Emergent Positioning in Insider Ethnographic Field: Deconstructing the Ideological Frame of Insider or Outsider or Both

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Abstract

The central concern of this paper is to discuss the positioning of the researcher while researching one's own community ethnographically. It argues that insider and outsider positioning of a researcher in insider ethnographic research appears in a contextual, iterative, and emergent manner. The strategies provide space for critical self-reflexive practices in the field, thereby enhancing the quality standard. In addition, it argues that the positioning of the researcher appears while maintaining the ethical issue of confidentiality. Thus, the paper claims that it is not necessary to set the ideological frame for structuring the researchers whilst engaging in the field with particular positioning. It highlights that the defined roles of a researcher guide him/her in a way denying to engage in the field adapting the contextual phenomena, thereby creating difficulties for generating quality data.

Keywords: confidentiality, contextual, insider, outsider, positioning, self-reflexive

Introduction

Ethnography is a form of qualitative research, which is conducted in a group of people in order to understand the cultural perspectives and practices of the people under study. It facilitates to explore primitive or firsthand information entering the life-worlds of people. It focuses on the engagement of researchers in the field for an extended period to delve into the realities from the people's perspectives. The researchers involve in the field either as participant observer- participating in the daily activities of participants or as non-participant observer-observing the world of participants from outside without participating in their actions. Further, the researchers develop sound ethical relationships with the research participants and discuss or interact with them in a culture-sensitive manner. They learn the culture sharing the living and lifestyles of people. They feel and experience the lives of people how they act, react, and behave in their cultural contexts. They experience and reflect the cultural practices.

Ethnography helps to understand the life patterns, distinctive socio-cultural structures or institutions, beliefs, and values of people (Whitehead, 2005). It facilitates to explore the everyday behavior, practices, actions, and interactions of people. The researchers present themselves in the field as careful listeners to explore how people interpret the world in their socio-cultural circumstances. They engage with an open mind with open-ended or emergent probing questions. However, the research practices depend on who are the researchers. The ways of engagement of a researcher who is from the researched group/people (insider) may differ from that of the researcher who is from another group (outsider).

Researching one's own community is insider research and another community is outsider research (Greene, 2014). The identity of the researcher as an insider or outsider in the ethnographic field plays an important role in generating quality data. For example, insider researcher tries to understand how culture sharing group members understand and interpret their cultural world in which they live (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005) from his/her perspective. The outsider researcher analyzes the phenomena of inquiry from his/her frame of reference. Nevertheless, both insider and outsider researchers position themselves as insider or outsider when they engage in the field for a prolonged period. Thus, this paper discusses the roles of insider researchers away from home or community while carrying out ethnographic fieldwork among the members of culture sharing group based on my own lived experiences. The major argument of the paper is that the debates on the pros and cons or dichotomy or separate roles of insider or outsider positioning of the researcher are less worthy as they appear in an emergent manner. It argues that there exists contextual, emergent, and iterative positioning as insider or outsider while researching one's own community.

In so doing, the paper discusses the academic debate of the positioning of researchers while conducting qualitative research in the researcher's community or other community. Further, the subsequent section discusses the relationship between researchers and the participants or community members. In addition, the section discusses the reflexivity that appears while positioning as an insider or outsider for maintaining the quality standard of the

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research. Finally, it argues that the contextual positioning appears while maintaining ethical issue of confidentiality.

Debates on Positioning

There are several debates among many scholars or qualitative researchers in regard to the positioning of researcher in insider research. For instance, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that the researcher occupies space between insider and outsider rather than insider or outsider while conducting fieldwork. They further argue that the researcher remains at the third space of ambiguity or paradox or ambivalence. Likewise, Breen (2007) is also in favor of positioning at the middle of insider/outsider dichotomy adopting the benefits of both the positions. However, he emphasizes insider positioning in one's own community as a research field. However, Kerstetter (2012) discusses four categories of positionalities that the qualitative researchers adopt in the field such as indigenous-insider, indigenous-outsider, external-insider, and external-outsider depending on the researchers' knowledge and values based on their socialization within different communities. But, Chavez (2008) argues that the outsider-insider distinction is a false dichotomy since outsiders and insiders have to contend with similar methodological issues around positionality. He further notes that the positionality of a researcher depends on the sense of self and the situated knowledge of the researcher about the field and research participants.

