

ETHICS IN TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

1

WHAT IS ETHICS?

It is about thinking about the right thing to do.

2

WHY IS ETHICS IMPORTANT WHEN DOING RESEARCH?

It ensures that:

“No deception or harm to participants, scientific community, and society occurs.”
(Cuschieri, 2022)

3

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ETHICS

Research ethics is institutionalized through ethics review boards and processes.

4

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH?

It is research that go beyond linear approaches to knowledge production, and collaborates across disciplines, society, and policy

- It seeks to:
- Address existing societal challenges
 - Contribute to societal transformation

5

WHY IS ETHICS RELEVANT FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH?

In collaborative research, roles and responsibilities might be difficult to determine.

[READ MORE](#)

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

WHAT IS AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?

You must choose between two (or more) options and whatever you choose, you will do something wrong or fail to do something right.

CONSIDER THIS ETHICAL DILEMMA IN TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH:

“My aim in my research is creating positive impact for a marginalized group. However, during my research I realize that this might have negative consequences for another group. That group has more power and is able to defend their own interests...”

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HOW COULD THIS DILEMMA BE ADRESSED?

Classic Ethical Theories	Additional Approaches
Virtue Ethics	Care Ethics
Duty-based ethics	Ubuntu Ethics
Utilitarianism	Pragmatism

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[CLICK TO READ MORE ABOUT ETHICS AND TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH](#)



ETHICS

WHAT IS ETHICS?

It is about thinking about the right thing to do, about duties and responsibilities, values and norms, and about how to live a good life.

Recommended readings: Section 1 & 2

WHY IS ETHICS IMPORTANT WHEN DOING RESEARCH?

Considering ethics in research is fundamental to upholding the integrity of the scientific process and the well-being of all involved parties. It ensures that “no deception or harm to participants, scientific community, and society occurs”.

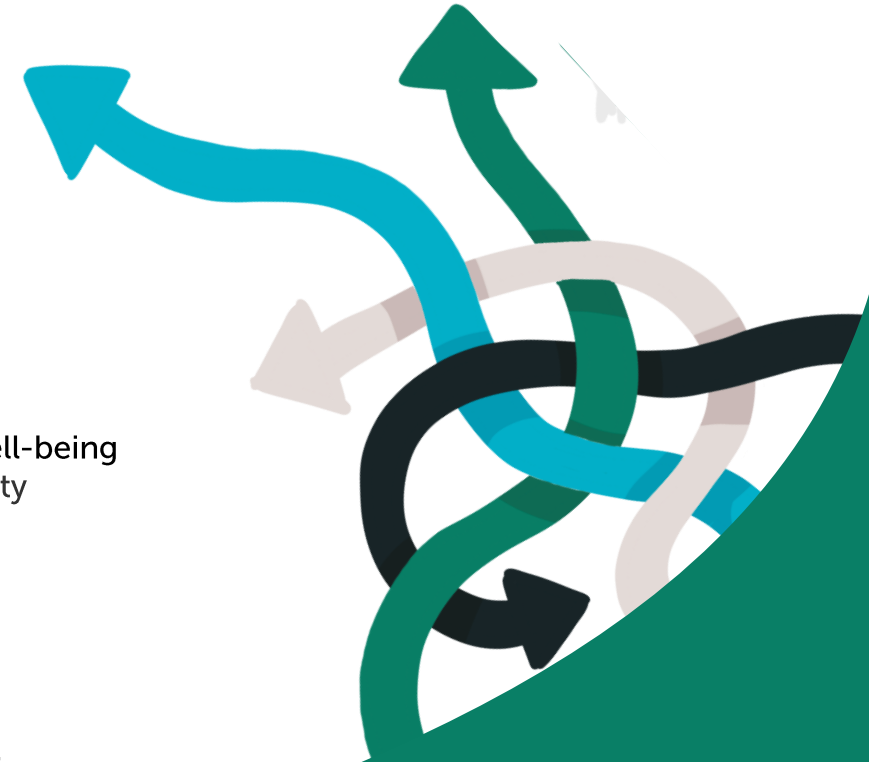
Recommended readings: Section 3

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ETHICS

To address scientific malpractice, formal review processes and institutional review boards have been set-up. Ethical assessment in social science emerged from several international conventions in the field of medical ethics. Most formal research ethics reviews adopt the four principles of Beauchamp and Childress, which include:

- 1) Non-maleficence
- 2) Respect for autonomy
- 3) Beneficence
- 4) Justice.

These principles have found their way into formal ethical reviews, often practicing a value-neutral and utilitarian ethics.



