

Discuss the relative merits and demerits of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives in the study of religions. Is a scholar from either perspective better qualified to study/interpret/explain religions?

Introduction

For this essay, as a new postgraduate student, I aim to evaluate the relative merits and demerits of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives in the study of religion. I hope this will help inform my navigation, adaptation and adoption of an acceptable research stance as I move forward into 2025 to undertake my own research into the nature and impact of spiritual experiences within the helping professions. A stance and an approach that are compassionate, empathetic and respectful of the diversity of beliefs, practices, and intersectionality that exist in our post-modern world. Research that is morally, ethically and objectively legitimate, robust and valid for the inquiry, interpretation and explanation of religious and spiritual studies.

First, insider and outsider perspectives in the study of religion are considered. Second, the relative merits and demerits of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives are discussed, recognising that all is not as simple as it might seem. Third, I draw attention to the space in between 'inside' and 'outside'. Next, I consider ways to mitigate, bridge or integrate perspectives creating a more holistic approach to research in this field. In conclusion I reflect on my learning and identify areas for my ongoing development in studying, interpreting and explaining religion and spiritual experiences.

Insider and outsider perspectives in the study of religion

Religion itself is less the topic of debate here. However, definitions may help. Chryssides and Geaves (2007) recognise this. Insiders and outsiders of various religions rarely see themselves clearly and easily as a dictionary definition. Terms like 'faith' and 'worship' (Chryssides and Geaves 2007) are not necessarily understood by all practitioners of the varied world religions we have today. Some religions uphold a supernatural being, others do not. They suggest a distinction between 'substantive' (what religion *is*) (Otto, Tylor) and 'functionalist' (what it *does*) (Yinger). Further, it can be seen as an embodiment of writings, traditions, beliefs and mysteries, 'the ultimate concern' (Tillich) having 'salient features' amidst a range of categorisations, classifications and typologies (Weber, Willis, Smart, Gombrich, Alston). Religions are not static or stable (Davis 2017), nor are the contexts in which they, and we, evolve.

McCutcheon (1999) believes that the consideration of insider or outsider, to whatever degree or extreme, is "*one of the most important issues confronting scholars who study human behaviour, institutions and belief systems*" (1999: vii). Together with theory from linguistics, anthropology, and supporting terminology and techniques McCutcheon (1999) identifies theme to highlight differing stances in the debate. The autonomy of religious experience that he associates with the phenomenological approach. The reductionist stance, more for the scientific and possibly secular outsider. 'Methodological agnosticism' drawing on descriptive, unchallenged, insider accounts. Finally he presents a case for reflexivity where scholar and subject work in relationship, aware of own internal processes as well as varying degrees of participation (McCutcheon 1999; Knott 2010).

Chryssides and Gregg (2019) advance McCutcheon's work (1999). They advocate a more nuanced, relational understanding of 'insideness' and 'outsideness'. It goes beyond, binary

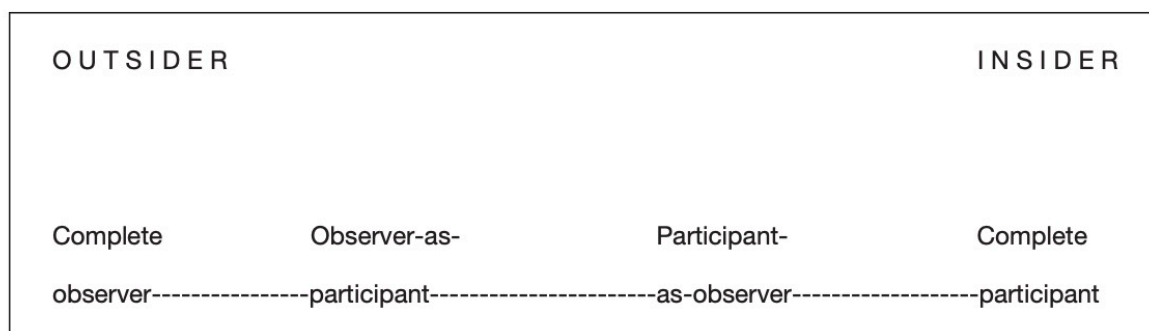
distinctions and restrictions. They contend that insider and outsider identities are more fluid, shaped by personal, relational and social factors, culture and context. They question boundaries. Should we just accept the post-modern contention that there are 'simply a range of subjective perspectives which we can only acknowledge?' (2019: vii). The insider and outsider debate, the researcher's 'position', 'perspectives' taken, 'methodologies' adopted, and host audience 'familiarity' is 'much more complex' (2019: vii).

