The May 13 Group PODCAST

Episode 1.3: Why ‘the next day’?

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Vidhya
Hello everyone and welcome to The May 13 Group podcast. My name is Vidhya Shanker and I am an evaluation practitioner and scholar based in Minneapolis.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Hi everyone, my name is Carolina de la Rosa Mateo and I'm an evaluator based in Connecticut.

Vidhya
As a reminder, The May 13 Group is an emerging ecosystem. It's a solidarity economy, intentionally oriented toward and energized by epistemic healing and wholeness in, through, and around evaluation through structurally focused collective action, including direct action organizing, cooperative economics, and mutual aid.

Vidhya
For today's session, we wanted to follow up on our last session where we asked, “why evaluation?” and whether evaluation can be a site of resistance. Today we're asking, “why the next day?” And so when we were putting this episode together, among ourselves, we experienced some tension in explaining why we came up with “the next day for evaluation” as The May 13 Group sort of tagline. And we thought about how the tension has a little bit to do with the tension between paying attention to history and orienting ourselves, you know, towards the past and the kind of strong expectation not to focus on the past and to focus on the future. And so, you know, I think there's valid critiques of orienting ourselves towards the past where we're sort of admiring the problem instead of focusing on a solution. And we see this critique in, you know, Appreciative Inquiry,[1] which instead tries to build on strengths, you know, our, some of our strongest moments and, you know, dream of something else. And I'm always reminded of my, my partner has a saying in Mende, where when you trip, and you're trying to get up, you don't look at what you tripped on, right? If you're trying to get up, you look at the person who is helping you up. And so, I often use that saying when I'm trying to introduce Appreciative Inquiry to folks who are unaccustomed to it.

[1] Appreciative Inquiry (YouTube playlist of super-short videos)

Vidhya
At the same time, we wanted to acknowledge that our economic system and our epistemology that we're working within, in the nonprofit industrial complex,[2] in evaluation, is so strongly focused on linear progress and innovation toward a predetermined goal. And that kind of a system hates looking backwards,[3] and it detests context in general, whether it's geographic or historical. And so what we thought we'd do today is balance ourselves among past, present, and future. So, why "the next day?" and we want to ask, you know, "What came before, what's happening now, and what are we hoping toward?" And so we wanted to start with, kind of the more simple answer of, you know, because there is a very quaint story, I think, and it involves, you know, Caro and myself. So I don't know if you wanted to describe your memories, impressions of the, of the simpler answer, I guess.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Thanks, Vidhya. So it's funny, because the simple answer is actually quite simple. And I don't know what the right term to describe it is. Is it maybe "serendipitous?" Maybe it was fate, I'm not sure, but so…our presentation—I think we talked about it in previous episodes: Vidhya and I in May of 2020, so, right before the uprising, did a presentation after an invitation from the Center for Evaluation Innovation, CEI.[4] So, it was in front of a group of, in front of a philanthropic audience. It was all on Zoom since that was right after the pandemic had began. And the title of the webinar we did was "Why is Evaluation So White?"[5] The work and organizing Vidhya and I had been doing around that time was in part kind of just looking at the dissertation work that you had done, Vidhya, around how evaluation has conceptualized race and kind of everything that's happened over the past few decades.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
And it just so happened that our presentation was on May 13 and The May 12 Group, which I believe we've touched on very lightly in previous episodes, as well—and that we'll talk a little bit about more shortly as it refers to the past is, kind, of where a lot of how we construct evaluation and knowledge production, at least as it relates to our field, started—so, that was May 12th. The next day is May 13. We presented on May 13, so, it kind of just aligned in a very coincidental way, but it's working for us. So that's the simple answer.

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[2] Dylan Rodriguez first named and described the nonprofit (and nongovernmental) industrial complex (NPIC) in 2007 as follows: "a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements." It is "the natural corollary to the prison industrial complex (PIC). While the PIC overtly represses dissent, the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a "shadow state" constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services. The NPIC functions as an alibi that allows government to make war, expand punishment, and proliferate market economies under the veil of partnership between the public and private sectors." (The Revolution Will Not Be Funded)

[3] Debating Colonial Legacies of Development Studies (video of conference session in which Uma Kothari talks about the liberal, positivist roots of this reluctance to look at history)

[4] Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI)

[5] "Why is Evaluation So White?" (90 min webinar that took place on May 13, 2020)

Vidhya
Yeah, thanks. I do love that story. And that, you know, like, we've talked about, I'm of two minds that we may have overemphasized the origins of evaluation in The May 12th Group,[6] because, you know, we realized that The May 12th Group did not come from nowhere, right? It came from certain ways of thinking about knowledge and reason and rationale and science and measurement[7] and deservingness and merit,[8] all of which we were trying to think critically about in our work in Minnesota and then certainly now in The May 13 Group. And so, we wanted to emphasize that "the next day" is about the transition from the harms of the past and the present to a future of—or a dream anyway, if we want to challenge the idea of linear progress—to a dream of liberation and wholeness and healing. And so, how can we make that transition intentional and just,[9] and avoid replicating the past?

