

# Enhancing Credibility of Evidence and Social Justice in Evaluation Research: Applying Mixed Methods & Feminist Feminist Approaches to RCT

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KEYNOTE PANEL

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EVALUATION CONFERENCE

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# Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

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Thought to be the “best research” with a “sound methodology”

Quantitative, experimental approach became  
“GOLD STANDARD”

# Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

Meta-analyses establish the quantitative, experimental approach of evidence-based research (EBR) as *a priori* best practice

“Gold Standard”

Test an intervention to determine effectiveness

Relies on positivist epistemology

- Social reality is “out there” and “truth” can be known

Emphasis: scientific objectivity

Binary Approach:

Intervention worked/didn't work

# Randomized Control Trials as the Gold Standard

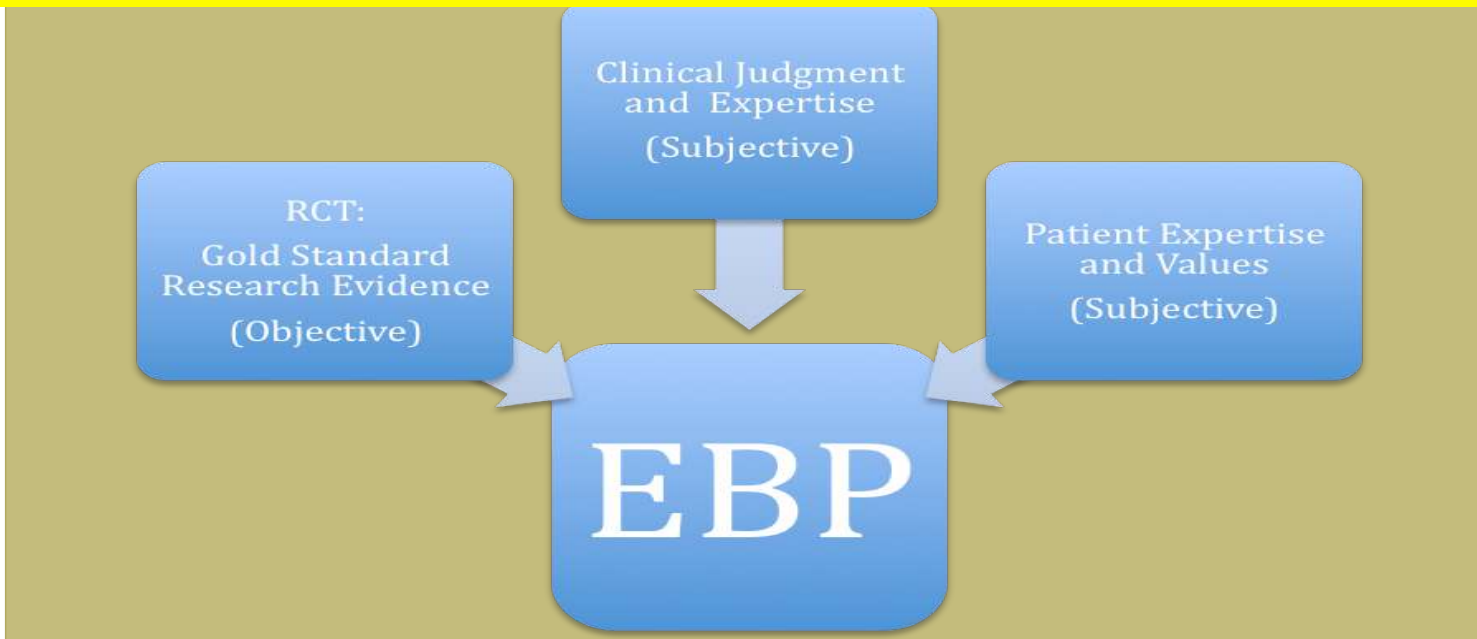
## “Hierarchy of Evidence”

What is credible evidence?



