

Articles should deal with topics applicable to the broad field of program evaluation. Articles may focus on evaluation methods, theory, practice, or findings. In all cases, implications for practicing evaluators should be clearly identified. Examples of contributions include, but are not limited to, reviews of new developments in evaluation, descriptions of a current evaluation study, critical reviews of some area of evaluation practice, and presentations of important new techniques. Manuscripts should follow APA format for references and style. Length per se is not a criterion in evaluating submissions.

Taking Stock of Empowerment Evaluation An Empirical Review

Robin Lin Miller
Rebecca Campbell
Michigan State University

Abstract: Empowerment evaluation entered the evaluation lexicon in 1993. Since that time, it has attracted many adherents, as well as vocal detractors. A prominent issue in the debates on empowerment evaluation concerns the extent to which empowerment evaluation can be readily distinguished from other approaches to evaluation that share with it an emphasis on participatory and collaborative processes, capacity development, and evaluation use. A second issue concerns the extent to which empowerment evaluation actually leads to empowered outcomes for those who have participated in the evaluation process and those who are the intended beneficiaries of the social programs that were the objects of evaluation. The authors systematically examined 47 case examples of empowerment evaluation published from 1994 through June 2005. The results suggest wide variation among practitioners in adherence to empowerment evaluation principles and weak emphasis on the attainment of empowered outcomes for program beneficiaries. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords: *empowerment evaluation; research review; participatory evaluation*

Developing cumulative knowledge in evaluation and advancing evaluation theory requires systematic evidence on evaluation practice (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1991; N. L. Smith, 1993). Worthen (2001), in his commentary on the future of evaluation, pessimistically (and we hope inaccurately) predicted that evaluation in 2010 would continue to be guided by common

Robin Lin Miller, Michigan State University, Department of Psychology, 134A Psychology Building, East Lansing, MI 48824; e-mail: mill1493@msu.edu.

Authors' Note: We are grateful to Maria Teresa Valenti and Mei Chao for their research assistance and to Tina Christie, Michael Hendricks, Miles McNall, Michael Patton, Michael Scriven, Nick Smith, and three anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on prior versions of this article.

American Journal of Evaluation, Vol. 27 No. 3, September 2006 296-319
DOI: 10.1177/1098214006291015
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wisdom and opinion rather than by empirically derived knowledge. The current article was motivated by our desire to contribute to empirical knowledge on evaluation practice and by our belief in the value of understanding how theoretical prescriptions and real-world practices do or do not align for refining evaluation theory. In this article, we seek to strengthen the empirical evidence base on evaluation by presenting the results of an empirical case review of empowerment evaluation practice. We selected empowerment evaluation practice for study because we believe that by submitting its practice to empirical scrutiny, we might clarify some of the key points of disagreement in the empowerment evaluation debates.

Overview of Empowerment Evaluation

Empowerment evaluation entered the evaluation lexicon when, in 1993, then president of the American Evaluation Association David M. Fetterman made it his presidential theme. In his published presidential address, Fetterman (1994a) drew on diverse influences, including work in community psychology (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988) and action anthropology (Tax, 1958), to craft a vision of the evaluator as an agent of social change. In his address and in subsequent work (cf. Fetterman, 1994a, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005), Fetterman and colleagues have articulated a form of evaluation practice in which evaluators bring the voice of disempowered citizens to those who have power and facilitate citizens' control over their own affairs. In describing empowerment evaluation as a new form of evaluation practice, Fetterman (1994a) argued that evaluation should serve as a tool for self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Throughout their theoretical writings on empowerment evaluation, Fetterman and his colleagues have framed it as a process that facilitates the development of perceived and actual control over the fate of a community of people joined by their relationship to a social program. Mirroring the distinctions made by Schulz, Israel, Zimmerman, and Checkoway (1995) and Zimmerman (2000) between the mechanisms of empowerment and the state of being empowered and between individual and organizational empowerment, Fetterman (1994a) noted that empowerment evaluation ought to enact empowering processes in the conduct of evaluation and to facilitate empowered outcomes.

At the level of an individual, psychologically empowering processes are those that provide opportunities for people to work with others, learn decision-making skills, and manage resources (Schulz et al., 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowering processes as such are typical of many participatory and collaborative approaches to research and evaluation in which program stakeholders work with evaluators to design and conduct research or an evaluation project (Patton, 1997b; Worthington, 1999).

At an organizational level, empowering processes are those in which responsibility and leadership are shared and opportunities to participate in decision making are made available (Schulz et al., 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Evaluation practices considered to be empowering to organizations include the formation of evaluation teams within organizations or programs, as well as adherence to democratic processes in which organization members come together to discuss the meaning of evaluation findings and their action implications.

Empowered outcomes are evidenced by whether individuals or aggregate bodies of individuals engage in behaviors that permit effective pursuit of planned change and results in success (Schulz et al., 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). According to Schulz et al. (1995) and Zimmerman (2000), empowered individuals are critically aware and therefore able to analyze what must change, possess a sense of control and so feel capable of acting, and engage in participatory behaviors. An empowered person perceives their personal agency and acts in ways

that reflect this perception. At the organizational level, empowered groups compete effectively for resources, influence policy, and are networked to others.

By extension, Fetterman suggests that empowerment evaluation, if properly carried out, should result in actual shifts in power as symbolized by individuals' engagement and participation in making decisions in which they previously were minimally involved or uninvolved and in an organization's ability to garner resources and influence relevant policy concerning issues related to a program. In the literature on empowerment evaluation, empowered states are typically signaled by possessing evaluative capacity, taking action to improve the probability that programs succeed as a result of conducting and using evaluation, and mainstreaming evaluation activities into programming. Empowered outcomes such as these are reasoned to result from empowerment evaluation because of its reliance on empowering processes; an evaluator cedes control to stakeholders in a participatory process and facilitates the evolution of an evaluation in which stakeholders make the decisions and carry out the evaluation work. By taking control of the evaluation, stakeholders are believed to enhance their capacity for critical analysis, redouble their commitment to their program's goals, and commit themselves to learning about their program.

Criticisms of Empowerment Evaluation

Despite its apparent popularity and resonance in some quarters of the evaluation community, empowerment evaluation remains a controversial and contested approach. Critics such as Michael Patton, Michael Scriven, Daniel Stufflebeam, and Lee Sechrest, among others, have raised concerns about empowerment evaluation, including its reliance on self-study (Scriven, 1997a, 1997b, 2005; Stufflebeam, 1994), its vague contingencies for practice (Cousins, 2005; N. L. Smith, 1999; Worthington, 1999), the rigor and propriety of the evaluations (or "pseudoevaluations") that may result from it (Sechrest, 1997; Stufflebeam, 1994), and the absence of rigorous evidence to show that it is indeed empowering and leads to empowered outcomes (Patton, 2005; Worthington, 1999). We briefly touch on three of these areas of critique regarding empowerment evaluation: conceptual ambiguity, a lack of unanimity in practice, and limited documented evidence of success.

