is that evaluators hold the pen in designing and conducting the evaluations. Putting the pen down can literally mean "minimizing power dynamics." Often, evaluators do not realize their power over an organization or its clients, but minimizing power often promotes more genuine cooperation between the clients and evaluators. Another goal of power-sharing is to allow the community to "tell their stories in a more complete and holistic manner."

There are other ways for evaluators to balance privilege and power while collaborating with a community. For instance, evaluators should use inclusive language and practice humility. A scholar stated that humility requires an "enormous amount of self-work, … specifically in practicing anti-racism, understanding White privilege, and addressing settler colonialists." The field of evaluation is young and continuously evolving. Some evaluators have already embodied the change in language by expanding the binary gender selections in surveys. Recognizing and minimizing evaluator power is the first step in modeling change; evaluation can be different and does not have to adhere to the structure of the society. Evaluators can and should lead by example. One scholar noted, "There's a lot of power in your generation [my generation, a millennial], so much that it gives us middle agers lots of spirit and life."

Non-prescriptive practice. The interviewees clarified that CRE cannot be reduced to a toolkit, as CRE is more closely related to having a lens or stance. Practicing with a CRE lens means that all evaluations are "not equal," regardless of the methods used. One method that works with one community may not work well with another; recognizing that each community is different is equally essential. One scholar said, "Evaluators must recognize that community matters and that we are not chemicals in test tubes."

Evaluation toolkit is a popular term that evaluators use. However, in CRE, there is "not a specific toolkit" that can work with all "contexts or cultures." A scholar explained that it is more crucial to concentrate on "How you operationalize it within a context in the framing of CRE. It is not the steps…It is the frame. It is the numerator." Another scholar agreed that CRE practitioners must be aware that practicing CRE means "tailoring" our evaluations based on context and that "process" is not ticking a box in a checklist. Instead, CRE is an iterative process of "learning,

unlearning, and relearning." Another scholar explained that understanding contexts can contribute to the community positively by "maximizing the efforts for the greater good."

Epistemology of CRE

Lived Experiences. The factors influencing how scholars obtained their knowledge regarding CRE are crucial in understanding the relationship between scholars and their written works. The central theme of the origin of CRE knowledge is "lived experiences." It is also noteworthy that all scholars in this study identify as belonging to one or more marginalized groups: female, Indigenous, Latina/o/X, and African American or Black. They shared stories about how their identities influenced their involvement in CRE. Specifically, one scholar shared that they were "first-generation college graduates during the post-civil rights movement." Their experience with issues relating to "racism, discrimination, and inequities" contributed to how they wrote and what they chose to write. Several scholars explained that the contexts of their experiences contributed to their scholarly work.

For some scholars, evaluation was not a field to pursue, but it became a path to their passion. For instance, a scholar said, "Afro-American studies … grounded in community organization" led to their current works. Scholars are attuned to the purpose of their works because they saw that the "higher power opened evaluation" to them and being a "steward" to the community became a "calling." Most scholars stated they came into the evaluation field indirectly; some also found themselves introduced to CRE from reading or writing about evaluation concepts related to social justice. A scholar shared that when they started writing about social change, their work was perceived as "radical." The same scholar continued to

convey that to this day, writing about social change or concentrating on culture is still radical because, like most new concepts, most people dislike change.

Objectivity versus subjectivity. Lived experiences and personal stories make up the foundation of scholars' views on CRE functionalities. Scholars' identities also influence their stance on objectivity versus subjectivity of evaluation practice. One of the main discussions during the interview was determining how to balance objective versus subjective evaluation practices. Some evaluators believe in maintaining objectivity to provide non-biased findings. However, this is far from the CRE scholars' beliefs. One scholar proclaimed that objectivity is "non-existent because [we] bring their true self, biases, experiences, sympathies, empathies, with them." We, as evaluators, are made up of our "experiences and culture;" we choose how to ask a question, what to ask, how to design a study or evaluation, and how we incorporate the findings in a specific context. The scholars shared that personal preferences and biases exist; all evaluators' decisions are linked to their biases. CRE scholars agreed that "values, beliefs, and ideology … manifest in evaluation" practice. There is no escaping our true selves when writing or practicing evaluation. A scholar continued, "The possibility of objectivity when dealing with people is practically impossible." The scholar explained that humans make quick judgments and inherently make "a whole constellation of feelings" when meeting new people. They continued, "There is no 100% objectivity."

Before practicing evaluation, evaluators should identify "intrinsic" feelings and then practice "demystifying" these feelings. This means as evaluators, we should be critical of our work, understand how we place judgment, and "scrutinize our evaluative judgment criteria." A scholar said that we take "resources from the community" when we engage in evaluation.

Evaluators should identify ways to minimize what we take for granted. The CRE scholars argue that understanding our biases does not lead to a full-proof objective practice. Instead, it leads to a subjective approach impacted by our experiences. The moment evaluators let go of the fallacy that evaluation is an objective inquiry, it will be the evaluators' first moment in being able to use the CRE lens appropriately.

Axiology of CRE

Axiology is defined as the values considered during decision-making. The axiology of the CRE scholars relates to how CRE differs from other evaluation approaches or lenses when making decisions in practice. There are two superordinate themes in this section: the unique stance of CRE and the prerequisites or qualities of CRE are identified in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Definitions of Axiology Superordinate Themes

Superordinate Themes	**Meaning**
Interviewed CRE scholars' stance on CRE	The interviewees' stance on the value of CRE.
Prerequisites or Qualities of CRE Lens (RABEL)	This section is divided into five categories that make up some expected behaviors of evaluators using the CRE lens.

Interviewed CRE scholars' stance on CRE. A scholar commented that CRE "lens can be used with other evaluation approaches." The "formative and foundational" aspects of CRE can be combined with other evaluation approaches, such as "transformative evaluation" and "goal-free evaluation." The flexibility of CRE makes it complicated but also applicable to practice.

First, practicing CRE is a perspective. There are “no specific steps” to practicing CRE, making CRE a process that most find difficult to understand. Secondly, contexts differ, which can be a hurdle in practicing evaluation.

A scholar stated that CRE focuses on “recognizing CRE is theoretically and politically positioned.” Just like the evolution of “social justice,” CRE is “political,” “biased,” “iterative,” and “young,” while other approaches have rigid structures. CRE addresses social injustices such as “systemic racism” and distinguishes itself from different evaluation approaches by focusing on “marginalized communities.” A scholar reiterated that it is vital to “devote themselves to serving the community.” A few scholars noted that spending time with the community can be achieved by “listening” to the community members, “celebrating” with the community members, and “respecting” their space.

Prerequisites or Qualities of CRE Evaluators. Before practicing CRE, the interviewees believed that evaluators should do “inner work” to address personal biases and beliefs before practicing CRE. There should be personal “insight” before claiming as a CRE practitioner. Five identified qualities reflect the prerequisites of personal work in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3

Definitions of Subordinate Axiology Themes

Axiology	**Sub-Themes**	**Meaning**
Qualities/ Prerequisites of CRE Evaluators	Reflection	Self-reflection on biases and privileges.
	Authenticity	Be truthful when connecting with people.
	Bravery	Have the courage to speak against injustices and inequities.
	Elevate Others	Use self-privilege to name and highlight other people.
	Learn from others	Learn to be a better evaluator and person.

Reflection. Reflection is a practice that addresses one's inner monologue of "biases and privileges." A scholar said that it is essential that we are "checking ourselves" and being "honest with [ourselves]" provides opportunities to understand our identities and to obtain insights into our "passions" in our professions. Another scholar explained that understanding "who we are" within the community and the world allows us to have a "deep sense" of our "values.". This can also be achieved by reading available literature and reflecting on how you may agree or disagree with the evaluation theory. One of the scholars shared that reflecting on ourselves also provides a foundation for how we "design evaluation, implement evaluation and disseminate findings." Having a sense of who we are will create a foundation for our evaluation practice. Reflection is not easy to accomplish within a set number of hours. Reflection requires patience and practice. Our identities may evolve as we learn more.

Authenticity. Another prerequisite is knowing how to be authentic to self and others. One scholar explained, “There is no meaningful, useful, authentic evaluation that isn’t culturally responsive. It’s not possible to do a good evaluation without being culturally responsive.” Being authentic can help develop trusting relationships with evaluation stakeholders because stakeholders and evaluators are teachers and learners. Another scholar further explained that practicing authenticity can diminish “power dynamics that will be in place when you enter a community.” Part of that authentic engagement with stakeholders is to be “there for the people” by “democratizing the evaluation process” and telling stories in a “complete and holistic manner.” A scholar said that being authentic can also mean that we eliminate the sense of superiority because when we “bring [our] authentic self,” we will realize that “not everyone is going to like you, and they are not going to tell you what you want to hear.”

Marginalized communities suffer various forms of trauma, and when we are authentic, the community may be more open to showing us their true selves. Sometimes, that means putting in extra hours and providing further assistance. One scholar spent their money buying “gift certificates so some could have snacks.” Being authentic in our practice and communication can also be challenging. We condition ourselves to wear our masks to hide our true selves from others through how we dress and speak. Although dominant society and culture have some predetermined standards, the CRE lens promotes being “authentic to our identities.” The interviewees believe evaluators can be professional and still be genuine and personable.

Bravery. Being brave and speaking up against any injustices is also one of the CRE evaluator’s prerequisite qualities. One scholar shared, “[They] hope that people will start to think out loud. We [have] some very good and thoughtful White evaluators who think a lot about practice and

cultural responsiveness." Another scholar believed that having the courage to step forward to say it is a "requirement to be culturally responsive in evaluation" would help normalize being culturally responsive. Sharing power is a purpose of CRE because CRE scholars acknowledge the harm power can have on marginalized communities. Being brave can also be applied to speaking the truth to those with power. A scholar noted that when engaging with "people with power, we have to be brave," When engaging with marginalized communities, "we have to have humility and listen."

Some interviewees report practicing bravery all their lives. They shared the importance of courage despite obstacles. A scholar said bravery means doing something good for the community by "interrupting" the broken system. One scholar warned that the downfall of being brave is that we would eventually "get in trouble," such as "[losing evaluation] contracts or other opportunities for speaking their truth." Another scholar shared that experienced scholars would question younger generations' realities because:

> People who are attracted to evaluation as a profession have a self-image that is not easily penetrated with the reality of other people's lives … [including] the communities in which they engaged.

Practicing bravery is a risk. We have to weigh the pros and cons of each situation, and we may encounter resistance and opposition.

Elevate Others. The following prerequisite to practicing CRE is elevating others, especially forgotten ones. Thus, CRE scholars believe in giving credit to those who contributed significantly, whether to the field of evaluation or a project. Throughout the interviews, CRE

scholars practiced elevating others by speaking highly of each other. Scholars often cited each other during the interviews by crediting others and passing on shared knowledge. Most scholars provided specific names and articles to reference. They report commitment to elevating others because they have experience seeing how one's work can "impact the work" of others.

Some interviewees do not consider themselves racially marginalized, but they are marginalized in other ways and noted that their firsthand experiences may be more favorable than others. For instance, one scholar shared that while White women are welcomed, "many women of color are not welcomed." The same scholar continued and said that it became a practice for scholars to be "allies" to racially marginalized evaluators who are not officially recognized for their contributions to evaluation, such as

> Edith Thomas, Elmima Johnson, Anna Marie Madison, Hazel Symonette, Sarita Davis, Jenny Jones, Veronica Thomas, Denice Ward Hood, Katrina Bledsoe, Pamela Frazier-Anderson, and more.