- Current “Gold Standard” /double blind Randomized Controlled Trial
- Cohort Studies
- Case Designs
- Quasi--Randomized Trials
- Clinical Study
- Non--Experimental Study
- Expert knowledge
- Consensus
- Observation**

# Components of Evidence-Based Practice



Source: Sackett *et al.*, 1996

# Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Model

THEN	NOW
Clinical Expertise	Clinical Expertise
Patient Values	Patient Values
Best Evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)</li></ul>	Best Evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)</li></ul>

## Criticism: RCTs....

Strip away understanding of social context

Fail to explain how experimental findings might translate into everyday life

Exclude issues of difference (race, gender, class, nationality, etc.)

Reinforce stereotypes

# Enhancing EBP Credibility

**INCLUDE QUALITATIVE COMPONENTS (theory and praxis)**

**HOWEVER:**

QUAL and QUAN components often remain separated

Confusion regarding how to integrate QUAL and QUAN

Lack of guidance how to use QUAL in RCTs



# De-Linking Theory and Method in RCT Praxis

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Methodology links a evaluation problem with a particular method or methods.

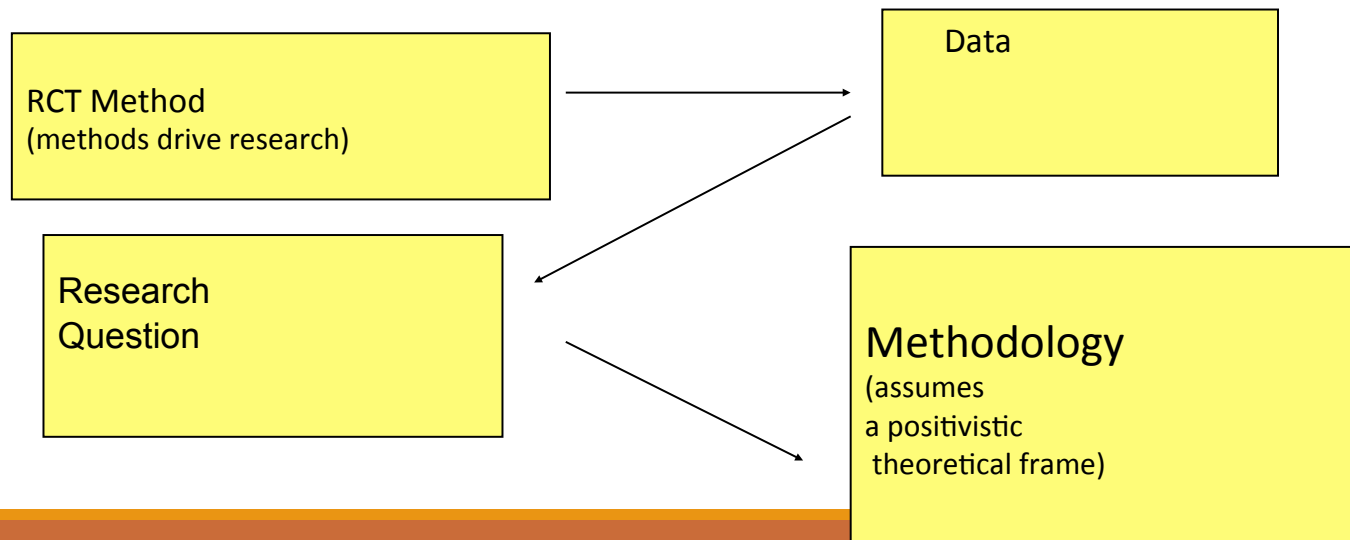
Methodologies are derived from a researcher' s assumptions about the nature of existence (ontology).

Our ontology leads to our perspective philosophy on the nature of knowledge building (epistemology)

# Methods-Centric Praxis of RCT

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Focuses on a methods-centric research design that leaves out consideration of subjective meanings of subjects and health care experts.



# Feminist Approach Framework to Evaluation Research

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# Feminist Research Approach

Places women's issues, concerns, and experiences at the center of research inquiry

Stresses intersection of gender with race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.

Promotes social change and social justice

Highlights issues of power between researcher/researched

Practices reflexivity

# Infusing Feminist Principles into Evidence-Based Research

**“Context of Discovery”**: questions, hypotheses

- Ask “who has been left out?”
- Practice strong objectivity (reflexivity)

**“Context of Justification”**: measures, methods tools

- Ask “how do issues of power, authority, and ethics affect data collection?”