Vidhya
The only way, I think, to avoid replicating the past is by understanding it. And the only way to sort of, I guess, manifest, maybe, realize, the dream of liberation and wholeness is to keep practicing it. And so very quickly, to recap, The May 12 Group, you know, was an explicitly exclusionary kind of old boys' network—and girls' network, so to speak—of White evaluators from higher ed. And a lot of times when the story is told, the immediate kind of response is toward diversity and inclusion, right? And so we know that that isn't actually going to get us to our dream. And so, then, how do we frame the problem differently? That it's not about a lack of diversity or it's not fundamentally about the exclusion of certain phenotypes or racialized bodies, right? The May 12th Group results from and reflects and reproduces and reinforces, like I said, these ideas about individual merit because the members who composed The May 12th Group were active during the period of highest levels of civil unrest…in not just the United States, but the world, very explicitly about inequality, oppression, civil rights,[10] Black Power,[11] student activism on college campuses, about seeing folks—seeing themselves in the curriculum,[12] anti-capitalist and socialist, explicitly socialist, struggle.[13] And so there's really no way that they didn't know that there were thinkers and do-ers in evaluation who didn't so-called "look like them," right? They had gone to school with many of those folks because—we know that, from

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[6] The Oral History Project Team. (2005). The Oral History of Evaluation, Part 3: The Professional Evolution of Michael Scriven. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 26(3), 378-388. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005276646 (article describing the members' explicit intentions)
[7] Schwandt, T. A. (1989). Recapturing Moral Discourse in Evaluation. *Educational Researcher*, 18(8), 11–35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1176461 (article from more than 30 years ago)
[8] Capitalism and the Logic of Deservingness: Understanding Meritocracy through Political Economy (PhD dissertation)
[9] A just transition would mean approaching production and consumption cycles holistically and waste-free. The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there. Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.
[10] Civil Rights consist of social opportunities and protection under the law (encyclopedia entry)
[11] Black power emphasized black self-reliance and self-determination more than integration. Proponents believed African Americans should secure their human rights by creating political and cultural organizations that served their interests. (National Museum of African American History & Culture entry)
[12] Ethnic Studies: Born in the Bay Area from History's Biggest Student Strike (web-based article)
[13] Student socialist movement in France (encyclopedia entry)

Stafford Hood's work,[14] where he documented African American scholars and practitioners in evaluation who had studied with their same professors. And so, we have to then think about—oh, and it's worth noting that they didn't just exclude Black practitioners and scholars, but they also excluded White scholars and practitioners who were thinking critically about race.

Vidhya

So, we don't see those folks on the Evaluation Theory Tree,[15] for example. We do see after several complaints and iterations later, we now see "cultural competence"[16] and "inclusion"[17] and "multicultural validity"[18] and "social justice"[19]—what they call "social justice." But the folks who were critiquing race and constructs of validity[20] and that kind of thing from the perspective of epistemology are not visible in the evaluation canon. And so I wanted to just be clear that this comes from ideas about positivism[21] and scientific management[22] and capitalism,[23] ultimately, where, if we think about educational research and the IQ tests and the College Boards: those were very specifically developed to measure intelligence in racialized ways. The notion of

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[14] Hood, S., & Hopson, R. K. (2008). Evaluation Roots Reconsidered: Asa Hilliard, a Fallen Hero in the "Nobody Knows My Name" Project, and African Educational Excellence. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(3), 410-426. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308321211 (article detailing the work of one example of the erased voices)

[15] Unearthing Evaluation's Roots (AEA364 blog entry describing the tree)

[16] A Critique of Cultural Competence: Assumptions, Limitations, and Alternatives (article that gets at some of why "the revolution will not be culturally competent")

[17] The Trouble with Inclusion; The common understanding of "inclusion" that this paper critiques differs fundamentally from Anna Madison's concept of "primary inclusion," (1992) which was about involving program participants in problem definition, program design, and the evaluation process (article)

[18] Kirkhart, K. E. (1995). 1994 Conference Theme: Evaluation and Social Justice—Seeking multicultural validity: A postcard from the road. *Evaluation Practice*, 16(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821409501600101

Kirkhart, K. E. (2010). Eyes on the prize: Multicultural validity and evaluation theory. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 31(3), 400-413. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214010373645 (two articles describing multicultural validity, by its originator)

[19] Righteous Callings: Being Good, Leftist Orthodoxy, and the Social Justice Crisis of Faith (article offering one critique of the notion of social justice)

[20] Davis, J. E. (1992). Reconsidering the use of race as an explanatory variable in program evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1992(53), 55-67. https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1601 (article written more than 30 years ago)

[21] Derived from a research strategy and approach rooted in the principle and belief that truth and reality are free and independent of the viewer or observer (Aliyu, et al., 2014). Positivism is committed to universal, law-like generalizations across contexts, sees context as "noise," and distinguishes cause from effect. It involves isolating and measuring variables, conducting statistical analyses, structured interviews, and surveys to quantify results and predict and control future outcomes <Farrow, R., Iniesto, F., Weller, M., and Pitt, R. (2020). *Research Methods Handbook*. The Open University. https://open.library.okstate.edu/gognresearchmethods. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License>.

[22] Brought the scientific method into managerial practice. It focuses on the loss that capital incurs through "inefficiency" in labor productivity and proposes that 1) the remedy for inefficiency lies in systematic management; 2) the best management is a "true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rule, and principles, as a foundation;" and 3) scientific management's fundamental principles are applicable to all kinds of human activities <Taylor, F. W. (1915). *The Principles of Scientific Management*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers>.