LEARN MORE

→ [Dutch Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#)

→ [EU guidance on Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#)

ETHICS IN TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH?

Transformative research refers to a broad and diverse family of research disciplines and approaches that have a clear normative ambition to challenge the existing status quo, transform dominant structures, and support transitions towards a more just and sustainable society. To this end, actors from different scientific disciplines and societal domains work together in a systematic co-production setting and process.

Transformative research is characterized by its emphasis on generating actionable knowledge and promoting real-world changes in behaviors, values, and institutions.

Researchers engaged in transformative research often adopt pragmatist assumptions about the interplay between knowledge and action, leading to the generation of contingent knowledge through processes of action and experimentation. This approach encourages continuous societal learning and acknowledges the complexity of societal challenges that require collaborative efforts to address effectively.

Overall, transformative research aims to go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and linear approaches to knowledge production, seeking to create meaningful impact and contribute to positive societal transformations.

Recommended readings: Section 6

WHY IS ETHICS RELEVANT FOR COLLABORATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH?

In collaborative research, roles and responsibilities might be difficult to determine:

- Who is the researcher?
- Who generates and owns the knowledge?
- Who is responsible for the outcomes?

Transformative research often implies normative goals. How can we make sure that we create positive impact and transformations for the better?

Recommended readings:
Section 6



ETHICAL DILEMMAS

WHAT IS AN ETHICAL DILEMMA?

You face an *ethical dilemma* if you must choose between two (or more) options and whatever you choose, you will do something wrong or fail to do something right.

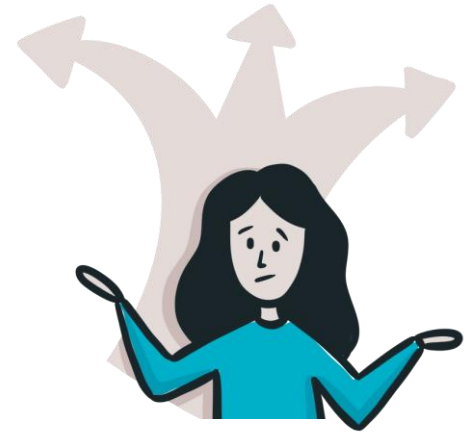
You might also be facing an *ethical conflict*.

This means that the problem can be solved by discussing different reasons to do A or B or applying moral principles.

*Recommended readings:
Section 3 & 4*

CONSIDER THIS ETHICAL DILEMMA IN TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH:

"My aim in my transformative research is creating positive impact for a marginalized group. However, during my research I realize that this might have negative consequences for another group. That group has more power and is able to defend their own interests. At the same time, they could become important change-makers if I get them on board. Still, if I involve them, I could risk losing the trust of my original partners. I have promised that they are the most important stakeholders in this project - and it might also happen that the stronger party ultimately uses my research to further their own interests. I am not sure about that, I'm not completely familiar with the power relations and the history of the conflict between both groups. Shall I continue with my original aim or adjust the project and include both parties?"



HOW COULD THIS DILEMMA BE ADDRESSED? Consider the dilemma from different approaches.

- **VIRTUE ETHICS:**
Which virtues could help me in this case? Courage? Patience? Prudence? What is the 'golden mean' between different reactions to the dilemma?
- **DUTY-BASED ETHICS:**
Which obligations do I have to the different parties? May I break my promise? Do I use my research partners merely as a means or do I really respect their interests?
- **UTILITARIANISM:**
What would be the consequences? Which decision will maximize utility / the well-being of the greatest number of people? How can I calculate this?
- **CARE ETHICS:**
How can I value the relationships that I have built – and the emotions related to that? Which obligations arise from these relationships? What is the best way to care for the interests of all?
- **UBUNTU ETHICS:**
Which role does solidarity and community play in this case? To which group do I belong, and which duties does that bring? How can we treat this case as a collective affair?
- **PRAGMATISM:**
What are the specific demands of this complex situation? How can we figure out a 'pragmatic' solution? What can we learn, and which (new) habits could help to address similar issues in the future?

Are there any other alternative theories that could help me to reflect about this case? And which other aspects are to consider (e.g. power relations, narrative ethics)?

LITERATURE: ETHICS OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

1. Reliable information on core ethics concepts and theories

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/>
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.edu/>

2. Introductions to ethics

- Blackburn, Simon (2001). *Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- M. van Hees, T. Nys, I. Robeyns, *Basisboek ethiek*. Amsterdam, Boom, 2019.
- Rachels, J. (2003), 'A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy'. In: *The Right Thing to Do*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1-19.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ (3rd ed., 2015). *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Statman, Daniel (1995). *Moral Dilemmas*. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi. 5-27.
- Wiggins, David (2006). *Ethics: Twelve Lectures on the Philosophy of Morality*. Penguin Books.