The researcher's insider or outsider identity or positioning from within the self and other participants have a significant impact on the research process (Bourke, 2014). The positioning, insider or outsider, concerns more on the researcher's role and influences the research process. This is because a researcher believes that qualitative researches are guided by belief systems of understanding the world from the perspectives of research participants and feeling the pains and pleasure of the participants. In this sense, he/she needs to hold both insider and outsider positions during the research process. However, for insider researcher, the cultural intimacy binds him/her together and the detachment with the culture sharing groups for many years away from home, the group members perceive differently even being in the close social world (Rai, 2018). Therefore, there exist both insider and outsider positions in the field when an insider researcher engages in his/her own culture sharing group as the field (Chavez, 2008). Sometimes, he/she engages holding an insider position and at other times he/she holds an outsider position. Insider or outsider positions facilitate the researcher to engage self-reflectively in ethnographic fieldwork providing him/her a valuable resource for exploring, presenting, and representing the culture (Haynes, 2011).

Reflecting as an insider and an outsider supports understanding the cultural phenomena in a more depth and detailed manner (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Thus, the positioning facilitates to reflect and situate self in the research process (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The reflective practice is of a paramount concern in the ethnographic field either positioning insider or outsider. However, the debate of positioning is worthless as it occurs iteratively knowingly or unknowingly. How does positioning occur in the field? Let me discuss our positioning in different stages of ethnographic fieldwork through which I try to deconstruct the worthlessness of debate of insider or outsider positions.

Field Engagement: Interaction with Culture Sharing Members

The field works mostly in qualitative researches are contextual activities (Parajuli, 2007). This section deals with the context-specific relationships of the researcher with the researched at the time of ethnographic fieldwork. In so doing, I discuss the researcher's positioning while accessing gatekeepers, building rapport and trust, and interacting with the participants. Further, I discuss the informal observation and writing process in the field and appearance of positioning while maintaining reflexivity and confidentiality. I concentrate on relationships with research participants substantiating through my experiences and examples.

Self/Other as Gatekeeper

Insider researchers have already established a big network of social relationships with the community members. The closer relationships among the members allow more rapid and complete acceptance (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The insider positioning facilitates to select purposefully the information-rich participants as the researcher's personal judgment. It helps to begin research activities from the researcher's own family. For example, I tried to understand the phenomena of the livelihoods of the Yamphu community from my own parents while conducting my Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) dissertation. They informed me about livelihoods based on their experiences. Moreover, the researcher converses and interacts informally with many members of the community with a view to understand the phenomena of inquiry. The network among the members of the culture-sharing group serves the researcher to learn the contextual realities in a comprehensive manner. Thus, insider positioning helps to play the role of gatekeeper to the researcher himself/herself and make an easier access to the participants.

On the other hand, even being an insider researcher, there are also the possibilities that the researcher may not know or have familiarity or intimate relationships with all the community members. The larger the community, the more the members of the community may not be known to him/her. This is because s/he may have disconnected for many years from the community because of his/her engagement in the academic base camp in urban areas. However, such unfamiliar community members may be his/her relatives and hence it would be easier to build rapport and trust with them. In this situation, the researcher plays the outsider role of identifying gatekeepers. The village chieftain or traditional community leader who has unbroken relationships and positive influence with

community members serves as a pertinent gatekeeper (Parajuli, 2007). Access to pertinent participants through such gatekeepers facilitates the researchers to build rapport and bond of trust in an easier way.

Cultural Ways of Rapport and Trust Building

Successful ethnographic research depends on the establishment of good rapport among the research participants. Insider researcher may have already established rapport and bond of trust among the participants. S/he has amicable relationships with the community members. The "ethnic ties and relations help to develop such relations" (Sluka, 2007, p. 121). Thus, the insider positioning helps to build "greater relational intimacy" (Breen, 2007, p. 12) with the community members facilitating to build rapport (Hodkinson, 2005). It benefits for generating quality data due to emotional and sentimental ties among the culture sharing group members. For example, when I engaged in the Yamphu community for M.Phil. research, my community members as participants were open to share their perspectives on their livelihoods. The sense of 'we' facilitates to generate detailed information.