[23] What "Capitalism" Is and How It Affects People (article)

intelligence itself is racialized. And so, the idea was you wanna test who is going to succeed in college, who has the potential to succeed.[24]

Vidhya
The test of statistical significance[25] was developed to compare volume of skulls, racialized skulls, and other, sort of, phenotypic characteristics to "prove" differences between the races.[26] And so, the whole idea is based on this idea of scarcity,[27] right? Which is capitalist, the foundation of capitalism, that knowledge is scarce and we have to assess who could, you know, who will succeed in college, who has access to higher education, which is very different, right, from an indigenous understanding of knowing and knowledge and, you know, study and learning and apprenticeship where, you know, the other example that I always bring up is, also in Sierra Leone, not surprisingly. When we were building a school, preschool, about 2015, '16, we were discussing with villagers how to do it—my partner and I were—and me being an American-trained evaluator, I thought, "Well, why don't we, if we have an existing structure, why don't we just do a pilot?" And the building would have accommodated 30 students and the village said, "no, because how do we decide which those 30 are?" And they said, "we build it for everyone or we build it for no one." And so they, 150 villagers, did build a larger structure and everyone in the village could send their kids to school there if they wanted to, because it's important that everybody has access to the education for the survival of the group. If only some people have access to the education that they need, the group as a whole can't survive. So we're gonna transition in a second, but I wanted to give space, Caro, for any reflections or thoughts or additions. And then we can move, transition into the present—how this shows up in our work and our training.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Yeah, I guess I don't have too much to add right now, just reflecting on the conversations you and I have had in the past preparing for this conversation. It's really made me prompt some thinking around, I guess, questioning our reality. And I think that's a lot of what this is, because some of this isn't so clear cut or it's not explicit. And I know you've spent kind of years being immersed in a lot of this information. So, I appreciate the examples. And then, just what you shared just now, the story about Sierra Leone, it kind of really fits nicely with what we're going to talk about next, which is this idea around what you said with the school and the structure that was being developed originally, or that you were thinking about originally, could only serve a few and not serve the whole. So, I think that ties in nicely with what we're going to talk about next. So, more to come.

Vidhya
Great, thanks. So, we thought we would talk about next how this shows up in our work—in our training and in our work. And we thought about doing a session, which—maybe we still

[24] History of the SAT reflects systemic racism or The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing (two articles)
[25] Statistical significance (brief definition)
[26] Besag, F. P. (1981). Social Darwinism, race, and research. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 3(1), 55-69. https://doi.org/10.3102/016237370030010 (article)
[27] Reclaiming Abundance Under Capitalism (article)

will—where we gather a few of us to talk about what we learned or what we didn't learn—and what we didn't learn—in our evaluation training, whether it was you know, through an academic program or professional development or whatever it may have been. And so, so, speaking about my own experience, anyway—and now I just calculated, and my first evaluation class was almost 20 years ago, but it still feels like the present moment when I think about the grand scheme of things. So, I do hope that evaluation training has changed, but I'm actually told by a few folks who have been studying curricula and syllabi that it hasn't changed that much.

Vidhya
So, OK, so I just want to start by saying, I mean, no evaluation as we know it would exist without an underlying history and structure of capitalism and colonialism and the European Enlightenment.[28] You know, the structures and the assumptions that produce poverty and wealth and inequality and the idea of measurement, again, as we know it, are fundamental to evaluation. And so, the idea of decolonizing evaluation is, to me, is kind of as ridiculous in some ways as decolonizing development aid, OK, when development aid arose very directly explicitly from colonial administrative offices, the very same offices and the very same administrators.[29] They just turned a switch and called it development aid once countries got their so-called independence. OK, and same with DEI. DEI was a co-optation by corporate management of movement organizing.[30] And so that doesn't mean that these places can't be a site of resistance, though. OK, and that's what I'm trying to say about evaluation.

So when I started my evaluation program, I remember reading, I think it was Lee Sechrest, I wanted to double check, it might have been someone else, but it was 1969 date of publication…

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[28] Schwandt, T. A. (1992). Better Living Through Evaluation? Images of Progress Shaping Evaluation Practice. *Evaluation Practice*, 13(2), 135-144. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821409201300206 (article from more than 30 years ago)

[29] Uma Kothari discusses the international development field's origins in the imperial and colonial efforts of Europe and European settler states like the USA in relation to its current discourse, which she describes as highly racialized and yet, simultaneously, silent about race. For example, the scholarly journal known as *Foreign Affairs* from 1922 until its demise in 2012 had previously been called the *Journal of International Relations* (from 1919 to 1922) and originally called the *Journal of Race Development* (from 1910-1919).