Conceptual Ambiguity

A principal criticism leveled against empowerment evaluation concerns its theoretical underdevelopment (Patton, 1997a, 1997b; Scriven, 1997b; N. L. Smith, 1999; Worthington, 1999). Critics note that empowerment evaluation is not adequately differentiated from other approaches to evaluation that are collaborative in their nature or are designed to mainstream evaluation into an organization's culture (Cousins, 2005; Patton, 1997b). Echoing elements of approaches such as transformative, advocacy, and democratic evaluation, empowerment evaluation uses the language of social change and of illumination and includes among its core principles the pursuit of social justice. Empowerment evaluation places core emphasis on developing buy-in and ownership of evaluation through democratic processes to encourage an evaluation's influence (cf. Fetterman, 1997b; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). The centrality of evaluation influence evident in empowerment evaluation is common to a variety of collaborative, participatory, responsive, and utilization-focused evaluation approaches. Emphasis on the development of an organization's capacity to conduct evaluation and the creation of learning cultures is also a refrain in empowerment evaluation, making it similar to other mainstreaming, capacity-building, and organizational learning efforts in evaluation.¹ Thus, an enduring criticism of empowerment evaluation concerns the fact that it shares enough in common with other approaches to blur its conceptually unique stance on evaluation. Conceptual ambiguity might make it particularly difficult to discern precisely how to enact empowerment evaluation.

Empowerment evaluation is also criticized for its lack of specificity regarding its theorized mechanisms of change (Miller, 2005; N. L. Smith, 1999; Worthington, 1999). The current literature does not clearly outline how facilitating a collaborative evaluation will result in mainstreamed evaluation, improved programs, or increased evaluation capacity. Moreover, the link between these processes and shifts in actual power, the attainment of social justice, or liberation is similarly undefined. The theory describes poorly for whom such shifts in power are intended and the appropriate role of the evaluator in orchestrating shifts in power in pursuit of social change (Miller, 2005; Worthington, 1999). Because empowerment evaluation has not dealt adequately with these issues, it is not clear what settings, programs, and circumstances are most appropriate for empowerment evaluation. Although its developers have stated that empowerment evaluation is not appropriate for all situations and purposes (Fitzpatrick, 2000), empowerment evaluation theorists have yet to describe if the practice is best conducted with programs that have particular characteristics, such as an explicit focus on social justice or preexisting values that are closely aligned with empowerment evaluation, or when empowerment evaluation ought to be avoided.

Lack of Unanimity in Practice

Empowerment evaluation theorists argue that it is the unique combination of elements inspired from a variety of theories and approaches to community-based inquiry that, when put into practice, makes empowerment evaluation distinct. Yet empowerment evaluation has also been criticized as difficult to readily distinguish from kindred evaluation theories when examined in the context of actual practice (Cousins, 2005; Patton, 1997b; N. L. Smith, 1999). The diversity of ways in which one might conduct an empowerment evaluation has proved less than edifying for those who want clarity about what counts as an empowerment evaluation. For example, echoing Patton's (1997b) criticism that available case examples of empowerment evaluation practice are not always informative for telling empowerment evaluation apart from other forms of practice, Cousins (2005) systematically examined five case examples of empowerment evaluation presented in a recent book by Fetterman and Wandersman (2005). Cousins mapped each case along five dimensions: control over the evaluation, the diversity of actors involved in the evaluation, the dispersion of power in the evaluation team, the manageability of the evaluation, and the depth of stakeholder participation. Cousins suggested that variation in the implementation of empowerment evaluation across these cases calls into question what makes empowerment evaluation distinct. Cousins argued that the lack of unanimity regarding what constitutes an empowerment evaluation underscores its theoretical imprecision and vague prescriptions for what constitutes high-quality practice.

To address criticism and evolve empowerment evaluation theory, Wandersman et al. (2005) articulated 10 principles that they argue, when applied in combination, distinguish empowerment evaluation from its cousins conceptually and in practice. Wandersman et al. asserted that any particular evaluation may reflect these principles in varying degrees but suggested that the core of empowerment evaluation requires that all of these principles be present and inform practice for an evaluation to call itself an empowerment evaluation. In Table 1, we take the liberty of recasting these principles in terms of their prescriptions for facilitating empowering processes and for identifying empowered outcomes.

Viewing the principles from a process and outcome standpoint clarifies to some degree what might be the essential features of empowerment evaluation practice. Although these principles may advance understanding of what empowerment evaluation ought to be, it is not clear that empowerment evaluation practice fully reflects these values. Similarly, it is not known whether empowerment evaluators resolve contradictions and tensions among these principles in similar ways.

Table 1
Empowerment Evaluation Principles

Process

- A community should make the decisions about all aspects of an evaluation, including its purpose and design; a community should decide how the results are used (community-ownership principle).
- Stakeholders, including staff members, community members, funding institutions, and program participants, should directly participate in decisions about an evaluation (inclusion principle).
- Empowerment evaluations should value processes that emphasize deliberation and authentic collaboration among stakeholders; the empowerment evaluation process should be readily transparent (democratic-participation principle).
- The tools developed for an empowerment evaluation should reflect community wisdom (community-knowledge principle).
- Empowerment evaluations must appreciate the value of scientific evidence (evidence-based-strategies principle).
- Empowerment evaluations should be conducted in ways that hold evaluators accountable to programs' administrators and to the public (accountability principle).

Outcome

- Empowerment evaluations must value improvement; evaluations should be tools to achieve improvement (improvement principle).
 - Empowerment evaluations should change organizations' cultures and influence individual thinking (organizational-learning principle).
 - Empowerment evaluations should facilitate the attainment of fair allocations of resources, opportunities, and bargaining power; evaluations should contribute to the amelioration of social inequalities (social-justice principle).
 - Empowerment evaluations should facilitate organizations' use of data to learn and their ability to sustain their evaluation efforts (capacity-building principle).
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Source: Adapted from Wandersman et al. (2005).

Lack of Documented Evidence of Success

Empowerment evaluation's critics have noted that few case examples provide systematic evidence that by using an empowerment evaluation approach, one can obtain espoused aims, such as improved evaluation capacity, high levels of evaluation use, and increased perceived and actual self-determination (Patton, 2005). In this sense, critics argue that there is weak evidence that the approach is empowering or that it leads to empowered outcomes. Absent systematic evaluation of the evaluation process and its consequences, critics such as Patton (2005) have questioned whether empowerment evaluation is as empowering as kindred approaches that seek to engage program staff members in determining an evaluation's focus and methods and the meaning of the results. (Of course, many other approaches to evaluation could be similarly criticized for providing little in the way of systematic evidence of their effects.) How the outcome principles can be operationalized to measure the success of empowerment evaluation projects remains an underdeveloped aspect of theory and practice.

The Current Review

Critics of empowerment evaluation have raised important concerns regarding the degree to which its practitioners adhere to underlying principles, enact the principles in recognizably similar ways, and attain empowered outcomes. Within the context of calls for critical systematic investigation of evaluation theories and practice (see, e.g., Henry, 2001; Henry & Mark, 2003; Shadish et al., 1991; N. L. Smith, 1993; Worthen, 2001), empirical examination of the merits of such critiques is warranted. What do empowerment evaluators do in their projects? How closely does their practice reflect well-articulated features of empowerment evaluation?