The same scholar suggested that "there should be a legacy volume honoring these women!" To elevate others means giving credit to others' works, providing the recognition they deserve, and shining the spotlight on those who contributed. Evaluators and evaluation scholars often exclude the ideas and contributions of marginalized people.

Learn from Others. Learning from others is just as crucial as elevating others' work. Learning is a lifelong journey using the CRE lens, "no matter how senior." Learning from a cultural diversity standpoint is essential because the interviewees believe learning can "honor people's cultures." Learning from others allows us to understand other people's experiences to ensure that their stories are "shared responsibly." A scholar stated that while the CRE concept is simple, it is still "life work" in practice. Learning from others is as important as sharing knowledge across

disciplines because the evaluation discipline is "strained." The same scholar said we could break from this pattern and evaluators should "talk to each other and break down the silos. That would help all of us be better."

Another suggestion a scholar shared was to "co-author with other evaluators" to marry ideas and surround ourselves with people we trust. Another scholar claimed that the partnerships we created are "families" because they will protect us from making "undesirable decisions." CRE cannot be achieved alone; practicing CRE means practicing evaluation with "humility" alongside others.

Reflecting, being authentic, practicing bravery, elevating others, and learning from others highlight the prerequisites or qualities of CRE evaluators. Being culturally responsive is not equivalent to cultural competence because one cannot be competent in all cultures. For example, some scholars shared different verbiage that appropriately exemplifies cultural sensitivity, such as intercultural responsiveness and cultural humility. They said we should consider our identity and commit to the prerequisites before practicing evaluation.

Discussion

Mertens and Wilson (2019) classified CRE as a social justice-based evaluation approach, and the participating CRE scholars agree that CRE is rooted in social justice. More precisely, CRE is embedded within the scholars' identities. The findings of this study are consistent with the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) statement on *Cultural Competence* (American Evaluation Association, 2011), the *Guiding Principles* (American Evaluation Association, 2018), Hood, et al. (2015), Kirkhart (2013), Neubauer and Hall (2020), and Torrie et al. (2015). Hood et al. (2015) noted the importance of serving the community. This parallels the CRE's ontological

stance for the evaluator to provide more opportunities to include marginalized communities and allow them to express their needs and wants within the evaluation processes. Torrie et al. (2015) also reported similar findings stating the importance of reflexivity and respect for other cultures, namely, the people of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Lived experience significantly influenced the scholars' desire to write about CRE. Their upbringing and their views on life contributed to their educational and career goals. As noted earlier, the participating scholars identified as belonging to one or more marginalized groups. The participating scholars used their writing as advocacy work to motivate change within the socially unjust society (McBride et al., 2020).

The field of evaluation is continuously changing, and some of these changes can be difficult for some to accept (Schwandt & Cash, 2014). Regardless of resistance, CRE scholars are determined to be their authentic selves. The participating scholars believed reflecting on our identities, societal roles, and biases is essential, as they often elevate our practice. The findings of being introspective as CRE evaluators are consistent with Bledsoe (2014), who argued that change began in understanding ourselves and historical contexts. The participating scholars argued that CRE is everyday work, whether they are working on their professional or personal portfolios. Although their actions are rooted in their identities, they also continuously learn from others by immersing themselves in new and unfamiliar situations. One of this study's findings is also consistent with a model proposed by Neubauer and Hall (2020), where they said that the exploration of our identities is essential and to work on self-reflection continuously. CRE continues to evolve, as apparent in the shift from only including qualitative methods in CRE to incorporating mixed methods in CRE. Some CRE scholars also believe that when practiced correctly, CRE could be appropriate with a quantitative-based evaluation.

Based on the scholars' axiological perspectives, CRE practitioners should have prerequisite qualities for practicing the CRE lens. Specifically, scholars believe that practitioners should have personal growth qualities such as being reflexive in their work, being authentic to themselves by recognizing their biases, practicing bravery by standing up for what they believe in, elevating others' work through support and promotion of marginalized scholars, and learning from others, especially those who experienced marginalization. The axiological perspective of CRE scholars is also similar to Kirkhart (2013), specifically regarding reflexivity. The fluidity of CRE makes CRE particularly well-suited to practice alongside various evaluation approaches. In addition to finding similarities in Kirkhart's work, the findings of this study are also consistent with the *AEA Cultural Competence* Statement and *AEA Guiding Principles (*. Notably, this study found that to use the CRE lens, one ought to decrease the use of power, which is consistent with the AEA Cultural Competence (2011) statement. This study also identified that CRE practitioners should strive to offer non-prescriptive evaluation methods and share evaluative roles with community members. The findings are consistent with the AEA Guiding Principles (2018), noting that evaluators should honor and include the cultures within the community participating in the evaluation.

The identified ontological, epistemological, and axiological themes only apply to what was shared during the interviews and are subjected to the authors' interpretations. Therefore, this study provides a fragment of the philosophical underpinnings of CRE. This study was conducted during the coronavirus disease 2019, the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement worldwide, the tumultuous United States presidential election, and the oscillation of political power in Malaysia (my birth country). These and other social and political events confirmed our interest in

CRE because CRE is political and impacts our everyday lives. Understanding our role as evaluators through the CRE lens can promote social justice and self-awareness in evaluation.

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CHAPTER III

STUDY 2: PRACTICING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EVALUATION: INSIGHTS FROM PRACTITIONERS

CRE is a thoughtful evaluation lens, and the CRE principles and concepts align with the professional competencies, suggesting that practices of CRE are strong evaluation practices, which makes the American Evaluation Association (AEA) *Evaluator Competencies* (American Evaluation Association, 2018) more concrete and tangible. Since many CRE practitioners and scholars contributed to the *2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies*, it is unsurprising that most competencies align with CRE concepts. For instance, as part of the *Professional Practice* domain, the competencies note that an evaluator should respect people "from different cultural backgrounds and indigenous people … promote social justice and the public good" (p. 2). Consistent with the *2018 AEA Evaluator Competencies,* Schwandt (2018) and Symonette et al. (2020) suggest that the evaluation field is moving toward these fundamental objectives, specifically toward integrating a socially just evaluation practice through a commitment to promoting equity. CRE was founded on this premise. Schwandt argues that sometimes evaluation approaches claim to embrace social justice issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusivity but often lack the action to back up their claim. CRE's view of practicing evaluation with cultural sensitivity requires such action. Hood et al. (2015) state that evaluators should be attentive to program participants' languages, community beliefs, and behaviors. Thus, the CRE

approach concentrates on having evaluators self-reflect, commit to serving marginalized communities, and rebuild trust with communities.

CRE involves developing genuine relationships and non-prescriptive practices with marginalized communities (Chouinard, 2014; Frierson et al., 2010; Hood et al., 2015). Smith (2010) states that evaluation practice evolves, so it is essential to continuously investigate how evaluators use specific evaluation approaches. Hood (2001) and Chouinard and Cram (2020) believe that knowledge derived from thorough investigations of CRE could potentially increase the knowledge base or identify potential gaps for practicing CRE evaluators, thus indirectly improving CRE practice. To identify the gaps and improvement opportunities, first, there is a need to investigate the cumulated evaluation practitioners' thoughts about CRE and how they practice CRE.

Investigations by Chouinard et al. (2017), Coryn et al. (2011), and Miller and Campbell (2006) note that structured theory guidance often needs to be translated into practice. While it can be challenging to honor the values and principles of CRE and ensure the practice of prioritizing values and principles, many self-awareness techniques can be used. For example, Kirkhart's (2013) universal *Culture Checklist* focuses on the self. Kirkhart states that practicing dimensions such as understanding historical perspectives, the location of the evaluation being conducted, practicing reflexivity, practicing plasticity, identifying power distribution, and identifying community voices are some elements that can be embedded in the CRE evaluation lens. The *Culture Checklist* is also consistent with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2017), which specifies that learning about other cultures, understanding historical contexts, and gathering data that reflect the community is essential to evaluation activities.

CRE is based on catering evaluation to a specific culture at a particular location, time, and context, which requires specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Thomas (2004) states that CRE requires evaluators to devote considerable time and energy to understanding the particular cultures involved in any evaluation context. Continuously identifying how to practice CRE is crucial and will add to the current literature (Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Boyce, A., 2017; Hood et al., 2015; Shanker, 2019). Thus, this study aims to contribute to the current CRE literature by investigating and describing how evaluators practice CRE. The following are the investigative questions.

1. How do CRE practitioners practice CRE?
2. What are the positive outcomes and challenges of CRE practice?

Methods

Design

This study uses a reflective interviewing technique to gather answers from CRE practitioners. The intention was to uncover the experiences of evaluation practitioners via in-depth one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed the interviewees to share as much or as little as they wished. The plan was to gather all the stories shared by the interviewees and analyze the data using inductive and deductive analysis. The inductive analysis, where I analyzed the data-based emergent themes, promoted any potential themes without restrictions. I also used the deductive analysis method to bring the identified emergent themes into categories that fit the research questions.

Sample

The multi-stage sample selection includes purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015) and snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). As part of the purposive sampling, the selection includes the identification of CRE practitioners who publish in peer-reviewed journals and evaluation conference proceedings related to CRE between 1998, roughly coinciding with the introduction of CRE, and 2020, the end of data collection. The second sampling technique includes snowball sampling or chain referral sampling at the end of each interview seeking referrals from the interviewees.

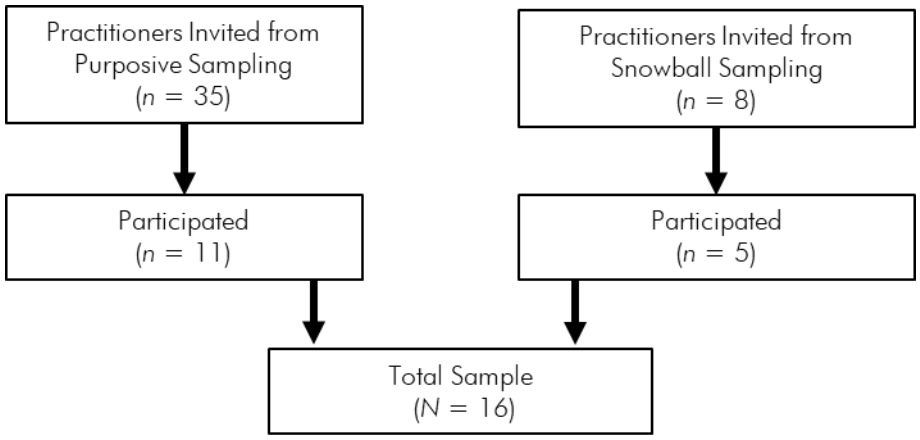

Figure 3.1. Study sample method and final sample selection

The following is a list of practitioners participating in this study. They also permit the use of their names in this study. I use gender-neutral pseudonyms* for those who did not consent to include their names in this study. Participants with ** indicate that they also participated in the first study presented in this dissertation investigating the philosophical foundations of the CRE lens.