Find more at:
Kothari, U. (2005). From colonial administration to development studies: A postcolonial critique of the history of development studies. In U. Kothari (Ed.), *A Radical History of Development Studies: Individuals, Institutions and Ideologies* (pp. 47-66). London, UK: Zed. https://123library.org/book/242281/a-radical-history-of-development-studies#page=56

Kothari, U. (2006). An agenda for thinking about 'race' in development. *Progress in Development Studies*, 6(1), 9-23. https://doi.org/10.1191/1464993406ps124oa

Kothari, U. (2006). Critiquing 'race' and racism in development discourse and practice. *Progress in Development Studies*, 6(1), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1191/1464993406ps123ed

[30] Weisinger, J. Y., Borges-Méndez, R., & Milofsky, C. (2015). Diversity in the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 45(IS), 3S-27S. https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764015613568 (article)

Hey—future Vid here. I DID double-check and it WAS someone else. Sincere apologies to Lee Sechrest's family. But it was actually Edward Suchman.[31] And the date of publication was actually 1967. We will include the citation in our notes.

Vidhya
…where he explicitly dismissed all "other" knowledge, "other" ways of knowing, I guess I'll put it that way, outside, you know, what he refers to as "Western medicine," OK? And so this idea of "Western" also is one of my pet peeves, because it is not really about "the West." I mean even "the West" is a construct. OK. It's only "the West," you know, to the West, OK? Because the, the earth is a sphere, OK, so um, so there are indigenous groups, right, and communities of color, oppressed nations, as Justin[32] calls them—which I appreciate—marginalized groups in the Western hemisphere. OK, and so calling it "the West" is part of this Orientalist[33] idea of making it look like it's a cultural difference when it's actually an ideological difference.

Vidhya
So yeah, it was written in 1969,[34] but I was still reading it in my introductory coursework in 2006, and that's what I think is important, OK? Very similarly, you know, I led a session once with the International Society on Evaluation Education,[35] which—yeah, I mean, there's a lot to say about that, also. Anyway, I was trying to have people experience what—have the faculty in the meeting experience what I experienced, and I feel like many of *us* experience, whoever "us" is, reading evaluation literature, like what I just explained about the 1969 book. And so, you know, one of the studies that we read routinely is the Perry Preschool Study.[36] It's a famous study.

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[31] On p. 97 of the book, Suchman writes: "As described by Shapiro, 'the history of medical treatment until relatively recently is the history of the placebo effect.'[11] Frank points out that, 'Until the last few decades most medications prescribed by physicians were pharmacologically inert. That is, physicians were prescribing placebos without knowing it.'[12] Today, this is still the probable basis for the so-called 'faith' cures reported by almost all known religious or mystical sects—and non-Western medicine in general."

Suchman, E. A. (1967). The Evaluative Research Design. In *Evaluative Research: Principles Practice in Public Service & Social Action Programs* (pp. 91–114). Russell Sage Foundation. https://www.russellsage.org/sites/default/files/978-0-87154-863-4-text.pdf

[32] Justin Laing of Hillombo Consulting

[33] What Is Orientalism? A Stereotyped, Colonialist Vision of Asian Cultures (accessibly written description of orientalism, which Edward Said used to refer to the othering of "the Orient." European expeditioners, like many travelers, used the sun—which rises to everyone's east, no matter where they are located—to *orient* themselves. "The Orient" is synonymous with Asia only from the perspective of Europe.)

[34] Vidhya was wrong about the date of publication; it was 1967

[35] This organization seems now to be defunct? Perhaps someone (we?) should revive a truly international version of it?

[36] Perry Preschool Project—Center for the Economics of Human Development (website describing the original and ongoing study)

Vidhya
And then I juxtaposed that study and how they spoke about African American families with the Moynihan Report[37] from 1965, which is the foundational text for the War on Poverty[38] and all the social programs that are evaluated. And then I also juxtaposed that with the Welfare Reform Act, the Personal Work and Responsibility Reconciliation Act[39] that is still, you know, basically operating. I mean, because I evaluated welfare—Minnesota's TANF[40] Employment Services. OK. And so, so, the text is—if you juxtapose them, which maybe we'll do a session on that, too—you can see the same, same pathologizing language about Black families in all of these texts. And people are going through evaluation programs, you know, reading these studies as if, like, as if it's not, it's not really happening, right? They're not questioning, you know, how are they, how are, how is, what assumptions do these authors have about the families and how they're measuring their dysfunction, quote unquote, and their, you know, success, quote unquote, like what, what assumptions are built into this language?

Vidhya
And so, so the third example is: I interviewed one of the founders of evaluation, so called, from The May 12th Group and the Theory Tree. And in that meeting, where I was kind of a sidekick, the interviewer was a more prominent evaluator, and I was responsible for sort of recording and transcribing and that kind of thing, because I was very early in my academic career. But I was in the room and I was—I am—a brown-skinned woman, right? And so—I'm South Asian, which may or may not have made a difference—but he had no qualms, OK, explicitly—what should I say?—mocking affirmative action.[41]

Vidhya
OK. He did it multiple times. It wasn't like an off-handed comment, OK? And he said it was off the record, right? So it's not in the printed version of the interview, the publicly-available version of the interview, but he was very comfortable saying it in front of me. OK, whether he registered me as a person of color or not—I don't know. Whether he thought, you know, as a South Asian, that I would agree with him—I'm not sure. Or whether he just didn't even see me—you know, that also happens to South Asians, especially women. So, um, so, the point being is that we, we as racially otherized evaluation students and practitioners, we go through these programs, right, and we experience being talked about in the third person, right?