The 'emic' and the 'etic'

Anthropologists took on the idea of "emic" (insider) and "etic" (outsider) etymologically developed from the world of linguistics (Pike 1967). The emic arises 'from studying behaviour as from inside the system' (Pike 1967: 37); the etic perspective, as from the outside. (Knott 2010: 245–246). Pike (1967) suggests both approaches are valuable. The etic allows an overview of different behaviours occurring whereby events, symbols and analysis can illustrate some understanding and knowledge from around the world within different cultures. The emic offers insight into something of the whole of a specific culture, a more detailed subjective analysis of the behaviours of those within it, and potentially a scientific basis for comparative behavioural prediction, although, as Pike notes, this will only ever be partial and never fully valid.

It may be that we move between 'insider' and 'outsider' in our studies. Both have relative merits and demerits and at certain times one stance may be more favoured and valuable than the other. Augmenting the debate Knott (2010) focusing on critiques and emerging approaches suggests that the positions might exist more on a spectrum than be juxtapositions. She presents four case studies referenced against her suggested positions (Figure 1) offering a broader openness of perspective moving between insider and outsider with the possibility of incorporating the more secular, scientific and reflexive.

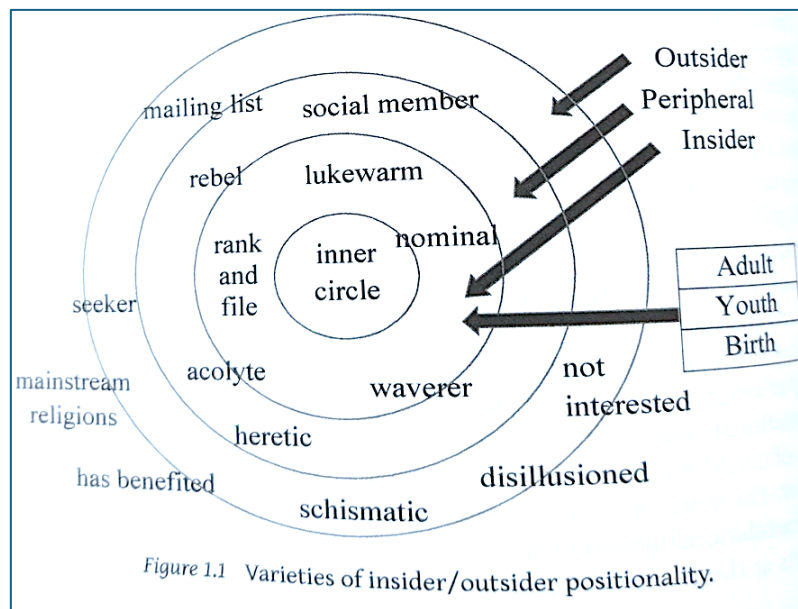
Figure 1: Knott's Model of Insider Outsider Relationships



Knott (2010: 246)

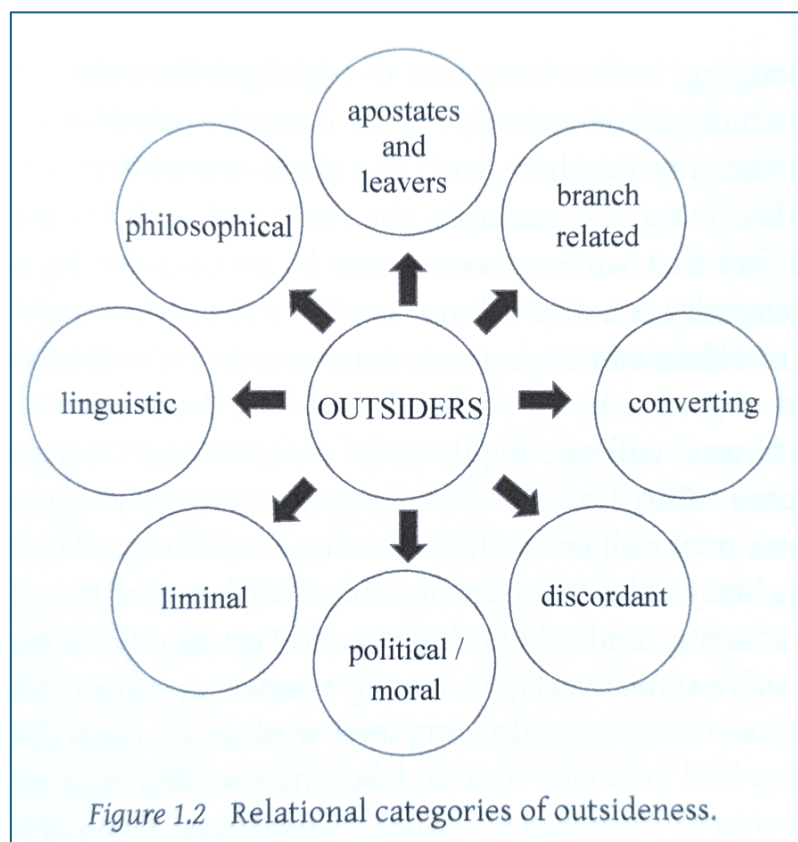
Chryssides and Gregg (2019) extend the work done by Knott (2010), positioning the role of scholar and subject outside of an 'either or' bind. They present two figures (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Figure 2: Varieties of insider/outsider positionality



