



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
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Insider/Outsider Perspectives Review

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Researching Contemporary Cosmologies

The Sophia Centre 2026

Reflexivity – Situating Self

- Issues concerning membership of the group being studied
- Where the researcher places themselves regarding those communities they are researching on the spectrum of insider-outsider
- Insider (emic) perspective: sharing the characteristic, role or experience under study with the participants
- Outsider (etic) perspective: one outside the commonality shared by participants
- Scholarship of more recent years places more emphasis on a reflexive approach and situating oneself as researcher than perhaps was formerly the case

Rabe's Three Concepts (Rabe 2003)

- there is **power** involved in the relationship between the researcher and the people and organisations participating in the research
- Researchers gathering data from the participants have the power to represent as they choose
- Research participants have less power in the content of outcomes, although they can choose what they share with researchers
- In the case of work-based projects conducted under the umbrella of an organisation, the association and the ways you choose to represent it may place you in a position of power
- The insider has inside **knowledge** that the outsider does not have
- In the **role of the researcher** researchers experience the life of those studied by living with them, which may lead them to understand and have insight into an insider's perspective
- Anthropologists and those conducting participatory research may obtain both insider and outsider knowledge

The Researcher's Context

- A critique of researchers' roles has developed "in response to a greater consciousness of situational identities and to the perception of relative power" (Angrosino, 2005, p. 734).
- Postmodernism emphasizes the importance in narrative interpretation of understanding the researcher's context (gender, class, ethnicity, etc.)
- Woke perspectives may entail only considering those with insider status as able to conduct authentic research
- The insider or outsider status of a researcher can substantially impact the research, affecting
 - how a researcher enters the area
 - the agreements the researcher has with participants
 - the nature of the researcher's ongoing contact with participants
 - the level of trust demonstrated by participants

Groupings for Researcher Membership

- Adler and Adler (1987) identified three groupings for qualitative researchers engaging in observation
- **peripheral member** researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of group members
- **active member** researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals
- **complete member** researchers, who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research

Insider Perspectives

“The impact of insider epistemology has been considered by qualitative researchers who are insiders to the population of study and by those who are outsiders. In examining staff development research, Asselin (2003) has suggested that it is best for the insider researcher to gather data with her or his “eyes open” but assuming that she or he knows nothing about the phenomenon being studied. She pointed out that although the researcher might be part of the culture under study, he or she might not understand the subculture, which points to the need for bracketing assumptions. Rose

(1985) concurred, “There is no neutrality. There is only greater or less awareness of one's biases. And if you do not appreciate the force of what you're leaving out, you are not fully in command of what you're doing” (p. 77).’

Dwyer, S. & Buckle, J. 2009, p. 55

(Dis)advantages for Insider (emic) Perspectives

- Acceptance & membership provides a potentially greater level of trust and openness in participants
- Provides a starting point (commonality) giving more access to groups closed to “outsiders.”
- Participants willing to share experiences due to an assumption of understanding and belonging
- Shared status affords access, entry, and a common ground from which to begin the research
- The participants may make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully
- An insider researcher’s perceptions may be biased due to personal experience - as a member of the group s/he could have difficulty separating it from that of the participants – this could lead to interviews shaped and guided by the researcher’s experience and not the participant’s – leading to biased analysis & emphasis on shared factors between the researcher and the participants demoting factors discrepant (or vice versa)

Watson (1999); Armstrong (2001)

(Dis)advantages for Outsider (etic) Perspectives

‘There appear to be as many arguments for outsider research as against, with the same issues able to be raised in support of outsider research, as against it.

(Serrant-Green, 2002, p. 38)

(Dis)advantages for Outsider (etic) Perspectives

- Fay (1996) addressed the question, “Do you have to be one to know one?” (p. 9), commenting that membership of the group being studied is neither necessary nor sufficient to “know” the experience of that group.
- “Knowing an experience requires more than simply having it; knowing implies being able to identify, describe, and explain.” (p. 20).
- He proposed that not being a member of the group can facilitate knowing, giving four reasons for this.

1) individuals are often so enmeshed in their own experience that the adequate distance required to know their experience is not available; therefore, someone from the outside might more adequately conceptualize the experience.

2) Second, people are full of overlapping, confusing, ambivalent, mixed, and sometimes contradictory goals, motives, desires, thoughts, and feelings. Because of these features of the human experience, another might sometimes be able to see through the complexity in ways the individual cannot.

3) often others external to the experience might be able to appreciate the wider perspective, with its connections, causal patterns, and influences, than one also internal to the experience.

4) we hide ourselves from ourselves out of fear, self-protection, and guilt, from which it might be extremely difficult to disentangle. It might be those external to the experience that more clearly see what is occurring and can override the self-deception. From this discussion, it is clear that there are both positive and negative aspects of insider and outsider status. A prudent researcher must be aware of these aspects in relation to his or her particular status to the group under study.

