

Finding your ethical research self: A guidebook for novice qualitative researchers

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The preamble states this book is written for novice qualitative researchers; however, it reads as a book written for social research students and lecturers. A student could work through the book, consider the reflective exercises and carry out the activities suggested, or a lecturer could use the book as a way of structuring a session/s or course on qualitative research. The book is authored by Martin Tolich, an Aotearoa New Zealand academic from Otago University and Emma Tumilty, an Australian bioethicist. Material used in the book is from Martin Tolich's teaching of research ethics throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and in Portugal. Martin Tolich has written social research texts which may be familiar, and I have found his work useful in teaching research and in my own research. A theme of the book is that qualitative researchers need to have an ethical compass so they can effectively respond to ethical issues as they arise throughout a research process as opposed to relying on an ethics review to keep research participants safe.

Rather than starting with an ethical code, or describing the process of applying to a research ethics committee for ethical approval, the book began with a description of a classroom-based discussion about consent. Informed consent was introduced to a student cohort by placing a recording device in front of the class to see how they would respond. The authors returned to this example of consent and other student learning activities, alongside case examples, throughout the book. Alongside informed consent, the first part of the book explored key aspects of ethics in qualitative research

such as conflicts of interest, confidentiality and the right for research participants to withdraw from research. The Nuremburg code is used as a reference point for these discussions, for example, the authors consider the Nuremburg code in relation to the Milgram and Zimbardo experiments.

Two chapters are dedicated to specific types of qualitative research: unstructured interviews, focus groups, narrative research, autoethnography, photovoice and participant observation. The examples given of ethics in relation to these types of research were mostly classroom-based rather than from real world research projects. One chapter is dedicated to working with community-based agencies and discusses developing a memorandum of understanding to carry out research which involves an agency, followed by two chapters focused on ethics review. Potential harm to participants is considered, and briefly, potential harm to the researcher. Much of the discussion about potential harm to a researcher social workers will be familiar with from their own study and practice.

A strength of this book is the sole focus on qualitative research. Readers are encouraged to consider the fluid nature of ethics in qualitative research and develop their own ethical intuition so they are equipped to make ethical decisions in situ rather than rely on ethics review processes. It is of note that the authors encourage the use of reference groups when making complex ethical decisions and for the protection of research participants. The authors state that "ethical intuition, imagination, reasoning, and are agency are key concepts" (p. 56) and

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how you might develop these is returned to throughout the book.

What I was hoping for from the book was a deep dive into ethical issues encountered by qualitative researchers with real world examples and processes for working through them. While the book uses some commonly used historic case studies of ethical issues in research, there is extensive use of made-up examples used in the classroom. It would have been helpful to have some local, recent examples from social research and some Indigenous research examples. Much of the material is taken directly from what happened in the classroom and there is only

a brief mention of Indigenous research, or of working with cultures different to your own.

For students this would be a helpful text, and the teaching examples are useful for those teaching research ethics; however, for social workers, it may have been more engaging if the examples used were real and the focus was on research as opposed to the teaching of research. I would recommend this book to anyone teaching qualitative research or embarking on postgraduate study involving qualitative research, but I consider its use limited for social workers, and the brief attention given to Indigenous approaches to research is a significant limitation.

Reviewed by [Lesley Pitt](#), Open Polytechnic