Understanding what is being called empowerment evaluation in practice can provide insight into the theoretical development and specificity of this form of evaluation practice.

The current study examined the state of empowerment evaluation practice. Specifically, we sought to address the following questions:

1. Are there distinct, discernable variations in how empowerment evaluation is implemented in practice? Are there different modes of practice defined by their approach to empowerment evaluation?
2. In what kinds of settings are empowerment evaluations conducted? Do practitioners' approaches to empowerment evaluation vary as a function of the types of settings and populations served in a project?
3. Why do evaluators, and/or their collaborative partners, choose empowerment evaluation as their evaluation strategy? Do the reasons why empowerment evaluation is selected vary by mode of practice?
4. How are consumers involved in empowerment evaluation projects, and does the nature of their involvement vary by empowerment evaluation approach?
5. What evidence do empowerment evaluation practitioners provide to demonstrate project success? To what extent are empowerment evaluation principles such as ownership, inclusion, democracy, and social justice evident in empowerment evaluation practice? Are these principles equally evident across approaches?

Method

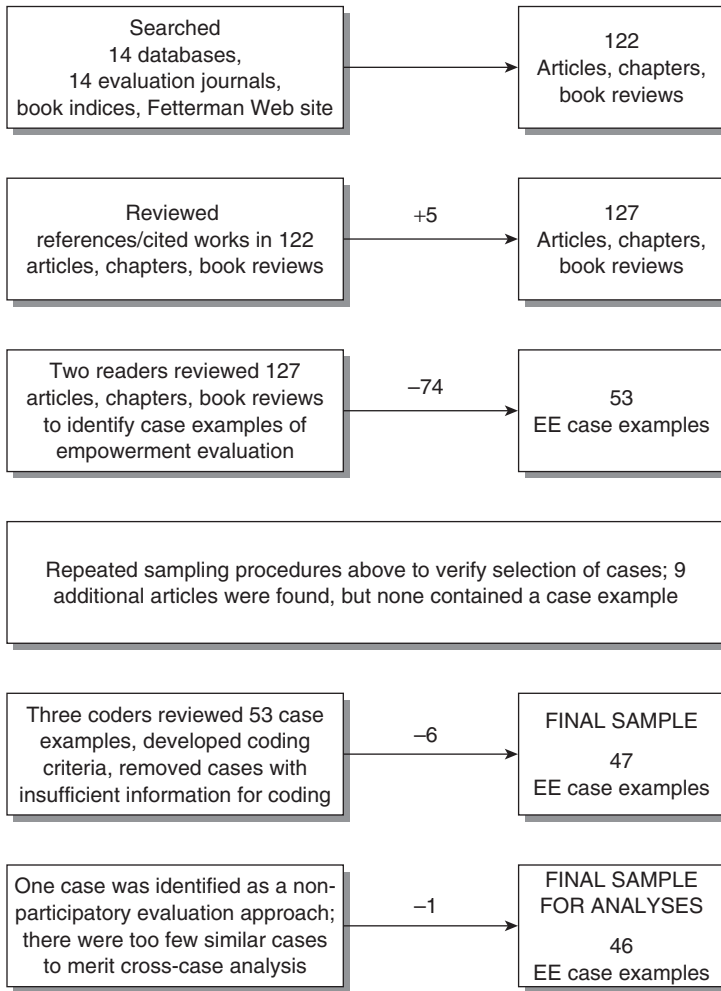
Sample

To generate a sample of empowerment evaluation cases (see Figure 1), we searched databases in the social sciences (e.g., ArticleFirst, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, PsychINFO, Social Work Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, WorldCat, Wilson Select Plus), education (e.g., Education Abstracts, ERIC), and health (e.g., CINAHL, Medline), as well as Google Scholar, for all English-language journal articles, book chapters, and book reviews published between January 1994 and July 1995 using the search terms *empowerment evaluation*, *empowerment adj evaluation*, and *empowerment w/ evaluation*. We searched for the appearance of these terms in the abstracts, key words, and bodies of articles and chapters. We also searched the contents of specific journals (namely, the *American Journal of Evaluation* [formerly *Evaluation Practice*], the *Canadian Journal of Evaluation*, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *Evaluation*, *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *Evaluation and the Health Professions*, *Evaluation Review*, the *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice*, the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*, the *Journal of Nondestructive Evaluation*, the *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, and *Language Resources and Evaluation*) for the same time period using the same search terms. Because two evaluation journals are not indexed in databases such as those we searched, we manually searched all issues of *Evaluation Practice* and *New Directions for Evaluation* published from 1994 onward. Additionally, we manually searched the indices of books in which we identified chapters on empowerment evaluation from our database searches. We also reviewed David Fetterman's empowerment evaluation Web site for published references listed there. From these searches, we identified 122 unique chapters, articles, and book reviews, excluding dissertations, conference presentations, and unpublished technical reports.

We obtained copies of all 122 published articles, book chapters, and book reviews. We then reviewed the references list in each to identify potential articles and chapters published during the time period of interest to us that we had failed to identify through our primary search methods. Five additional works were identified by perusing reference lists, for a total of 127.

These works fell into several categories. The first set of works described empowerment evaluation, its origins, and principle tenets. Typical of the works in this category were the

Figure 1
Sample Selection Process



Note: EE = empowerment evaluation.

introductory book chapters in Fetterman et al.'s books on the topic and conceptual articles on empowerment evaluation. A second set of works focused on methods of community-based inquiry other than empowerment evaluation. In these articles, authors either made brief reference to empowerment evaluation or made claims regarding empowerment-related phenomena. A third category of works provided critiques of and reflections on empowerment evaluation. The final category included articles and chapters in which the authors stated that they had conducted empowerment evaluations and discussed their experiences as case examples of the approach. These latter articles and chapters constituted our initial sample for this review.

Because some articles and chapters discussed more than one project, and other projects were discussed in more than one publication, we sought to identify the unique empowerment

evaluation projects described in the articles and note which publications provided descriptions of each project. To do so, one reader scanned each article to determine which described the conducting of an evaluation project. A second reader scanned the set of articles that were deemed not to include case examples to verify that their exclusion was warranted. The set of articles that described evaluation projects was then divided among three readers, each of whom read each article to determine that it included an author-professed case example or examples of empowerment evaluation. For articles to qualify as case examples, their authors had to state explicitly that the evaluations they conducted were empowerment evaluations, whether or not we would have agreed that what the authors did was consistent with our interpretation of empowerment evaluation. The authors also had to provide at least cursory descriptions of the projects. Articles meeting these criteria were nominated into our final sample. In total, we identified 53 case examples using this process. (Six of these cases were ultimately excluded from our analyses, as described below, because the cases were not presented in enough detail to code.) We then searched electronic databases by the names of the authors who wrote our case examples to identify other published accounts of the projects. We identified three other articles via this means.