Chryssides and Gregg (2019: 22)

Figure 3: Relational categories of outsidersness



Chryssides and Gregg (2019: 23)

The relative merits and demerits of 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives

Traditionally the 'insider' can be seen as someone who 'belongs', in some way, to the religion they are studying. There may also be physical, emotional, mental and spiritual qualities of 'being', 'doing', and 'becoming' alongside belonging (Willcock 1998; Ennals et

al 2015). Conversely, will the 'outsider' not belong? Will they be alien to the individuals, communities and religion they are studying. They may have no particular religious beliefs or may be a member of another religion. Can they report objectively or only remain distant and dispassionate. 'Insiders' may well be aligned, to a greater or lesser extent, to the religion's beliefs, traditions and practices and yet the definition becomes one of a more extensive range of possible positions of belongingness considering affiliation, non-affiliation, and disaffiliation together with "different modes of accepting and rejecting various forms of religious life" (Chryssides and Gregg 2019: vii).

Insiders may therefore have greater access to the subjective experiences of others and a more nuanced understanding of rituals, beliefs, and practices. They have the potential to capture the authentic voice of religious practitioners and to represent them to others both within and outside of the religion in ways that other 'insiders' will sympathise and empathise with. The 'insider' as 'participant' and 'researcher' can, therefore, hope to preserve and respectfully interpret the cultural and spiritual heritage of their own tradition. However, how open will they be to disclosure? Will the scholar on the inside be closed to extant to the social pressures and cultural changes around them, such as the Church of England and recent abuse scandals arising in part from protectionist behaviour (Sinmaz 2024).

Geaves (2019) discusses why seeker and scholar cannot simply align with the ideas of insider or outsider questioning how deeply researchers should integrate into a subject's practices, their participation and disclosure. He coins the term "*strategic temporary insider*". In addition, Moore (2019) shares a personal perspective on researching the People's Temple. She shows how personal involvement impacts on the insider/outsider lens so blurring boundaries. Wilson (2019) reflects further on this illustrating how a researcher's identity and faith position influence relational boundaries, especially when researching religious communities distinct from one's own. Accessing insider worlds is explored by Jacobs (2019), where outsiders navigate access to insider communities, noting that entry is more about reconciling perspectives than merely finding gatekeepers.

Psychological bias, such as the 'halo' or 'horns' effect might arise, consciously or unconsciously (ACAPS, 2016). Psychological projection from within might limit what is reported without (Johnson 2017). Fear may inhibit the telling of the truth. The 'insider' may be influenced by the very 'insideness' of their own allegiance to a particular religion and so unconscious bias might affect lines of inquiry and reporting. Even when it is seen, heard and felt as it is, both insider and outsider will be making their own judgements, applying their own filters and biases and so drawing their own conclusions. Is it all perhaps just a matter of belief? Bias, conscious or not, may initiate protectionism, restricted disclosure, and perhaps even dishonesty and unethical reporting. Insider scholars may unintentionally, or intentionally, prioritise what is sacred to them, their beliefs, traditions, and practices, over and above rational critical inquiry.

'Insiders' may have more theological leanings. They risk exclusivity. Inner and outer sanctums might be restricted only to those 'inside'. Academic neutrality may be inhibited and limited. 'Methodological agnosticism' aims to maintain observers' neutrality (McCutcheon 1999). Potentially 'outsiders' can associate with colleagues of their own and other disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, sociology, neuroscience and psychology bringing new insights.

The scholar of religion as an 'outsider' has critical distance as an ally. This may minimise bias and retain higher degrees of objectivity. Their broader position and a more defined

discipline-centric role could offer opportunity for comparative analysis and afford less constrained opportunities in identifying themes and patterns present in other religions.

Reductionist approaches suggest a more 'outsider' focused approach using objective study focusing on the predictability of human behaviour. Pye (2000) advocates for 'participant observation' as well as 'observant participation'. He believes that "the study of religions fieldwork never ends" (Pye 2000: 69) suggesting that the naiveté a practiced scholar of religion can bring *"can discover things which are only half known to the intellectuals of the country itself. It may seem that such discoveries occur by chance."* (Pye 2000: 69).

The value of professional distance might lead to detachment, lack of empathy, and so engender superficiality, misunderstanding and discrimination. Phenomenologists argue that the debate is inherently theological, it has bias to what is sacred to the Christian and impartiality and critical distance is questioned. McIntyre (in McCutcheon 1999: 49) sees a great divide between the sceptic scholar and religious believer.

The 'outsider', maintaining a degree of distance, might however risk misinterpretation or reductionism when analysing another's religion, beliefs, practices and experiences. Singh (1991) raises a key issue regarding Western writers who "attempt to interpret and understand Sikhism is an outsider's or non-participant's endeavour . . . Primarily, religion is an area which is not easily accessible to the outsider, foreigner or non-participant" (1991: 3). They may impose, consciously or not, something of their own values, and socio-cultural norms, which in turn may influence the judgements made and reported.

