

# The Principles of Ethics: In Two Volumes

## Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research

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*Ethical tensions are part of the everyday practice of doing research—all kinds of research. How do researchers deal with ethical problems that arise in the practice of their research, and are there conceptual frameworks that they can draw on to assist them? This article examines the relationship between reflexivity and research ethics. It focuses on what constitutes ethical research practice in qualitative research and how researchers achieve ethical research practice. As a framework for thinking through these issues, the authors distinguish two different dimensions of ethics in research, which they term procedural ethics and "ethics in practice." The relationship between them and the impact that each has on the actual doing of research are examined. The article then draws on the notion of reflexivity as a helpful way of understanding both the nature of ethics in qualitative research and how ethical practice in research can be achieved.*

**Keywords:** research ethics; reflexivity; research practice

*Picture this scene. You are a researcher working on a study examining women's experiences of heart disease. You are interviewing Sonia, a woman in her late 40s with diagnosed heart disease. Sonia lives on a remote farming property in a rural region. She is married and has one teenage daughter living at home with herself and her husband. The interview is progressing well. Over a cup of tea in Sonia's kitchen, you inquire about the impact of heart disease on her life. Sonia stops and closes her eyes. After a few moments' silence, you notice tears welling up in Sonia's eyes. Sonia tells you that she is not crying—not because of her heart disease, but because she has just found out that her husband has been sexually abusing her daughter since she was a child.*

This kind of scenario is not unusual when conducting qualitative research. Most qualitative researchers can describe similar experiences they

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