For 2 of the case examples for which we had multiple publications, one or more published accounts of the projects characterized them as something other than empowerment evaluations (e.g., participatory action research, collaborative research). In addition, 10 of the case examples, excluding Fetterman's own work, were published during the time period of interest to us but described the projects as having been conducted prior to 1993, the year of Fetterman's (1994a) presidential address and initial articulation of empowerment evaluation theory. Thus, in 12 cases, we concluded that although the authors believed that their work resonated with some aspect of empowerment evaluation, it was probably not informed by the empowerment evaluation literature at the outset. These cases were included in our sample nonetheless because the authors asserted that the projects were exemplars of empowerment evaluation.²

After we had identified our initial sample of 53 case examples, we repeated our search procedures to verify the completeness of our initial identification search. On the second search, we used the same search terms and also searched for articles in which *empowerment* and *evaluation* appeared but not as a phrase. On our second search, we identified nine articles that our first search did not yield. None of these articles provided case examples.

Coding Procedures

Following the identification of unique projects, each project was assigned to one of three coders, who then read all of the publications concerning that project and abstracted from the case example a project description using a standardized data abstraction form. For each case example, we abstracted information concerning why an empowerment approach was selected and who made that selection; the evaluation setting; the purpose and a description of the program being evaluated; how the evaluator came to be involved; the procedures described for conducting the empowerment evaluation; the stakeholders involved in the empowerment evaluation and their role; the target population of the program, their involvement in the empowerment evaluation, and their role; and reported indicators of success of the evaluation (not the program) and the methods for determining these successes. We also made notes regarding special features of the case, such as whether the project was conducted prior to 1993 and whether different accounts of the project introduced inconsistent information about the nature and execution of it. We then met to review each case example as a group to make sure

that each project description was clear, thorough, and accurately represented the description of the project. We also discussed and resolved ambiguities in the cases.

Our next step was to code each case for key characteristics. On the basis of our summary reviews of the case examples, we developed codes to characterize the modes of carrying out empowerment evaluation, reasons for selecting it, stakeholder and target population involvement, adherence to empowerment evaluation principles, and reported indicators of success. Each case was coded initially by a single coder working independently. The codes assigned to each case were then reviewed and verified by a second member of the research team working independently. Coding pairs met to review the coding, discuss and resolve discrepancies in the use of codes, and develop a means to classify instances that were ambiguous. If the two members of the team could not come to consensus on the appropriate application of a code to a particular case, the first author decided on the final coding. The latter occurred only for the assignment of one code to two cases. In all other instances of disagreement, discussion among pairs of coders produced consensus on an appropriate code assignment for the relevant characteristics of each case.

Six cases were ultimately excluded during the coding stage because too little information about these cases was provided to code them. The book chapter in which these cases were described used the cases to illustrate key points but failed to present the case examples in their entirety. Thus, by the completion of coding, our sample was reduced to 47 cases.

Analyses

We developed a series of cross-case display matrices to begin to identify patterns in the data for the 47 cases that remained after coding. These displays compared the dominant way in which the evaluator approached conducting empowerment evaluation with features of the evaluation itself, such as characteristics of the program environment, the nature of stakeholder and target population involvement, failures and successes reported, and evidence of empowerment evaluation principles.

In reporting on the results of our analyses, we present numerical tallies for our coding of studies but do not report tests of significance. Our reasons for not computing tests of significance are threefold. First, our sample size ($n = 47$) would require the use of nonparametric univariate tests rather than multivariate analyses (Pett, 1997). The repeated computation of univariate tests would inflate Type I error without appropriate corrections (e.g., a Bonferroni correction). On the other hand, such corrections may be prohibitively conservative for such a small sample size. Second, and perhaps more important, it is questionable whether significance testing is appropriate in this project. Significance testing is used for drawing inferences about a population from an obtained sample. Although there are other case examples of empowerment evaluation (e.g., dissertations, unpublished projects), it is reasonable to infer that our sampling methods identified all known published examples (i.e., the population of published cases). This population reflects selection biases consistent with the "file-drawer problem" (projects go unpublished; Rosenthal, 1979), but the emergence of empowerment evaluation in evaluation scholarship is recent enough that we can be reasonably confident that we found all cases within our search criteria. In such situations, descriptive information of population parameters is more useful (Kline, 2004). Third, recent debates about the appropriateness of null hypothesis significance testing in the social sciences have highlighted how significance tests encourage dichotomous thinking: Does it work, yes or no (Kline, 2004)? Our goal in this project was to examine how empowerment evaluation is used in practice, not to beg the question of whether it is "working" or which empowerment evaluation approach is "best."

Results

Approaches to Conducting Empowerment Evaluation

To characterize approaches to conducting the evaluations, we coded each case example into one of four mutually exclusive groups on the basis of its description of how the empowerment evaluation was conducted (its “mode”). In several cases, projects described modes of conducting empowerment evaluation that, on the face of it, appeared to combine two of our code categories. In these cases, the coders met as a group to review the cases and come to consensus on which code best reflected the dominant modes of conducting empowerment evaluation as described by the evaluators. We were able to come to agreement on a dominant code for every project. The four primary modes of conducting empowerment evaluation are described below.

Socratic coaching. The Socratic approach to conducting an empowerment evaluation was characterized by evaluators maintaining question-and-answer relationships with stakeholders to promote their developing evaluative knowledge of their programs. In this mode, an evaluator reported that he or she facilitated a group process in which the group collectively decided on the evaluation aims, evaluation design, and evaluation procedures and collaboratively collected, analyzed, and reported evaluation data. As the empowerment evaluation process unfolded, the evaluator, at the group’s behest, reported helping the group solve problems, providing the group with requested training sessions, acting as the group’s sounding board, and posing questions to the group that would enhance its critical analysis of the program. The evaluator also often reported helping the group carry out activities but described participating in these activities as coequal to the other group members or working alongside the group. In the Socratic-coaching-style cases, evaluators typically described groups as taking the lead in interpreting results and putting them to use. The Socratic-coaching mode of empowerment evaluation was taken in 15 (32%) of the case examples.

Structured guidance. In this approach, a set of steps and details of their implementation were designed by an evaluator, typically (though not always) a priori. In many cases, templates provided evaluation guidance in the form of workbooks with worksheets. In other cases, the evaluation approaches were developed into manuals or were standardized and conveyed via single- or multiple-session one-on-one and group training sessions. In the structured-guidance mode, program staff members and other stakeholders learned about evaluation by working through the provided templates. The evaluators who used this approach frequently reported being available to staff members to provide additional training and technical assistance on the adequacy of their completion of any step of the process. Often, but not always, the evaluators had responsibility for completing the analysis and reporting steps. In this model, training was focused principally on how to use the template system or on how to apply an input-process-output-style framework to evaluation. Among our case examples, 17 projects (36%) applied this approach.

Participatory evaluation. In these cases, evaluators designed studies and executed most or all of them on their own. Evaluators had program staff members provide feedback on elements of the evaluations or participate in them in circumscribed ways, such as advising on the best way to recruit respondents, providing feedback on proposed measures, and helping with data collection. In these projects, evaluators did not provide training or guidance on evaluation

methods other than what would be absorbed by providing solicited feedback. Fourteen projects (30%) were classified as following this approach.

