

Chapter

**Space, Place, Common Wounds and Boundaries: Insider/Outsider Debates in Research
with Black Women and Deaf Women**

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Abstract

The chapter discusses issues of identity in research. It does this by examining the impacts of the identity of the researcher, participants and the various identity interchanges that take place. This chapter draws on the perspectives and experiences of participants and researcher in a PhD study with five¹ culturally Deaf (white) women and twenty five Black (hearing) women discussing their world of work in UK public sector organizations. The theoretical framework of 'Africanist Sista-hood in Britain' is that which underpins the positioning of the research and researcher. The chapter provides a reflexive account of the research but in a way that centralizes participant perspectives. Two goals have been achieved; firstly, it adds further contribution to the insider/outsider debate by adding participant perspectives on the issue, and secondly, it demonstrates the ways in which the theoretical framework of 'Africanist Sista-hood in Britain' can be used in research not just with Black women but also via collaborative approaches with other social groups. In so doing, the chapter raises a number of important questions: Should researchers seek out participant perspectives on the insider/outsider debates in research? In what ways does the identity interchange between researcher and researched have an impact on the research process? What does Africanist Sista-hood in Britain have to offer to Black women and others carrying out research in the field?

Keywords:

Insider/outsider research, Black women, Deaf women, Africanist Sista-hood, Black Feminism, Womanism, Africana Womanism, Deaf research

¹ Six Deaf women were interviewed but one withdrew due to a conflict of interest.

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the way a researcher's identity as a Black female, hearing researcher has an impact on the research processes with Black women and culturally Deaf women within the same PhD study. Central to the chapter are discussions of participant perspectives on insider/outsider researcher positioning and 'sameness' and 'difference' in research. The chapter adds significant contribution to existing discourses by centralizing participant perspectives, as well as adding discussions on Deaf/hearing insider/outsider positionings which have largely been absent from the field. It introduces the framework of "Africanist Sista-hood in Britain" which underpins the study. It uses participant contributions to make links to the central tenets as a source of validation of the developing framework. Alliances are also formed in Deaf cultural discourse in an attempt to foreground cultural and linguistic understandings of Deaf people. In working with these two participant groups, neither Deaf cultural discourse nor Africanist Sista-hood would be adequate in isolation. However, in creating theoretical alliances between the two, there is relevance in the frameworks for analysis for both participant groups.

The Deaf women in the research are culturally Deaf women. Within deaf studies literature, there is much debate about Deaf identity and the ways in which culturally Deaf people form a cultural and linguistic minority group that differs from dominant hearing perceptions of deaf people as disabled. In incorporating cultural Deaf discourse, I write about the distinct Deaf communities who refer to themselves less as disabled as is the dominant hearing articulation, rather their own lived reality is that of members of a cultural and linguistic minority who share a pride in their signed language and cultural norms that are distinct and in some cases in opposition to that of the majority hearing society (Ladd, 2003; Lane, 2005; Bahan, 2008; Padden & Humphries, 2005; Bauman & Murray, 2014). Deaf pride in their culture and the efforts made to maintain and nurture it are absent from the dominant constructions of Deaf people as disabled. When writing about culturally Deaf signing individuals or communities, the convention introduced by Woodward (1972) is to write the word Deaf with a capital D and so maintaining a distinction from deaf people outside of this culture who would not describe themselves in this way. This is the convention I will follow in this chapter.

The chapter starts by introducing the research project with discussions on research design, access, pilot study, data collection and changes to the design post-pilot. Integral to this are discussions of the theoretical framework, its foundations, influences and scope for research. The chapter draws heavily on participant data to discuss the views that Black

women and Deaf women shared on ‘insider/outsider’ positions in research. It does this in a way that incorporates discussions of researcher/researched identity, positive aspects of assumed *common bonds* that can occur between Black female participants and Black female researcher (Johnson-Bailey, 1999) and the parameters that should guide hearing with Deaf research.

In the final section of this chapter, participant data is used to validate the theoretical framework of Africanist Sista-hood by demonstrating the ways in which individual identity of Deaf women and Black women is still connected to historical identities of their collectives. It draws on examples from the data about names and self-naming, place and space and the way this is regulated both physically and professionally both for culturally Deaf women and Black women within their work spaces.

2. The Research Project

2.1 Research design

The research forms part of a PhD study focussing on perspectives and experiences of equality and diversity in the UK public sector. It seeks to examine whether the rhetoric provided by public sector organizations are validated via the experiences and perspectives of Black women and Deaf women who work within them. It falls within an interpretivist paradigm using a framework of Africanist Sista-hood in Britain, Deaf cultural discourse and using qualitative research methods.

The primary focus of the study is Black women working in the public sector across a range of organizations. Learning from the work of Patricia Hill Collins, within the framework is the recognition of the need to acknowledge both individual and collective views on our experiences as Black women whilst also working in alliance with other marginalized groups for wider social justice (Collins, 2000). In this case, the allied social group is culturally Deaf women.