(Fay 1996)

Can the Researcher ever be truly an 'Outsider'?

'The process of qualitative research is very different from that of quantitative research. As qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant "researcher" role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between. The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords.'

Dwyer, S. & Buckle, J. 2009, p. 6

Insider- Outsider: The use of a Hyphen

'Drawing on Aoki's (1996) work, insider and outsider are understood as a binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be bridged or brought together to conjoin with a hyphen. This hyphen can be viewed not as a path but as a dwelling place for people. This hyphen acts as a third space, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction. Hall (1990) stated that "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within" (p. 223). Our position as qualitative researchers is from the standpoint of being "with" our participants. The "with" is in "relation to" our participants and can suggest a tensioned space. Sonya found herself writing both "we" and "us," and "they" and "them" during data analysis. It is not that she sometimes saw herself as an outsider instead of an insider; rather, it acknowledges that not all experiences can be shared by everyone in any given population.'

Dwyer, S. & Buckle, J. 2009, p. 60

A Combination of Perspectives?

'In her discussion on positioning the researcher, Acker (2000) questioned when we know we are inside or outside or somewhere in between (§ 1). She concluded that the insider-outsider question cannot be fully resolved and that perhaps it is necessary not to bring this issue to a close but to find a way to work creatively within the tensions created by the debate. She suggested that we follow the lead of other researchers and attempt to find a way to be both.

A theme throughout human history is our powerful and persistent tendency to frame complex issues as a struggle between two opposing sides (Gould, 2003). Surely the time has come to abandon these constructed dichotomies and embrace and explore the complexity and richness of the space between entrenched perspectives. As qualitative researchers we are uniquely equipped for the challenge.'

A Collaborative Approach?

In their work 'Insider-Outsider Research in Qualitative Inquiry: New Perspectives on Method and Meaning' Court and Abbas explore the history, practice and benefits of a collaborative approach, advocating research partnerships, arguing that...

- insider-outsider research incorporates elements of ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, and case study
- Researchers may characterize their work as one of the above - but they have always been classified as ethnographers & researching culture entails, among other things, gathering narratives
- This entails understanding participants' lived experiences (phenomenology) as an important goal and taking participants and their culture as a form of evidence to make "naturalistic generalizations" and establish theoretical explanations for findings
- Insider-outsider research is genuinely qualitative in that it seeks to get to the heart of a person or a people, to hear and to convey people's stories, aided by the holistic viewpoint afforded by the merger of insider's and outsider's understanding.
- The best chance of approaching understandings of a culture is with an insider and an outsider researcher working together in a mutually respectful partnership developed and founded on trust, discussion, and ongoing examination of their insider and outsider perspectives

Court, D. and Abbas, R. K. (2022)

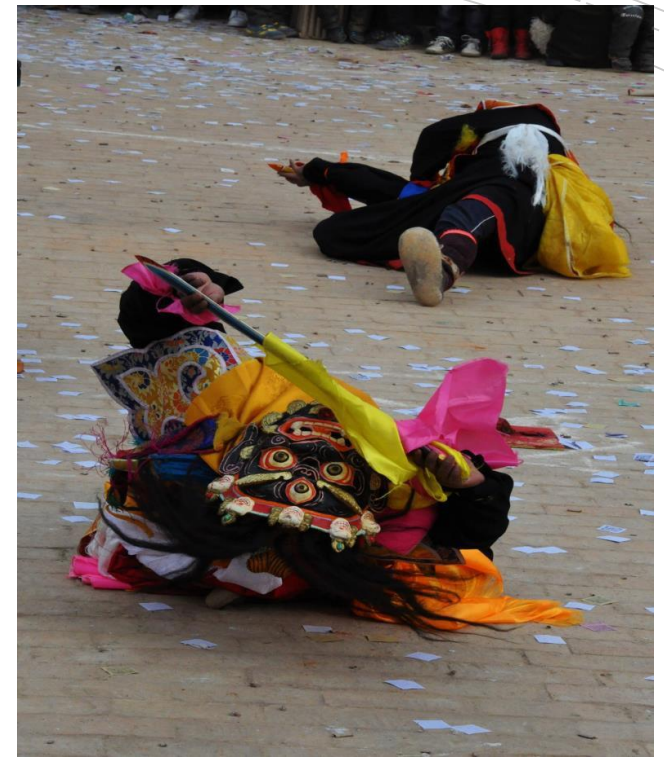
Case Study - A Collaborative Approach

Insider-Outsider

Tibetan woman from a village local to the *cham* (ritual dance) as insider-outsider participant-researcher

Outsider-Insider

English-Welsh woman from Cardiff University as outsider-insider participant-researcher at the *cham*



Photos: Dr Dawn Collins, Rebong 2009



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