3. Research Ethics

- Cuschieri, S. (2022). *Understanding Research Ethics*. In: *A Roadmap to Successful Scientific Publishing*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99295-8_2
- Iphofen, R. (2020) (ed.) *Handbook of Research Ethics and Scientific Integrity*. Springer (Living Reference Work)
- Wood, L. & Kahts-Kramer, S. 'But how will you ensure the objectivity of the researcher?' *Guidelines to address possible misconceptions about the ethical imperatives of community-based research. Research Ethics* 19, 1–17 (2023).

4. To learn from concrete cases, download the EUR Dilemma Game App

- <https://www.eur.nl/en/about-eur/policy-and-regulations/integrity/research-integrity/dilemma-game>
- Scan QR code to download the app (black = iOS; Green = Android)



Android



iOS



LITERATURE: ETHICS OF TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

5. Medical Ethics / Bioethics:

- T.L. Beauchamp & J.F. Childress. The Four Principles Approach. In: Richard Ashcroft, Angus Dawson, Heather Draper, John McMillan (eds.) Principles of Health Care Ethics. second edition Wiley, Chichester 2007, 3-10

6. Transformative research

- Bradbury, H. *et al.* A call to Action Research for Transformations : The times demand it. *Action Research* 17, 3–10 (2019).
- Hölscher, K. *et al.* Transforming science and society? Methodological lessons from and for transformation research. *Research Evaluation* 1 17 (2021) doi:10.1093/reseval/rvaa034.
- Mertens, D. M. Transformative research: personal and societal. *International Journal for Transformative Research* 4 , 18 24 (2017).
- Wittmayer, J.M., Loorbach, D., Bogner, K., Hölscher, K., Hendlin, Y., Lavanga, M., Vasques, A., von Wirth, T., and de Wal, M. Transformative Research: knowledge and action for just sustainability transitions. DIT Working paper for positioning transformative research. Rotterdam, Design Impact Transition Platform, Erasmus University Rotterdam (2021)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: ETHICAL THEORIES

Type of Ethical Theories	VIRTUE ETHICS	DUTY-BASED ETHICS	UTILITARIANISM	CARE ETHICS	UBUNTU ETHICS	PRAGMATISM
Key theorists	Aristotle	Kant	Bentham, Mill	Gilligan	Ramose	Dewey
Key words	Virtue; character; the Golden Mean; the good life (Eudaimonia)	Duty; intentions; the Categorical Imperative; being worthy of happiness.	Utility; consequences; the greatest happiness principle; pleasure vs. pain	Relationships; Context-sensitive decision-making; Emotions; Vulnerability; Dependence.	Reciprocity; Common good; community; Peaceful relations; Human life & dignity	Responsive to complexity; (collective) learning and experimentation; habit formation; socially conscious
Literature	<p>Aristotle (2012). <i>Nicomachean ethics</i>. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Book II.</p> <p>Annas, Julia (2006). Virtue ethics. In: D. Copp (ed.), <i>The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory</i>. Oxford University Press. pp. 515--536.</p>	<p>Kant, Immanuel (2013). <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Moral</i>. In: R. Shafer-Landau., <i>Ethical Theory: an Anthology</i>. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. 485-498.</p> <p>Hill, Thomas E. (2006). Kantian normative ethics. In: D. Copp (ed.), <i>The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 480-514.</p>	<p>Bentham, Jeremy (2007). <i>Of the Principle of Utility</i>. An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation. Mineola: Dover Publications. Chapter 1.</p> <p>Mill, John Stuart (2006). <i>What Utilitarianism Is</i>. In: J.M. Robson (ed.), <i>Collected works of John Stuart Mill</i>, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul. Chapter II.</p>	<p>Collins, Stephanie (2017). <i>Care Ethics: The Four Key Claims</i>. In David R. Morrow (ed.), <i>Moral Reasoning</i>. New York: Oxford University Press.</p>	<p>Thaddeus Metz & Joseph B.R. Gaie (2010) <i>The African ethic of Ubuntu/Botho: implications for research on morality</i>, <i>Journal of Moral Education</i>, 39:3, 273-290, DOI: 10.1080/03057240.2010.497609</p>	<p>John Dewey (1922). <i>Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Philosophy</i> (The Project Gutenberg eBook of Human Nature and Conduct, by John Dewey.)</p>