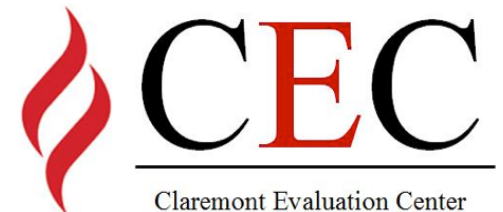


# WHAT IS GOOD WORK? YOUTH-PROGRAM EVALUATOR PERSPECTIVES ON HIGH QUALITY PRACTICE

SILVANA BIALOSIEWICZ, MA  
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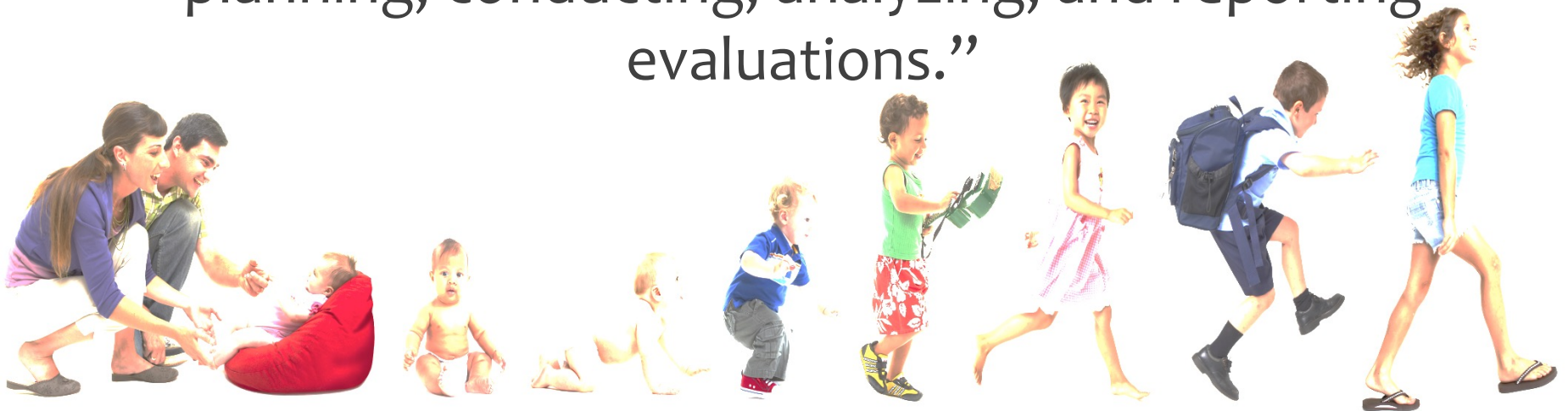
*American Evaluation  
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Conference*

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## IMPETUS FOR STUDY

“Evaluators have the responsibility to understand and respect differences among participants, such as differences in their culture, religion, gender, disability, **age**, sexual orientation and ethnicity, and to account for potential implications of these differences when planning, conducting, analyzing, and reporting evaluations.”



(AEA, 2004, emphasis added)

## IMPETUS FOR STUDY

“The culturally competent evaluator is one who draws upon a wide range of evaluation theories and methods to design and carry out an evaluation that is *optimally matched* to the context.”



(AEA, 2011, emphasis added)

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



How is high-quality youth-program evaluation defined?



What barriers do evaluators experience in conducting high-quality evaluation in this context?