At the extreme of being a complete observer there may be a tendency to reductionism. Edwards (in McCutcheon 1999: 207) states that,

"For many people, I realise, reduction agendas look like strategies designed to deprive them of the power of choice. But redescription does not entail displacement; there is scope for choice."

By contrast, and in support of a more empathetic approach Godlove (1999: 173) quotes Wilkins (1981: 707) arguing against reductionism,

"When we allow the "ostensible" meaning of religious language to be taken hostage to the etiquette of disinterested secondary discourse... not only do we prune the list of things we talk about, we also narrow the circle of people we will talk to, or better, of those who will talk to us. And that is a great loss, a kind of self-imposed deafness."

Furthermore knowledge, privilege and power dynamics may lead to derogatory and discriminatory reporting and further marginalisation, or engagement of certain religious groups. This may also lead to a want for more covert research and ethical issues are then raised. The extent to which the researcher involvement and transparency is discussed by Dallam (2019) opens up ethical considerations about covert research which might 'mimic' insider perspectives, and maybe, more insidiously, seek to expose perceived non-standard or socially unacceptable practices.

The work of Festinger et al (1956) is quoted as one such unethical study where the researchers infiltrating a UFO cult believing the end of the world was nigh. Knott (2010) further considers the ethics of position with regard to complete insider and complete outsider dynamics across a spectrum of 'insider-ness' and 'outsider-ness' (Figure 1).

The space between

Both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' have the potential to bring new knowledge, diversity and intersectionality challenges. Both may have privileges within their own communities, the opportunity for more or less diversity, shared history, stronger 'group think', and safety in numbers. They may not share history, 'group think', or safety in numbers, at least when within relationship with the host community, and these could be both blessings and curses in disguise. There is then a space between.

It would seem then that all is definitely not as simple as a binary and juxtaposed distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider'. It would seem there is room for manoeuvre within and without of the space between. Hoel (2019) suggests that the researcher/subject relationships are intersectional. Influenced by gender, age, race and class as well as other protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) and advocates a collaborative and less binary model.

The anthropological method of Bowie (2019) introduces a more cognitive, empathetic and engaged approach where researcher identity and vulnerability have to be considered. She explores how researchers' interactions with subjects such as within British spiritualism blur boundaries between participant and observer. Issues of identity bring challenge, choice and change to both researcher and the researched.

Chryssides and Gregg (2019) argue that by the very virtue of engaging in participant observation, the researcher, even in a small degree, becomes part of the phenomenon and makes some degree of difference, however, small, to it, comma, even if it is no more, then adding one extra statistic, if attendance is counted, or making a donation if contributions are sought. The participant observer goes inside. Schofield (2019) presents the idea of 'edges of inside'. This seems especially relevant for individuals who've engaged in some religious practises but remain partially outside the tradition.

Eccles (2019) examines women who switch to more liberal or New Age practises and suggests that this flexibility blurs secular and sacred boundaries. Undertaking longer-term individual and community research from different perspectives, such as anthropological, ethnographic or even autoethnographic may be more revealing of the behaviours, beliefs and changes people experience when aligned to, moving through, and going beyond any particular religious demarcations. Ex-members of new religious movements like Scientology have varied exit paths and ongoing connections with former beliefs, again challenging the binary 'fixed' nature and suggestion of insider or outsider (Gregg and Thomas 2019).

In re-examining the 'emic' and 'etic' Sutcliffe (2019) also considers New Age beliefs. He highlights the challenges of defining insiders and outsiders and their respective insideness and outsideness qualities and values in more fluid spiritual movements perhaps where religion per se might be less than obvious or even absent. He seeks to ask 'how' as well as 'by whom' recognising the emic/etic distinction offers 'cognitive power' to ascertain knowledge that has otherwise been obscured by 'cultural-political' interests "*mobilized by 'insider' and 'outsider' discourse.*" (Sutcliffe 2019: 30).

Spence et al (2019) discuss the complexity of religious identity raising questions as to the relative insideness and outsideness of the participants and their full, partial, non, or even challenge to their religions credo and stated beliefs. Lynch (2019) addresses a changing

insider outside a distinction considering Post Vatican II Catholicism arguing for a Catholicism that is moving more into a Modern Age, with groups such as SSPX challenging traditional church boundaries.

Online ex-member communities like the Kerista, the 1950s utopian community from New York, maintain interest and community beyond membership challenging the academic stance and definitions of purely insider or outsider (Cusack 2019). Online only religious communities create even greater challenges for non-polarisation. What is 'real' can now so easily be masked through fake representations, unethical intrusion, even AI algorithms deciphering insider and outsider knowledge for future exploitation.