Seek the **voices of the research participants**

# Feminist Research Ethics

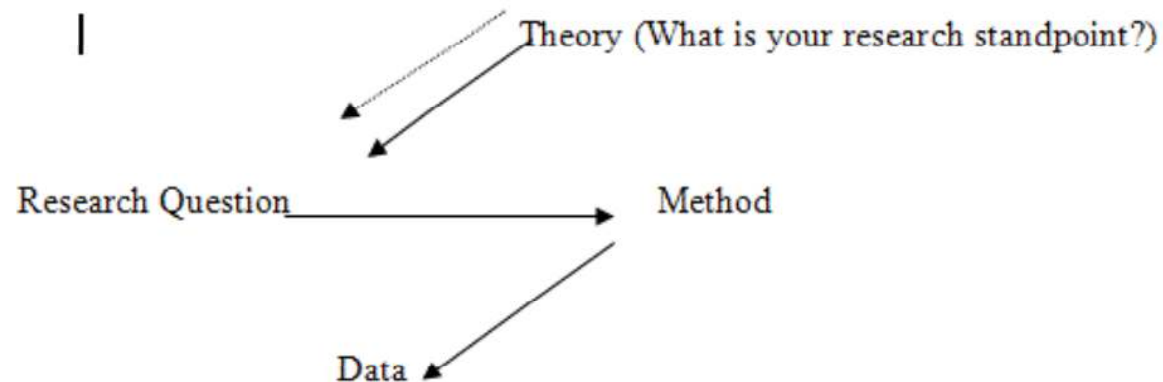
Examines the ethical issues of....

- Research problem selection
- Data collection
- Research design
- Sampling procedure
- Responsibility toward participants

## Importance of Reflexivity – Reflecting on what axiology (values) infuse any given research process

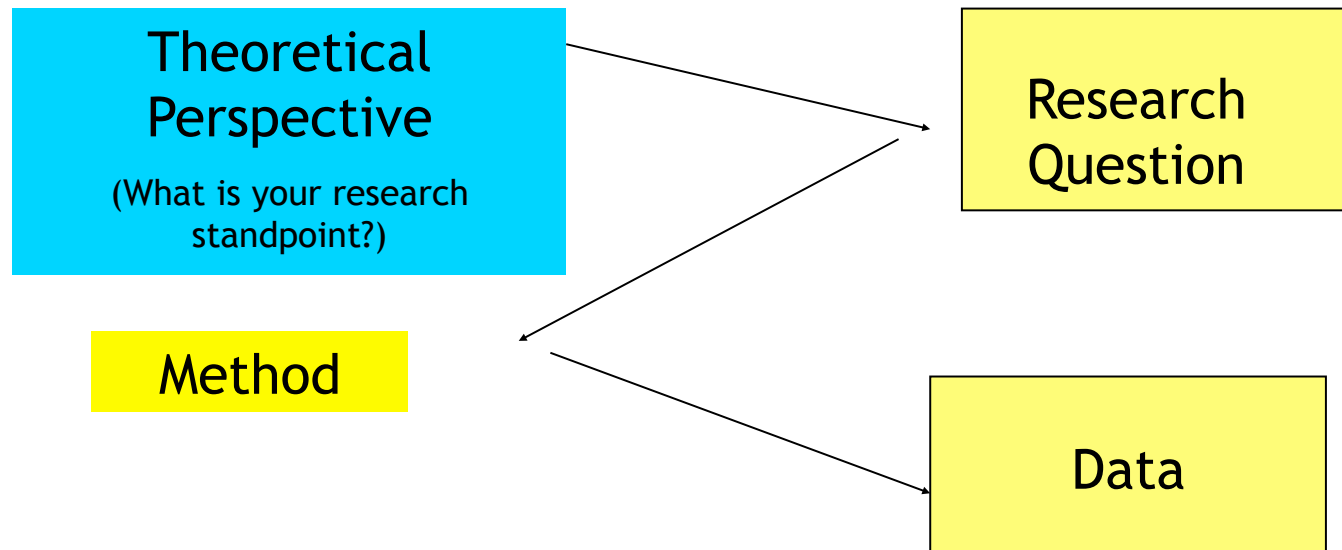
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**What are values you bring your research? The Funders?**



