

Using ‘Foucault’s toolbox’: the challenge with feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis

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Abstract

This paper discusses the challenges that the author faced when using post-structuralist feminist interpretations of Foucauldian discourse analysis as a research methodology, which emphasised the enmeshment of the researcher’s subjective self in the research. Analysis of the ‘self’ involved the author being stripped of her ‘creative role and analysed as a complex variable function of discourse’ (Foucault 1977, p. 138). In a struggle to deconstruct personal ‘truths’, the author repeatedly questioned and checked her multiple subjective positions and life narratives against feminist concepts within literature, with colleagues and research participants. Sensitivity towards the author’s power over the interpretation of the data became an object of discourse analysis in its own right. This paper argues that reflexive engagement strengthened the analysis through broadening the author’s own discursively defined views and by exposing how subjective experiences interacted with research.

Biography

Helen McLaren is a lecturer at the School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy at the University of South Australia. Her key research interests have centred on oppression, exclusion, disadvantage, inequity, shame, blame and silencing. Helen has used victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence and bad heteronormative relationships as vehicles in which to view these phenomena. Helen.McLaren@health.sa.gov.au