Finally, Geertz (1999: 51) provides his alternative position. He argues that, instead of seeing inside and outside positions as opposites, evolving either/or from the researcher, perhaps it is all a question degree. He refers to Heinz Kohut's 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' and concludes, "*catching an illusion, seeing a joke-or, as I have suggested, reading a poem-that it is like achieving communion*" (Geertz 1999: 63).

Approaches that may help to mitigate, bridge or integrate these perspectives

The 'insider' and 'outsider' debate to date shows that the stance, position, and perspective we take as scholars of religion and spiritual experience, combined with the host individuals and groups we wish to study, interpret and explain, with whatever chosen discipline and methodological approach we assume, is complicated by many variables. We exist within complex social, cultural inter- and intra- relational contexts. These shape our values, beliefs and practices.

The empathetic study of private religious experiences is offered to help bridge insider/outsider gaps. Harvey (2003) examines the challenges of post-graduates studying religions as "insider" or "outsider." Does belief aid understanding or do observers offer unique insights. Participant observation over insider participation or distant observation is a suggested approach. Yet this position requires preparation.

Harvey's (2003) studies with Maori suggests "guesthood" as a practice to foster relational depth, encouraging both researchers and the researched to engage authentically with each other, communities and traditions. Further he suggests that this custom for building relationship and determining degrees of acceptance, or not, of friend or foe, offers the researcher the opportunity to meet the subjects of research in their own safe space, first in the open, then inside, as a guest.

However, over time, might familiarity breed contempt? I would argue that whatever the degree of insider or outsider, the relationship must attempt a recognition of co-existence, and from this be generative, co-creative and co-productive. While contextually different this is very similar to the concept of contracting in therapeutic and consultancy settings. He argues for methods, positions, situatedness and approaches that ameliorate as best as possible the "*concerns about the foundations, conduct, discourse and outcomes of academic research that require a response in both methodological and ethical terms*" of the researched or subjects of research (Harvey 2003: 127).

Developing reflexive and collaborative methodologies, such as insider-outsider partnerships or autoethnography, might deepen understanding of diverse faiths and individual and collective experiences. Empathetic engagement or reflexivity, where researchers are self-aware of their positionality. Bowie (2013) quotes Flood (2006: 50) who

argues for a model in which the explanation of religion is “the exposition of a meaning rather than the location of a cause”. For Bowie (2013) the field of inquiry needs to be delimited in advance of applying an anti-reductionist methodological approach that of cognitive, empathetic engagement, which, she adds implies ‘commitment’. Of Fabian (1983) and the term ‘coevalness’, that the anthropologist and interlocutor exist in the same time Bowie (2013: 709) says that,

“Knowledge is a not an object, but an intersubjective process of creative engagement between individuals. It has a time-bound, material element—we co-exist in time and space in our communicative embodiment.”

Forming multi-disciplinary teams can provide varied perspectives, challenging the colonial biases inherent in traditional religious studies. Oviedo (2022) argues for multidisciplinary study of beliefs and believing. Scharmer’s approach in his Theory U ideas would suggest a similar approach bringing outsiders and insiders together to discover, through a prescribed process, contemplative practice, shared connection, the making of meaning and, to some extent, collective understanding (Scharmer 2009).

This work is further extended and enhanced from a socio-psycho-spiritual perspective by Ken Wilber’s integral theory. His work attempts to provide a “theory of everything”, in part transcendent and yet strangely humanistic, it has developed independent of material sciences search for the same. He provides a quadrant model framework in which, he believes, all observations and their integral relationships, can be located, related and understood. Scholefield (2019) believes this model can be applied specifically in religious and spiritual studies especially for those who declare to SBNR (spiritual but not religious). How remains, as yet, to be seen.

Figure 4: Integral Theory



Wilber 2000 from Bozesan 2011

Wilber's theory provides a framework for understanding human consciousness and development. It is believed to emphasise the progression towards an integrated existence. The four quadrants examine personal experiences, behaviours, shared values, and societies systems. ‘Levels’ highlight stages of awareness, ‘lines’ suggest specific capacities for growth and transient states of consciousness. These are intended to

reconnect individual consciousness with a transcendental reality. Mindfulness and spiritual practices are key resources to help enable development, personal and collective growth and spiritual evolution.

Scholefield (2019: 131) considers being on the edge of inside and quotes Lynn Davidman, who writes:

“By becoming self-reflexive about my own “sacred” spaces and practices, I was better able to see the many symbolic practices by which my respondents are comforted... Tradition, in contrast, focused on women who had made major life choices that were the opposite of mine... Here I found that although my emotions did not provide me with access to others’ similar feelings, some- times they actually afforded me insights into how my very different stance might be impeding my full understanding.” (Davidman 2002: 21, 23-24).