Nonparticipatory evaluation. The final category we identified among the case examples involved an evaluation that was designed and executed by an evaluator with no input or involvement from stakeholders. One project (2%) was classified in this group (Moeller, Day, & Rivera, 2004). In this particular case, the evaluator indicated that the project was an empowerment evaluation because by allowing a disenfranchised population to respond to a survey, the population was afforded a voice. Because only one case fit this profile, we do not include it in subsequent descriptions of cross-case analyses of our data, focusing only on the 46 cases that used a Socratic, structured-guidance, or participatory mode of empowerment evaluation.

Characteristics of Case Examples

To be consistent with empowerment evaluation theory, empowerment evaluations ought to be conducted in program settings that are focused on benefiting socially marginalized and disempowered populations. The 46 empowerment evaluations were conducted in diverse settings on diverse programs aimed at a wide range of target populations (see Table 2). No particular type of setting, program, or population is dominant on this list, though most programs are aimed at vulnerable populations by virtue of their young ages, sex, incomes, ethnic and racial backgrounds, or disability status. Indeed, very few of the programs in our sample are aimed at populations and settings that could be described as socially or economically advantaged. Many of the evaluated programs provide direct services to program clients (which, as noted previously, were often disadvantaged and/or otherwise vulnerable) and/or engaged in prevention efforts with their target populations. Projects also varied in size and scope from several large-scale, multisite, state- or provincewide projects to individual programs or components of programs.

Understanding the nature of the settings in which particular approaches to empowerment evaluations were pursued might illuminate contingencies governing empowerment evaluation practice. Table 3 presents a summary of the characteristics we coded for each case (overall and by evaluation approach). Evaluation approaches varied with regard to whether programs were multiple-organization efforts operating at multiple sites, such as coalitions and government programs operating at national, state, or county levels, or single-organization efforts offered out of single sites, such as neighborhood associations or single community-based organization projects. Among those using a Socratic approach, most case examples were conducted with single organizations operating at single sites. By contrast, most structured-guidance case examples were conducted with multiple-organization, multiple-site programs. Among the participatory-evaluation cases, most cases were of the single-organization, single-site variety, though only by a slim majority. These findings suggest that compared with other modes of empowerment evaluation, the Socratic mode was used most typically in intimate, face-to-face settings in which there could be repeated, sustained contact between evaluators and stakeholders. Structured guidance was most common when evaluators were confronted with programs that were geographically dispersed or with program initiatives that were translated into multiple and diverse projects at multiple sites.

Evaluation for improvement and the inclusion of program stakeholders in important decisions are theoretical hallmarks of empowerment evaluation. We coded each case regarding why an empowerment evaluation was selected and who selected it. We also examined whether

Table 2
Summary of Case Examples

Author(s) (Year of Publication)	Setting	Program Purpose	Program Service Population
Andrews (1996)	Community-based organizations	Attainment of stable housing	Homeless and low-income women
Barrington (1999)	National government umbrella program	Reduction of low-birth-weight infants	Pregnant women at risk for having low-birth-weight infants
Burke and Julia (2001)	United Way–funded agencies	Not stated	Not stated
Butterfoss, Goodman, Wandersman, and Chinman (1996)	Substance use prevention coalitions	Substance use prevention	General public
Campbell et al. (2004)	Rape prevention and rape services programs	Victim services to survivors of sexual assault and rape prevention and education programs	Sexual assault survivors; general public
Dorrington and Solis (2004)	Community-based organization	Community health education	Low-income Central American and Mexican immigrants
Everhart and Wandersman (2000)	Public school district	Development of social and emotional competence	Third grade students
Fawcett, et al. (1996)	Pregnancy prevention coalition	Prevention of unplanned pregnancies	Adolescents
Fawcett et al. (1996)	Substance abuse prevention coalition	Prevention of youth substance abuse	Adolescents
Fawcett et al. (1996)	Tribal substance abuse coalition	Prevention and care related to substance abuse	Jicarilla Apache Tribal community
Fetterman (1997ba, 1999)	Graduate school	Graduate education	Graduate students
Fetterman (2004)	Public school district	Strategic planning	School-aged children
Fetterman (1994b)	Consortium of providers and citizens	Not stated	Impoverished Black communities in Cape Town, South Africa
Fetterman (2005)	Low-income communities	Improve computer and Internet access	Economically depressed communities of color
Fetterman (2005)	School district	Improve academic achievement	Low-income, rural children
Fetterman and Bowman (2002)	National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Jet Propulsion Laboratory	Stimulation of interest in science	Adolescents
Flaspohler et al. (2003); Wandersman et al. (2003)	County board collaborations	Help children succeed on entry into first grade	Prekindergarten children
Gómez and Goldstein (1996)	AIDS-related community-based organizations	HIV prevention	Diverse youth and adult at risk for exposure to HIV
Grills, Bass, Brown, and Akers (1996)	Community organizing and substance abuse coalition	Reduce root causes of substance abuse, including economic inequality and poor access to quality education	African Americans residing in south central Los Angeles

(continued)

Table 2
Summary of Case Examples

Author(s) (Year of Publication)	Setting	Program Purpose	Program Service Population
Harper, Contreras, Bangi, and Pedraza (2003); Harper, Bangi, et al. (2004); Harper, Lardon et al. (2004)	AIDS-related community-based organization	HIV prevention	Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Latino adolescents
Keener, Snell-Johns, Livet, and Wandersman (2005); Livet and Wandersman (2005)	Family support center	Development of healthy families	Adolescent mothers and children; adolescents at risk for unplanned pregnancy
Keener, Snell-Johns, Livet, and Wandersman (2005)	Boys and Girls Clubs	Increase family sense of belonging and competence	Families of Boys and Girls Clubs
Keller (1996)	State correctional system	Reduction of overburden on probationary system	Adult probationers
Keller (1996)	State department of human services and department of protective services	Diverse support services	Vulnerable adults and children
Lackey, Moberg, and Ballestrieri (1997)	Community organizing and partnership program	Assistance to grassroots neighborhood organizations	Grassroots neighborhood organizations
Lee (1999)	Secondary schools	School improvement	Adolescents
Lentz et al. (2005)	Foundation-based health services collaborative	Prevention of shaken baby syndrome	Parents of infants
Lentz et al. (2005)	Foundation-based health services collaborative	Child abuse prevention	Families at-risk of child abuse or neglect
Levin (1996)	Elementary schools	Accelerate academic performance	Children at risk for low academic performance
Linney and Wandersman (1996)	Substance use prevention programs	Substance use prevention	General public
Porteous, Sheldrick, and Stewart (1999)	Provincial public health offices	Public health care management	General public
Robertson, Jorgensen, and Garrow (2004)	Federal criminal justice program for tribal communities	Improve how tribal justice systems work together	Oglala Sioux Nation
Rowe and Jacobs (1998); Rowe, Jacobs, and Grant (1999)	Community substance abuse partnerships and violence prevention programs	Substance abuse and violence prevention	Tribal community
Schnoes, Murphy-Berman, and Chambers (2000)	Comprehensive community initiatives	Improved family functioning	Parents
Secret, Jordan, and Ford (1999)	AIDS-related community-based organization	HIV prevention	Low-income African American women

(continued)