1. Aisha Rios
2. **Arthur Hernandez
3. Ayesha Boyce
4. Diana Lemos
5. Dominica McBride
6. **Hazel Symonette
7. *Kalani
8. Kanwarpal Dhaliwal
9. Karen Alexander
10. Kataraina Pipi
11. Kate McKegg
12. **Lisa Aponte-Soto
13. **Martha Brown
14. **Nicole Bowman
15. Vidhya Shanker
16. *Waverley

Instrumentation

The semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) aimed to elicit practitioners' insights and perspectives on CRE and the outcomes of their CRE practice. I constructed the questions using a specifications table to ensure we answered the research questions. As a research team, the first four authors reviewed the questions at least twice and agreed on the open-ended nature of the questions. Three practicing evaluation colleagues otherwise unaffiliated with

the study assisted in pilot-testing the protocol via Zoom. They provided insights for improving the interview question wording and the interview process. Considering the nature of semi-structured interviews, some questions were skipped to respect the flow of the conversation. There were two instances where the interviewees spoke freely about their experiences during the middle of the interview without specifically answering the written prompts.

Procedure

I recruited CRE practitioners via email. If the practitioner chose not to respond within two weeks, I followed up with another email for a maximum of three invitations per practitioner. After that, I scheduled Zoom interviews with practitioners interested in participating. All participants consented and agreed that their participation would be voluntary. The interviewer submitted the audio recordings to a paid and secure transcription service. I edited the transcripts by correcting spelling and misinterpreted words, then sent the transcripts to the interviewees for member-checking. Practitioners could edit, redact, and add any statements to the transcripts. Interviewees also had another chance to decide whether to have their names included in the study. The average interview was 92.1 minutes (minimum = 50, maximum = 120), excluding the non-recorded introductions and farewells. I conducted the interviews between May 2020 and November 2020.

Data Analysis and Processing

Similar to other qualitative data analyses, the analysis for this study was not linear (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, I uploaded the interviewee-approved transcripts to *MAXQDA* individually. As Smith et al. (2013) suggested, I began by thoroughly reading the individual

transcripts while jotting down some preliminary notes on paper. The second reading of the transcripts included writing down some potential emerging themes. Examples include general themes such as 1) social justice, 2) successes, 3) challenges, 4) identity, and 5) interests in CRE. After identifying the emergent themes, I read the transcripts individually and labeled them with possible emerging themes during the third reading. Some emerging themes included culture and context, building relationships, supporting communities, decreasing power as an evaluator, finding community experts, fighting inequity, creating trust with community members, addressing issues about race, and conducting CRE can be challenging as they are time-consuming and can create misunderstanding. As the only coder, I compensated for the inter-rater reliability by reading the transcripts until saturation.

After a round of labeling statements using the emerging themes, I placed the emerging themes into four categories based on the research questions: 1) purpose, 2) reason, 3) successes, and 4) challenges. Still, I quickly realized that the emerging themes did not make much sense when integrating the newly created themes to answer the research questions. After taking a two-week break from analysis, I read the selected supportive statements from the inductive themes and wrote them on several pieces of paper. During this process, *MAXQDA* was merely software to organize the data. The paper and pen format helped clarify the highlighted evidence. First, I wrote down statements that seemed intriguing without any specific themes. When reviewing my notes, the themes of social justice, many ways to practice CRE, and championing communities were apparent. Second, I re-read all the comments and confirmed my previous analysis, but I was still far from making sense of the evidence collected. After a week's break, I re-read and consolidated 10 pages of hand-written notes into five pages. The content seemed to be the same.

My handwriting was neater, which seemed like an insignificant accomplishment, but the structure provided more clarity.

As I continued making sense of the initial emerging themes, I noticed that the reason for practice seemed to overlap with the purpose of practice. The initial themes for practicing CRE included: attending community gatherings, being vulnerable, asking for help from community members, learning from others, and learning about the cultures within specific communities. My naïve mind thought it was the end of the never-ending analysis process and wrote the results section. Two themes emerged when identifying the themes: (1) mending distrust within the community and (2) serving marginalized communities. The reason to practice CRE was to challenge the evaluation field to increase the importance of focusing on culture. The successes include practicing humility and evaluation with creativity. Creative practices sub-themes comprise (1) community engagement as groundwork, (2) evaluation foundation, (3) data collection, (4) data analysis, and (5) reporting. The identified challenges include (1) the expense of CRE, (2) misunderstanding about CRE, and (3) resistance from the evaluation field.

I consulted with my chair and sent it to two other committee members. Unfortunately, a tragedy happened during the committee members' review when my committee chair passed away. This caused some interruption. Although my late chair approved the initial draft of the study, I was still waiting for the other two committee members to provide feedback. After taking a short break, I invited a new committee chair to help complete this paper as part of a dissertation process. All three committee members reviewed the same manuscript and provided similar revision comments. After hearing their comments, I felt overwhelmed and took a month to process the passing of my chair and their comments. I felt lost since I had no anchor to guide me

through the process. Although it felt lonely, my new chair replaced my previous one well; both knew each other, and their approach to guidance felt familiar. The familiarity of the guidance of the new chair gave me more energy to improve the manuscript. I continued to modify the manuscript per their suggestions, but it seemed like it was back to reanalyzing all data points and restarting the entire process. After putting a hold on this process for two additional weeks, I sat down again with the five pieces of paper. After reviewing old notes and having separate discussions with the three committee members, their encouragement led to the insight that the answers and themes were present; they were merely miscategorized. Their guidance provided a more precise direction. They advised reframing how practitioners use CRE. The following results section is the final report of this study.

Results

The results section includes six themes (see Figure 2), 1) consider culture and context, 2) community-based evaluation framework as part of the CRE lens, 3) promote social change using the CRE lens in evaluation activities, 4) provide and receive support from CRE community, 5) share evaluation power with community members, and 6) eliminate misunderstanding and resistance to CRE. The first three themes are relevant to practicing the critical tenets of CRE. The rest of the themes are relevant to reported successes and challenges.

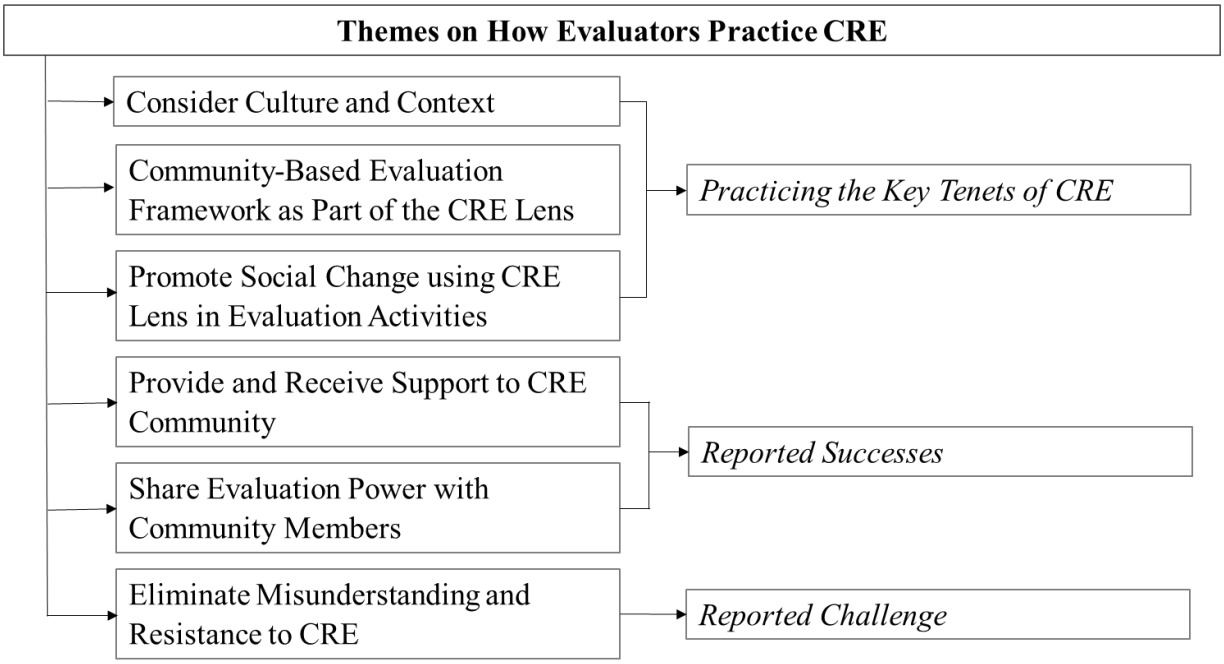

Figure 3.2. Identified themes

Consider Culture and Contexts – Practicing the Key Tenets of CRE

The practitioners agree that combining culture and context is the foundation of CRE. The interviewees speak passionately about CRE, indicating that CRE is more than an evaluation lens. It is an enthusiastic commitment to provide for marginalized communities and to ensure evaluation includes people's voices. The interviewees believe it is a lifetime's worth of work to devote to their people or the people they work with. One interviewee explains, "Part of the mandate to us as evaluators is to understand the landscape, the sociopolitical contours of the context that we're working in, and then to maximize our agency and efficacy for the greater good."

The interviewees agree that the focal point of CRE is social justice, specifically relating to culture and context. An interviewee says, "If a social justice paradigm is kind of a large

umbrella, I see CRE as fitting within that." The sentiment is consistent across the interviewees. The typical answer to the question about the purpose of CRE is to focus on the culture of a community. Regardless of the interviewees' cultural backgrounds, whether they relate to the Latin, Hispanic, Māori, African American, South Asian, European, or American Indigenous cultures, they provide answers consistent with the culture, context, and language. One of the practitioners explains:

> Culture … is definitely a construct that captures the essence of how people identify with in terms of their values, … actions, … who they affiliate with. In many ways, [it] is an identity, a societal identity. It's not one particular culture. … It could be multiple groups. And it's important to be thinking about culture inter-sectionally.

As expected, the interviewees identified culture as a theme since the word culture is in CRE's name. Context is a common theme for how practitioners investigate and learn about the specific context of a community. The practitioners want to learn about people's lives within the community because the interviewees believe power and privilege can inform the relationship between justice and culture. One interviewee summarizes some crucial questions to consider when using the CRE lens, "Who has a voice, who has power, and who doesn't have power? … It's all about taking our approaches and adapting them to the local … cultural context."

Another interviewee echoes the importance of context, culture, and people involved:

> It just seemed that the appropriateness, … soundness … validity of the evaluation would be profoundly impacted if it was not for the complete commitment of the evaluation team toward being responsive to the setting, the context, and the people that participate in the program.

Investigating the questions above can contribute to accomplishing the objectives for the specific evaluation projects.

Community-based Evaluation Framework as Part of the CRE Lens – Practicing the Key Tenets of CRE

Although there is no specific formula to practice CRE, the interviewees agree on how they approach evaluation using the CRE lens. One of the most common and consistent responses is connecting and understanding the community of interest before beginning typical evaluation activities such as data collection. One practitioner clarifies, "Culture-responsive evaluation always starts with a framework. Who are we serving, and how are we ensuring that we're collecting the right information?"

The interviewees believe that CRE might not have striking differences from other social-justice-based evaluation approaches; however, they emphasize the integration of culture and how evaluators respond to culture in evaluation activities. One interviewee explains:

> There is a set of… protocols and rituals that occur within each cultural context, and that determines the way – what people do and how they do it. … We need to understand and appreciate that in different cultural contexts so that we get the full picture and are able to fully appreciate the contribution that has been made to a service or program in a particular context.