2.2 ‘Africanist Sista-hood in Britain’: An evolving theoretical framework

I have written in detail about Africanist Sista-hood in Britain (Obasi, 2016) but for ease of reference, I have summarized some of that work within this section. Africanist Sista-hood in Britain was developed as a result of both top-down and bottom-up approaches to theory. Gibson and Brown (2009) describe top-down theory as any theory that has been formulated prior to the empirical work and bottom up theory as that which is created through the exploration of data. Working within new terminological frames the framework builds on the

work of Black feminists, womanists and Africana womanists to merge this with organic developments in the process of data collection and analysis in the research.

For many Black women, the search for an analytical framework that centralizes our individual and collective experiences and perspectives has ended with the developments of theories in Black feminism. However, influences of American history and legislation means that direct application to the UK context can be more problematic (Mirza, 1997; Young, 2000; Reynolds, 2002; Dean, 2009). Black British feminism does seek to address this issue, but it is the particularities of the British context that brings with it issues of contestation of who is considered Black which are also translated into Black British Feminism. Yet, there are still a significant number of Black women who have declared their dissatisfaction with the theory and more resolutely the terminology of feminism no matter its variant. The history of feminism with the privileged status of white middle class women and the marginalization of Black women makes feminism a bitter pill for many to swallow. Womanism (Walker, 1983) has for some provided a useful alternative but in Britain has had much less appeal or recognition (Charles, 1997).

‘Africanist Sista-hood in Britain’ offers original terminology whilst highlighting points of connection with and divergence from existing theories in an aim to regenerate long standing debates about epistemological and ontological understandings of Black womanhood. It recognizes the specific location of Black women in Britain and is reflective of the ‘race’, class and gender relations as well as other intersections that affect us. It does this by drawing on existing frameworks in the field and calling for further contributions to an organic framework.

Crotty (1998), in his much cited work explaining the foundations of social research, describes the way in which researchers can draw on established methodological works to develop one specific to the research in hand. Guest et al. (2012) provide an analogy with the work of Bruce Lee in developing his own fighting style due to his dissatisfaction with existing styles. In so doing, he has not developed a new fighting style but synthesized the most useful techniques from numerous existing ones. In reflecting on this fighting style, Lee describes it as something that is fluid and flexible inviting practitioners to take from it what they choose rather than trying to follow a prescribed process. In Africanist Sista-hood in Britain, a similar fluidity is built in. It is a fluidity that allows for incorporation of the work of our Sistas without being constrained by the frames of feminism.

In moving away from feminist terminology, it is not in an attempt to deny the numerous achievements of Black feminists and womanists to whom we should all remain

eternally grateful. Rather, it is an attempt to continue and build on that work but in a way that responds creatively to those both within and outside feminist discourses who have declared their dissatisfaction with the legacy the history and terminology still leaves. Black feminists themselves have recognized the limitations of the terminology of feminism (hooks, 1984; Collins, 1996; Collins, 2000; Springer, 2002). As Davis (2004, p. 95) points out, “we need to find ways to connect with and at the same time be critical of the work of our foremothers”. Many Black women have voiced their rejection of feminist terminology, yet this issue has not been adequately addressed by Black feminism. Jain and Turner (2012, p. 76) state: “When we look at the term feminist through the lens of the politics of naming we see that it is not an impartial label and that there are multiple reasons why women are reluctant to identify with it”. The dissent that has been voiced for many decades both in Western and so called ‘Third World’ Black women’s discourses still remains active and unsatisfied.

‘Africanist Sista-hood in Britain’ is a term that is quite deliberately proposed for a number of reasons and can be broken down into its component parts. The term ‘Africanist’ relates directly to Diaspora, and in doing so, connects us back to the direct or (an)Sista-ral heritage in Africa. An Africanist perspective sets out clear and unambiguous messages about embracing African (an)Sista-ry. In this sense, it differs significantly from the contestations that exist around political use of the term Black in the British context which is incorporated into Black British Feminism.

‘Sista’ is a term recognized within Black popular culture in the UK and beyond, but is also a term that has historically been articulated within Africa and as part of the migration journey for many Black women in the UK. To be a Sista is different from being a sister as within the term Sista is an implied recognition of a positive association with Black womanhood.

Like womanism and Black feminism, for Africanist Sista-hood, any perspective aimed at ending sexist oppression of all women, must also embrace issues of intersectionality in relation, not just to ‘race’ and class, but to issues of oppression facing all social groups (Collins, 2000). For many Black women, ‘race’ and gender are aspects of our identity that are recognized as constantly visible, but the intersectional and fluid position of our identities also contributes to the diversity that is Black womanhood. The fight for social justice must remain a central focus in any emancipatory framework. Africanist Sista-hood leaves space for recognition of the shifting nature of oppression which dictates that other forms of oppression may impact on groups and individuals within those groups to a larger extent than sexism and may impact simultaneously as part of their everyday lives.