Sharma, Suarez-Balcazar, and Baetke (2003)	Local American Red Cross chapter	Development of youth health promotion leadership	Adolescents
M. K. Smith (1998)	Mental health center	Improve client functioning	Psychiatrically disabled patients
M. K. Smith (1998)	County department of child and family services	Transition youth to living on own	17-year-olds in foster care
M. K. Smith (1998)	County department of child and family services	Family preservation	Families in which child maltreatment had been verified
Stevenson, Mitchell, and Florin (1996)	Substance use prevention coalitions	Substance use prevention	General public
Strober (2005)	Hospital pediatric transplant unit	Improve power sharing and joint decision making between parents of pediatric patients and health care providers	Parents of children in need of organ transplants
Suarez-Balcazar and Orellana-Damacela (1999)	Nonprofit community development corporation	Housing development, owner assistance, tenant organizing, property management	Low-income urban citizens
Sullins (2003)	Mental health drop-in center	Development of social skills, employment assistance, and group support services	Psychiatrically disabled outpatients/mental health consumers
Tang et al. (2002)	Departments of public health	Reduce tobacco use and secondhand smoke	Smokers
VanderPlaats, Samson, and Raven (2001)	National government coordinated effort in community-based organizations	Meet needs of families	Low-income, single parent, isolated families with children under age 6
Wandersman et al. (2004)	Faith-based community organization	Outreach, shelter, spiritual, and health services	Children, adolescents, and adults of nighttime street communities (e.g., prostitutes, homeless individuals and families, psychiatrically disabled outpatients)

Table 3
Characteristics of the Empowerment Evaluation Case Examples by Mode of Approach

Characteristic	Socratic (n = 15)	Structured Guidance (n = 17)	Participatory (n = 14)	Total (n = 46)
Setting of empowerment evaluation practice				
Single site, single organization	10 (67%)	5 (29%)	8 (57%)	23 (50%)
Multiple organizations	5 (33%)	12 (61%)	6 (43%)	23 (50%)
Rationale for using empowerment evaluation				
Skills building and capacity development	6 (40%)	9 (53%)	5 (35%)	20 (43%)
Compatibility of approach with core program values	6 (40%)	2 (12%)	6 (43%)	14 (30%)
Accountability and improvement	3 (20%)	6 (35%)	2 (14%)	11 (23%)
Make evaluation routine in organization	1 (7%)	7 (41%)	2 (14%)	10 (22%)
Overcome dissatisfaction with prior evaluations	2 (13%)	2 (12%)	1 (7%)	5 (11%)
Obtain staff buy-in for evaluation	0	2 (12%)	4 (29%)	6 (13%)
Choice to use empowerment evaluation				
Evaluator selected	3 (20%)	10 (59%)	6 (43%)	19 (41%)
Evaluator and organization jointly selected	5 (33%)	1 (6%)	2 (14%)	8 (17%)
Organization selected	2 (13%)	1 (6%)	1 (7%)	4 (9%)
Funding institution selected	2 (13%)	1 (6%)	2 (14%)	5 (11%)
Not clear from case example	3 (20%)	4 (23%)	3 (21%)	10 (22%)
Involvement of program consumers				
Respondents only	3 (20%)	5 (29%)	5 (36%)	13 (28%)
Provided feedback or input	0	2 (12%)	2 (14%)	4 (9%)
Participation in plan/design	8 (53%)	2 (12%)	2 (14%)	12 (26%)
Not clear from case example	4 (27%)	8 (47%)	6 (43%)	18 (39%)

Note: Not all cases identified why empowerment evaluation was selected; those that did provided multiple reasons. Percentages are rounded to nearest whole integer.

the reasons for selecting empowerment evaluation and the role of the person(s) who selected it varied with the specific modes of carrying out the empowerment evaluation. Across cases, skills building and capacity development, the compatibility of empowerment evaluation with core programmatic values such as self-determination and social justice, a desire for accountability and improvement, and a desire to make evaluation part of the organizational routine were the most common reasons cited for selecting empowerment evaluation.

Evaluators using structured guidance were most likely to identify skill building as a reason for selecting empowerment evaluation, were most likely to state that making evaluation routine was a purpose of the empowerment evaluation, and were also most likely to mention accountability and improvement as reasons for selecting empowerment evaluation. Evaluators who used participatory modes of empowerment evaluation were most likely to identify obtaining buy-in to the evaluation as a reason for conducting empowerment evaluation.

Some authors did not clearly indicate who selected empowerment evaluation. Among the 38 cases in which it was stated who made the decision, evaluators were the principal decision makers in 41% of those cases. It was far less common that the choice to use empowerment evaluation was described as a joint selection of the evaluator and stakeholders. Among the cases in which Socratic coaching was applied, 33% of the time, the decision to conduct an empowerment evaluation was made by the evaluator or a funding institution alone. In the cases of structured guidance, 65% of the time, the evaluator or a funding institution selected empowerment evaluation. Among the participatory evaluations, evaluators and funding

institutions made the decision regarding using empowerment evaluation in 57% of cases. It appeared that it was less common for program staff members and consumers to have a say about whether to pursue empowerment evaluation when structured-guidance and participatory modes of empowerment evaluation were used than when the Socratic mode was used.

Theoretically, empowering processes are inclusive processes, and inclusion is a precondition for a group or individual becoming empowered via an empowerment evaluation. We therefore coded each case for what stakeholder groups were involved in the evaluation and the nature of their involvement. All of the evaluations involved program staff members in some fashion. The nature of staff involvement is addressed in our classification of the major modes of conducting empowerment evaluation. Socratic modes of empowerment evaluation typically provided the most opportunity for staff members to be involved in evaluation decision making compared with the other modes of empowerment evaluation.

We also examined the role of program consumers and beneficiaries in the empowerment evaluations. Across the three modes of conducting empowerment evaluation, consumers of the evaluand were specifically mentioned as playing a role in the evaluation in 29 (63%) of the cases. Among these cases, 41% involved consumers only as respondents providing data to the evaluation. Comparing modes of empowerment evaluation, approximately half of the Socratic coaching evaluations involved consumers in some aspect of planning and executing the evaluation, which was less typical in the other evaluation approaches.

Measuring Success and Adherence to Empowerment Evaluation Principles

Whether empowerment evaluations can demonstrate that they result in empowered outcomes has been a key issue in debates on the approach. We examined the reported success of the empowerment evaluations in two ways. First, we coded cases for the outcomes authors chose to report about their empowerment evaluations. Second, we coded each case for its adherence to the principles of empowerment evaluation articulated in Fetterman and Wandersman's (2005) most recent edited book.

In nearly all cases, authors reported what they believed to be indicators of success of the empowerment evaluations, in addition to describing whether and in what ways the actual programs were successful. In 4 cases, authors reported that the evaluations failed in total or in part. Among those reporting success or failure, in only 7 cases were the indicators of the success (or failure) of the empowerment evaluations verified empirically through systematic metaevaluations. In these 7 cases, program document reviews, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and systematic observations of participants and stakeholders were conducted. For instance, using a multiple method approach, Campbell et al. (2004) reported that their structured guidance empowerment evaluation for sexual assault providers resulted in high rates of satisfaction, improved short- and long-term evaluation capacity in seven skill areas, and routinized evaluation in 90% of sites. In 39 cases, indicators of success and failure were described as anecdotal impressions of the authors and of others involved in the evaluation.