# THE CURRENT STUDY

## DESIGN

Qualitative Interview Study

**SAMPLE** 25 AEA-associated youth-program evaluators

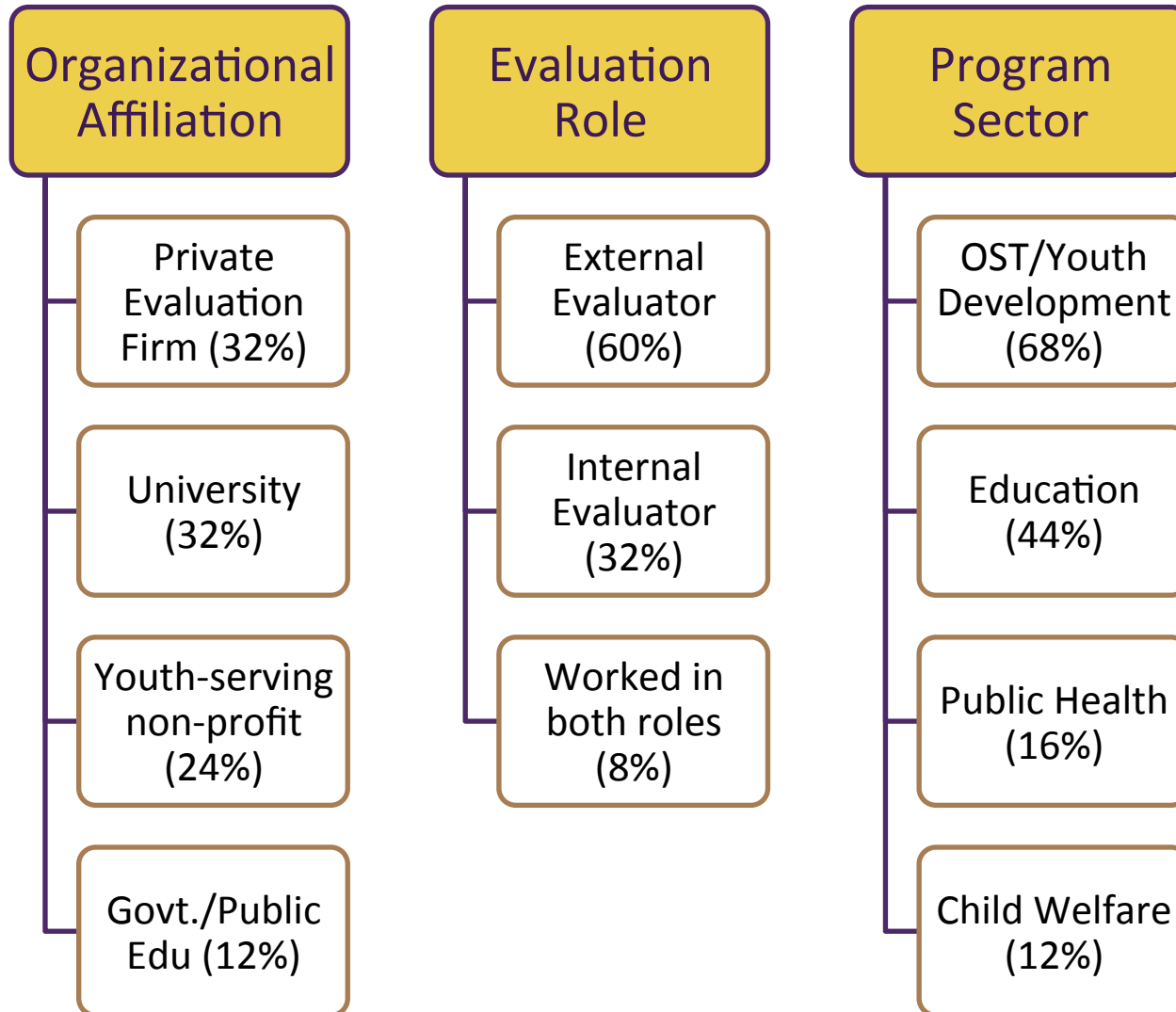
## METHOD

- Semi-structured interview protocol
- One-hour telephone interviews
- Thematic analysis in *Atlas.ti*

## SAMPLE DESCRIPTIVES

- 88% Female
- 60% held a doctorate degree
- Average of 10 years of evaluation experience (1-30 yrs)
- Disciplinary training:
  - Social Sciences (N=14)
  - Education (N=7)
  - Other (N=5)

# SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



# HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE

Participatory  
(64%)

Youth-Focused  
(64%)

Developmentally  
Sensitive  
(64%)

Sensitive to Ethical  
Issues  
(40%)

# HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE

Participatory

```
graph LR; A[Participatory] --> B[Represent all stakeholder voices]; A --> C[Engage parents as key allies];
```

Represent all stakeholder voices

Engage parents as key allies

“I would advise people not to be afraid of parents and to think of them as other people who want what’s best for their children... They might be a really great ally in trying to figure out whether programs are effective or not.”



# HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE

Youth-  
Focused

```
graph LR; A[Youth-Focused] --> B[Give youth authentic voice]; A --> C[Dedicate time to building relationships with youth]; A --> D[Use youth-participatory approaches];
```

Give youth authentic voice

Dedicate time to building  
relationships with youth

Use youth-participatory  
approaches

“Don’t let yourself be driven by the loudest voices. The loudest voices are easily the voices of adults who are far removed from whatever the needs or wants or interests are for the young people.”

# HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE

Developmentally  
Sensitive

```
graph LR; A[Developmentally Sensitive] --> B[Match methods & measures to developmental stage]; A --> C[Utilize developmental theory & research];
```

Match methods & measures to  
developmental stage

Utilize developmental theory &  
research

“You can’t just go in and ask the same questions you might ask to a high school and to an elementary school student. You have to understand something about their cognitive ability. It’s going to really affect the validity of your data if you’re not cognizant of what’s appropriate for the different age levels of participants.”

# HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICE

Sensitive to  
Ethical Issues



```
graph LR; A[Sensitive to Ethical Issues] --> B[Follow IRB ethical guidelines]; A --> C[Secure parent consent & youth assent]; A --> D[Reflect continually on ethics];
```

Follow IRB ethical  
guidelines

Secure parent consent &  
youth assent

Reflect continually on  
ethics

“We don’t give our students enough training [on ethics] and we don’t emphasize enough ethical reflection and how informed consent is a practice. It’s not about a one-time thing and it has to be renewed constantly.”