This theory may be significant for religious studies and the SNBR community as it integrates psychological, cultural, and institutional dimensions of religion, mirroring spiritual growth in many traditions. It offers a holistic perspective on how personal beliefs and collective practices intersect, fostering interfaith understanding and providing tools to analyse spirituality’s role in individual and societal development.

Reflexive approaches conceptualise religious scholarship as autobiographical. The anthropological method of Bowie (2019), reflexive in orientation, explores how researchers’ interactions with subjects such as within British spiritualism or followers of Amerindian cosmology. Boundaries blur between participant and observer.

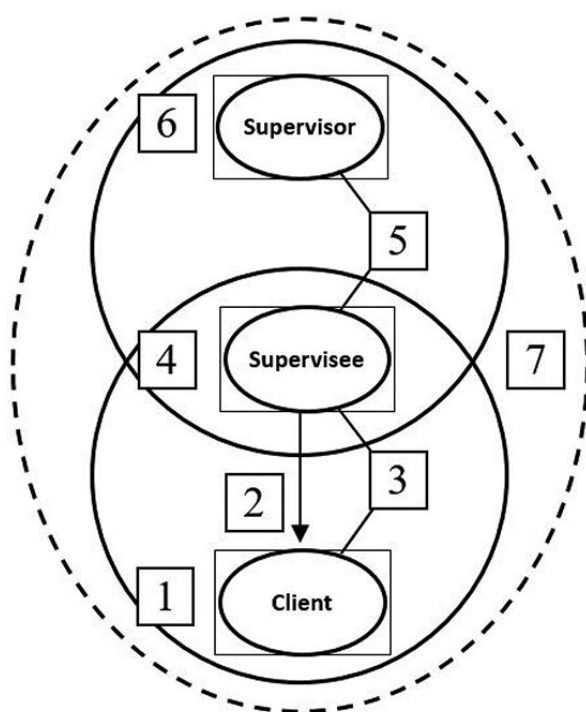
From the world of reflexive supervision Moore (2019) identifies the role our hidden body system plays in the unavoidable creation of empathetic connection. “Fuelled by emerging insights from neuroscience, we recognise that we are more profoundly connected with each other than previously thought. The mirror neuron system shows how we are hard-wired for empathy. Being empathic is not a choice we make. It is not a frame of mind in which we imagine what it would be like to be “in the shoes of someone in distress.” We actually feel the distress, which can become a gateway to understanding, through tuning into the emotional narrative between us.”

Of Flood (2006) Bowie (2013) notes the external account of a religion produced by a psychologist, sociologist, or anthropologist is generally “*antithetical to the internal claims of traditions*” (Flood 2006: 50), although it is the predominant model in both the natural and social sciences. Flood argues for a model in which the explanation of religion is “*the exposition of a meaning rather than the location of a cause*” (2006: 50). Flood distinguishes between first-order reasoning (the tradition), second-order reasoning—reflections on tradition—and third-order discourses, reasoning about the first two and so implicitly comparative (2006: 55–56).

Compassionate detached methodologies, such as Ellis and Bachelor’s Middle Way (2019) offers five principles of scepticism, provisionality, incrementality, agnosticism, and integration to explore values, belief and meaning. Narrative therapy (White and Epston 1990) and Drake’s (2019) integrative development programmes encourage exploration through narrative, dialogue, and discourse together with reframing perspectives especially when adopting a ‘clean’ stance (Sullivan and Rees 2008). Street epistemology (Boghossian 2014), helps navigate beliefs via a seven-stage process, helping to bridge the emic and etic gap as the outsider approaches the religious and spiritual world of the insider more rationally.

Much could be offered to the empathetic or reflexive etic or emic scholar from the knowledge base, discipline and social interactions of coaches, counsellors, supervisors and therapists. Robin Shohet and Peter Hawkins developed their Seven-Eyed model, a conversational approach, which considers a range of perspectives through dialogue and discourse to help supervisees better understand their own, and their clients, inner world, beliefs, values and behaviours be they religious, spiritual, both or neither. These approaches readily align to empathetic engagement or reflexivity, where researchers are self-aware of their positionality.

Figure 5: The Seven-Eyed Model of Hawkins and Shohet



- 7. The wider context
- 6. The supervisor
- 5. The supervision relationship
- 4. The supervisee
- 3. The supervisee-client relationship
- 2. The supervisee's interventions
- 1. The client

Hawkins and Shohet 2012

Researching these approaches in more detail, aligned to a more collaborative approach, researchers may better navigate the intricate interplay between our own position and the religious faiths, beliefs and experiences of others.

Summary conclusion

So, insider and/or outsider. Who might I be now? How do I want to be? What stance can I best take as a researcher of religious and spiritual experience in my chosen field?

How we choose to define, and enter into, the study of religion and its adherents, proponents, or opponents, we will have a stance, a position, a perspective. Personal histories, beliefs and values, attitudes, traits, behaviours, skills, knowledge, intelligence and even wisdom will shape our starting point potentially hindering or helping our chosen and perceived position.