If, in some context, the researcher starts to disclose the research purpose among the research participants and talk for maintaining anonymity so as to maintain confidentiality, s/he positions as an outsider. However, in other contexts, insider position facilitates us to adopt culture friendly strategy of building rapport and bond of trust. For example, while conducting my M.Phil. research, I used to give Tongba[1]/Jaad[2] and Rakshi[3] as gifts that generally made sense of respect to elders, and generally, such gifts are provided to the village chieftains or village Shamans who know Mundhum[4]. Thus, it is important to maintain cultural sensitivity in research to not harm them. The insider position supports her/him to maintain it as s/he is familiar with the particular culture of a particular group of people. This is also a cultural way of building rapport and trust which is a more meaningful approach to reduce hierarchy between the researcher and participants.

Lessening Hierarchy

The perception of community people that the researcher is a knowledgeable and highly educated person (with higher academic qualification) creates a hierarchy between the researcher and participants which may be detrimental to generating quality data (Parajuli, 2007). While researching one's own community as an insider researcher, insider positioning facilitates to lessen such a hierarchy between the researcher and participants as they already know each other in many cases. Insider researchers have multiple

1 Cylindrical wooden/bamboo vessel with fermented millet or mixture of millet and maize the liquor formed by pouring water and it is sucked through a pipe made of bamboo branches
2 Fermented rice or millet or maize from which a spirituous liquor is produced
3 Homemade liquor generally made from the waste of Jaad
4 Kirat religious folklore

identities in the community. S/he may be someone's brother/sister, uncle/aunt, and to name a few. Further, the elder participants may be relatives and some others may be friends. There are power differentials between researcher and participants when holding an insider position but that is less when holding an outsider position.

The insider researcher holds an outsider position when he engages with other unknown members of the community. There may have distant relationships with many other community members even in the same community as the modern society is fluid, heterogeneous, and changeable in terms of its demographic feature and culture. In such a situation, the researcher holds an outsider position disclosing the self-identity, research purpose, and procedure in order to lessen the hierarchy. The informal way of exchanging the identity minimizes the gap between researcher and community members/participants. This creates an environment of open or free discussion with such participants. The participants disclose their perceptions, feelings, and opinions openly when the hierarchy is lessened. They are more open to discuss/interact in a more respectful manner which helps to get rich ethnographic data. In this situation, the researcher "works at impression management to establish respect and avoid a power struggle with participants" (Greene, 2014, p. 10). The researcher presents himself/herself as "co-investigators in an attempt to minimize the power differential" between him/her and research participants (Breen, 2007, p. 7). Thus, it is essential to lessen power differential as it appears more when the researcher holds outsider positioning.

Dyadic Interviews and Informal Conversations

The insider position allows the researcher to engage in the field in a more reflective and interactive nature of discussions or conversations with the participants. In so doing, it facilitates sharing the experiences in their common local language in a more natural manner (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). It enables us to be involved with an open mind for engaged listening to the participants (Forsey, 2010). It helps to conduct the dyadic nature of interviews in a more culture-sensitive ways without making harm and boredom to the participants. This position facilitates to the insider researcher to conduct "a socio-culturally loaded communicative activity" (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 52). Thus, the researcher as a member of the community can have benefits of more meaningful fieldwork activities, thereby enhancing the quality of the research.

I have experienced that the common local language of researcher and researchers facilitates to interact meaningfully and comprehensively. For example, I used my Yamphu language in many cases with a view to facilitate my participants. The use of native language enabled me to make meaning of the socio-cultural world (Nelson, 1998) of the Yamphu community. Thus, the insider researcher with common language with the participants enables them to make a deeper understanding of social realities. The use of common language creates 'we feeling' and

makes it easier for them to articulate their feelings and opinions. In addition, this strategy avoids the monotony of the participants. But, the interviews occur with the same participant time and again as follow up interviews with a view to ensuring the accuracy of interpretations (Breen, 2007). Thus, insider positioning appears while using a local language as means of communication and understanding the phenomena of inquiry.