# A Feminist Evaluation Perspective links theory to Research Question to Method...

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## *What makes evaluation research feminist? (It's NOT the method)*

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- Positions gender as the center of inquiry
- Uses a variety of research methods
  - Quantitative
  - Qualitative
  - Mixed
- Grounded in women's lived experience
- Supports social justice and social transformation

# A Feminist Perspective is *not* just a Gender perspective.

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A Gender Perspective onto Evaluation seeks to:

- More often than not, add ***gender (sex) as a variable*** into the research project
- Goal is advocacy on behalf of ***gender inclusiveness in the service of - equality of opportunity for women***
- Gender Evaluation goal seeks examine gender (sex) differences in the analysis
- 
- seeking to understand different outcomes/impacts by gender

## An Evaluation Researcher with a Gender Perspective for example, would do some of the following things:

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---Purpose of evaluation would be to document differences in gender roles, activities, needs and opportunities in the target population.

In doing a statistical analysis, the quantitative data would be broken down by sex and other status characteristics.

- Focus of the analysis would be on emphasizing sex differences across cultures, socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, ethnicity, income, educational attainment.

Perhaps looking at differences among women

Examine traditional gender relations across different societal institutions-- social, economic and political life

## Need to consider continuum from Gender Research Framework to Feminist Framework.

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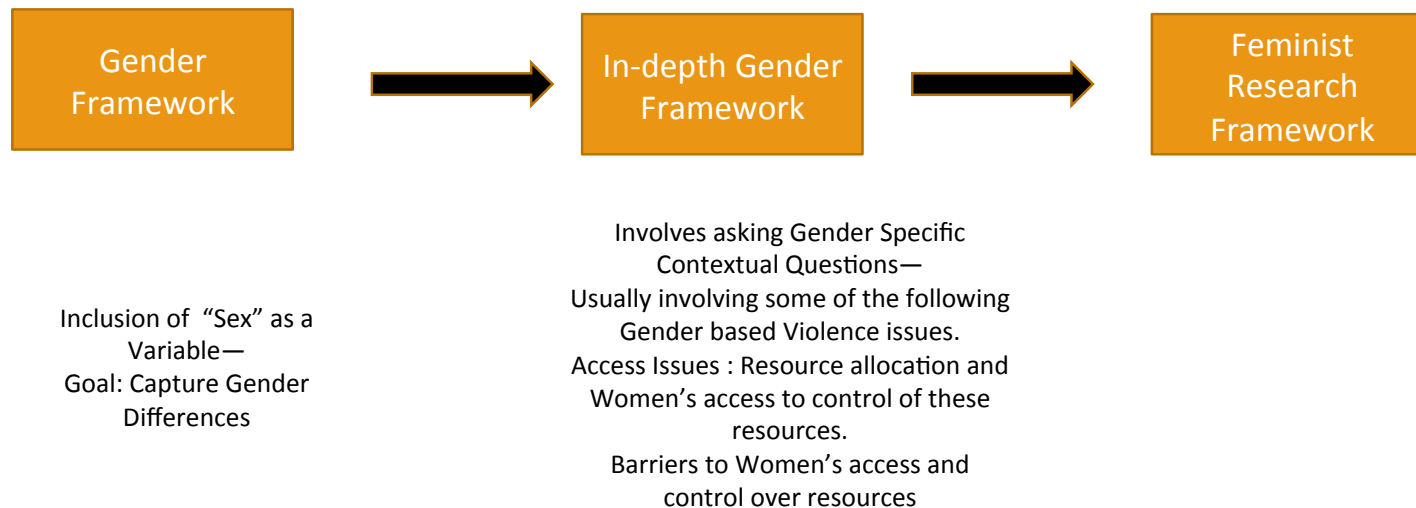
In considering the use of a given framework– From Gender to Feminist – Need to consider the Organizational context of your international research project.

Not all Organizations or other Research contexts understand or support the inclusion of a feminist approach.

You as the researcher also need to be reflexive of the overall Issues of introducing a feminist approach in an given international context.