Practicing CRE can be challenging when the evaluator comes from outside of a community of focus. Although most interviewees serve the people they identify or belong with, a few practitioners identify as outside the community they evaluate. For instance, a few practitioners identify as non-Indigenous but serve Indigenous communities. This is common in evaluation practice when a third-party evaluator is hired to complete an evaluation of a

community without any familiarity. An evaluator practicing with the CRE lens may face the dilemma of whether to take on a project or pass on project. A practitioner who works in a culture that is not their own shares some details on how they approach the issue:

> We have a standpoint here that if an evaluation is to be done in a different cultural context… We wait [until] we are invited to participate… Or if an offer or an invitation is made by a funder, … that clearly requires different cultural positioning, …. I will say, 'I need to check this out with my colleagues,' … and say, 'This has come in the door. Is there anybody interested in picking this up or wanting to lead this other than me? This is not something that I would lead.'
>
> If I'm invited back in by my colleagues, then I'll come, then I'm happy to be a support to that project. … My perspective is to be a support to the cultural perspective that leads if I'm considered useful. There are plenty of occasions when I'm not, and that's fine, too.

Interviewees suggest gradually acquiring knowledge of a community by understanding the vernacular and regional language, the relationships, and the way of life. Engaging with community members allows practitioners to identify a community's official and informal leaders and learn from them. A practitioner explains that community engagement must be actionable; these actions include participating in public gatherings, such as "eating with the community," and doing activities together, such as "going shopping or swimming together at a park." A few practitioners state that this stage could take longer than usual as establishing trust with community members and understanding a community is a gradual and genuine process.

Promote Change in Evaluation – Practicing the Key Tenets of CRE

The practitioners use CRE as a practice lens to challenge how most conduct evaluations. One interviewee says, "My mission is around interrupting to the extent possible, not because [I said] it needs to be interrupted, it is because we need to live in alignment with our own righteous rhetoric." Specifically, they wish to explore new ways to engage with people marginalized by society. For example, some interviewees hope to change how grant-making foundations see their communities by challenging mainstream evaluation. Sharing stories by marginalized evaluators can highlight a community's needs, giving the "foundations a new perspective of the community." One practitioner explains that they want to "fight for their people" to ensure that communities with the "greatest needs get the greatest help."

Promoting change is crucial for CRE practitioners. They want to ensure highlighting and integrating the evaluation populations' culture and language into the evaluation. A practitioner emphasizes the importance of bringing their culture into evaluation. "We need to be writing in our own language more, promoting our own language. [Our language] in itself is isolating, but we can take some commonalities out of there and share that maybe transferable across the world." Another practitioner echoes the "complication of culture," and it is crucial that "when we talk about [being] culturally responsive, it is [important] to capture the culture."

To promote change, the interviewees note that it must come from within the individual evaluator, and it can begin with self-reflection and humility.

One practitioner suggests that evaluators answer the following questions:

(1) How does an evaluator's "power show up" in practice?

(2) "How to get on the ground" with the community?

(3) "Where is my head" when it comes to "systemic racism" and the community, especially if the

community is marginalized?

(4) "Where is my heart" when conducting the evaluation?

(5) How do I address my "privilege and power?"

Therefore, the recommendation is that practitioners self-reflect before, during, and after an evaluation which is consistent with *Culture Checklist* proposed by Kirkhart (2013). They believe that the practice of humility is never-ending, because they know that an evaluation can have a tangible impact on community members.

Provide and Receive Support from CRE Community – Reported Success

The interviewees report a wide range of successes. Most of the successes are based on specific evaluation activities. For example, some evaluators write songs and create personalized movies to report their findings, some provide additional evaluation knowledge to the community they serve, and some offer other evaluation consulting services pro bono. Evaluators using the CRE lens often connect with other CRE practitioners. One practitioner mentions they were "recruited to a university where … [they got to] learn more about culturally responsive evaluation." The interviewed practitioners mention that practitioners should "find experts … when getting into a culture that [one] is not familiar with." Groundwork can be completed with

people within the evaluation field. The relationships established within the field of evaluation are crucial as they allow CRE to continue responding to societal changes. This collaboration can also occur within an organization. A practitioner shares:

> It's that open-door [policy] all the time. Staff understand that, and that's critical. That we have suggestion boxes at the front. …The space is set up; they can be in any space all the time. [Younger people or junior associates] are part of all our hiring decisions. So, young people participate in the hiring processes for all our staff. They drive programs, they can test out and pilot new programs. … That's really what's important.

Also, interviewees believe the connection within the group of CRE practitioners creates a safe environment for expressing ideas.

The interviewees hope to provide opportunities to diversify the field of evaluation to include more voices from around the world. Specifically, an interviewee notes that when using the CRE lens, veteran evaluators are often open to mentoring or finding other experienced evaluators to guide emerging evaluators. I find this theme consistent with my observations. Throughout this study, a few interviewees attended presentations that I led, visited when they were in town, and offered work opportunities. At first, the support was surprising. However, as I was going through the analysis and writing the results, I thought the interviewees genuinely cared about people. Their support has been instrumental in my dissertation journey and has further convinced me that evaluators who genuinely devote themselves to applying the CRE lens in their practice value relationships and partnerships.

Share Evaluation Power with Community Members – Reported Success

Some participants believe it is their responsibility to share their professional power as an evaluator with the community they serve. The interviewees state that some communities with marginalized people have difficulties welcoming or trusting evaluators. One practitioner jokingly says seeing an "evaluator is like going to the dentist." The practitioners reiterate that evaluators using CRE should let go of the need to control all aspects of evaluation. An interviewee says, "There is always an inherent level of power, and I think that it's imperative for us to be very mindful of all of the ways that power shows up."

Another practitioner offers an example of how they try to increase collaborative efforts and its effect:

> We trained community members to be the facilitators of meetings of engaging their neighbors and fellow workers in defining goals, objectives, action plans for their community… The residents really lifted up and activated and started taking matters into their own hands in their community.

A third interviewee offers an example of how to decrease the evaluator's power. They claim that it is crucial to observe who is present and who is not during the evaluation process. The practitioner says, "I am very aware of who's at the table and who's not, whose voices are heard and who is not [sic], who's represented and who's not."

The interviewees state that there is a need to ensure that the people at the table match those in the community. A lack of representation hints at an uneven distribution of power. It is essential for evaluators to be aware of these underlying issues as they can lead to inappropriate

evaluative conclusions. Another interviewee adds that at the end of the evaluation, one way to check on how one may have contributed to power-sharing is to reflect on whether they "leave [the community members] in a better place."

Eliminate Misunderstanding and Resistance to CRE – Reported Challenge

Practitioners share that their main challenge is the misunderstanding of CRE by some funders, which leads to resistance. Nevertheless, practitioners continue practicing CRE, knowing that "open understanding takes time." Another common challenge of CRE is that it is resource-intensive in terms of financial cost and time to "engage with the community" specifically, they believe that funders do not account for the monetary costs to prepare for genuine and responsive evaluations. Using the CRE lens requires time to collaborate with a community; practitioners wish to spend more time with the community and even more opportunities to interact with community members.

The interviewees believe that CRE is a "different way to think of evaluation" and can threaten evaluators or scholars who think differently; this resistance, in their opinions, derives from a "lack of understanding of CRE" and the power balancing discussed previously. Interviewees said that since CRE is a reasonably new evaluation approach, many fail to understand CRE, leading to incorrect assumptions. A practitioner says that when evaluators misunderstand the concepts of CRE, it gives "CRE a bad name."

The misunderstanding of CRE also contributes to "pushback" from the evaluation community. Another practitioner emphasizes that evaluators must better understand CRE before applying it in practice. Specifically, one ought not to say they "know a culture after reading an article or having a friend" of the same culture. The same practitioner notes that ways to decrease

learning the craft from experts through "reading books, taking courses, or professional development classes" is essential. Another practitioner shares their opinion about the reason for the resistance to CRE:

> This is their lived experience. They don't have all the baggage of the stuff from the past. CRE is a new technology. People are going to resist it because it's threatening, because it's new, it's different. It's a different way of thinking about evaluation.

One interviewee noted that change is often difficult. It is a change to ask evaluators to spend considerable time with the community before implementing the evaluation activities to identify the evaluators' power de-centering expertise by bringing in social justice values and advocacy stances.

Discussion

This study finds that the interviewees adopt the CRE's value of social justice. Specifically, CRE emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized populations, promoting flexibility and creativity in integrating culture and context in each evaluation activity. CRE practitioners embrace social justice because they want to change structural frameworks that ignore the consideration of culture in the evaluation process. One practitioner summarizes the findings well: "The whole [evaluation] practice has to be culturally guided and culturally checked."

Findings are Consistent with Current Literature

This study provides additional evidence to the current literature. Paying attention to the cultures and contexts of people is crucial in CRE. Kirkhart's (2013) *Culture Checklist* highlights the importance of the people's cultural history and location, which are dimensions that evaluators

should consider before, during, and after evaluation. Brown and Di Lallo (2020) demonstrate the importance of culture in their article, and McBride et al. (2020) demonstrate how to report the impact of culture and history in their evaluation report. As noted in the results section, decreasing evaluators' power is crucial. The participants believe that sharing or giving up the evaluation power to the community is essential to conduct an evaluation with a CRE lens. Paying attention to the power differentials between the community members and evaluators can ensure that the evaluation findings reflect the people of the specific community. The theme of decreasing power is consistent with evaluation literature (Hood et al, 2015; House, 2020; Kirkhart, 2013; McKegg, 2019; Reid et al., 2020; Shanker, 2019; Wehipeihana et al., 2010). Specifically, Shanker notes the harm that can be caused when power is not addressed, and Kirkhart argues that decreasing power is one of the *Culture Checklist* dimensions evaluators should include in their evaluation practice.

Alignment with AEA Evaluator Competencies

This study finds that CRE aligns with AEA's (2018) *Guiding Principles for Evaluator Competencies* which AEA categorizes into five domains: (1) professional practice, (2) methodology, (3) context, (4) planning and management, and (5) interpersonal relationships. The findings of this study indicate that the practitioners' self-report descriptions seemed to adhere to the AEA competencies without referencing them directly. First, they satisfy the professional practice domain by focusing on social justice and the public good. In terms of methodology, practitioners use creative, integrative methods that include community members throughout the entire evaluation process by creating advisory boards and reporting results in a meaningful medium tailored to communities. CRE evaluators work to learn about a culture and create

tailored processes for a given community when planning and managing evaluations. Lastly, CRE practitioners are good exemplars by promoting the importance of interpersonal relationships. CRE practitioners build trust and community relationships by spending time with community members.

The interviewees are enthusiastic about the work that they do. Their responses and views indicate that the values in their professional lives are consistent with the values of CRE, where they wish to improve evaluation by integrating culture into their practice. They also learn and support through partnerships, conversations, and scholarships. The CRE interviewees seem to have strong allegiance in the evaluation industry as they often mentioned each other's names during the interviews. The fellowship among the CRE practitioners benefits them as culture and context may still be underappreciated or even face resistance in evaluation practice.