On the other hand, outsider positioning appears when the insider researcher conducts more formal nature of interviews based on tools/guidelines (with a number of open-ended questions) that may not facilitate open discussions or interactions for sharing the experiences. The participants may hesitate to share their feeling and ideas in such a situation. For example, prior to the fieldwork of my MPhil dissertation, I prepared a set of open-ended questions under each research question with a view to facilitate me and my participants for conversations. This sort of open interview schedule could not facilitate me to make meaningful conversations with my participants rather they gave short and focused answers only and sometimes brief explanations (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). I experienced that the participants became more expressive and open to disclose their views or perceptions and the discussions or interactions became livelier when I put down the interview schedule. This was because the "answering against a list also made them feel that they were questioned by rather than talked to me which made the interactions awkward. The interviewees appeared more relaxed and talkative without a list" (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p.50). Thus, insider positioning emerges in the process of making conversation rich and meaningful.

The insider researcher has the possibility of making assumptions based on preexisting knowledge of the context. S/he may skip the pertinent discussions on the pertinent issues because of his/her confidence. The process of interviewing may be complicated by the assumption that he/she already knows the answers. For instance, Kanuha (2000) identified that the greater familiarity between the researcher and participants caused much information not discussed or unreported when she wrote interview transcripts (as cited in Breen, 2007). Insider researchers may communicate partly with the participants with incomplete sentences or discussions or interactions. Thus, it is essential to avoid such practices and interact or converse with the participants to the extent of a fuller understanding of the socio-cultural realities. In such a case, the outsider position helps to be reflexive on reducing such biases and skipping.

Recording and Note Taking

The researcher maintains recording of open interviews holding outsider position as a longer period of conversations with the research participants are not remembered at all and sometimes misremembered (Murchison, 2010). S/he records the conversations that may be relevant or irrelevant to the research concerns. However, the data initially felt unnecessary in the field may become very relevant later on.

For instance, the conversation I felt unnecessary in the first field visit of my M.Phil. dissertation, I needed to converse on the same issue in the second field visit. In most cases, the researcher records and maintains notes simultaneously. In so doing, s/he faces a problem of note-taking that s/he is unable to note down as fast as the participants speak and it is even more difficult when two or more people speak out at the same time. Further, it is difficult to be selective while noting down the views of participants as they do not express their views in a linear way.

Outsider position helps the researcher to maintain field notesin more detail. In so doing, s/he uses cryptic jottings or abbreviations and symbols which help to trigger our memory of the field. These instruments enable the researcher to revisit the data frequently. These aids are helpful to "check for or notice certain aspects or details that" we "do not make note of originally or use the record to double-check certain aspects of written notes" (Murchison, 2010, p. 35). Thus, the ethnographic recordings are also for the supplement of field notes. The field notes include the information of interviews and informal observations.

In other cases, holding outsider positionality and using a recorder and a field note may make the participants nervous or alter the ways of responding to the researcher. In this situation, the researcher holds an insider position and makes a shorter communication with the participants informally so that s/he can remember the conversation for some hours. S/he makes notes or journals of the conversation at the end of the day. Sometimes, the interactions with the participants may occur spontaneously. Moreover, "hand gestures and body language" (Murchison, 2010), the impressions, scenes, firsthand field experiences (Wall, 2008) and the cultural context or the natural setting at the time of interviewing or informal conversations with the participants are quickly forgotten. In such situations, the researcher uses headnotes as an insider researcher. S/he writes immediately the key points of conversation every day as a field journal which is reflective, descriptive, and analytic.

Informal Observation

The researcher engages in the field with keen observation of people's actions, interactions, and behavior. S/he observes the culture and contexts of people in order to get insight of the phenomena of inquiry. The sense organs, at the time, are gateways of information. Insider position helps to get insights into the phenomena more meaningfully through informal observation. It facilitates to reflect upon oneself and check the interpretation of social realities as the researcher's own experiences or opinions or perceptions. The observation takes place all the time in a culture-sensitive manner. The insider position supports to get informed from informal observation of culture sharing group activities. The researcher observes everything in the context including gestures of participants, physical environment, scenes, and so on. The informal observation helps to make overall images of the context.