If your point of view is viewed as that of a Western Feminist bringing in perspective into cultures where the research organization does not privilege or support gender and/or feminist frameworks may be problematic.

# Continuum from a Gendered- to Feminist Research Framework



Case study: Using a Gender  
Framework: rural road  
construction project in Yemen  
(From: Michael Bamberger)

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# The Yemen rural roads project (from:M. Bamberger).

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1. “The World Bank funded project provided support for the construction or upgrading of roads in rural areas of Yemen. The road engineers and transport economists consulted with community leaders on the design and location of the roads.
2. After the completion of the first phase there was criticism from women’s organizations that some of the roads had negative consequences for women and children. The Bank’s transport department requested a grant from a Gender and Transport research fund to conduct a gender assessment.
3. This found that while the transport team had met with community leaders, almost all were men – and none had discussed the project with their wives. The transport team had believed roads were “gender neutral” and all members of the village would benefit equally.
4. Through focus groups and individual interviews with village women, a number of negative outcomes were identified. “ (Michael Bamberger)



## Some negative consequences for women of the road construction projects (from: M. Bamberger)

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1. “Culture required women’s toilets should be located where they could not be seen by men. Roads are usually constructed on high ground, which meant that toilets had to be relocated further from the village. This more remote location meant that, in addition to the greater distance to walk, women were at greater risk of harassment and of accidents when walking in the dark.
2. The increased volume and speed of traffic increased women’s traffic-related accidents. For reasons of modest a woman cannot look at the driver and must walk with her eyes on the road – making it difficult to judge the speed of approaching traffic.
3. Many shops and schools were now located on the other side of the road so it was no longer safe for children to run errands or walk to school on their own. Additional time burdens for women.
4. Many roads were flooded during the rains. Women were more familiar than men about flooding as men often migrated for work during the rainy season. But women were not consulted when the route of the road was being planned.” ( Michael Bamberger).



**INFUSING FEMINIST PRINCIPLES  
OF PRAXIS IN RESEARCH: CASE  
STUDY APPROACHES WITH  
EMPHASIS ON RCT'S  
(RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIALS)-**

# RCT Design (tweaked)to Feminist Mixed Methods RCT....

INTEGRATING FEMINIST EVALUATION  
APPROACH INTO RCT USING MIXED  

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METHODS APPROACH – IMPORTANCE  
OF USING A QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

# Prior to RCT

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Mix methods (integrate qual –driven ) before study as a way to...

- Increase participant recruitment
- Is mindful of diversity as it pertains to research question
- Engage participant voices
- Obtain feedback and attitudes toward intervention
- Engage clinical expert voices (*intervention mapping*)

In order to...

- Refine intervention so that it is informed by participant views/experiences & clinical expertise (two things missing in EBP)

# During RCT

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Link feminist methodology with a qual method component to...

- Understand evaluation protocol and administration
- Assess its impact on population
- Determine who dropped out and why

In order to...

- Make adjustments to design
- Enhance validity and ethics/social justice/diversity of future RCTs

Embed feminist qual-driven component into ongoing RCT to collect data unobtrusively via observational method without compromising experimental design

# Post-RCT

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Privilege lived experience of participants...

- Consider post-intervention interviews and focus groups with:
  - Participants
  - Clinicians
- Compare results of interview sets

In order to...

- Assess the impact of intervention on target population
- Increase efficacy of intervention in future RCTs
  - Feedback loop: post-RCT assessments impact shaping of next clinical trial design

# Case Study

MAMMOGRAPHY SCREENING  
COMPLIANCE RATES

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PUSCHEL AND THOMPSON (2011)

# Study Overview

Santiago, Chile: compliance rate of 12% among women aged 50+ for free mammography screening

## Goals:

- Understand lack of response to free screenings
- Understand low rate of compliance

## Evaluation Design:

- Multi-methodological sequential mixed methods RCT
- **QUAL** (focus groups/interviews/observation) → **QUAN** (track screening of random sample assigned to intervention groups)

# QUAL → QUAN

## QUALITATIVE

### Focus groups

- 7 groups, 48 women
- 3 groups:
  - Never had a mammogram
  - Mammogram in past 2 years
  - Diagnosed with breast cancer