Reflections on the Timing of this Study

Staying true to the concepts of CRE, the contexts of this study matter, it is important to acknowledge the events that occurred during this study. The study includes a lot of emotions and passion. First, I conducted the interviews at the beginning of the *Coronavirus Disease 2019* (COVID-19) pandemic and the rise of Black Lives Matter. I suspect that these events contributed to how the practitioners answered some questions. During data collection, most were already aware of the murder of George Floyd. Due to the events, the participants' passion for social change may have been amplified during the interviews. Second, I wrote the initial results section on January 6, 2021, when citizens attacked the United States Capitol. Although this did not impact the data collection of this study, it impacted the subsequent writing. During the writing, the thought of political views and polarization kept coming to my mind. There were times when I

was angry while writing, which led to negative-sounding and grammatically incorrect sentences. Third, my committee chair passed away unexpectedly while drafting this manuscript. I was also his last teaching assistant and worked closely with him on several projects. His departure played a crucial role in my well-being and my reflection process throughout writing this manuscript. Fourth, I gained a new dissertation chair who has been genuine and supportive. The context above demonstrates some of life's uncertainties. Clearly (2013) said, "Nothing stands still" (p. 1). The world will continue to change, and cultures will continue to evolve. Values that people had a few years ago may not reflect the same values that they have at this moment. Evaluators should continue to interrogate who they are, identify what they want to achieve in their work, investigate and welcome change, and be responsive to ongoing cultural changes.

Limitations

I am merely an interpreter and a collector of stories shared by the interviewees. Thus, there are several limitations to this study. First, the findings are limited to what these practitioners shared. This study fails to encapsulate the totality of the interviewees' stances. To learn more about the interviewees, we encourage you to converse with them or explore their scholarly works. Further, this study included the perspectives of 16 CRE practitioners. Thus, we cannot generalize the findings to all CRE practitioners. There is a creative process that CRE practitioners use, and no one interview will encapsulate all their unique, innovative methods.

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CHAPTER IV

STUDY 3: INTEGRATION OF KIRKHART'S *CULTURE CHECKLIST* IN CLIENT EVALUATION REPORTS

Checklists in evaluation, as in other work, serve as explicit reminders of the tasks and duties essential to reliable performance (Scriven, 2019; Stufflebeam & Coryn., 2014). Like other forms of systematic organization, such as expert systems for medical diagnoses, checklists are the least controversial when the professional world they guide is well-demarcated and specified (Scriven, 2013). The less routine or specified a task or responsibility, the more checklists become reminders of things to worry about rather than lists of things to do (Scriven, 2013). The term reflexivity represents the ethos of worry–constant doubt and deconstruction—at the heart of all scientific ambition.

Kirkhart (2013) participated in an edited book for Scriven and paid homage to Scriven's checklist by creating a non-iterative *Culture Checklist*. While Kirkhart called it a checklist, in the spirit outlined above, Kirkhart also noted that the *Culture Checklist* is a reminder to consider the dimensions of cultural competence. The nine dimensions proposed by Kirkhart resonated with efforts across evaluation but have become grounds for culturally responsive evaluation (CRE), as evidenced by its prominent place as a chapter of Hood et al.'s (2015) seminal book on CRE.

What is Culturally Responsive Evaluation?

Hood (1998) introduced the term CRE during the Stake symposium celebrating Stake's contributions to evaluation. Since the symposium, references to key terms relating to CRE have been growing in evaluation literature (e.g., Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Hanberger, 2010; Hood et al., 2015). CRE is an evaluation lens that emphasizes culture and how evaluators respond to diverse evaluation contexts such as history, language, and community needs (Hood, 1998; Kirkhart, 2010; LaFrance & Nichols, 2010; Thomas, 2004). Before conducting an evaluation, the preparation phase should include understanding how people's values, beliefs, and context are crucial in CRE (Hood at el., 2015). House (2016) explains that considering the community's values, in general, is a crucial aspect to include in evaluation, regardless of the lens the evaluator uses, while Fetterman (2017) argues that critical thinking about values and people in evaluation is also essential.

CRE focuses on the self-awareness of the evaluators. Hood et al. (2015) note that Kirkhart's (2013) *Culture Checklist* is similar to Scriven's (2013) *Key Evaluation Checklist* (KEC), as both checklists are iterative, and evaluators should aim to address items in the checklist before, during, and after conducting an evaluation. The *Culture Checklist* has nine components: (1) understanding the history of the community, (2) familiarizing self with the cultural identity of the persons in the specific location, (3) investigating the power distribution in the community, and (4) identifying who holds power between community members and leaders, (5) identifying the voices that will be incorporated within the evaluation, (6) ensuring the speed of the evaluation is appropriate for the community, (7) communicating on how the evaluation will benefit the community, (8) practicing plasticity of evaluation to be malleable, and (9) exercising reflexivity throughout the entire evaluation process.

Problem Statement

This study investigates whether and how the CRE evaluators included Kirkhart's (2013) *Culture Checklist* in their client reports. Most importantly, this study is not an evaluation of the reports. It is to see if the elements of the *Culture Checklist* are present and then identify how the authors include the checklist in their reports.

While this study was underway, I intended to review peer-reviewed articles. However, Chouinard and Cram (2020) already published their book investigating the content of peer-reviewed articles relevant to CRE. They used a qualitative method to identify themes of the CRE publication history. Chouinard and Cousins (2007) published a similar study earlier, concentrating on empirical studies where evaluations were conducted in Aboriginal communities. To ensure that this study does not replicate prior studies, Chouinard and Cram (2020) focused on evaluation reports that evaluators created for their clients. The reports are considered grey literature outside the peer-reviewed process (Farace & Schöpfel, 2010). Choosing client reports enables the investigation of how evaluators communicate evaluation results with their clients. The inclusion of grey literature widens the literature of CRE to gather insights into how authors report their findings to their clients, specifically in this study, whether and how they cover the nine components of the *Culture Checklist.*

Methods

Design

This is a systematic review of online CRE reports or exemplars provided by CRE scholars and practitioners. The inclusion of grey literature allowed this study to look beyond peer-reviewed articles. The review of the reports included how CRE practitioners use the *Culture*

Checklist. All reports were dated between 1998, the introduction of CRE as a general classificatory term, and 2021, the end of data collection for this study.

Sample and Procedure

The primary sampling goal was to identify evaluation reports related to CRE; therefore, searching peer-reviewed articles failed to identify CRE reports. Instead, *Google* searches provided more access to identifying reports available on independent evaluation companies' websites. The terms used to identify the reports included culturally responsive evaluation report, CRE report, and CRE. The use of convenience samples (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of exemplars continues by soliciting from CRE scholars and practitioners. I solicited the reports via personal and professional connections. All CRE reports were reviewed to ensure that they were suitable using the following inclusion criteria:

1) Written in English,
2) Evaluation conducted after 1998,
3) Specifically stated CRE as an evaluation lens, and
4) An evaluation report concentrating on a specific evaluand*

*This does not include CRE guidebooks on how to use CRE as practice.

Sample Process

I identified 16 reports via *Google* search and five from networking (see *Figure 1*). After reviewing the reports for the first time, I removed eight reports as the documents were guidebooks on using CRE. A second review led to the removal of five reports as either they

neglected to specifically identify CRE as a lens used or the evaluation occurred before the founding of CRE.

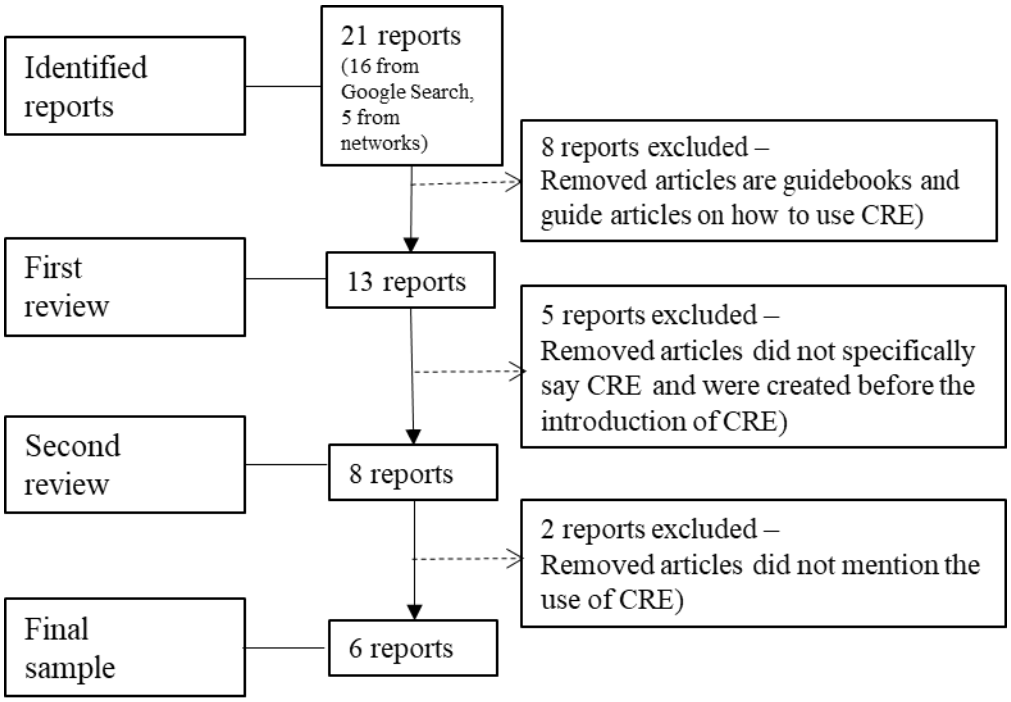

Figure 4.1. Sample process

I imported the documents to *MAXQDA* for another reading, after which I excluded two additional reports for failing to state CRE as a lens. The final six reports satisfied the four inclusion criteria listed above. Practicing CRE evaluators shared three of the final six reports, and I identified the other three via *Google* searches. Table 1 highlights the reports selected for this study.

Table 4.1

Summary of Reports Selected for this Study

Report Authors	**Title**	**Program Evaluation Population**	**Evaluation Objectives**
Braun (2019)	Outdoor School for All! Diverse Programming and Outcomes in Oregon	Program participants and program partners	To understand and build knowledge about the outcomes of outdoor school programming and support system
Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016)	Kua Ea Te Whakangao: Māori & Pacific Education Initiative: Value for investment evaluation	Aotearoa Māori community	To identify the success and cost-effectiveness of the underachievement of Māori and Pacific young people in education.
McBride et al. (2020)	Time, Treasure, Talent, & Testimony: Giving by Women of Color in Chicago	The Women Business Leaders in Chicago	To identify philanthropic drivers, relationship building, capacity building, and donor support for Chicago Foundation for Women.
Ramset-Klawsnik et al. (2016)	Culturally Relevant Evaluation of Prevention Efforts. Part II. Evaluating the Curriculum Effectiveness	School children and teenagers	To evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum to the needs of the Indigenous authors and participants.
Sam (2019)	Hope for Kids `Elua Evaluation Report	Children participating in the Hope for Kids in Hawaii	To investigate the outcomes of children participating in the *Hope for Kids* program.
Tākao et al. (2010)	Te Piko O Te Māhuri - The key attributes of successful Kura Kaupapa Māori	Parents, grandparents, teachers, staff, principals, and graduates of the Kura.	To identify the meaning and measurement of success from the *Kura's* parents, grandparents, teachers, staff, principals, and graduates.

Data Processing and Analysis

After summarizing the literature in Excel, I imported the files to *MAXQDA* for analysis. The first step of the analysis was to answer the research questions deductively. I used the *Culture Checklist* to verify how each report included the dimensions listed in the checklist.

1. State community *history*,
2. Provide information about the *location*,
3. State the *power* distribution in the community,
4. State the *relationship* between community members and leaders,
5. Include the *voices* incorporated within the evaluation,
6. State how the *timing/speed* of the evaluation is relevant to the community,
7. State the *return* on investment for the community,
8. State the practice of *plasticity*, and
9. State the *reflexivity* of the evaluation.

