

insider-outsider approaches



overview

- the 'problem & terms
- spectrum of approaches & evaluation
- discussion questions

‘the problem’

“...the problem is whether, and to what extent, someone can study, understand, or explain the beliefs, words, or actions of another.”

McCutcheon, 'General Introduction.' McCutcheon (ed.) *The Insider-Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion. A Reader*. Continuum (2005) p.2

emic & etic viewpoints

**“...etic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system,” and the
“emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from inside the system.”**

Pike, *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*. Mouton (1967) p.37, quoted in McCutcheon, p.17

Junker & Gold's spectrum / continuum



[Gold, 'Roles in Sociological Field Observations.' *Social Forces*. 36 \(1958\)](#)

discussion question (i)

How does the 'study of religions' differ from religious education?

discussion question (ii)

Why should 'study of religion(s)' scholars strive to maintain **objectivity** and **neutrality** in their research?

discussion question (iii)

What role does empathy play in the academic study of religion? How might 'study of religions' scholars strive to understand the experiences of religious practitioners while maintaining a value-free orientation?

discussion question (iv)

What challenges do individuals with deeply held beliefs (or non-beliefs) face when studying religions other than their own? How might they confront these challenges to achieve a more thorough and less distorted understanding of the subject matter?

discussion question (v)

evaluate:

“..all scholarship has an autobiographical aspect which is often overlooked or sometimes outright ignored and disguised.”

McCutcheon, 'General Introduction.' McCutcheon (ed.) *The Insider-Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion. A Reader*. Continuum (2005) p.9

discussion question (vi)

Identify an aspect of a religion to which you belong, or with which you are familiar (e.g. a ritual, a sacred object or a custom). Why might it seem strange to an 'outsider', and how might you make its strangeness familiar?