### Semistructured interviews

### Observation and field notes



## QUANTITATIVE

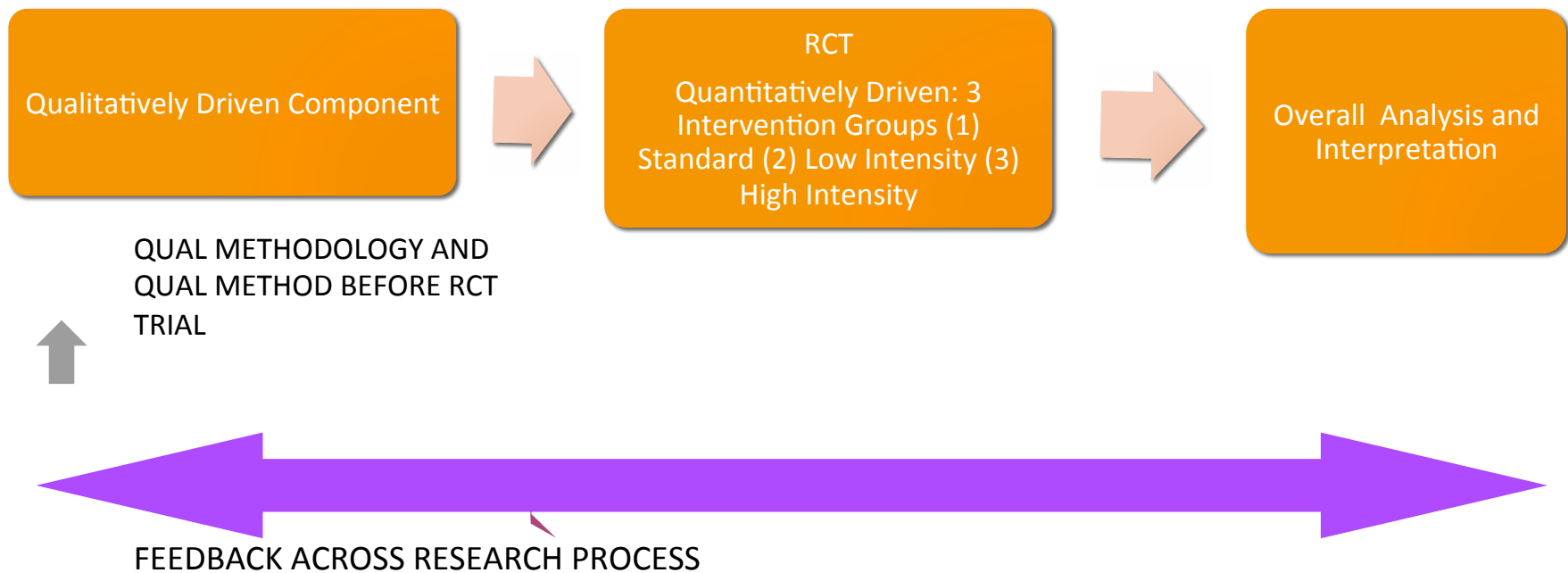
### 3 experimental groups after 6 months

- Standard (brief advice): 7% screening
- Low intensity (brief advice, mail contact): 52% screening
- High intensity (brief advice, mail contact, personal outreach): 70% screening



## Mixed Methods Sequential Design (Puschel & Thompson, 2011).

SUBJECTIVE METHODOLOGY AND QUAL METHOD PRIOR TO RCT DESIGN



# Case Study Lessons

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Qualitative component of the mixed-method RCT design revealed:

- New knowledge about what interventions might work with targeted population
- Qual and quan methods can be treated as equally important

Weaving and shifting subjectivist/positivist methodologies allowed researchers to:

- Ask new questions that get at “lived experience” of those impacted by the intervention.
- Uncover subjugated knowledge in order to gain a more complete understanding of intervention
- Find effective localized interventions (in dialogue with the national healthcare social policy agenda)

# USING a Feminist Perspective onto RCT's to get at the "Unintended Consequences" of Evaluation

**Projects** (from: Hesse-Biber/Bamberger/Tarsilla, forthcoming)

Going back to 1936, Sociologist Robert Merton noted that the actions of individuals organizations as well as national and international entities have impacts that are unanticipated or unintended.