Vidhya
And we, you know, this is where my art history training really comes in handy because, like, we're looking at ourselves through their eyes. And there's no space to feel the feelings or ask the questions, you know? And I was thinking about like, you know, my kid discovered, somehow

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[37] The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (report by Daniel Patrick Moynihan while he was in the Department of Labor)
[38] War on Poverty (encyclopedia entry)
[39] Vidhya misspoke; she meant The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
[40] Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (also known as Welfare Reform)
[41] Affirmative action (Executive Order)

through the algorithms, Modern Family.[42] I don't know how because we don't have TV service. We don't even have a TV. But anyway, so, she's been watching Modern Family and I don't know if there's been any critical reviews[43] of it or anything, but I find it super racist. OK, and you know, I was trying to explain to her why…. Why? OK, because there are basically, are hardly any people of color on the whole show, right? Like, so how is it racist, right? Because there aren't any, hardly.

> Hey—future Vid is back. It might sound like I'm saying the show can't be racist if there aren't any fully developed, adult black/brown/indigenous characters. Of course, I'm saying quite the opposite. There are hardly any. AND the show traffics in pretty explicit racial stereotypes about Asian Americans and Latine folx. And this is a much larger conversation about the politics of representation, self-representation, positionality, the gaze, etc. all of which we should, actually, talk about in a future episode.[44]

Vidhya
And so, sometimes, you know, it engages in these stereotypes and these jokes, and there's no real way for, like, us, I mean—if I'm gonna say collectively "us"—to speak for ourselves, right? And so, you know, we were talking about this, well, she's like, "well, sometimes they're talking about, you know, they're bringing up stereotypes. And I think they're trying to be funny. I think they're trying to be ironic, you know, like they're trying to show how stupid it is that people say these things and stuff." And I was like, "yeah, but what does that mean for us who are watching it? They're assuming that their audience is entirely White or that what they're saying isn't going to hurt us who are watching it." So, when they make comments about Asians, for example—which they do a lot, actually—are they making it for other White people? Like, how do they think I feel hearing that? Right? And this is what I'm saying about our training. Like, we've been taught to basically squelch, you know, the knowledge that we gain from our own experience or from our homes, right, or from our ancestors. And that's like, because it's not talked about, it's—the present situation of inequality and poverty is normalized, right? And all we're gonna do is just evaluate it. But we never talk about how we got here.

Vidhya
And so, I guess like I'll just sort of, I don't know, I mean we could talk about RFPs and randomized controlled trials and I mean there's a lot more. But I did wanna share this quote

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[42] Modern Family (TV Series 2009–2020) - IMDb (description of the TV series)
[43] This was the closest we could come to a "critical" review, although it does not go into sufficient depth or nuance, perhaps because it reflects only the first two seasons in an 11-season show, nearly every episode of which Vidhya ended up watching with her daughter! Other episodes included Cam's mocking imitation of what a parent who is indigenous to the Americas may act like, Phil's fetish for Black women, several anti-Asian remarks, and the ongoing portrayal of Gloria and her family, who are from Colombia, in ways that reflect and reinforce an imperial gaze.
[44] If still not clear, this itself is racist: That there are no regular Black characters—whether fully developed and able to talk or not—is racist. Additionally, even though there IS an Asian adoptee and a Colombian immigrant character, the Asian adoptee is not old enough even to speak for much of the show's run—jokes are made at Asians' expense, including hers; plots about the Colombian immigrant largely reinforce stereotypes about Latine women.

from Gayatri Spivak,[45] who to my knowledge is the first person to use the phrase "epistemic violence,"[46] although lots and lots and lots of people have recognized the idea and written about it, definitely after her, Charles Mills[47] included. But anyway, so she says, you know:

Vidhya
"To be able to present a project that will draw aid from the North," right?—I don't like the "North South" division either. It's arbitrary and artificial. But anyway:

Vidhya
"To be able to present a project that will draw aid from the North, for example, to understand and state a problem intelligibly and persuasively for the taste of the North, is itself proof of a sort of epistemic discontinuity with the ill-educated rural poor.[15] (And the sort of education we're thinking of is not to make the rural poor capable of drafting NGO grant proposals!) This discontinuity, not skin color or national identity crudely understood, undergirds the question of who always rights and who is perennially wronged."[48]

Vidhya
And so like I said, millions of people, maybe not millions, but at least hundreds, have talked about this since Gayatri Spivak for sure and probably before. But that was my introduction to the concept. So I'll leave it there, but there's plenty more, like I said, we could talk about in terms of RFPs, the way they're structured, and methods….

Vidhya
I don't know if you have any reflections, Caro.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Yeah, I'll—I have a question which I hopefully won't forget before I make my comment, but I'll just add, because you said and I'm not quoting you correctly, but something like, you know, talking about how we got here and as you were sharing your story about when you were a student working with an evaluator and you were kind of there for the note, the note-taking, and the person was talking about affirmative action. It made me think, that's how we got here, but we're still here! Because I shared with you a story that I'm not going to get into the details of, but very recently engaging in a group of various evaluators—we're just working on a project together. It's not an evaluation per se, but doing some collaboration on a project. And there is an individual who pretty much does not care about DEI and has a very specific way that they think about how evaluation should be done from a very, kind of, academic background. Like if you