## BARRIERS TO GOOD WORK

Perpetual under-funding (52%)

Client misconceptions of high-quality practice (44%)

Data collection issues (44%)

Lack of client involvement (44%)

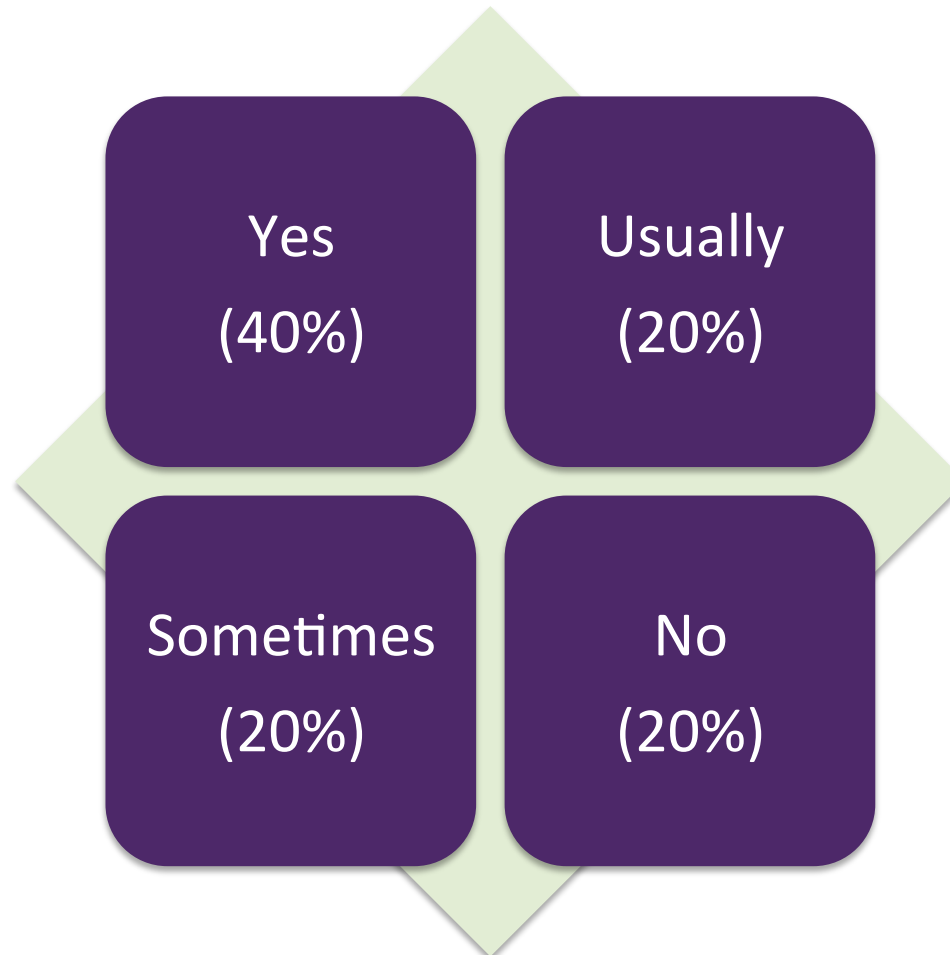
IRBs (36%)

Evaluator bandwidth or content expertise (32%)

Limited knowledge base or knowledge sharing (20%)

# ARE WE DOING GOOD WORK?

*Given your criteria for high quality work, do you feel that you are able to conduct evaluations that meet your personal standards?*



# ARE WE DOING GOOD WORK?

“I think I am because I’m committed to it, but I wouldn’t say that it is necessarily valued or that it is necessarily rewarded. It means I work a lot of extra hours. It means I do a lot more than my colleagues. I feel it’s always a struggle.”

# ARE WE DOING GOOD WORK?

“Unfortunately, I think the barriers to conducting high quality program evaluation for children’s services are too much to be overcome through personal choice making. I think that the entire field would need to get behind the idea of innovating to better evaluate programs for children, especially when we’re gathering data from children.”

## REFLECTIONS

How do we overcome these barriers and move the field of youth-program evaluation forward to a state in which exemplary practice is the norm rather than the exception?





# REFLECTIONS

1

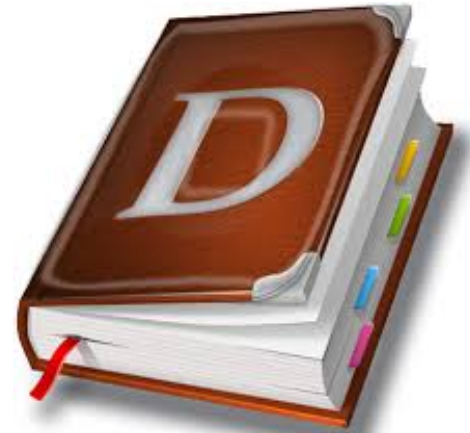
Recognize,  
value, and  
appreciate  
youth



## REFLECTIONS

2

Promote  
shared  
definitions  
of high-  
quality work



## REFLECTIONS

3

Cross Train  
in Evaluation  
and  
Developmental  
Psychology

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# REFLECTIONS

4

Tear down  
inter-  
disciplinary  
silos



**Practice**

**Theory**



# Thanks!

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