These actions, he notes, often stem from a range of factors—stemming from error, ignorance, to being blinded by one's values or even self interest. In the context of evaluation research, unintended consequences (UC) refer to results or outcomes of programs or policies that were not anticipated or not desired at the time those programs or policies were being designed and/or implemented

# Unintended Consequences....

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Contemporary development practice attests how frequent UC are and how they significantly affect the impact of programs and policies. Interestingly, what our development evaluation experience from the last few decades suggest is that UC may be

(a) unanticipated because it is often difficult to determine all outcomes and having a given stake in an outcome or being blinded by values may create faulty judgment;

(b) not even detected or simply discovered by chance; and

(c) anticipated and yet not fully prevented - the so-called undesired consequences –as demonstrated by instances of recidivism following vocational training programs for prisoners about to be released from jail, the persistence of alcohol-related traffic accidents despite the introduction of tougher penalties, or the continuation of domestic violence perpetrated by individuals who have taken part in anger management and ad hoc counseling programs.

# Addressing Unintended consequences can enhance credibility of RCT....

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**Serves as a check onto the unquestioned belief in a hierarchy of evidence that places RCT at top as “gold standard”**

**As RCT impact evaluation designs expand within field of international development, deploying such designs uncritically, in practice and and was given rise to a set of validity problems on the ground, such as a growing lack of assessment of the effectiveness of particular development program’s initiative, the inability to determine what specific interventions are most appropriate to introduce into a particular evaluation setting.... And so on.**

## Case Study 2

Study Women in Developing Countries, Role of New Technology interventions and unintended consequences.

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Kutoma J. Wakunuma \*Conducted a four (4) year study in Zambia.on cell phone usage of women.

Research Question: What is the downside that cell phones have on women' in Zambia?

“Implicating mobile phones in violence against women: What’s gender got to do with it? “

## Cell Phones : Promote Women's Development/close gender inequality gap and foster social change for poor women

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(quote from research study by Wakunuma: "Belief that cell phones can serve to decrease gender inequality gap.

"Potential for Educational opportunities – Case of rural women in India study by, Balasubramanian et al (2010) notes cell phones can offer women a "

"transition from silence to voice, from powerlessness to empowerment ... in non-formal learning contexts, just as it is in formal contexts, and that technology offers a means to accelerate this process if the use of technology is placed in an appropriate social context" (p. 207 as cited in Wakunuma ).

"Importance of Cell phones in women's health care especially with regard to HIV/AIDS (see Kinkade & Vercalas 2008 as cited in Wakunuma).

# Implicating mobile phones in violence against women: Mixed Methods Study

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Kutoma J. Wakunuma's work on Cell Phone Usage among men  
And women in Zambia

**420 questionnaires (cross-section of Zambians) –399 total returned.**

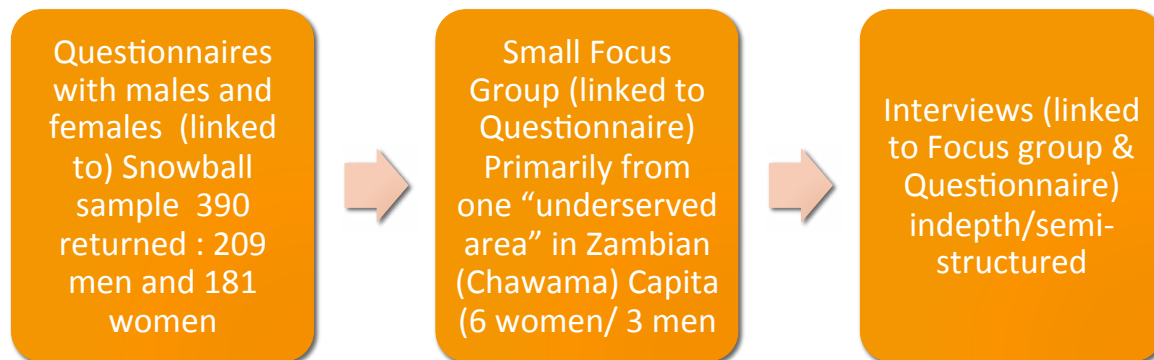
**Primarily from women in Lusaka (293). Snowball sample self/administered/assisted by networks to fill out.**