In Table 4, we display the successes reported by evaluators and compare these successes by mode of conducting an empowerment evaluation. The four most common indicators of the success of empowerment evaluations authors reported were the use of data for decision making, program improvement, and policy influence ($n = 26$, 57%); skill and knowledge gains on the part of stakeholders ($n = 24$, 52%); the perception that the evaluation process was helpful ($n = 17$, 37%); and the routinization of evaluation activities after the initial empowerment evaluation ($n = 16$, 35%). Other indicators of success included meeting accountability

Table 4
Indicators of Empowerment Evaluation Success by Approach

Indicator	Socratic (<i>n</i> = 15)	Structured Guidance (<i>n</i> = 17)	Participatory (<i>n</i> = 14)	Total (<i>n</i> = 46)
Use of data	11 (73%)	9 (60%)	6 (42%)	26 (56%)
Skills/knowledge gained	10 (67%)	10 (59%)	4 (28%)	24 (52%)
Perceived as helpful	8 (53%)	6 (40%)	3 (21%)	17 (37%)
Evaluation routinized (after the project)	10 (67%)	3 (18%)	3 (21%)	16 (35%)
Met accountability requirements	2 (13%)	3 (20%)	2 (14%)	7 (15%)
Staff/consumers coached/new roles	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)	7 (15%)
Provided meaningful experience	5 (33%)	0	1 (7%)	6 (13%)
Improved communication/collaboration	5 (33%)	0	0	5 (11%)
Increased/protected funding	3 (20%)	2 (13%)	0	5 (11%)
Evaluation materials disseminated	0	2 (13%)	2 (14%)	3 (6%)
Maintained focus on goals	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	0	3 (6%)
Sense of ownership	0	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	3 (6%)

Note: Outcomes reported by two or fewer authors are excluded.

requirements, staff members and consumers teaching others evaluation skills or taking on new roles after the evaluation, providing a meaningful experience, improved communication and collaboration, and increases in or protection of funding.

The reporting of particular indicators of success and failure differed by the mode of conducting an empowerment evaluation. Regarding failure, in two cases in which the evaluators selected the approach on their own prior to becoming involved with the settings, the evaluators tried a Socratic approach, but it was met with little interest. In these cases, the evaluators switched to participatory evaluations. In one of the cases, the evaluation was still deemed a failure after switching the mode of carrying it out from Socratic to participatory because commitment to evaluation remained low and aspects of the evaluation were difficult to carry out without cooperation. In the other case, the evaluation was ultimately deemed successful.

In two other cases, authors reported that the evaluations failed to some degree. These cases used structured guidance. The authors of these cases, both involving multiple organizations that were working on similar programmatic initiatives, reported that the evaluation systems were not used by sizable proportions of the organizations that were participating in the evaluations or were used poorly (e.g., template entries were unrealistic or overly mundane), despite expert guidance.

The types of successes reported for the empowerment evaluations differed by mode of conducting empowerment evaluation. The authors of the Socratic cases were most likely to report that evaluations became routinized following the completion of the projects, that the processes provided meaningful experiences to participants, and that the evaluations improved organizational collaboration and communication. Authors of the Socratic cases and the structured-guidance cases were most likely to report that data were used to guide decision making and improvements or influence policy and that the projects developed evaluative skills and knowledge among stakeholders. Taking all reported indicators of success into account, on average, Socratic cases reported a mean of 3.8 success indicators per project (range = 0 to 7). Structured-guidance cases and participatory cases reported an average of 2.8 success indicators per project (structured guidance range = 0 to 6, participatory range = 0 to 5).

In addition, we coded each case example on whether it reflected each of the 10 principles of empowerment evaluation (see Table 1). Cases were coded as reflecting a principle if the

Table 5
Enactment of Principles of Empowerment Evaluation by Approach

Principle	Socratic (<i>n</i> = 15)	Structured Guidance (<i>n</i> = 17)	Participatory (<i>n</i> = 14)	Total (<i>n</i> = 46)
Community knowledge	15 (100%)	14 (82%)	13 (92%)	42 (91%)
Organizational learning	13 (87%)	12 (70%)	10 (71%)	35 (76%)
Accountability	11 (73%)	15 (88%)	7 (50%)	33 (72%)
Capacity building	11 (73%)	10 (59%)	5 (36%)	26 (56%)
Improvement	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	6 (42%)	22 (48%)
Ownership	14 (93%)	4 (23%)	4 (28%)	22 (48%)
Inclusion	10 (67%)	6 (40%)	4 (28%)	20 (43%)
Social justice	9 (60%)	0	3 (21%)	12 (26%)
Democracy	9 (60%)	0	1 (7%)	10 (22%)
Evidence-based strategies	2 (13%)	4 (23%)	3 (21%)	9 (19%)
Average	7	4	4	
Mode	8.5	5	4	
Range	2 to 10	1 to 6	1 to 6	

case descriptions provided any evidence of adherence to a principle's implications for conducting the evaluation processes or its implications for outcomes of the evaluations. For example, a case in which the evaluator did not involve any stakeholders in selecting the evaluation's questions, design, or measures would be coded as failing to follow the process principle of inclusion. A case in which the organization used the results to influence local legislators to change local policy to improve community life for residents would be coded as providing some evidence of adhering to the principle of social justice.

Across all cases, community knowledge, organizational learning, and accountability were the principles most evident in descriptions of the cases, and social justice, democracy, and the valuing of evidence-based strategies were the least evident (see Table 5). Attention to particular values varied by the mode of conducting empowerment evaluation. Among the Socratic coaching cases, a majority provided at least some evidence of emphases on improvement, ownership, inclusion, social justice, organizational learning, and democracy; these values were less evident among cases using the other two modes of empowerment evaluation. Indeed, we found no case of structured guidance in which there was evidence of adherence to social justice or democratic principles. Accountability was most evident among structured-guidance cases and least evident among participatory cases. Participatory cases contained less evidence of capacity building than either of the other modes of conducting empowerment evaluation.

The three modes of conducting empowerment evaluation also varied in the number of principles applied per case. The Socratic cases showed evidence of adherence to 7 of 10 principles, on average (see Table 5). The structured-guidance cases and participatory cases showed evidence of adherence to 4 of 10 principles, on average. In general, these findings suggest that the Socratic cases came closest to the practice ideal set forth in the most recent treatments of empowerment evaluation practice.

Discussion

The principal purpose of our research is to describe the state of empowerment evaluation practice in the published literature and to analyze how closely practice and theory align. The

47 case examples examined in this review were remarkably different in their approaches to empowerment evaluation and degree of adherence to its espoused principles of practice. The larger picture that emerges from these data suggests that although many evaluation projects get labeled (and relabeled) as empowerment evaluations, frequently, these evaluations do not embody the core principles that are supposed to undergird empowerment evaluation practice.

