

Not knowing: Towards an ethics for employing psychoanalysis in psychosocial research

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Abstract

The rise of 'psychosocial studies' has seen psychoanalysis drawn on in narrative work facilitating a complex view of subjectivity that is discursive, irrational and invested with emotion. Nevertheless, transferring concepts and techniques from a clinical context into a research context invariably comes with its own set of problems, not least of which pertain to ethics. After introducing the tenets of psychosocial studies and its associated methodology, this paper describes my own personal experience of ethical discomfort while conducting psychosocial research, arguing that reflexivity and validity are key concepts in an ethical research practice that employs psychoanalysis.

Notwithstanding these ethical advances, I describe how my use of psychoanalysis when analysing textual material has moved from an approach that draws on Kleinian psychoanalytic thought to an analytic stance based on a Lacanian perspective which frames psychoanalytic readings of text as tentative, reflexive and irreducible to ever knowing the subject. The implications of analysing text in a way that holds onto the unsettling and fragmentary aspects of narrative are discussed in the context of recent debates on the use of psychoanalysis in psychosocial research and the ethics of subjectivity.