For each scholar, either 'insider' or 'outsider', if in fact the absolute binary distinction can be truly made, the presence or absence of prior knowledge, familiarity, local connections and existing relationships will bring relative 'merits' and 'demerits' in their study, interpretation and explanation of religion.

As Pye (2000) surmises *“The increasing irrelevance of a firm ideological or religious starting base for the specialist in the study of religions means that the old paradigm of “home” and “field” or “insider” and “outsider” is seriously weakened. By contrast, the recognition of the intricate relationship between participation, observation and reflection, wherever one is, and the increasing possibilities for mobility between diverse yet comparable fields amount to a new methodological paradigm for the study of religion.”* (Pye 2000: 79).

References

- ACAPS, (2016). COGNITIVE BIASES. Available at: https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Technical_notes/acaps_technical_brief_cognitive_biases_march_2016.pdf.
- Boghossian, P. (2014). *A Manual for Creating Atheists*. Pitchstone Publishing (US&CA).
- Bozesan, M. (2011). *The Future of Wall Street: An Investor's Perspective from the Intersection of Capital, Philanthropy, Business, and Human Evolution*
- Bowie, F. (2013). Building Bridges, Dissolving Boundaries: Toward a Methodology for the Ethnographic Study of the Afterlife, Mediumship, and Spiritual Beings. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 81(3), 698–733. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lft023>.
- Bowie, F. (2019). *Negotiating blurred boundaries: ethnographic and methodological considerations* in Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*. Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd. (110 – 129).
- Chryssides, G. D. and Gregg, S. E. (2019). *Relational religious lives: beyond insider/outsider binaries in the study of religion* in Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*. Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd. (3 – 29).
- Chryssides, G.D. and Geaves, R. (2013). *The study of religion: an introduction to key ideas and methods*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*. Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Cusack, C. M. (2019). *Both inside and outside: "ex-members" of new religions and spiritualities and the maintenance of community and identity on the internet*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (393-416). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Dallam, M. W. (2019). *Research ethics beyond the boundaries of right and wrong*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (3-29). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Davidman, L. (2002). *Truth, Subjectivity and Ethnographic Research*. In J.V. Spickard, J. S. Landres and M. B. McGuire (eds), *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, 17-26. New York: New York University Press.
- Davis, T. (2017). *What Is the Academic Study of Religion? – Department of Religious Studies*. [online] religion.ua.edu. Available at: <https://religion.ua.edu/student-essays/what-is-the-academic-study-of-religion/>.
- Drake, D. (2019). *Using Integrative Development to Create a Coaching Culture in a Professional Services Firm*. In Hamlin, R. G., Andrea D. Ellinger, A. D. and Jones, J.

- (eds) Evidence-Based Initiatives for Organizational Change and Development, Vol 2. S.L.: Business Science.
- Eccles, J. B. (2019). Reflexive and holistic switchers: older women/newer commitments. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (330-349). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Edwards, T. (1999). Religion, Explanation, and the Askesis of Inquiry. In McCutcheon, R. (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. A&C Black. 197-212
- Electricalspirituality.com. (2024). Available at: <https://www.electricalspirituality.com/ken-wilbers-the-fourth-turning/> [Accessed 17 Nov. 2024].
- Ellis, R.M. and Batchelor, S. (2019). *The Buddha's middle way: experiential judgement in his life and teaching*. Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Ennals, P., Fortune, T., Williams, A., & D'Cruz, K. (2015). Shifting occupational identity: doing, being, becoming and belonging in the academy. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 35(3), 433–446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2015.1107884>
- Flood, G. (1999). *Beyond Phenomenology*. A&C Black.
- Flood, G. (2006). Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 74(1), pp.47–58.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfj012>.
- Geaves, R. (2019). *The death pangs of the insider/outsider dichotomy in the study of religion*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (151-170). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Geertz, C. (1999). "From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding in McCutcheon, R. (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. A&C Black.
- Godlove, T. F. (1994). *Religious discourse and first-person authority*. From Method & Theory in the Study of Religion 6, 1-4, 147-161. In McCutcheon, R. (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. A&C Black.
- GOV.UK (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. [online] [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk). Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.
- Harvey, G. (2003). GUESTHOOD AS ETHICAL DECOLONISING RESEARCH METHOD. *Numen*, 50(2), pp.125–146. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/156852703321506132>.
- Hawkins, P. and Shohet, R. (2012). *Supervision in the helping professions*. 4th ed. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill / Open University Press.
- Hinnells, J.R. (2005). *The Routledge companion to the study of religion*. London ; New York: Routledge.

