



# Privilege and Validity in Defining “What Works”

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# Noticing Boundaries

*To photograph is to frame and to frame is to exclude.*

(Sontag, 2003, p. 46)

# Origins & Definitions

- **Validity** (vă•lĭd'i•tē) (Lat. *validus*, strong < *valēre*, to be strong) *n.* Well grounded, just.
- **Privilege** (prĭv'lij) *n.* A special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual, a class, or a caste.

# Validity & Privilege

*Validity is situated as not just one of many issues in science, but as the crux of the issue: the claims of science to a certain privilege in terms of authoritative knowledge.*

(Lather, 2001, p. 241)

# Inclusion & Exclusion

*Validity boundaries are always ideological power alignments. They always create insiders and outsiders.*

(Scheurich, 1996, p. 53)

# Beyond the Binary

- Limitations of Scheurich's "two-sided mirror" (Scheurich, 1996)
- Broader understandings of "degrees of privilege" rather than "have vs. have not" (Kolan & Two Trees, 2014)

# “Common Places” of Privilege

- Assumptions that frame the evaluation
- Social relationships established to conduct evaluation
- Methods, design choices
- Final synthesis of evidence, determining “goodness”
- Communicating findings and recommendations
- Metaevaluation (Kirkhart, 2016)

# Framing Assumptions

- Context of the evaluand, evaluation
- Scope, boundaries of the evaluand, evaluation
- Theoretical foundations
- Evaluation influences hoped for or intended



# Relationships

- Person of the evaluator
  - Intersecting cultural locations, holding varying degrees of privilege
- Evaluator role
  - Ascribed authority
- Relationships enacted to carry out the evaluation
  - Authenticity

# Design

- What is accepted as “credible evidence” or “pertinent data”
- Choice of methods, design
- Time frame
- Criteria accepted as defining “what works”
- Examining privilege in the operation of the evaluand

# What Works for Whom?

- How does privilege operate within the context of the evaluand and the parameters of the delivery system and support system?
- How is privilege acquired, exercised, shared, meted out?
- Do some consumers enjoy easier access than others?
- Are all consumers viewed as equal status or are there “preferred” customers or “model” clients?
- Do all consumers benefit equally from services received?

# Synthesis & Interpretation

- Synthesis of evidence in arriving at a stamp of legitimacy
- Fair and balanced interpretation
- Whose worldviews are represented in the interpretation
- What evidence is privileged in the synthesis

# Communication

- Audiences selected, omitted
- Language and protocol
  - What procedures are chosen
  - Barriers to receiving information
- Returning benefit
  - Whose interests are served by the recommendations

# Metaevaluation

- Accountability
- Validity
  - Adequacy and appropriateness of understandings reached, inclusive of determinations of merit and worth
  - Adequacy and appropriateness of actions taken, inclusive of decisions to act or not act

# Privilege & Validity

- Validity is vested with authority.
- Narrowly defined, it restricts legitimacy and creates marginalization.
- Appropriately expanded, it can be used to advance social, economic, and environmental justice.

# Validity & Fairness

*The relationship between validity and fairness depends on. . . how broadly we define each of these concepts. Validity and fairness come. . . from somewhat different points of view and involve different emphases, but the overlap is more pronounced than the differences.*

(Kane, 2010, p. 177-8)



# Validity as Argument

*Concepts, evidence, social and personal consequences, and values... linked as strands within a cable of validity argument.*

(Cronbach, 1988, p. 4)

# Expanding Validity Arguments

## Five Perspectives

(Cronbach, 1980)

- Operational
- Economic
- Explanatory
- Functional
- Political

## Five Justifications

(Kirkhart, 2013)

- Methodological
- Experiential
- Relational
- Consequential
- Theoretical

# Privilege Threatening Validity

- May be seen as opposing social, economic, and environmental justice
- Can create blinders to our recognizing power and resource inequalities as we plan our evaluations
- May lead to ignoring cultural responsibility
- Can create complacency, leading us to stay within our comfort zone of what is understood as “normal” or “how evaluation is done”

# A2 Valid Information

*Evaluation information should serve the intended purposes and support valid interpretations.*

- “. . . an integrating theme across all the Accuracy Standards.” (p. 171)
- Cites as a hazard, “*privileging representations from the most powerful groups only, while ignoring other less powerful stakeholder groups.*” (p. 174)

(Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011)

# Privilege Supporting Validity

- Privilege educates us, revealing
  - ways in which our practice is biased—infused with assumptions that work against public welfare.
  - ways in which we may be working at cross purposes with our intentions.
- Privilege gives us options.

# Privilege Supporting Public Welfare

- Privilege *yielded, shared, and dispersed* supports social, economic, environmental justice
- Privilege *used* with conscious intention to advocate for social justice.

# Summary

- Validity holds privilege.
- Validity and privilege may function in opposition or mutual support.
- Expanding validity and validation repositions insider/outsider boundaries.
- Privilege demands attention to exclusions as well as inclusions in determining “what works”

# Counterarguments

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* (Lorde, 1984)

*My rationale for hanging on to the term “validity” is to both circulate and break with the signs that code it. What I mean by the term . . . is both mobilizing all the baggage that it carries and, in a doubled movement, using it to rupture validity as a “regime of truth . . . .”* (Lather, 2001, p. 241)



# Counterargument

*Validity may be essential to good outcome evaluation, but it is not clear that everything essential to good outcome evaluation needs to be placed into a validity typology.*

(Shadish, 2011, p. 108)