

# **Ethical emotional encounters: Contemplating challenges in psychoanalytically informed research**

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## **Abstract**

Researchers using qualitative methods are required to be ethically mindful not to cause harm to participants. However, when emotional encounters between researchers and participants occur there are inherent ethical tensions that need to be continuously navigated. In this paper I contemplate the challenges I encountered whilst using a psychoanalytically informed research interview method (adapted from Cartwright, 2004; Kvale, 1999; Stromme, Gullestad, Stänicke & Killingmo, 2010). I interviewed women on the topic of maternal subjectivity when their children have a disability. The ethical quandaries included accessing nuanced data by engaging with participants' unconscious material; as well as the use of the transference-countertransference situation outside of a psychotherapy setting. Literature has previously discussed the ethics of using this psychoanalytic method, particularly around the interpretation of data from a psychoanalytic lens. However, the aim in this paper is focused on the application of psychoanalytic concepts in the process of data collection and how to ethically manage these emotional engagements with participants. It will be argued that when researchers are also mindful, psychoanalytically-trained psychotherapists, who engage with their own subjectivity in personal psychoanalytic psychotherapy, this psychoanalytic inquiry method can be a very ethical way of being with participants.