- Hoel, N. (2019). *Taking the body seriously, taking relationalities seriously: an embodied and relational approach to ethnographic research in the study of (lived) religion*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (151-170). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Johnson, R.A. (2016). *Inner gold: understanding psychological projection*. Asheville, North Carolina: Chiron Publications.
- Knott, K. (2005). *Insider/outsider perspectives* in Hinnells, J.R. (2005). *The Routledge companion to the study of religion*. London; New York: Routledge. (243 – 258)
- McIntyre, A. (1964) Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing? In Faith and Philosophers, Hick, J. (Ed.). London, Macmillan from McCutcheon, R. (1999). *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*. A&C Black.
- Moore, B. (2017). *Reflexive Supervision*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Moore, R. (2019). *Taking sides: on the (im)possibility of participant observation*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (151-170). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- O'Donohue, J. (2005). *Beauty: the invisible embrace*. New York: Perennial.
- Pike, K.L. (1967). *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behaviour*. (2nd Ed.) The Hague, Mouton.
- Pye, M. (2000). *Participation, Observation and Reflection: An Endless Method*. In Ethnography is a Heavy Rite Studies of Comparative Religion in Honor of Juha Pentikäinen. Nils G. Holm, Hannu Kilpeläinen, Risto Pulkkinen, Veikko Antonen, Ilkka Pyysiäinen, Anna-Leena Siikala (eds). ÅBO 2000 Religionsvetenskapliga skrifter No 47
- Robert Wilkins (1981: 707)
- Saunders, P. and For, C. (2011). *When prophecy fails*. St Leonards, N.S.W.: Centre for Independent Studies.
- Scharmer, C. O. (2009). *Theory U*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Singh, D. (1991). *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*. New Delhi, Sehgal Publishers
- Sinmaz, E. (2024). *Justin Welby says he will step down as archbishop of Canterbury*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/nov/12/justin-welby-step-down-archbishop-canterbury>.
- Sullivan, W. and Rees, J. (2008). *Clean language: revealing metaphors and opening minds*. Carmarthen, Wales: Crown House Pub.
- Sutcliffe, S. J. (2019). The emics and etics of religion: what we know, how we know it and why it matters. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate*:

New perspectives in the study of religion, (3-29). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.

White, M. and Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. 1st ed. New York: Norton.

Wilber, K. (2000). *A theory of everything: an integral vision for business, politics, science, and spirituality*. Boston: Shambhala.

Wilcock, A. A. (1998). *Doing, being, becoming*. Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 65, 248–257.

Wilson, T. (2019). *Who researches? Who changes? Christian autoethnography and Muslim pupil identity in a Church of England primary school*. In Chryssides, G.D. and Gregg, S.E. (2019). *The insider/outsider debate: New perspectives in the study of religion*, (151-170). Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, Ct: Equinox Publishing Ltd.

Otto, Tylor) and 'functionalist' (what it does) (Yinger). Further, it can be seen as an embodiment of writings, traditions, beliefs and mysteries, 'the ultimate concern' (Tillich) having 'salient features' amidst a range of categorisations, classifications and typologies (Weber, Willis, Smart, Gombrich, Alston).

Extras...

Words

Witness – active

Issues of identity – changing identity

Religion is not stable or static – Tim quote

Nor are we – identity – context

Belief – knowing – wisdom ???

Testimonies

Religious: A drop of water cannot comprehend the ocean, yet without it, there is no ocean.”
– Buddhist proverb

Secular: “The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.” Robertson Davies

McCutcheon’s demarkations

Chryssides and Gregg’s insights and augmentations

My own...

Further considerations

Identity

Intersectionality

Gender

Sexuality

Relational diversity

Insiders as outsiders

Outsiders as insiders

The idea of ontological turn – Bowie, Heywood

Chryssides and Gregg (2019) advance McCutcheon (1999) to further illustrate that insider and outsider identities are not fixed. Instead, they are much more fluid, shaped by personal, relational and social factors, culture and context. These can occur in the context of religious and spiritual exploitation, and spiritual exploration and again fit within a larger field of human interaction, engagement and relationship, in time and through time, maybe even with the environment, the planet and the universe as cosmological partners beyond the realms of our understanding.

Already, the position, perspective, underpinning theory, and methodological frameworks, together with study, interpretation and explanation of religion may well arise from, and derive, a diversity of findings, potentially encouraging academic and host community agreement, disagreement, acceptance and/or rejection.

An alternative 'reflexive' approach suggests self-awareness, researcher context, and opens up the debate to be inclusive of diversity and intersectional issues, power and status.

But we have to start somewhere. It may well be that there is no wrong or right perspective, inside or outside, if indeed these perspectives really can exist outside of the relative, and certainly never absolute. It may be more that there are more appropriate, or less relevant positions for researchers to adopt and adapt in developing relationships with individuals and host communities in the scholarly study of religion in time and over time. Perhaps we start more etic, become more emic, and then return home, changed, more learned, with new thoughts, new feelings, new experiences to share, whatever methodological stance we took on the way there and back.

'Secular and scientific' approaches have emerged where advocates for the 'outsider' stance reject assumptions of shared experience and take religion as a comparative, universal, social phenomenon. However, these rejections may hinder disclosure.

Heywood