

Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures



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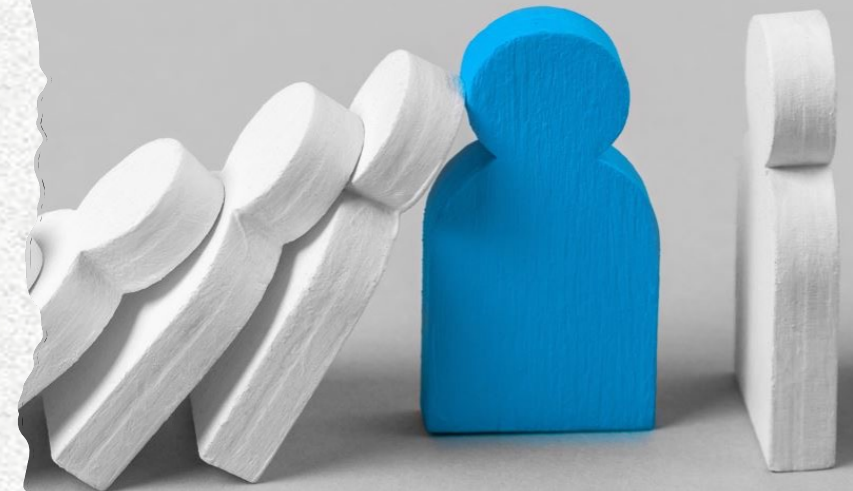
Published on 11 Nov 2010



Before we dive in

Definitions:

- **Insider/Outsider Status** - In research, insider/outsider status refers to the researcher's position about the culture or community they are studying.
- **Qualitative Research**: It is a type of research that seeks to explore and understand social phenomena and human experiences in-depth, often through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and texts.
- **Positionality**: In the context of research, "positionality" refers to the social, cultural, and political position of the researcher and how this position may influence the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation.



Abstract

Early discussions of insider/outsider status assumed that the researcher was predominately an insider, or an outsider and that each status carried with it certain advantages and disadvantages.

More recent discussions have unveiled the complexity inherent in either status and have acknowledged that the boundaries between the two positions are not all that clearly delineated.

Positionality, power, and representation proved to be useful concepts for exploring insider/outsider dynamics.



Population Targeted

The population targeted in this article are researchers who engage in qualitative research, particularly those who conduct research within their own culture or across cultural boundaries

Four case studies

- a Black woman interviewing other Black women,
 - Asian graduate students in the US interviewing people from 'back home',
 - An African professor learning from African businesswomen,
 - A cross-cultural team studying ageing in a non-Western culture
- are used as the database to explore the complexities of researching within and across cultures.



Goal of Study

The goal is to explore and understand :

- The complex dynamics of insider/outsider status and positionality in qualitative research, particularly when researching within one's own culture and across cultural boundaries.
- And to examine how power, knowledge construction, and representation impact the research process and outcomes.



Research Questions

- What does it mean to be an insider or an outsider to a particular group under study?
- Can women understand men's experience?
- Can Whites study Blacks?
- Straights study gays?
- The colonized study the colonizer?

Key aspects of research design



Qualitative research
approach



Data collection method

Research approach

The paper utilizes a qualitative research approach, precisely a case study approach, which aims to explore assumptions and potential biases related to their own culture, gender, race, socio-economic status, and other factors that might affect their interactions with the participants and assess their assumptions about access, power relationships, and commonality of experience.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing at a desk. The desk is cluttered with various items: several sheets of paper with text and images, numerous colorful sticky notes (pink, yellow, green, blue), a color calibration chart, a white mug, a desk lamp, and a printer. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a meeting or office setting.

Data Collection

The paper utilizes semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. The interviews were conducted with people from within and different cultures.

Key findings

- Insider and outsider status in research is not fixed but rather relative to the cultural values and norms of both the researcher and the participants.
- The positions of insider and outsider are influenced by power dynamics and positionality, which can impact knowledge construction and representation in research.
- Claiming insider or outsider status is complex and requires an understanding of the intricacies of the cultural contexts in which the research is conducted.



A Black Women interviews a black women

- The study discusses a study by Johnson-Bailey on the educational narratives of re-entry Black women.
- The study found that there was a strong bond of sisterhood based on race and gender between the participants and researcher, but class and color posed more complicated scenarios. Both the researcher and participants shared an understanding of societal hierarchical forces, specifically racism.
- Class was found to be inextricably tied to the situations of Black women and their families, while colorism, a form of intra-racial discrimination, was examined in a less open manner than class.
- Three of the eight women in the study raised the issue of colorism, and it was noted in the analysis that the remaining women unknowingly related instances of how they had benefited from colorism.

The study provides insight into the complexities of the intersections of race, gender, class, and color in the experiences of Black women.

Asians interviewing Asians away from home

- The study discusses the challenges that two graduate students faced while conducting research on their own cultures in the US. Ming-Yeh Lee, from Taiwan, did not have difficulty accessing interviewees, but faced a validity issue due to cultural values that emphasized education. Young wha Kee, from Korea, found it harder to access Koreans living in the US, partly because of her Christian status and perceived higher status.
- She also faced difficulties due to the rigid hierarchical structure of Korean culture. Both students faced challenges due to their gender and age, as well as cultural values that emphasized age, gender, education, and seniority.
- We understand that power relationships between researchers and participants are shaped by many factors, including cultural values, gender, education, and seniority, and that these relationships need to be carefully considered in research.



