




EVALUATION ETHICS IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION TO PRESENTERS

- Most from The Northern Institute (TNI), Charles Darwin University; ethical evaluation a TNI focus
 - Eileen Cummings, Rembarrnga Ngalakan elder; years of policy, program development and evaluation experience; Adjunct Fellow at TNI
 - Emma Williams has commissioned, conducted and evaluated evaluations in NT, as a senior bureaucrat and as TNI Principal Research Fellow
 - Allan Arnott has worked for many years in NT remote communities, including evaluation work; TNI Principal Scientist, establishing evaluation program
 - Terry Dunbar – Iwaidja-Warramunga woman; heads CDU's Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education, worked on NHMRC guidelines
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Eileen to begin?

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

AES currently reviewing its 2000:

- *Code of Ethics* and
 - *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*
 - Timely to look at this issue, but important to note that while there are many evaluative interactions with Indigenous peoples, focus here is on Australian Indigenous peoples in the Northern Territory
 - After reviewing issues, we propose four potential ways forward but also pose some tough questions at two levels
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Eileen

EVALUATION ETHICS

- The Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) in 2000 adopted a *Code of Ethics* and produced *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*
- Neither of these documents (currently being updated) refers specifically to conducting evaluations with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- However...



Eileen

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH GUIDELINES

- Guidelines do guide researchers' work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, e.g.:
- *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS 2010)
- *Values & Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (NHMRC 2003)
- 'Evaluation' is not referred to in either of these, although many evaluations have to undergo ethical processes (with some blurry lines)

Eileen - Therefore the current situation in Australia is that Indigenous ethical research guidelines do not deal specifically with evaluation, and evaluation guidelines

ETHICS IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

- NHMRC guidelines (derived from bio-medical model) include 'informed consent' and 'anticipated benefit'
- AIATSIS provides 11 principles in three contexts:


Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding

1. Consultation, negotiation and free and informed consent are the foundations for research (**evaluation**) with or about Indigenous peoples
2. The responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing
3. Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research (**evaluation**).

Allan – we've replaced research terms with evaluation terms, and would like you to reflect with each point how true this is of your own practice and experience of evaluation

ETHICS IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS, CONT'D


Respect, recognition and involvement

4. Indigenous knowledge systems and processes must be respected.
 5. There must be recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples as well as of individuals.
 6. The intellectual and cultural property rights of Indigenous peoples must be respected and preserved.
 7. Indigenous researchers (**evaluators**), individuals and communities should be involved in research (**evaluation**) as collaborators.
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Allan

ETHICS IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS, CONT'D


Benefits, outcomes and agreement

8. The use of, and access to, research (**evaluation**) results should be agreed.
 9. A researched (**evaluated**) community (**program participant**) should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.
 10. The negotiation of outcomes should include results specific to the needs of the researched (**evaluated program participants**) community.
 11. Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research (**evaluation**) project, based on good faith and free and informed consent.
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Allan


CONTEXT OF EVALUATION

Evaluation differs from some other forms of research as:

- its primary purpose is typically to make value judgements to inform decision-making, often within a short time frame;
 - at least some research participants likely to be financially dependent on those contracting the evaluation, and its findings may affect their livelihood; and
 - a frequent – perhaps the most frequent – business model is to have much of the evaluation designed by non-researchers, with the fieldwork, analysis and report writing contracted to researchers; results go to decision-makers.
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Allan

NT INDIGENOUS CONTEXT

- NT covers one sixth of the continent, but has 1% of Australia's population
 - Approx 30% Indigenous, with Australia's highest proportion of Indigenous peoples leading relatively traditional lifestyles
 - Top End in particular an area of extreme language diversity; substantial cultural diversity throughout NT (with some common themes)
 - Culturally respectful engagement requires engaging with the 'right' stakeholders in the right order, and acknowledging that not everyone has the same authority to speak on issues
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Eileen

IDENTIFIED ISSUES

Consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding

- Evaluation design parameters may be set by non-researchers with little knowledge of time and resources required for ethical practice
- Critical stakeholders (e.g. elders, decision-makers) may be excluded from design, or participation may not be voluntary for others
- Parameters may be so rigid that community-originated ideas, or issues uncovered during the evaluation, cannot be addressed

Allan – also, Terry notes that involvement of some groups may preclude involvement of others with certain community dynamics

ISSUES, CONT'D

Respect, recognition and involvement


- Need for more qualified Indigenous evaluators
- Perhaps even more critical, ensuring that we understand the value of Indigenous knowledge in evaluation and reward it – too many cases where knowledge is disregarded or used without adequate recompense
- Indigenous intellectual property often not written into contracts



Allan


ISSUES, CONT'D

Benefits, outcomes and agreement

- May be pressure to produce more negative, more positive findings than warranted by the evidence
 - Dissemination may be restricted; researchers may be warned not to report findings to participants
 - Findings may be ignored, misrepresented, misused
 - Greater emphasis sometimes placed on good participatory approaches than on value of outcomes (where evaluator may have limited leverage)
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Allan

TOUGH QUESTIONS

- Evaluations often have multiple tiers of power differentials. What does 'informed consent' or 'anticipated benefit' mean if the researcher does not have any leverage or even information on how the results will be used?
 - If potential for evaluation to lead to the termination of a beloved local program, would community participants consider this a benefit?
 - Should ethics apply only to those conducting evaluations, or also to those commissioning and using them?
 - How different are these ethical issues from those for a Somali program, or one for disadvantaged Anglo-Australians?
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Emma

TWO LEVELS OF ETHICS

- AES developing ethical evaluation guidelines – who else occupies this space? How will guidelines intersect with others', e.g. in Australia NHMRC, ARC, AVCC? What about New Zealand and PNG?
 - Who will be consulted and how will the engagement process work?
 - At the ethical application (praxis?) level, how do our own values impact on our application of guidelines, e.g. does we see our responsibility extending past developing an ethical product?
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Emma

POTENTIAL WAYS FORWARD

Could just say 'too hard' and leave evaluations to those less concerned with ethics, but four other areas of action seem more positive:

1 Improving guidelines

- Better mutual recognition and engagement between evaluation and Indigenous research guidelines (AES process could address this)

2 Better engagement with critical ethical partners

- Multi-streamed dissemination
- Funders, contract managers commit to ethical behaviour

Emma - Terry notes ARC, NHMRC, AVCC groups also critical to include


WAYS FORWARD, CONT'D

- 3 Special ethics committees replacing HRECs, or at least better specialised training and support for those reviewing evaluations
- 4 Moving to a more holistic, ongoing model of evaluation accountable to Indigenous peoples rather than – or in addition to – external funders



Emma

CONCLUSION

- Evaluations present a range of ethical issues less commonly found in other forms of research
 - Four alternative solutions suggested - one difficult to achieve in the short to medium term, but three that could potentially be put into action almost immediately
 - Important to note that ethics praxis is personal – where does each evaluator see their ethical responsibility? Does it end with ethical fieldwork and putting in a good report, or extend to outcomes? How balance good vs good?
 - What is AES role in these areas?
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Emma

TIME FOR QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