Across all modes of empowerment evaluation practice, the core principle of using community knowledge was nearly ubiquitous, but the principles of democracy, social justice, and using evidence-based strategies were particularly infrequent. Our findings revealed that empowerment evaluation was often used with programs that serve vulnerable populations, a particular irony given how few projects adhered to democratic and social-justice principles. Regarding evidence-based practices, it is possible that the research base on these groups is not developed sufficiently to indicate clear evidence-based strategies. However, either in lieu of such empirical guidance or, on occasion, in addition to it, it was typical that empowerment evaluation projects drew on the unique knowledge, experiences, and values of the partner community.

Critics of empowerment evaluation have challenged its conceptual clarity and lack of unanimity in practice (Cousins, 2005; Patton, 1997a, 1997b; N. L. Smith, 1999). This review of the extant case literature suggests that there is considerable heterogeneity in practice and that variations in practice aligned with different conceptual tenets. Our analysis revealed three distinct modes of empowerment evaluation. The Socratic-coaching approach was typically done in smaller scale projects, and perhaps not coincidentally, these were most likely to adhere to more empowerment evaluation principles. The structured-guidance approach was often used in large, multisite evaluations in which one-on-one contact may have been challenging. The number of principles of practice adhered to by the structured-guidance group was substantially lower. A third subtype emerged consisting of projects labeled as empowerment evaluation by their authors but, relative to other case examples, reflecting more traditional evaluation. Not surprisingly, these cases adhered to fewer principles of empowerment evaluation practice.

Although empowerment evaluation advocates for the inclusion of program consumers in the evaluation (cf. Fetterman, 1994a), and it is they who ultimately are to be empowered, program recipients were seldom part of the empowerment evaluations, relative to what one might expect. In general, the Socratic empowerment evaluations provided the majority of case examples in which evaluators consistently engaged programs' target populations in the design and execution of the evaluations. Although in Fetterman's initial writings, empowerment evaluation was framed as an activity that would confer benefits on a diversity of stakeholders to a program, interpretations of empowerment evaluation in practice seem more narrowly focused on benefiting those who run and deliver programs. The goal of empowering citizens who are the beneficiaries of social programs has become less salient in cases of empowerment evaluation practice than has increasing the self-determining status of program staff members and managers and holding the program staff members accountable to funding institutions. Socratic approaches, although demonstrating more consistency with the tenets of empowerment evaluation and its purported outcomes, were less likely to show clear evidence of concern with accountability. A better understanding of why program beneficiaries are so often excluded and of the practical challenges of combining principles such as accountability and social justice in a single evaluation are critical areas of investigation for future inquiry on empowerment evaluation.

Our review of these cases of empowerment evaluation must be considered in light of several important caveats. First, one of our criteria for case selection was that the authors labeled their projects as empowerment evaluations. There has been considerable discussion in the literature regarding the conceptual distinctiveness of this approach, and as such, we felt that it

was appropriate to identify the entire population of published empowerment evaluation case examples, defined by self-identification rather than a judgment as to whether we concurred that they were indeed empowerment evaluations. However, there were some cases, including recently published cases, that were largely unrecognizable to us as consistent with the principles of empowerment evaluation practice.

Second, the cases varied tremendously in the level of detail they provided about their methods and rationale. We coded the information provided in the published accounts of the cases and did not presume or infer beyond what was explicitly stated in the articles. Hence, it is possible that some projects did follow principles of practice that we coded as not occurring because they were not discussed in the written records of the cases. For instance, program recipients might have been included in aspects of the project (so the “inclusion” principle should have been affirmative), but if that was not mentioned in any way in the article, the coding would not reflect adherence to that principle. As a result, our coding may not fit the evaluator’s view of his or her project. Therefore, this review reflects the status of the published literature on evaluation practice, which can be useful for highlighting issues that should be discussed in the publication of empowerment evaluation projects.

Third, few evaluators empirically studied their projects, so there is little in the way of corroborating evidence that particular successes occurred. If an evaluator stated, for example, that the results were used by the community, we coded that as an outcome of the project even if empirical evidence of use was not provided in the case report. Such coding is consistent with our tactic to code what was specifically mentioned in a report, rather than inferring processes or outcomes, but does highlight that what is often described in the empowerment evaluation literature is rarely substantiated with data. In addition, it is possible that unsuccessful empowerment evaluation projects are particularly likely to go unpublished (see Kline, 2004; Rosenthal, 1979). Such a selection effect would overestimate success, but this is not unique to empowerment evaluation and instead reflects a ubiquitous consequence of the file-drawer effect. Systematic study of the process as well as dissemination of unsuccessful findings would improve our understanding of the circumstances under which empowerment evaluation is successful and how success can be defined.

Fourth, our findings revealed that Socratic-coaching projects adhered to more principles of practice than either the structured-guidance or participatory projects. This does not necessarily mean that this mode is “best,” because a Socratic approach may provide more opportunities for engaging principles such as community ownership, democratic participation, and inclusion. Our findings highlight the critical importance of further theoretical development on how these principles are to be enacted in projects of varying size, scope, and setting. How might an evaluator working within a structured-guidance approach, for instance, embody the principles of inclusion or democratic participation? If all 10 principles are to be evident in empowerment evaluation practice, and this review clearly indicates that this seldom occurs, then more conceptual development of the theory is needed to specify how this can be achieved.

Finally, coding the extant literature vis-à-vis Fetterman and Wandersman’s 10 principles (Wandersman et al., 2005) provides a picture of where the field currently stands in mapping theory to practice. Yet it is important to note that most of the cases analyzed in this review were published before Fetterman and Wandersman put forth this 10-principle view. These 10 principles are not completely new ideas to the field but instead reflect a synthesis and integration of many years of writings about and practicing empowerment evaluation, so it is reasonable to examine how well practice conforms to these conceptual tenets. That the majority of cases analyzed did not meet all 10 principles supports critiques that empowerment evaluation is not entirely conceptually distinct from other methods of evaluation and that its practitioners do not approach their work in identifiably similar ways. It may be useful to consider

whether there are underlying contradictions among the 10 principles, which may explain why only one case in this review was able to demonstrate any evidence of all 10 tenets.

In conclusion, this review highlights that the field of empowerment evaluation has considerable work to do to align practice and its conceptual framework. Although our review was not intended to suggest that theory should follow practice or that practice should follow theory, our results certainly beg the question of what our collective responsibilities are as a community of theoreticians and practitioners to confront and close gaps between theory and practice and to submit all of our theories to close empirical scrutiny. Criticisms that empowerment evaluation is not fully theoretically articulated seem justified in light of the diversity of practice documented in this empirical review of the literature, a criticism that could be fairly leveled at other approaches too. The 10 principles set forth by Fetterman and Wandersman (Wandersman et al., 2005) need to be reexamined in light of the different modes of empowerment evaluation currently in practice. Evaluators need guidance as to how all 10 principles can be achieved in a project; only one such model example emerged from this review. Similarly, the field would benefit from an analysis of how to implement these principles in projects of different sizes, scopes, and aims. Evidence of the processes that lead to empowered outcomes will be instrumental in solidifying the utility of empowerment evaluation to its practitioners.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive overview of the similarities and differences among participatory approaches, see Cousins and Whitmore (1998).
2. The inclusion of these cases also had little discernable impact on patterns in our findings.

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