African businesswomen instruct the professor

- The study explores the challenges of conducting insider research on semi-literate women in Botswana who have moved from unemployment and poverty in rural areas to owning and managing successful small businesses in urban settings. The author, who is a female insider and a doctoral student in the US, encountered unexpected problems such as being seen as a confidant for unrelated information, receiving advice on how to survive in their context, and being expected to spend more time giving advice on unrelated topics.
- Additionally, the interlocking nature of culture, gender, and power made it difficult to understand the cultural meanings conveyed through language, proverbs, and non-verbal expressions. The credibility of the information was also influenced by the cultural norm of group interviews, which had a direct impact on translation and interpretation.
- These challenges highlight the importance of understanding the complexities of insider research and the need for reflexivity in navigating the power dynamics and cultural nuances inherent in the research process.





'Do all these people have to be here?'; collecting data as a cross-cultural team



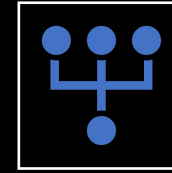
- Conducting research in a culture different from one's own requires balancing the strengths of insider and outsider positions.
- Being an outsider can make one a curiosity and can elicit fuller explanations than would be given to insiders.
- The insider's assumptions, language, and cognitive frames are made explicit in the outsider's questions and vice versa, allowing for a more complete understanding of the subject matter.
- Gender and social class can affect one's position as an insider or outsider.
- Maintaining tension and distinctness among different standpoints can create a marginal lens through which to examine subject matter.



Positionality



The concept of positionality refers to an individual's position in relation to a particular culture or community.



Culture is not a monolithic entity, but instead characterized by internal variation, which makes it difficult to define an insider.



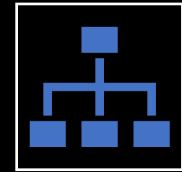
An individual's positionality can change based on factors such as education, gender, social class, age, political affiliation, religion, and region.



The positionality of a researcher can impact their relationships with research participants.



Researchers must consider their positionality when conducting research in order to accurately understand and represent the perspectives and experiences of their participants.



A typology of positionality is proposed, including indigenous-insiders, insider-outsiders, outsider-insiders, and outsider-outsiders.

Power

- Power-based relationships between the researcher and the researched are present in all phases of social life, including research activities.
- In the mid-seventies, anthropology experienced a crisis when it realized how exploitative it could be, leading to the concept of scientific colonialism.
- Recent analyses have exposed power-based dynamics inherent in all research and have suggested that power is something to be aware of and negotiate in the research process.
- Feminist scholars are concerned with foregrounding women's experiences, with participants having an equal relationship with the researcher, with the research experience empowering, and with a more interactive relationship with the reader/consumer of the research.
- Participatory action research focuses on the political empowerment of people through participation in knowledge construction, with participants being colleagues in the research process and equally in control of the study.
- In any team research, power is a factor, and the balance between methodological and cultural knowledge must be negotiated.
- The power dynamics of the interview process are negotiated by the interviewer, interviewees, and the culturally embedded interview context constructed by both.
- Age, gender, educational background, and seniority structure power relationships embedded in the interview context.
- Researchers must be aware of conflicting interests when researching and negotiating the power dynamics of their situation with the examined to establish rapport and trust.

Representation

Representing the 'truth' of research findings and allowing participants' voices to be heard is a challenge for researchers.

Earlier, more static understandings of insider/outsider statuses were based on positivist notions of reality.

Constructivist and postmodern notions of truth and reality provide a more complex understanding of the 'truths' insiders and outsiders uncover.

Researchers struggle with accurately interpreting participants' perspectives, and language translation further complicates this process.

Cultural nuances, idioms, and metaphors translate awkwardly and often require explanation.

The reality of data collection and analysis involves compromise and negotiation.

Conclusion

- The authors argue that researchers will experience moments of being both insider and outsider during a study and that this acknowledgement undermines the notion of objectivity.
- They draw on examples of Black women interviewing Black women, Asians interviewing people from their home country, an African scholar interviewing local businesswomen, and a cross-cultural team studying ageing and learning in a non-western culture to illustrate the complexities of claiming an insider or outsider status in research.
- The authors argue that adopting a multiplicity of perspectives is essential for anthropologists to adapt to the realities of the modern world and that the views of both insiders and outsiders should be accepted as legitimate attempts to understand the nature of culture.



Personal Thoughts

- The paper highlights the complexity of navigating insider and outsider status within and across different cultures, and how power dynamics can shape these experiences.
- It emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and self-awareness in navigating these dynamics, and the need for individuals to critically examine their own positionality and biases in order to effectively engage with diverse cultural perspectives.
- It also emphasizes the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration to build bridges and foster greater understanding and mutual respect.

Any questions

Feel free to share your ideas and opinions



Thank you

Thank you for paying
attention!



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