

Foggy journeys: When the rubber hits the road

- Paper presented at the Australasian Evaluation Society 2005 International Conference
- 10 -12 October – Brisbane, Queensland www.aes.asn.au

**Australasian Evaluation Society
Evaluation Inside Out**

Presenter - Liz Smith

Our starting point

71%

Our starting point

“The investments, dilemmas and implications of researchers’ ethical decisions and moral choices are usually secreted away, buried, concealed, and hidden from public scrutiny, thereby crafting an illusion that ‘good’ research is being done by ‘good researchers’.”
(Halse & Honey 2005)

Our journey today

- Purpose: Share stories, suggest strategies
- Takeaways: Preparation for realities and shared responsibility

An ethical road trip

- Road maps: ethical principles
- Driving our car: ethical application tensions
- Defensive driving: model for ethical reasoning
- Hitting black ice: ethical challenges
- Applying the brakes: suggested resolution strategies
- Final directions...

Road maps: ethical principles



Road maps: ethical principles

- Beneficence
- Respect
- Justice
- Truth
- Freedom

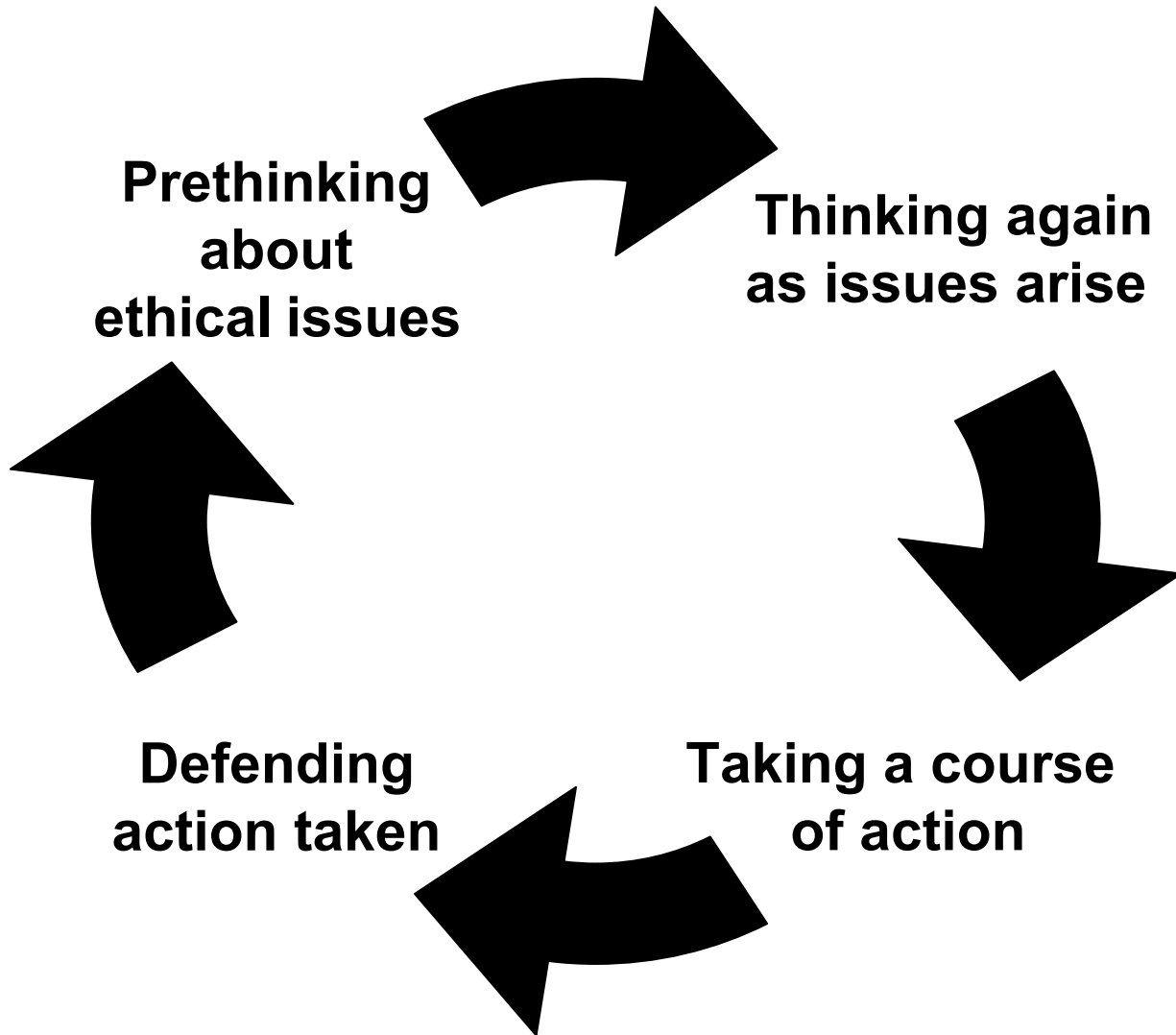
Interpreting road maps

- Guidelines or analytical frameworks
- Underpinned by positivistic assumptions
- Socially and culturally constructed
- Not ethical if not legal

Driving our car

- Balancing client, participant, personal and business needs
- Client abdication of responsibility, BUT we don't control...
 - Agenda
 - Budget, time, access
 - Information dissemination
- Limited access to formal ethical review processes

Defensive driving



Three vignettes

When the rubber hits the road...

Watch out black ice ahead...



Hitting black ice: vignette #1

- Case studies on sensitive topic
- Socially disadvantaged low income
- Concerns about participant impact, and revealing crime

Hitting black ice: vignette #1

- **Tensions:**

- Participant safety
- Legal requirements
- Researcher safety

- **Ethical principles:**

- Beneficence
- Respect
- Freedom

Hitting black ice: vignette #2

- Programme evaluation involving front line staff and providers
- Accessing via managers
- Interviews / group discussions