On the other hand, the outsider position appears

emergently when the researcher seeks consent of observation in the field. It emerges when s/he involves in the field with observation protocol or observational checklist or guidelines. Further, it appears when s/he writes an observational account of the impressions or experiences of the field in the daily journals or memos. Moreover, outsider position facilitates to capture the impressions of the observation in digital camera as photographs and collect numerous photographs of the field and use them as data. The photographs serve as a non-linguistic genre (Luitel, 2009) which enhances the quality of the research illuminating the readers on cultural phenomena. The photographs help to exemplify and make a rich description of the phenomena. Moreover, "the images are tremendously helpful in reminding of what places, moments and people were like and the pictures trigger a vivid memory of the moment of the field which helps in writing context and scenes of the particular culture of the community" (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 50). Thus, the photographs serve as the visual data of the field that help to make meaning of the world of participants.

Immersion in Complexity and Erasing Chaos

In the initial days of fieldwork, the researcher falls under a huge confusion. It is difficult to understand the realities in a fuller manner. S/he may fall into chaos (Blommaert & Jie, 2010) when encountering with more than one participant. The diverse perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences of multiple participants create a confusion. It is difficult to understand the realities. S/he cannot achieve the information in a coherent and patterned form. S/he falls under contradictory perspectives or sometimes similar views. The confronting perceptions create chaotic social phenomena. However, the insider position facilitates to understand the phenomena of inquiry from the perspectives of research participants. The insider researcher might have faced similar experiences. It is easier for him/her to conceptualize the ideas unpacked by the participants. The insider position helps the researcher to understand the chaos reflecting upon himself/herself as a member of the community. The position facilitates mapping the information of other participants with his/her own lived experiences. Further, the insider position facilitates to visit the participants time and again with a view to erasing the chaotic information.

On the other hand, the outsider position emerges and helps the researcher to maintain constant comparative analysis through field journals. The field notes and descriptive and analytic field journals serve to erase the chaos. Sometimes, the researcher puts the multiple participants together and asks the questions that have created confusion. For example, in my MPhil research, I asked some questions with two participants gathering them together who answered the contradicting ideas in the earlier interviews. I tried to get the consensual views. Thus, the researcher confirms the ideas or thoughts of the participants. Sometimes, the information might be different as it depends on the subjective views and in

such a situation the researcher tries to understand why so. Moreover, the researcher needs to have a writing of micro happening or activities and insights into the field. These strategies help to remove the chaos of social complexity or the realities that are "non-linear, not perfectly logical, not clearly sequential" (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 51). The writing, thinking, and analysis of ideas in the field with outsider positioning facilitates overcoming the chaos and confusion.

Incessant Writing and Reflexivity

The researcher writes continuously from the very beginning of our entry to the field. S/he writes the scene and impressions of what is observed and conversed with the participants. "When a subject is raised—often as a question about a particular group or at least a cultural practice or belief—this begins to give focus and direction to the inquiry and the writing" (Hoey, 2014, p. 12). The incessant writing is necessary to maintain the thick description in the focused area of inquiry and to maintain the quality standard of transferability of the research. The researcher writes reflectively the experiences of the field holding an insider position as a member of the community. The outsider position appears when writing field notes which is the preliminary writing stage of the phenomena of the field. S/he notes key ideas based on his/her understanding, analysis, and meaning constructed in the field. The field note helps to capture the key essences of dyadic interviews and conversations. Further, field note facilitates us to develop the field journal or memos of the field. The journals are descriptive, analytic, and reflective which help to analyze the data simultaneously. It helps to make constant comparative analysis of the themes and categories that emerged in the field, thereby enhancing the quality of research.

Insider researcher often faces criticisms of being biased as s/he has intimate relationships with culture sharing groups. Self-reflexivity helps to be aware of dominating his/her own views onto participants. The projection of his/her views or perspectives may be an obstacle to articulating the views of participants as the individuals may have multiple perspectives. S/he needs to provide them the alternative chances of expressing their views. Otherwise, the biasness may jeopardize the research results. Insiders' biases may cause "error" (Greene, 2014, p. 4) in the research results. This awareness is equally applicable to the outsiders. Reflective thinking of the self helps to be aware of the potential of biases that lead to errors in research. Reducing potential biases of distorting research results can help the researcher to maintain the trustworthiness of the research.