Using pattern coding, I coded all reports using the italicized keywords above. I used the *Culture Checklist* definitions of the keywords to determine if the reports provided evidence of each stated dimension. I read each report on *MAXQDA* at least three times to ensure that I identified all potential evidence of the dimensions by highlighting any statements, sentences, or diagrams from the reports relevant to the dimensions using the highlight. Some dimensions were apparent, while others needed some interpretation. For instance, location and history were two of the easiest dimensions to identify, but plasticity and time required more analysis.

I contemplated whether to connect with the report authors to vet my coding but decided against it for three reasons. First, the objective of this study is to identify if the framework was

evident in the reports, not if the authors thought they used it in guiding their work. Second, it may well be that some authors would retrospectively see their reports as more or less oriented to the *Culture Checklist* dimensions than was present at the writing stage. Third and most pragmatically, three reports did not include contact information.

After compiling all the reports' segments of texts or tables on *MAXQDA*, I reread these to determine their categorizations. I categorized each statement into one of three categories, 1) evident, 2) partially evident, and 3) not evident. Coryn et al. (2011) used this technique when analyzing their work, coding evidence from selected articles into these three categories. While they used these three categories to quantify their findings, the intention of the coding system for this study centers on categorizing the relevance of the statements to the framework. The categories depended on the meaning of the coded segments. Some segments were short but very telling, while others were long but lacked clarity. Note that the number of times each report was analyzed needs to reflect whether the evaluation report authors addressed the *Culture Checklist* dimensions.

While the coding schemes were set, retrieving these statements was more holistic since the information was in report format. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate why the report authors included and excluded specific information in their evaluation. After the analysis, I added another step to report grouped dimensions. During the review by the co-authors, it was evident that the dimensions failed to stand alone. I conducted another round of analysis to identify how each of these dimensions is grouped to tell this study's findings fluidly.

Results

The results section is divided into four categories as the dimensions in the *Culture Checklist*, as these dimensions are associated. The first category includes the dimensions of

location, history, and voice, followed by the next category of reflectivity and plasticity, then power and relationships, and finally, the category of time and return to the community. Additionally, each category begins with Kirkhart's (2013) definition of each dimension.

Location, History, and Voice

Of the nine dimensions, location, history, and voice were prominent in the evaluation reports. These three elements allowed the report authors to set the evaluation's background by sharing a specific community's historical context. Kirkhart (2013) described the location dimension as follows:

> [The] cultural contexts and affiliations of evaluators and evaluand, including theories, values, meaning making, and worldviews. Recognizes multiple cultural intersections at individual, organizational, and systems levels. Geographic anchors of culture in place. (p. 147)

When discussing the history dimension, Kirkhart states that history focuses on the "history of [a] place, people, program (or [an]other evaluand), and evaluation's role. Knowledge of cultural heritages and traditions, including their evolution over time" (p. 147). Kirkhart shares that the voice elements are a way to amplify marginalized people's perspectives, including using the community's language to communicate with the community. After gaining knowledge of history and location, the next step often leads to identifying the voices of the community.

Kirkhart (2013) notes that learning about the location and history allows evaluators to understand the landscape before data collection and provides insights on including the community members' voices. The three elements are often the first evaluation activity for evaluators to gather knowledge and understanding of the community they will engage with.

Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016), Tākao et al. (2010), and McBride et al. (2020) stated in their reports that they spent time with the community as part of their initial evaluation activities. McBride et al. (2020) opened their report by providing the location and historical context, "In Chicago, the culture and history of philanthropy left a legacy" (p. 6). McBride et al. also described the history of Chicago in the report's introduction. The other five report authors also provided details about the location of where evaluation activities occurred and with whom they interacted as means of identifying the desired population for their methods of inquiry. McBride et al. (2020) considered the importance of including multiple parties' voices and decreasing potential power differentials in the following statement:

> To minimize the impact of power dynamics, the visioning session was conducted in a World Cafe style in which participants randomly sat at tables with no defined leaders or heads of the tables, and they switched tables for each question. Participants were encouraged to speak and listen with their heads and hearts. Those who were accustomed to speaking were asked to be considerate of others, and those who did not speak much were asked to be more vocally and visually expressive. (p. 14)

Location of the evaluation anchors the culture of an evaluation to a place, while the history provides the context to understand the specific culture of the people, community, and program. All the reports provided historical context specific to the community. Tākao et al. (2010) and Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016) emphasized the importance of location, historical context, and community voice as part of the evaluation by stating the culture of Māori, the culture of principles of Māori in education, and the emphasis of the culture in learning. Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016) highlighted the consideration of culture in their evaluation:

> In most of the initiative's projects, culture was embedded within the project philosophy and way of working. … The Māori projects strongly embody the principle of 'by Māori, for Māori, as Māori,' such as in the significant 'Be Māori' plank of The Leadership Academy. *Teu le va* principles underpin the operation of the Pacific projects. This is evident in the strong focus on the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of relationships with all key stakeholders. (p. 31)

While considering the history and location, the Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016) provided an example of how to report the people's voices:

> One parent of a Leadership Academy cadet [said,] "I can see in the future our son will be able to speak for us on marae; he will be able to welcome people on and do the *wero* with his *taiaha*. He won't be held back, feeling too shy to step forward." Rise UP family members shared some of their experiences of valued outcomes for their families [,] "[Rise UP] just enabled me to go to the parent−teacher interviews and ask constructive questions … Had I not asked the right set of questions [my daughter] would have been in the wrong class, not learning anything." (p. 33)

Braun (2019) also provided information about location and voice at the beginning of the report and noted the previous challenges in measuring the outcomes of the program, "Outdoor school has been an Oregon tradition for over 50 years. … However, there has been limited quantifiable measure of these outcomes statewide to date" (p. 2).

Reflexivity and Plasticity

Throughout the analysis, a common theme emerged: not all elements could stand alone without another element. Reflexivity and plasticity are cases where the elements are often

presented together in the same section of a report. Kirkhart (2013) defined reflexivity as a personal evaluation of an evaluator's work which may include self-reflections and emphasizing meta-evaluation of an evaluator's work. The practice of plasticity ensures that responsive evaluators pivot their methods as they receive added information and respond, "to new experiences, and evolve new ideas and forms" (Kirkhart, p.148).

The CRE evaluators often included notes of reflexivity that led to the notion of plasticity by adjusting to the changing evaluation environment. Braun (2019) provided information on how reflexivity leads to plasticity. After receiving feedback, Braun modified a gender identity question to an open-ended question rather than multiple choice:

> Genders were identified from an open-ended question. [Braun coded the open-ended responses into] … identities like "I don't know yet," "boy/girl," "trans," and "non-binary" were, for convenience of analysis, collapsed into one category — transgender/non-binary (p. 10).

Kinnect Group and North Foundation (2016) also explained their reflexivity and plasticity by including a written journal in their evaluation report. Below is a snippet of the evaluator's journal:

> An evaluator reflected on an evening spent running a focus group with Ideal success/Ngā Huarahi Tika whānau. [Evaluator noted that] "last night *whānau* [extended family group] validated that the way you [the project] work with them and for them adds value to their lives. In particular, whānau valued the lengths that you go to ensure their wellbeing. They loved the fact that you just show up: to mediate on their behalf; to mentor and instruct them; to assist them in getting work, getting to school, engaging well with each other and others. (p. 35)

Tākao et al. (2010) evaluation stood out as evaluators who report concurrently on the practice of their reflexivity and plasticity. In their report, they included notes on how they practiced reflections and plasticity by including their notes in the report's appendix. Takao et al. summarized notes on what they observed and how it led to changes in the evaluation activities. This information provides vital context and documents the reasons behind the evaluators' decisions to change. Their report also described their receptivity towards change while collecting information.

Power and Relationship

Regardless of the population, the report authors acknowledged that differential power exists and could impact the evaluation results or other outcomes, such as not receiving funding for the program. Kirkhart (2013) explains power as " understanding how privilege is attached to some cultural signifiers, prejudice to others. Attention to address equity and social justice, avoid perpetuating condescension, discrimination, or disparity" (p. 147). Recognizing power often determines the type of relationships among community members. Kirkhart (2013) discusses the relationship dimension to connect with the community by relating the evaluation to "place, time, and Universe. Maintaining accountability to the community with respect and responsibility" (p.147) while establishing trust with the community.

Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016) acknowledged the importance of relationships by writing, "Ongoing cycles of reflection, building strong relationships, listening to the voices of stakeholders and being prepared to change direction when necessary are important features of this project" (p. 17). Kinnect Group and Foundation North stated that when trust and

relationships were established, "[t]he participants experienced their culture being validated and celebrated both outside the classroom and within" (p. 31).

The Ramset-Klasnik et al. (2016) report addressed power while working with Native Americans. They claimed to use their power as reporters to ensure that the stories remained true, avoiding discriminating against the voices of the Indigenous people participating in the evaluation. Ramset-Klasnik et al. (2016) went on to explain the importance of power and relationship through an example:

> For indigenous people, it would not matter if a muskrat, beaver, or squirrel made it down to the bottom of the lake to bring up the mud that Star Woman … used to create the world. It matters only that a small creature with a big heart succeeded.
>
> Indigenous people expect the story to change over time, but the values communicated by the story remain unchanged. Those values are what determine respectful behavior and community life based on compassion and respect. (p. 7)

Regardless of the community of interest, emphasizing the considerations for the entire community while decreasing the power of an evaluator is crucial. Decreasing an evaluator's power is essential to amplifying the needs and wants of the community members in the evaluation process. Evaluators can decrease their power by including community members in the evaluation process. Recognizing and understanding the power within the community allowed the evaluators to cultivate a more meaningful relationship with the people participating in the evaluation. Relationships matter in the Kaupapa Māori community. The Kaupapa Māori believe all relationships should be "nonjudgmental and inclusive" (North Kinnect and Foundation Group, 2016, p. 45). Tākao et al. (2010) also discussed the importance of relationships when working with Kaupapa Māori:

> Having trusting, high-quality relationships among those involved in research is a key tenet of Kaupapa Māori and developmental research. The nature of the relationship between the researchers and each of the Kura Kaupapa Māori was always going to be a vital component of the overall research approach. The importance of research relationships in Māori research is well documented. (p. 166)

Developing relationships while noticing the various levels of power is vital in cultures. Sam (2019) writes that foundational relationships are essential to moving the evaluation forward. McBride et al. (2020) noted that sharing evaluation process information with participants is another way to cultivate relationships:

> There was a significant number of participants that did not know [the organization], which indicates a lack of relationship with them. One of the main lessons from the data around relationship building in the context of philanthropy is to know what is important for people in the community and what drives their giving and participation. Evaluation participants provided their priorities and preferences for giving, as well as how nonprofits communicate with them. The information presented above shows examples of their preferences and can act as a starting point for cultivating relationships around more community-engaged philanthropy. (p. 34)

Time and Return to Community

Kirkhart (2013) defines the time dimension in the *Culture Checklist* as "calls attention to rhythm, pace, and scheduling and to the wide vision of past and future. Encourages evaluation to consider longer impacts and implications—positive or negative" (p. 147). Kirkhart (2013) noted that evaluation must:

> Support reciprocity by focusing attention on how the evaluation and/or the persons who conduct it return benefit to the evaluand and the surrounding community. Addresses return both during and after the evaluation process. Positions the evaluation as nonexploitive. (p. 147)

