“Is the Joke on us, Deaf Anthropologist?”: Reflections on native anthropology of Deaf culture by Deaf researcher(s)

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Native Anthropology describes the discipline with an "'insider,' the person who conducts research on the cultural, racial, or ethnic group" of which they belong in (Jones 1970: 251).

Not to be confused with "indigenous anthropology" which practices strictly Non-Western theories.

Narayan argued that separates anthropologists as "real" vs "native" so she suggested for "enactment of hybridity" that will indicate researchers "as minimally bicultural in terms of belonging simultaneously to the world of engaged scholarship and the world of everyday" (1993:672).
Early Vision of Levi-Strauss about Anthropology

Referred an anthropologist as “the astronomer of the social sciences” to “discover a meaning for configurations which, owing to their size and remoteness, are very different from those within the observer’s immediate purview” (1963: 378)
Deaf Anthropology

- A discipline concentrating on Deaf issues, community, society, language and culture.

- As a Deaf person of Color, one will share more than merely a language-cultural minority (Deaf ethnicity) but also with multiethnic identity. (Lane et al. 2011)
Is the study of “others” in Deaf Anthropology a deviation from Levi-Strauss?

Regarding to shared-identity issues, this talk will investigate the point where it becomes problematic between insider-vs-outsider positioning.
Interview Participants

- 7 scholars participants
- 5:2 ratio of Women to Men
- 4:3 ratio of Deaf to Hearing
- Only 2 are Person of Color
- All multidisciplinary
Interview Questions

1. What sociological traits do your study groups (in the past and the present) share in common? (Please limit to 200 words)

2. Is there any particular reason of that? (Limit 200 words)

*3. Do you identify yourself as a member of the same community which (the majority of) your study group(s) come from?

*4. Please state your shared identity/ies. If any, as an insider, how does your shared identity make any convenience to your data collection? If none, as an outsider, please describe any inconvenience this has caused to your data collection.

*5. As an outsider, what other challenge have you experienced with your research subjects, in particularly not sharing similar identity/ies?

*6. As an insider, what major concern did you have when sharing a similar identity or culture as your research subjects?

7. Describe the majority of the audience that your research projects/papers are destined for.
#4. As an insider, how does your shared identity make any convenience to your data collection?

- It becomes tricky for both of us when the participant says... “I do this for you” (me as the RA) when we’re doing the experiment together. Plus, deaf RAs have access to the pool and it becomes sensitive because it suggests that the hearing collaborators "take advantage" of their deaf collaborators and their access to the population” - Participant #2 (Deaf female Caucasian)

- “... being hearing often gives me privileged access to hearing people’s attitudes and ideologies about deaf people that I then examine in connection to related narratives by relevant deaf people.” - Participant #6 (Hearing female Caucasian)
#4. As an insider, how does your shared identity make any convenience to your data collection?

**TRUST & ACCESS**

- “Trained natives” would have "the immeasurable advantage of trustworthiness, authentically revealing precisely the elusive thoughts and sentiments of the native” (Boas 1937).

- “d/Deaf habitus” = based on the interaction between d/Deaf researchers and informants as the prior “being more empathic” and/or “better able to interpret Research findings due to their social proximity to research participants” (O’Brien & Emery 2014:34).
#5— As an outsider, what other challenge have you experienced with your research subjects, in particularly not sharing similar identity/ies?

- “Well... definitely power and social inequalities in terms of access to education and public discourse. Hearing people can easily be suspected of working with Deaf communities and collecting data in their own personal and professional interests.” - Participant #4 (Hearing male Caucasian)

- “The encounter of a researcher who does not fit their image – I am una gringa in a sense, but I am not white or pass as one – is surprising and disconcerting.” - Participant #5 (Deaf Woman-of-Color)

- “As a deaf researcher, I find it difficult, if not impossible to directly study non-deaf/non-signing participants. I’d have to creatively collaborate with a hearing researcher to do this or work closely with a non-deaf research assistant.” Participant #7 (Deaf male Caucasian)
#5— As an outsider, what other challenge have you experienced with your research subjects, in particularly not sharing similar identity/ies?

Hindrance
(Constantly breaking down expectations)

- National and racial identity creating political and economical status
- Longevity of ethnography period
- Not to say any drawback isn’t a valuable learning experience.
#6— As an insider, what major concern did you have when sharing a similar identity or culture as your research subjects?

- “...I sometimes highlight undesirable traits, and do not "whitewash" in group bad behavior. This can be difficult because people think you should not wash your dirty linen in public.” –Participant #1 (Deaf Woman of Color)

- “I'm damn privileged compared to many deaf people who I know, and it affects the dynamics among us.” –Participant #2

- “It doesn’t suffice to say that I identify as Deaf and use ASL, I need to be “visible” in order to be valid in the sense that they can recognize me as a member of the U.S. Deaf community. Furthermore, the majority of Deaf people I come in contact for my research are of Caucasian descent, so our sharing a similar identity and culture is mediated by our differing ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds.” –Participant #5
#6— As an insider, what major concern did you have when sharing a similar identity or culture as your research subjects?

Responsibility/Burden & Repetitive Proof of Membership

- Ethnic issues (Shifting to objective perspective, fairness, and ultimate decisions) For ex. these volunteering respondents for this Deaf Academics conference turning anonymity.

- Over-protectiveness

- What’s the benefits of research for your focal group?
Deaf or not, signer or not, native researchers cannot know everything already about the focal group/community. Our studies will at least reframe our situated knowledge to study cultural/identity group inversely.

“Every anthropologist carries both a personal and an ethnographic self.”

Deaf Anthropology = Hybridity* of discipline and enactment

*(Narayan, 1993; Abu-Lughod 1992)
More studies needed on Deaf multiethnicity and...

More Deaf and Person-of-Color (DPOC) researchers to increase greater scholarships supplying more diverse perspectives.

Hopes in a Near Future...