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[45] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Columbia University Department of English and Comparative Literature faculty page). It's worth noting that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has been accused of misappropriating the position of "the subaltern," which she is *not* in relation to the overwhelming majority of Indians, because of her oppressive caste ancestry, upbringing, and status AND which she *is* in relation to the British and to her White colleagues

[46] Epistemic Violence (website)

[47] Charles W. Mills (obituary)

[48] Spivak, G. C. (2004). Righting Wrongs. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Spring/Summer 103(2/3): 523-581 (article)

didn't go to school and get a certain type of evaluation training, you are not qualified to be a good evaluator. That is the impression that I get from talking to this individual, which I wholeheartedly disagree with.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
So then the question that comes up for me, and we don't have to get into it too much, because it's not quite the purpose of this conversation, but for people, not just for people who maybe have little evaluation training as I do, because I may have shared in the past, I've only taken a few evaluation courses. My degree was in Public Health with a focus on Community Health Promotion. But there are many people doing evaluation who don't even have that, right? There's kind of this stereotype, or I don't know if a stereotype is the right word, but I hear people say all the time, "Oh, I fell into evaluation," right? They were in a role that required them to have this shift in responsibilities and evaluation became a part of it. So, I guess the question is, what does this all mean for people who have not been exposed to evaluation training, at least in an academic setting, is that almost like a good thing or not? I don't know. It's just kind of something that's coming to mind. But I was wondering what you thought about that.

Vidhya
Yeah, I love that question because, oops, yes, it does come up all the time. And so some people are like, "Well, I wasn't trained in evaluation, so I don't really care about the literature," right? And so to that I say, "You may not care, but everything you do is being shaped by those norms," right? The RFPs, forget the RFPs even, like, the programs themselves are derivative of the logic underlying evaluation, right? Funding streams and then, you know, RFPs for program evaluation. So what people think about rationale and reasoning, you know, so, we assume that if people cannot articulate a theory of change or a logic model, both of which–I mean, if you look at the original logic model, is very clearly from manufacturing and very clearly derivative of military science. So if you think about inputs and outputs and outcomes, that is a very specific understanding of how change happens based on production, industrial production. And like I said, military science. If we think about missions, it's not a coincidence that the Catholic Church and missions, military missions and corporate missions,[49] they all have the same original meaning, right? OK, we go in for a purpose and we lead people toward that destination. And so as much as we may, many of us, and in my case, I can't claim any of that because I have my whole PhD in Evaluation and my nonprofit, I have my Master's in Nonprofit Management for God's sake. So I'm, I know that I'm, like, steeped in this kind of thinking, but what I see when I work with people is that we've *all* internalized this logic because we've been told that this is the way to think. And this is why, you know, when we were talking earlier about, like, my misgivings about where I'm sending my kid to school is that, you know, just like I was saying about evaluation, when we don't ever ask, like, "How did we get here?," we normalize it, right? So, evaluation never names the epistemology, epistemological underpinnings that it's using. It never names the economic system that it's based on, which is neoclassical economics and capitalism, right? And so these things seem like they can't be questioned. They seem like they are just normal. And that's why, you know, when I say something like, "I don't want to just immediately pursue philanthropic funding," I'm met with people, with responses from people who are like,

[49] Mission statements as strategic management tools–A brief history (web-based article)

“Well, I just like to do things logically.” So I'm gonna write up a charter for the program and just get funding without ever thinking that there could be another way to finance the work, which people are doing, which people who never had access to philanthropic funding have been doing, right? So, that's part of the issue is that the way that RFPs are written, and they still—many RFPs and standards of evidence still worship at the altar of randomized control trials. And randomized control trials assume that the problems that we see around us in the world lie in us as individuals. Otherwise you couldn't, it doesn't make any sense to, randomize treatment, right? But if your conceptualization of the problem is that it is a problem of disintegrated communities and economies and—disintegrated by design, by forces, by capital, by governments and corporate interests who have intentionally destroyed families and communities—then it doesn't make sense to randomize treatment, right? So, this is where, again, the logic underlying racialized difference and measurement and meritocracy, deservingness, all really crystallizes into thinking about these problems as if they reside in our bodies, right? Our deficient bodies or, maybe—if we're lucky—increase the unit of analysis to families and communities, but not question the overall economic system, right? And cultural rationale that allows that economic system to continue, right—the justification for it. And that's when we, I think, get into this transition towards the next economy, which I think is actually useful. I don't know if there's anything else that you wanted to say about the…

Vidhya
OK, so I think this, like I said, we'll include notes, resources in the notes about positivism and scientism[50] and scientific management and eugenics.[51] The kind of big point I want to make here, though, is this tension, another tension which is not unrelated from the earlier tension we shared about, like, past, present, and future, but this tension between what Marxist theory would, you know, refers to as the base and the superstructure. And so when we're talking about the base, we're talking about material relations of, you know, socioeconomic relations of production, really. Like, what is your relationship to production? Do you control the means and the ends of production? Or are you, you know, producing profit for someone else? Do you own your own time or not? And then, you know, and I'm still learning, to be honest, a lot about a lot of these things, because there's also, you know, people are adding another dimension—or people have added—which is not just profit, not just capital and labor, but rent.[52] OK, but I'll save that. I just wanted to put it out there that there's more to this that I don't necessarily know all about. But the reason I wanna talk about this base-superstructure[53] piece is that a lot of critical theory, which I'm very drawn to and I use all the time, is focused on trying to understand what is wrong, right? Like, and articulating what about the system isn't working. And the tension is that the kind of, again, “founding fathers,” so to speak, of critical theory from the Frankfurt School were independently wealthy. They were from the capital class, even though they criticized it so much. They benefited from it. They were funded by the capital class and they never actually sided with the working class. They went on, frankly, to work for the CIA, for example. They squashed

