

Methods of Working with Black and Minority Ethnic Older Women

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Outline of the presentation

1. Researching older black and minority ethnic women: my identity
2. Insider outsidersness and the notion of the 'third space'
3. Working with black and minority ethnic women: the ethnographic self
4. Developing a culturally sensitive research framework
5. Working with black and minority ethnic women as a vehicle for social and political change.

Researching older black and minority ethnic women...my identity and background

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Ethnic and cultural socialisation
- Religion – secular background
- Working class background
- Education
- Feminist politics
- Why research across ethnicities...?

A lack of attention to ethnicity in research...

- Increases the invisibility of those who are already marginalised in society
- Reinforces centrality of western medicalised (Euro/American) ideologies and practices
- Produces unrepresentative research findings
- Political agenda – visibility of all women
- Disrupt ethnocentric boundaries of insider/outsider

Insider/outsider as binaries: 3 assumptions

Insider

- Shared membership of aspects of socio-cultural group.
- Understands meaning of behaviours, values & beliefs.
- Socialised into nuances of ethnic/cultural language.

Outsider

- Interests and priorities may be dissimilar.
- May not fully understand behaviours, values and beliefs. Pre-conceptions about the group.
- Not socialised into nuances of ethnic/cultural language.

Problematizing the insider outsider argument

- Creates the argument that researcher and participant should share ethnic and cultural backgrounds
- May inadvertently re-create ethnocentric notions of identity – essentialises characteristics of ethnic and cultural identity and may reinforce whiteness as the ‘norm’ and minority ethnic as the ‘other’
- Constructs identities and statuses as static rather than fluctuating.

Problematizing insider/outsider distinctions: some research participant assumptions about my ethnic background

- I did not share their ethnic and cultural traditions
- Secular - so cannot understand/empathise with religious affiliation
- Whiteness perceived to be an 'invisible' ethnicity. Paradoxically this increased trust – perceived to be outside of the ethnic group and social networks
- Participants felt they needed to educate me – assumption I would not share similar experiences so needed to provide more detail.

Problematizing insider/outsider distinctions: some research participant assumptions about my ethnic background

- Age – I was younger so this often meant participant's described their experiences in more detail - because they assumed I was 'too young to know'.
- Othering – due to ethnic differences I was sometimes constructed as the 'other'. For example when talking about protecting skin from the sun:

Marie and Jane (Afro Caribbean, age 60 +)

- (...) you find that 'our' skin is really ...might be darker but you hardly find a lot of wrinkles in 'our' faces. People say 'blimey you haven't got a lot of wrinkles', and you find that white people have a lot of wrinkles. The skin that 'we' getthe skin that 'we' have (Marie) Cause we don't go out in the sun you know? (Jane) Well black people don't sit in the sun (Marie).

Working with black and minority ethnic women: diverse knowledge claims

- In Western society some knowledge claims are dismissed and others prioritised.
- This is an issue for researchers who may inadvertently prioritise knowledge that maintains what is constructed as legitimate

Working with black and minority ethnic women: diverse knowledge claims

- The identities, experiences, and knowledge claims of researcher, interpreter, and research participant move within and between cultural spaces and meet in the 'third space' (Bhabha 1990, 1994).

Notion of the 'third space' (Bhabha 1990,1994; Khan 1998).

- A 'third space' (Bhabha 1990,1994; Khan 1998) where identities and selves of researcher and participant interact.
- Knowledge and identity claims intersect, create new dialogue – potential to disrupt hegemonic stereotypes.
- As a tool of analysis it enables researchers to theorise the 'in-between reality' that is 'marked by shifting psychic, cultural, and territorial boundaries'(Khan 1998: 464).

Interpretation and the development of knowledge and understanding in the 'third space': 2 examples

1. Meanings attached to language change across culture, ethnicity, geography, and between languages.

For example...

- English language tends to be more constrained, limited and less expressive than Urdu/Punjabi. This means that the emotional charge and degree of significance attached to particular issues may be underplayed when translated into English.

Interpretation and the development of knowledge and understanding in the 'third space': 2 examples

2. The biography of the interpreter and her/his relationship with the research participant's

For example...

- Age, religion, status in local community /group may affect what is said, what is left unsaid, what is appropriate.
- It may not be appropriate for the interpreter to ask particular questions due to age differences, for example.

Working with black and minority ethnic older women: the ethnographic self

- Significance of the body/physical markers of identity
- Appearance - clothing etc. e.g. acceptable attire (that denotes respect) differs across ethnicity, culture, religion
- Position/territories/space (especially in participant observation)
- Body contact - acceptability of

See: Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*. London: Sage.

Wray, S. and Bartholomew, M. (2010) 'Some reflections on outsider and insider identities in ethnic and migrant qualitative research'. *Migration Letters*, 7(1): 7-16.

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Working with black and minority ethnic older women: the ethnographic self

- Range of Interaction cues - conversation, gaps, eye contact, facial expressions etc.
- Possibility of misinterpretation e.g. what is polite/impolite/acceptable
- Body language

Working with black and minority ethnic older women: developing a culturally sensitive research framework

- There is a need to consider:
- Influences on the direction of the research
- Concepts and theories used – re-think, adjust?
- Meanings attached to underlying features of concepts such as empowerment, agency,
- Power relations

Working with black and minority ethnic older women: developing a culturally sensitive research framework

There is a need to:

- Engage reflexively with the competing narratives and knowledge claims of researcher, interpreter and participant throughout the research.
- Formulate a political agenda for the research that is able to represent a diversity of perspectives.

Working with black and minority ethnic older women: developing a culturally sensitive research framework

- Consider the cumulative impact of life-course difference's on the experience of ageing
- Engage participants as co-researchers

Working with black and minority ethnic women as a vehicle for social and political change

- Creation of a cross-cultural political agenda to improve older women's lives
- The subjective knowledge claims of women are central to the development of a united political agenda for feminism
- Nevertheless... it is clear that these ways of knowing are not exclusive to gender but change across culture, time, space, and language.

Working with black and minority ethnic women as a vehicle for social and political change

- Reflexive engagement with ethnic difference is a vehicle for social and political change, as Audre Lorde puts it:

Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic (1984:111).

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