The CRE report authors did not provide as much information about the time dimension as the others. Tākao et al. (2010) provided details on the timeframe for their data collection and described how they integrated multi-level information gathering to document evaluation activities:

> The fieldwork took place over the period from 6 April to 29 July 2009. A pilot phase at Tāmaki Nui a Rua was undertaken to ascertain which research tools and activities would be most appropriate and effective. Each field visit was for three days. Day one and two were spent at the kura, and day three was used for the researchers to write up field notes, reflect on the process, and prepare for the next field visit. A Steering Group made up of representatives from Te Rūnanga Nui, the Ministry, and members of the research team was convened three times during the fieldwork phase; the first meeting was held prior to the fieldwork, the second following the pilot phase, and the third at the completion of the fieldwork. (p. 169)

Tākao et al. (2010) then addressed how the investment of time from the community contributed to promoting, sustaining, and acknowledging the Kaupapa Māori way of living and doing work. Takao et al. wrote:

> This research is an opportunity to actively privilege and affirm Kura Kaupapa Māori knowledge, voice, and experience, as well as advance Māori aspirations for their children's education. …. Central to Kaupapa Māori is te reo Māori me ōna tikanga. Te

> reo Māori and Kaupapa Māori knowledge are inextricably bound. One is the means to the other. The development of Kura Kaupapa Māori has played a vital and critical role in the more recent theoretical and philosophical [conceptualization] and definitions of Kaupapa Māori and ensured the survival of Māori knowledge. (p. 165)

Discussion and Implications

Although the various evaluator reports did not specify the Culture Checklist, this exploratory effort shows the difficulty in portraying all elements of the framework in a written document. This could be attributed to the evaluators not trying to present the *Culture Checklist* in their reports. The reports were written in a way to satisfy the needs of their stakeholders. The findings of this study support that the framework better serves as a guide for evaluation practice rather than for reporting. As a guideline, the *Culture Checklist* can help frame the evaluation process but is not a rigid framework. Kirkhart (2013) states it is a list that works as "cues for reminders … to ground the work, prevents errors of omissions" (p. 153). As a checklist of cues for reminders, it is essential to acknowledge that the inclusion or omission of any element from any referenced evaluation reports does not imply a value judgment on any of the evaluations or evaluators.

Kirkhart (2013) notes that the checklist is grounded in mainstream United States experiences. It should be acknowledged that using the *Culture Checklist* would be less prevalent in evaluations performed in other countries or among diverse social groups. However, this study's findings indicates that the *Culture Checklist*, although not explicitly designed for them, seemed to apply to the Native American, Kaupapa Māori, and Native Hawaiian communities. For instance, some of the dimensions, such as relationship, location, reflexivity, and history, are consistent with the Indigenous evaluations (Brown & Di Lallo, 2020; Maddox et al., 2021;

Taylor-Schiro-Biidabinikwe & Cram, 2021) and Kaupapa Māori (Cram et al., 2018; Hepi et al., 2021; Pipi, 2007) evaluations. This study included two evaluation reports from the Māori communities, the Kinnect Group and Foundation North (2016) and Tākao et al. (2010). Both reports demonstrated all nine dimensions of the *Culture Checklist*. Ramset-Klawsnik et al. (2016) evaluated a program in the Native American community and included elements of the *Culture Checklist* in their report. They provided a thorough history of the community. However, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the applicability, reliability, and validity of the *Culture Checklist* for each community.

Based on the findings of this exploratory study, it would be reasonable to use the *Culture Checklist* as a helpful tool for evaluators in various evaluation settings, even outside of the groundings of its origins. While this checklist appears to extend well to evaluations across various geographic regions and cultures, it should be utilized with its limitations fully considered.

Limitations

This study's sample size is small, and the sample is limited to a few specific populations and locations. Additionally, the evaluations referenced did not specify using the C*ulture Checklist.* It is also important to note that the authors wrote the evaluation reports and presented the findings to a set of unique stakeholders with expectations and requirements unknown to us. The report authors may have used other written or oral checklists. This study does not imply that the *Culture Checklist* was or should have been used. This study analysis also included unintentional personal biases from the authors' geographic, ethnic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. Lastly, it is vital to note that this study is not meant to judge the report's merits but

rather on whether and how the authors provided information consistent with the *Culture Checklist* dimensions.

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CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this concluding chapter, I summarize and review the main findings, followed by the implications of each study. Lastly, I also discuss future research that may contribute to CRE literature.

Summary and Review of Main Findings

In Chapter 2, I investigated the philosophical groundings of CRE. The findings emphasized that CRE is highly considerate of the community, and it was interesting to hear the CRE scholars speak about the communities they serve. The scholars agreed that CRE is about providing service to marginalized communities, highlighting the communities' lived experiences, and improving the scholars as people and evaluators. Considering the community context is something they practice improving their evaluation skills. In Chapter 3, I investigated how evaluators use CRE. I learned that the practitioners concentrate on three critical tenets of CRE: (1) consideration of culture and context, (2) use of a community-based evaluation framework, and (3) promotion of social changes in evaluation activities. What left an impression on me through interviews for Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 is that the interviewees know each other and highlight each other's work. The interviewees name each other as resources. Their sense of community is evident in their report writing. Chapter 4 investigates whether the evaluators

included the nine dimensions of the *Culture Checklist* in their reports and how they described the dimensions. The *Culture Checklist* includes location, history, and timing dimensions for all evaluators included in their reports. The three dimensions provide a background and understanding of the community the evaluators served.

There are commonalities between the three studies. First, the findings of all three studies are consistent with the current understanding of CRE. It is crucial to investigate and consider the culture and context of the community as the first step of evaluation. Second, all findings of the three studies emphasized the importance of evaluators serving marginalized communities. Serving marginalized populations requires consideration, reflection, and plasticity. The third and most important is the integration of community values and voices throughout the CRE evaluation process, which supports one of CRE's essential key tenets, evaluative power reduction. Genuine engagement with the community allows evaluators to produce findings and reports that allow the community to share their stories. Lastly, the three studies have a common conclusion of giving back to the community through evaluation by providing the community with new evaluation tools.

Implications of this Dissertation

Many CRE scholars write about their individual experiences. Still, I am unaware of any previous study where interviewed CRE scholars shared their thoughts about CRE summarized using thematic analysis. When I grouped the 14 scholars' insights into the findings in Chapter 2, the results provided evidence of the commonalities among the CRE scholars illuminating a better understanding of CRE's purpose, knowledge, and values. Chapter 2 provided evidence that CRE is centered on the people, explicitly finding justice for marginalized communities. Participating

CRE scholars agreed that it was important for evaluators to use the CRE lens to serve the marginalized community by establishing genuine relationships, sharing the evaluators' power with people within the community, and continuing to be flexible in evaluation practices.

Lastly and most importantly, Chapter 2 identified some qualities evaluators should have as they incorporate the CRE lens in their evaluations such as practicing reflectivity, authenticity, bravery, and qualities such as elevating others and learning from others. For the first time in published CRE works, a group of CRE scholars provided insights on a few prerequisite qualities for CRE practitioners. Their contributions to this study provided more concrete expectations on practicing evaluation responsively.

Chapter 3 adds to the CRE literature regarding how CRE is practiced (Boyce, A., 2017; Chouinard & Cousins, 2007; Chouinard & Cram, 2020; Hood et al., 2015; Kirkhart, 2013; Shanker, 2019). Specifically, Chapter 3 contributes to the current literature by presenting the cumulative experiences of practitioners. Chapter 3 also confirms the social justice aspect of CRE as the CRE practitioners' reported desire to collaborate with communities with marginalized populations and to tell the community's stories genuinely. Chapter 3 also describes the CRE practitioners' sense of belonging in the CRE community. The interviewees shared that there is an imbalance of power between members of a community and external sources such as the organizations' funders. By identifying the power imbalance between the evaluator and community members, evaluators could uncover stories and develop insights into the needs of a community. Through this study, I also uncover that the CRE lens supports the social justice lens by focusing on each community's needs via developing genuine relationships and understanding the uniqueness of each community. Lastly, Chapter 3 affirms that evaluation is a creative process with foundational rules that can change over time.

Chapter 4 explores how evaluators report their evaluation findings. I referenced the *Culture Checklist* against the reports to see if the authors mentioned the nine dimensions of the *Culture Checklist* in their reports. While Kirkhart (2013) created the checklist with a Western mindset, the findings in Chapter 4 demonstrate that the *Culture Checklist* is applicable in the evaluation with Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Māori. While this checklist is transferable to evaluations across various geographic regions and cultures, potential limitations to the specific community should be considered.

The findings in Chapter 4 suggest that using the *Culture Checklist* as a professional development tool for evaluators would be reasonable. For instance, reflection is a valuable tool to debrief on the successes and areas for improvement of the evaluation project. The *Culture Checklist* also applies to evaluation projects that include social justice aspects, as with the six reports selected for the study that evaluated social programs focused on marginalized populations.

Future Research

Past and current social and political events encouraged the investigation in Chapter 2. I hope future scholars will consider interviewing more scholars to add to the findings, which can confirm or disconfirm the initial findings. I also encourage others to investigate other aspects of CRE's philosophical groundings, such as CRE's methodology, and investigate the evaluation of CRE from the year of introduction until now. Lastly, I hope that researchers will find that the methods used in Chapter 2 serve as a reference for investigating the philosophical stances of other social justice-based evaluation lenses, such as investigating if another social justice-based approach is consistent with the current literature. It would also be beneficial to identify improvements to the current methods to expand the conversation about social justice approaches.

Continuing the research in Chapter 3 with additional evaluation practitioners who use other social justice evaluation approaches may provide insights into evaluation practices. Including more evaluators will help the community understand how CRE evaluators practice evaluation. Further, Chapter 3 also allows for monitoring the evolution of CRE in practice. As Smith (2010) mentions, reporting how evaluation approaches evolve continuously is imperative.

An observational study with CRE evaluators could be a follow-up study for Chapter 4 to either expand, update, or document the use of the *Culture Checklist* with marginalized populations. Researchers could also search for ways to validate the *Culture Checklist* empirically. It may also interest researchers to explore how the dimensions relate to one another. For instance, reflexivity and plasticity are two separate dimensions. Still, per the study's findings, most report authors discussed the two dimensions concurrently. Disambiguating the *Culture Checklist* dimensions may prove beneficial.

Moving Forward

There are numerous positive findings obtained from this dissertation. However, there are opportunities for improvements to move CRE forward. First, the *Culture Checklist* requires an update to reflect constantly changing societal standards. Second, having a foundation of philosophy is crucial in making evaluation approaches accessible to evaluators. Third, the CRE foundation could provide ideas on identifying practical steps to practice CRE. Lastly, continuously updating CRE will require plasticity and reflection among CRE scholars.

Updating the Culture Checklist

Many CRE practitioners depend on the *Culture Checklist* (Kirkhart, 2013), so it is crucial to keep it updated. It has been at least ten years since the *Culture Checklist* was published.

Updating the checklist will allow evaluators to keep CRE current. An instance of the update is to include new information or revise the terminology. For instance, the term checklist indicates that if all steps were checked, the practitioner has successfully implemented culture into their practice. Upon closer investigation, the *Culture Checklist* is much more than a checklist. It is a strategy that all evaluation practitioners should consider. The nine discussed elements are often practiced concurrently and not as discrete steps. As indicated in Chapter 4, some elements should be grouped together. Specifically, plasticity cannot be practiced without reflexivity. Checklist elements, such as reflection, must be practiced internally before applying to evaluation practice. Reflection can be challenging to implement if the evaluators are unfamiliar with the process because reflection requires dedication and internal application. For instance, when I introduced reflection sessions at the end of every evaluation project to my team to learn how our team could improve, the team was hesitant and unsure of what intentional reflection meant. Intentional reflection can be a foreign aspect for many people and must first be practiced until it becomes natural.