[50] What is Scientism? (website)
[51] Eugenics and Scientific Racism (website)
[52] Economic Rent: Definition, Types, How It Works, and Example (website)
[53] Base and Superstructure: Defining Marxist Terms (article);
Base and Superstructure: The Marxist Analysis of Society | Socialism 101 (video)

socialist revolutions in other countries. And locally, they would call the police on protesting students. So there's a big critique of the critical theorists[54] in that they spent a lot of, they lived very comfortably earning their livings criticizing the system without putting any material energy into changing it. And so, so, that's something that I'm, you know, we mentioned this briefly in the last episode where I have to really think hard about somebody who occupies, now, this buffer zone,[55] right, of the professional managerial class[56] who feels kinship, frankly, with the working class and yet is answering to the owning and ruling class. OK, but there's another dimension to this where, I can't see these as two separate—binaries, like, you either focus on the sort of cultural justification for the material problem or you work on the material problem. I think that in general, I'm trying to unlearn binaries and this is another one where that makes sense because I, I come, like I've said more than once, I come from the oppressing caste in India, which by definition was not supposed to own anything. That doesn't mean that we, as a group, have not found ways to be very materially comfortable, which is an entirely different conversation actually worth having. But that isn't what I'm talking about today. What I'm talking about now is even if you assume that we lived on alms, you know, and continued not to accumulate wealth as we were supposed to not accumulate, we controlled the norms, right, the societal norms through our interpretation, exclusive interpretation of the scriptures, right, and imposition of the scriptures on local practices, right, and through our kind of control over cultural capital, right, we could almost do more damage than if we owned the actual means of production. Instead, what we owned was the rationale, like, justifying the social system. And we definitely found ways to profit from it, even though, like I said, according to tradition, theoretically, we were not supposed to accumulate wealth. OK. So, so, to me, and this persists today because Brahmins are about 2% of the population in India. OK, so, it's comparable to, you know, apartheid South Africa, for example. People do contest whether, you know, you know, the, kind of, geographic origins of brahmins, and I'm definitely not equipped to get into those debates in any depth. But I can say this much, if 2% of the population occupies, like, more than half, well more than half of decision-making roles, that sounds like something isn't going the way it should be. And so the power that we have is control of the narrative. And so that's where I'm, like, when we think about transition, OK, we want to make sure that we, again, balance this tension between changing the material relations of production, and that's where the Just Transition principles come in handy. And we can share that link, too, and talk about it more when we talk about the solidarity economy[57] and the ecosystem,[58] because that is our next two episodes. We can go into depth on what a regenerative economy[59] as opposed to an extractive economy[60] would look like with specific reference to the knowledge economy. But I think that, like, the bigger picture is this idea that there is a transition and that part of the transition involves acknowledging the harm, naming it, right? And then acknowledging that not everybody should pay for the transition, OK? Because, you know, we were talking earlier about this, like, we did not all equally contribute to

[54] The CIA & the Frankfurt School's Anti-Communism (2022 web-based article by Gabriel Rockhill)
[55] The Ruling Class and the Buffer Zone (7-page article written by Paul Kivel in 2004)
[56] On the Origins of the Professional-Managerial Class (2019 interview with Barbara Ehrenreich)
[57] What Do We Mean By Solidarity Economy? (website)
[58] Ecosystem (website)
[59] Measuring regenerative economics: 10 principles and measures undergirding systemic economic health (article)
[60] Explainer: What is the extractive economy? (web-based article)

the present situation, right? And so in the same way that the just transition doesn't make the same demands of countries who have been extracted from, as it does from countries who have done the extracting, I think the transition for evaluation, for the next day, should not be borne exclusively by evaluators from, evaluation scholars and practitioners and organizers and activists, from marginalized groups. That's not, again, that's not a binary because we vary, that group varies. And I feel like, where I am in a position to bear some of that weight because of my individual positionality, but also because of my, you know, relative age and experience, I would like to create a May 13 Group that allows all of us, right, to depend on each other in a way that we don't have to feel like we have to bear the weight entirely on our own,[61] so, we have to choose between our communities and making sense to capital. So I don't know if any of that made sense, the last part especially.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
No, that did make sense. Yeah, and I think that's a tension that like you stated that a lot of us hold, right? Trying to kind of work in service of our community, for our community and the best interests, but then having these—what's the word?—not guidelines, but I'm kind of at a loss for words. These constructs that we have to work within that are—not to say they don't matter, but they're human created, right? They don't matter in that sense. And it's definitely difficult. So for The May 13 Group, I think having that space will be really important and really valuable.