Insider position helps to be reflexive to the self. The researcher reflects upon himself/herself, sometimes as a member of the community/insider and sometimes as a researcher/outsider. Further, s/he becomes reflexive on cultural views or perspectives while interacting with the participants. Not mere reflective to the self, the insider position facilitates to have self-critical reflection (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). S/he consciously experiences

the socio-cultural phenomena as both researcher and participant which is because the insider researcher is in the process of researching self. Moreover, insider position helps to understand the self as culture sharing member of the community as a researcher and researched. It makes the researcher aware of interpreting the data thereby enabling to exploration of the full stories of the participants.

Outsider position helps to engage in a way of thinking of awareness in order to diminish the effects of the researcher's bias in the course of generating data. It helps to think upon the emerging ideas in data. The reflective thinking from the outsider position helps to map the researcher's understanding of theoretical ideas. It helps to make a constant comparative analysis of his/her understanding of the phenomena. The outsider position facilitates to reflect on to "establish and maintain an appropriate degree of both social and emotional distance which, of course, is required to the researcher to acquire truthful information" (Greene, 2014, p. 11). In so doing, we engage creating sound ethical relationships with the key participants.

Maintaining Ethical Issues

The insider position helps to get informed consent of information-rich culture sharing members as research participants in an easier manner. Interaction with the participants with informed consent facilitates them to get their stories more expansively. Insider position helps to identify and consult other actors who appear in the stories/texts and in photographs (Tolich, 2010) for getting their consent. The researcher needs to be aware that the photographs should not be worth harming others. For example, I consulted many actors who appeared in stories and photographs for their consent during the fieldwork of my M.Phil. dissertation. However, sometimes, it was not necessary to get the informed consent of participants as the informal conversation in regard to the research issue occurred covertly. Thus, ethnographic field engagement occurs either covertly and overtly with sometimes insider or sometimes outsider positions.

Outsider position appears when the researcher asks or informs the participants for maintaining privacy or confidentiality of their information and names. The ethnographers like Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) emphasize to protect the privacy of research participants through using pseudonyms. However, as argued by Tolich (2010), the pseudonyms for protecting the privacy of research participants are ethically weak solutions as using pseudonyms creates overlook the threat posed by this way of confidentiality. This depends on the context and type of researches. In crime and sensitive researches like drug abuse or gender-based violence, the confidentiality and anonymity of research and research participants may play the pertinent roles. "The notion of confidentiality may be one that is appropriate, or desired, only in particular types of social research" (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2006, p. 15). However, in insider research, it is not sure that the readers do not identify the people or organizations or the place of anonymity as the researcher presents detail and in-depth description of participants or geography or personal history and characteristics of participants (Trowler, 2011). However, the outsider position helps us to maintain the confidentiality of research participants while crafting ethnographic tales. The confessional and impressionist tales (Maanen, 2011) are crafted so that the participants are not disclosed in the tales.

Conclusion

The researcher holds both insider and outsider positions when he/she engages in insider ethnographic field for a longer period. These positionings appear in a contextual manner based on the need for the engagement with the researcher's own culture sharing community members meaningfully in the research process. Our positioning (insider or outsider) hides and appears continuously in an iterative and emergent manner during the research process. Particularly, during the field engagement, the insider and outsider positioning occurs alternatively in a frequent manner.

It is difficult to generate the specific recipe for engaging in the ethnographic field holding insider or outsider positions while researching one's own group. The researcher needs to have arts or skills or creativity for how to make successful interaction with the participants holding these positions. However, there are ways how to engage ethnographically in the field in insider research creating both insider and outsider positions even maintaining reflexivity as well as ethical issues of confidentiality. There appears contextual positioning of the researcher when he/she engages in the insider ethnographic field. This is because the purpose of ethnography is to get detailed and in-depth information of everyday life of people including their norms, values, culture, actions, interactions, socio-cultural behaviors, and way of interpreting their world rather than specific methical approaches. Therefore, the ways of defining roles or setting the ideological frame of insider or outsider or both may structure the researchers denying to have contextual adaptation for exploring detailed information. Thus, the debate on creating insider or outsider or both positions in an ethnographic field is less worthy to put forward.

The consent is provided

Conflict of interest:
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