Hitting black ice: vignette #2

- **Tensions:**
 - Power imbalance
 - Financial dis/incentives
- **Ethical principles:**
 - Beneficence
 - Truth
 - Respect

Hitting black ice: vignette #3

- Evaluation completed
- Contracted process followed, report signed off
- Client requests transcripts

Hitting black ice: vignette #3

- **Tensions:**

- Not agreed deliverable
- Lack of control of use
- One-dimensional, personal identifiers
- Cost of delivery
- Maintain goodwill of client

- **Ethical principles:**

- Beneficence
- Respect
- Truth

Applying the brakes: suggested resolution strategies

- Defensive driving:
 - Recognising ethical challenges
 - Active and self questioning approach
 - Using road maps
- Client / contractor discussions
- Jointly agreed strategies / responses

Defensive driving questions

- Description
- Location
- Methods
- Participants and relationships
- Consequences
- Publications

Applying the brakes: resolution strategies

Vignettes♣	#1	#2	#3
Intros	√	√	
Informed consent	√	√	
Outros	√	√	
Waivers	√		
Signed off interview notes	√	√	√
Researcher matching	√		√
Support people	√		√
High level summaries (\$)	√		√
Feedback information	√	√	

Final directions

- Road safety maximised by critical reflection before, during and after
- Ethical application is a shared responsibility
- Fog is the defining weather pattern

“Like travel through a fog, the journey of ethical decisionmaking in human subjects protections is a matter of discernment not mere compliance.”

(Gabriele 2003)

Our car: context of ethical application

- Independent research and evaluation consultancy roles:
 - Personal values
 - Professional identity
 - Client relationships
 - Business reputation

Differing landscapes - evaluation vs research ethics

- Value laden
- Judgemental
- Change agent
- Power dimensions
- Political

Differing landscapes - evaluation vs research ethics

Aspect	Evaluation	Research
Use	Intended for use	Produces knowledge
Motivation	Improve practice	Develop theory
Questions	Decision maker	Researchers
Judgement	Compares what is and should be	Studies what is
Setting	Program	Research
Autonomy	Limited	Relatively
Allegiance	Funder	Self