**Linked to a sub-sample of focus groups and some focus group respondents were interviewed as well.**



# Sequential Mixed Methods Study: lived experience focus

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## Focus group Interviews to get at subjugated knowledges (quoted (from Wakunuma, n.d. )):

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“Another woman in the focus group revealed how she had to sell her mobile phone because her husband suspected her of infidelity. He would search her mobile phone to monitor any calls she might have received while he was away at work even though they may have been as a result of wrong numbers. When he found numbers he did not recognise, he would immediately call the number to make enquiries and then would start a fight with his wife

The interviewee said,

Interviewee: It’s like whenever he knocks off he has to check all incoming calls that came in when he was away at work. But when he comes from work, I never touch his cell phone.

(Group laughs sympathetically)”

From: Implicating mobile phones in violence against women: What’s gender got to do with it?

# Unintended Consequences of cell phones ...

UNLIKE THE ORIGINAL EXPECTATIONS, WAKUNAMA'S STUDY FINDINGS SUGGESTED THAT MALES SPENT A GREAT DEAL MORE CELL PHONE TIME AND PURCHASED MORE UPGRADES TO THEIR CELL PHONE USAGE THAN WOMEN. WOMEN, ON THE OTHER HAND, WERE FOUND TO USE THEIR CELL PHONES, BUT PRIMARILY FOR 'PAGING' OR 'BEEPING' AS THIS WAS THE LEAST EXPENSIVE COMMUNICATION OPTION.

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**Embedded in the structure of gendered relations in the developing world, entrenched hard to eradicated views of women's place reinforced by long-standing patriarchal forces.**

**The use of these new technologies like mobile phones, can also be used by these entrenched traditional forces to produce unintended consequences that wind up reinforcing the existing regime of gendered inequities and further serve as a means for reinforcing and promoting social control of women's lives.**

# CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN RCT'S LEARN FROM FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES...

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Infusing RCT with a qualitative component, BEFORE THE RCT process opens up new evaluation ground that allows the space for the overall evaluation to be open to the possibility of contributing a richer interpretation and fuller understanding of program outcomes than the exclusive or predominant use of one method would have ever allowed. --- AS IN THE CHILEAN MAMMOGRAPHY CASE STUDY.

Far from being an instrument addressing only the information needs of programmers and managers, deploying the use of mixed methods RCT will also be instrumental in the uncovering of equity and social justice issues, often ignored or dismissed by conventional quantitative designs (as we have seen in the CELL PHONE Zambian case study).

# Conclusion

A feminist praxis approach to evidence-based research:

- Urges researchers to practice **strong reflexivity**
- Interrogates the ethical issues of the **contexts of discovery and justification**
- Takes into account **differences** among participants
- Pays attention the **lived experiences** of participants
- Provides RCTs **with larger social and political impact**

# Biography

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Sharlene J.N.Hesse-Biber, Ph.D. University of Michigan, is Professor of Sociology, Boston College. Her monograph, *Am I Thin Enough Yet?* (Oxford, 1996), was selected as one of *Choice Magazine*'s best academic books for 1996. She is author of *The Cult of Thinness* (Oxford, 2007) and *Mixed Methods Research: Merging Theory with Practice* (Guilford Publications, 2010). She is editor of *Feminist Research Practice* (Sage, 2014). She is the co-author of *Working Women in America* (Oxford, 2005) and *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (Sage, 2006;2011). She is co-editor of *Approaches to Qualitative Research* (Oxford, 2004), *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (Oxford, 2004), *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (Sage, 2006) and *The Handbook of Emergent Methods* (Guilford, 2008). She is editor of *The Handbook of Feminist Research* (Sage, 2007/2012), an AESA Critics Choice Award winner and selected one of *Choice Magazine*'s Outstanding Academic titles for 2007), and *The Handbook of Emergent Technologies* (Oxford, 2011). She is co-developer of HyperRESEARCH, a software tool for analyzing qualitative data, and a transcription software tool, HyperTranscribe ([www.researchware.com](http://www.researchware.com)).