Vidhya
Right.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
And at the same time, it also makes me think about, in an ideal world, somebody could take an action, an evaluator could take, engage in some act of resistance at wherever they work or wherever it is. And the idea is that The May 13 Group would be here to support whatever happens, but that's still on an individual level, that's a scary thing to do because, depending on who you are, what commitments you have, what priorities you have, that, a lot could be at stake. And I don't know that it's possible for The May 13 Group or any group in this lifetime, anyway, to be able to 100% support someone if things go south, if that makes sense. Not to be pessimistic about it, but I'm also grounding us in reality. So, for me, it's also finding that line between dreaming and then, also, what could we reasonably do when we put all our efforts together while also acknowledging that that's a small piece that we could do in the long-term, right? Because that's something we're trying to emphasize, too, that this is long-term work. I think you've said in the past that—was it movement building or organizing or creating cooperatives? Something to that effect—takes like 10 years or something to that effect. So this is….

[61] National Labor Relations Act (website)

Vidhya
Yeah, 10 years is what I read. It was news to me, too. It does make sense. And if we think about it, the neoliberal movement[62] that is now so palpable, we can see it so clearly, was at least 50 years in the making. And they really carefully sowed the seeds, trying to erode public education, trying to put these systems in place that they knew would lead to this situation now, where some people are waking up and being like, “Oh, this came out of nowhere.” Like, “Where did this come from?” But it was all, and they were not shy, but I mean, it's all very carefully documented. Just like the 2025 Playbook[63] is, you know. Nobody's hiding what they're trying to do, right? And so, so I think about, like, the individual acting in, in their, you know, individual workplace. I would, I would, and again, you know, part of the point of The May 13 Group is that we figure this out together. So, I don't necessarily have an answer. And I know you weren't asking me for one. But I do think that part of this shift will be for all of us to remember that we are stronger together than we are as individuals. And so the reason that the, you know, places that we work at are able even to do what they do, right, is because in their minds, they can replace us with another brown person, OK? I mean, that is what they have been doing.

We rotate, you know, through these positions. We don't necessarily know the histories when—we're glad to get in, our foot in the door, and we take these jobs. I learned that lesson actually from Juanita Espinosa from the Native Arts Circle.[64] When I moved here to Minneapolis, I found out the history of the people who had my positions before I got it, my position. And then it made so much more sense to me, like, why the institutions work the way that they do.

Vidhya
And so I think part of it would be, though, that again, we have to think about a larger context. So the person acting, you know, in an individual incident, like that incident didn't come out of nowhere, right? And the problem that they're, you know, acting against or resisting or reacting to or whatever it is, responding to, also didn't come out of nowhere, right? And so if institutions also, like, if we were seen as a force, like a union, OK, we would not be played against each other in quite the same way, right? Like, if we could make statements or demands collectively, then we wouldn't necessarily be putting people in those positions where they're, you know, it's like I either comply or I don't or I fight and I could be homeless if I fight, right? Like, and so, like I said, I don't, there is no immediate answer and our desire for an immediate answer, and this includes me, OK, our anxiety around not having an immediate answer is all—again—part of the indoctrination. Because we can't, it's not a logic model on paper. I mean, that's not what this is. Like, we do actually have to figure it out together. That is the work, right? And so, I mean, I'm laughing just because like, we don't know, we've never done it before. Like, how would we possibly know, right? And so, and yet it is anxiety-producing and people do wanna know. Like, it's comforting for you to tell me what the outcome is.

[62] Neoliberal globalization (encyclopedia entry)
[63] Project 2025 (playbook by the Heritage Foundation)
[64] Study finds untapped potential in Native American art (article featuring an artist and arts activist, who is one of Vidhya’s first colleagues and mentors)

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Right.

Vidhya
You know what, I, one time, I just learned this: The idea of self-sabotage, right? Like, so when people get into a…

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Hmm.

Vidhya
…position of relative power or prominence or something that they may have been dreaming for, for a long time and then they, you know, blow it so to speak. I just saw this and I don't remember where or anything. I mean, I saw it in a flash—like, that is an effort to control the outcome.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Hmm.

Vidhya
So, we enter a space and we don't know what's gonna happen. And I've been in these meetings with people that I'm scared to talk to and I don't know what to say and I'm trying to use their language and words that'll impress them and data that, you know, and I'm like, “Oh, don't mess this up, don't screw this up.” Or I get this job that I, it's like the highest job that I've ever had in terms of positional power and I'm like, “OK, don't screw it up, don't screw it up.” You know? And, and I realized like, it's a very different way of thinking than, again, than just living in harmony, right, with your surroundings and knowing the protocol, knowing you're supported by the earth and your people and like, you will take things as they come, right? Like that kind of anxiety is not, you know, a natural part of the human condition. It's a, again, it's contrived, it's an artificial construction of being, like, in these places that were built to exclude us, you know? You know, I guess I just want to—I don't know what I'm trying to say here. I'm trying to say that being fully present in the moment, in a, in an environment, social and natural environment that you feel is full of abundance and care for you, does not elicit the same kind of pressure and anxiety as trying to survive in the nonprofit industrial complex, which is very, very pathetic. I mean, like, and so, that not-knowing the answer is itself like something that we have to shed, I feel like—the feeling that we should know the answer. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

Carolina De La Rosa Mateo
Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Getting comfortable with uncertainty, with discomfort, which is my worst nightmare, but we're going to get through it. But I think that's it. That's it for today. It's been a really good conversation, and I hope that all you listeners enjoyed, learned something new, and we will catch you all next time.