Philosophy of Science in Evaluation

Integrating the philosophy of science in evaluation is crucial as understanding the foundational philosophy of an approach or lens can promote clarity of the approach to all. For instance, one of the first themes I identified while investigating the ontology of CRE in Chapter 2 was social justice. However, social justice was too broad of a theme to be meaningful. Through the investigation, it became more apparent that what mattered to CRE scholars was serving the people who have been marginalized and the specific populations that they identified. Having that foundational understanding clarifies the importance and purpose of an evaluation approach

which can clarify how to move from theory to practice. Investigating the clarity of the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of a lens or an approach could provide a clear roadmap on where the approach stands compared to other approaches.

The philosophy of science in evaluation tends to be intimidating. I remember being bombarded with philosophical words that were not part of my vocabulary. I thought this was because English is not my first language, but my English-speaking colleagues struggled with the same issue. I believe that ontology, epistemology, and axiology can be simplified to make it accessible to all. For instance, my investigations of the philosophical groundings of evaluation led me to better understand the three terms. For me, ontology means identifying the purpose and reasons that influence the purpose, and epistemology means the experiences that drive a person's intention to identify with a specific evaluation approach. Axiology means what the values that influence the decisions made by the individual are. I hope this clarifies any confusion that students and evaluators may have had, as my colleagues and I have experienced.

Practicing CRE

Identifying the axiology of CRE led to one of the most exciting and applicable practices that can be implemented individually. Other than considering the culture of the evaluation population, individuals should consider practicing (1) reflections on identifying our personal biases and privileges, (2) being authentic when connecting with people, (3) being brave to challenge injustices and inequities, (4) use privileges or power to elevate others, and (5) learn from others. I named these qualities as a RABEL practice: *reflect*, be *authentic*, be *brave*, *elevate* others, and *learn* from others. The items listed in RABEL require consistent and continuous

practice. For instance, I am still identifying new biases that I have. This practice must be executed to understand and modify unwanted behaviors. While identifying the biases is the first step, there needs to be the courage to challenge ourselves to make adjustments needed to be the steward for the evaluation community. As one of the scholars stated in Chapter 2, “It is for the greater good.”

Furthering the CRE’s Mission

CRE is not an all-or-nothing approach. As many scholars and practitioners stated in the interviews, practicing CRE is an iterative process. This feedback loop while applying CRE can be interrupted and has to be interrupted to promote growth in our evaluation practice. An evaluation approach or lens that can stand the test of time is an approach that continues to evolve. Just as language changes over time, CRE should keep up with societal changes. For example, some evaluators oppose the CRE lens due to its social justice stance, but the existence of CRE led to diversifying the evaluation field. The identified CRE philosophical assumptions are consistent with the *Evaluation Manifesto* (The Evaluation Manifesto, 2022). The manifesto showcases how to move the evaluation field forward. The *Evaluation Manifesto* highlighted ten points.

1. Evaluation should be a collective and transformative action
2. Evaluation advocacy can be an empowering tool for social justice
3. Evaluation will evolve in visible, inclusive, and supportive spaces
4. Evaluation can be demystified by rejecting labels and gatekeepers
5. Building confidence and capacity is key to developing evaluation practices

6. Evaluations should be transparently grounded in criticality and context
7. All types of evidence used in evaluation can have value
8. Hierarchical assumptions about evaluation methods should be disrupted
9. An inclusive approach to evaluation funding should be adopted
10. Higher education requires a cultural shift to ensure evaluations lead to learning

Through CRE, evaluators can be the change agents in evolving the evaluation field. The evaluation field has to be an environment inviting new and different ideas. CRE challenges societal injustices, and when paired with the *Evaluation Manifesto arguments*, it could lead to a change in the evaluation field. The combination could promote evaluation inclusivity and accessibility to experienced and emergent scholars and practitioners. I challenge evaluators to stand up for marginalized people boldly and to be the evaluation stewards aiming to eliminate social injustices.

Personal Reflections

My experience authoring this dissertation was filled with numerous unforeseen circumstances. The global pandemic, the rise of Black Lives Matter, the Anti-Asian Hate movement, the January 6th insurrection in the United States, the ever-changing government in power in Malaysia, the passing of my initial dissertation chair, the passing of my mother-in-law, and the worsening of my health have all contributed to the lengthy process of this dissertation. When I started this journey, my goal was to graduate in 2021, but unforeseen circumstances delayed this dissertation. While drafting my dissertation, I gave up my fellowship, accepted a full-time position, resigned, and accepted another full-time position. If I had known all these issues would arise, I would have spent another year of my fellowship working solely on the

dissertation. Throughout this journey, I learned that practicing the elements of CRE is just as crucial to practice in my personal life and my professional life. Reflecting and adjusting to various situations while considering the culture and contexts is the hallmark of CRE. Inside and outside of professional evaluation, I intend to practice CRE for the rest of my life.

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Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Not Needed Letters 1, 2, and 3

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
FWA00007842
IRB00008254

Date: February 21, 2020

To: Chris Coryn, Principal Investigator
Ouen Hunter, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for IRB Project Number 20-02-42

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled "A Phenomenological Investigation of Culturally Responsive Evaluation" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Based on that review, the IRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals and your scope of work does not meet the Federal definition of human subject.

45 CFR 46.102 (f) Human Subject

(f) *Human subject* means a living individual **about whom** an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains:

(1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
(2) Identifiable private information.

Intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered (for example, venipuncture) and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes. *Interaction* includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject. *Private information* includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information) in order for obtaining the information to constitute research involving human subjects.

"**About whom**" – a human subject research project requires the data received from the living individual to be about the person.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the IRB files.

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
FWA00007342
IRB00008754

Date: February 21, 2020

To: Chris Coryn, Principal Investigator
Ouen Hunter, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for IRB Project Number 20-02-43

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled "Bridging Theory and Practice in Culturally Responsive Evaluation" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Based on that review, the IRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals and your scope of work does not meet the Federal definition of human subject.

45 CFR 46.102 (f) Human Subject

(f) *Human subject* means a living individual **about whom** an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains:

(1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
(2) Identifiable private information.

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Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the IRB files.

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IRB00008254

Date: February 21, 2020

To: Chris Coryn, Principal Investigator
Ouen Hunter, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for IRB Project Number 20-02-44

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled "Evaluating Culturally Responsive Evaluation" has been reviewed by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Based on that review, the IRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals and your scope of work does not meet the Federal definition of human subject.

45 CFR 46.102 (f) Human Subject

(f) *Human subject* means a living individual **about whom** an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains:

(1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
(2) Identifiable private information.

Intervention includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered (for example, venipuncture) and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes. *Interaction* includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject. *Private information* includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (i.e., the identity of the subject is or may readily be ascertained by the investigator or associated with the information) in order for obtaining the information to constitute research involving human subjects.

"**About whom**" – a human subject research project requires the data received from the living individual to be about the person.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the IRB files.

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Appendix B

Study 1 Protocol with Embedded Table of Specifications

Appendix B

Study 1: Protocol with Embedded Table of Specifications

Main Questions	Probe	Purpose / Explain	Ontology (O), Epistemology (E), Axiology (A)
1) Would you mind telling me about yourself?	How did you get into evaluation? Can you tell me about your work experience? What about your educational experience? What do you see as the philosophical grounding of CRE? (O)	Intro – Ice Breaker and could lead to ontology. What can be known about the ontology of CRE	

2) What motivated you to start writing about CRE?	Why did you write about "this paper"? What inspired you to write "this paper"? What prompted you to write about CRE?	To understand their experiences and motivations	O, E, A
3) In your own words, what is the purpose of CRE?	What is CRE's goal? Why was CRE created?	To understand the objective or purpose of RE	O
4) In your opinion (not based on what is written), what issues can CRE address?	What issues (personal or societal) that CRE addresses? What is the primary goal that CRE is trying to address? What is the value of CRE?	Investigate their perceived values and understanding of CRE	O
5) Why is CRE important in evaluation practice?	Why does CRE matter in evaluation practice?	This is to investigate the value of CRE	O, A
6) How is CRE implemented in practice? What are these steps? Follow-up: How are these steps	Can you share how you think CRE is practiced? Why are these steps necessary?	This is to investigate the functionality and origin of ideas of CRE	E

differ from regular evaluation steps?			
7) How can you practice CRE ethically?	What are some issues that we should consider before practicing CRE? How do you incorporate everyone's opinions without committing to 'tokenism'?	This could get very deep in axiology, but it will also be related to epistemology.	E, A
8) How do you find a balance of objective evaluation while being subjective in the evaluation context?	Evaluators often try to be value-free or objective; how can we navigate the need to be objective while considering the evaluation context?	This is related to getting more into the value of CRE	E
9) How is CRE like other approaches?	What are some similarities between CRE and other evaluation approaches, such as transformative evaluation?	Depending on how the participant answers the question, there could be elements of O, E, and A	O, E, A
10) How is CRE different from other approaches? Can you provide some examples?	Based on your experience, how is CRE unique from other approaches?	Depending on how the participant answers the question, there could be elements of O, E, and A	O, E, A

11) We discussed how CRE is unique and how CRE is like other approaches. In your opinion, why do we need CRE as another evaluation approach?	What is the rationality of CRE?	This is to identify their knowledge of CRE and how they interpret their views on CRE. This is focused on epistemology but could have elements of axiology.	E, A
12) In your opinion, what are some of the limitations of CRE?	How can CRE improve to be a better evaluation approach? What are some opportunities for CRE to improve as an evaluation approach?	To identify weaknesses of CRE.	E

Appendix C

Study 2: Interview Questions

Appendix C

Study 2: Interview Questions

*Denotes important questions

1) Would you mind telling me about how you got into the field of evaluation? (Ice Breaker)

2) *What motivated you to use CRE as an evaluation approach? *(Reason)*

3) In your own words, how would you define CRE? *(Reason)*

4) *Why is CRE important in evaluation practice? *(Purpose/Reason)*

5) *How do you apply the CRE lens into your evaluation practice? *(Purpose - How)*

6) Can you share the steps/stages you use while using CRE? *(Purpose - How)*

7) It takes time to get to know and establish relationships with the community. How do you negotiate the required relationship building time with your clients? *(Purpose - How)*

8) *How do you engage with different stakeholders such as program participants, policymakers, service recipients, and program managers? *(Purpose - How)*
    a. How do you connect with different stakeholders?
    b. How do you prioritize the voices of the evaluation?

9) How can CRE be practiced ethically? *(Purpose - How)*

10) *Can you share some of your successes in your approach to CRE? *(Successes)*

11) *Can you share some of the challenges in using CRE? *(Challenges)*

12) How do you turn the results of the data you collected into action? *(Purpose - How)*

13) What are the essential CRE skills that CRE evaluators should possess? *(Purpose - How)*

14) How do you think the current events (COVID-19, BLM movement) will impact your practice in CRE?

15) *Are there other evaluation stories relating to your practice that you would like to share? *(Successes/Challenges)*

16) Are there any questions that I should ask, but did not? What are they and why are those questions important?

17) Before we move on to conclude the interview, do you have any additional comments?