The ‘-hood’ component of the term is about the collectivity and connectivity which is a driving force behind the concept. It has at the centre the values of internal validation, self-definition authentication, creativity and elevation of subjugated knowledge. Lived experience is a central tenet in which validation and authenticity from within the Sista-hood is gained. Within Africanist Sista-hood it is important to build in the safeguards against this loss of control from those guilty of ‘knowing without knowing’ (Collins, 2000, cited in Reynolds 2002). It is recognized that every individual, male or female, Black or white, has a contribution to make, but without the recognition of the importance of both *knowledge* and *experience*, the validity of those contributions will be limited and may need further validation.

Unlike Black British feminism, it is a discourse ‘in Britain’ rather than one centred around a British identity as exists in Black British feminism. It also focuses on the location in Britain rather than restricting it to women with British citizenship. It is inclusive of Africanist women living their life in Britain, but who are either not legally British citizens, or do not wish to readily showcase that aspect of their identity given the tumultuous history of British ‘race’ relations (see greater details of this theoretical framework in Obasi, 2016 and 2016a).

2.3 Learning from the pilot study

Details of the pilot have previously been published (Obasi, 2014). Within that publication, I discussed some of the possible benefits of a pilot study, and indeed in this research, the pilot proved very valuable in testing out the theoretical framework, research methods, and analysis. It was also useful to highlight some preliminary findings and use some of these findings and participant perspectives to contribute to further re-design of the study as well as improve data collection methods.

In relation to the Deaf interviews post-pilot, in addition to my own reflections, I sought out discussions with other (Deaf and hearing) academics that suggested analysis straight from the data would be a more beneficial approach that might also tackle some of the issues in relation to being ‘*lost in translation*’ (Stone & West, 2012; Obasi, 2014) as well as the issues of language and power in research discussed by Temple and Young (2004) and Young and Temple (2014). There are some arguments put forward by Gibbs (2007) that researchers can actually benefit from working directly with the data in any research project rather than working through transcriptions. In this case, some of those advantages were in relation to my need to continually return to the data to check for the signed quotes, which led to continual review of facial expression, intonation and intensity which all form part of the

meaning in BSL (British Sign Language). This all increased authenticity and familiarity with the data.

The decision on how to represent signed data was also a very difficult one, and one in which I have changed my position a number of times. There are a number of equally valid but sometimes opposing perspectives and practices in the area. Signed languages have been wilfully suppressed in favor of spoken or written languages (Ladd, 2003; Bauman, 2008; Ladd, 2008, Obasi 2008). In the case of academia, where most of the Deaf women worked, this position is exasperated even further (Bauman, 2008; Stone & West, 2012; Young & Temple, 2014). The decision in moving from signed to a written representation of the language in and of itself can be seen as further contributing to this. Temple and Young (2004) discuss issues of the dynamics of power in relation to minority and majority languages, and the processes that take place during the translation of interviews. They point to the way that transcription into the dominant English language can also have an invisibilizing effect on the source language when translating research interviews. Young and Temple (2014, p. 145) go further and state that “the language that is less powerful is made to disappear and by implication so too do the users....the seemingly straightforward and expedient research practice of transcription is akin to epistemological and ontological vandalism”.

Ladd (2003), in his ground breaking work on Deafhood, also takes a ground breaking approach to representation, as in some cases not just BSL grammar but also non-manual representations are written into the quotes of his participants, in way that represents true authenticity. Given the framework, authenticity would be my natural aim. However, there are other issues to consider including issues of authority and voice, raised by Hole (2007a) in a similar endeavor as a hearing woman interviewing Deaf women in sign language. As a non-native signer I am not confident I could achieve the equivalence of Ladd (2003).

Another consideration raised by Young and Temple (2014) is about the negative impacts that can result from researchers’ attempts to follow source language grammatical structure in a written representation as this could reinforce stereotypes of illiteracy and in the particular case of Deaf people can be inappropriately linked to the “dumb” label inferring stupidity. Najarian (2006) also points to the potential to ‘trip up the reader’ where a signed grammar is followed. For the most part I have opted for a full English translation of the quotes but on occasion left in ‘a BSL flavor’ where the opportunity lends itself.

3. Data Collection

3.1 Access

In terms of access, a form of snowballing was used where participants were asked to recommend others for the research (Liamputtong, 2013; Patton, 2015). This was a preferred option because of the view that by implication the participant also recommends the researcher as well as endorsing the research. This is particularly important within the Africanist Sista-hood framework as it strengthens the idea of validation from within the collective of the social groups identified.

Linking again to the theoretical framework, as discussed by Browne (2005) in her research with non-heterosexual women, snowball sampling is a method that enables participants to have an on-going influence on the research beyond their contributions in the interviews. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) go as far as to say that participants become de facto research assistants. Young and Hunt (2011) write about the way that culturally Deaf perspectives have been excluded from research agendas where Deaf people are seen as objects of data collection rather than shaping the research and what is asked. Snowball sampling, therefore, in some ways provides an opportunity to allow this contribution. This method was particularly attractive to this research because of the opportunities it provides for both validation and monitoring based on the assumption that participants would only recommend others if they had had a positive research experience and felt the research worthwhile (Browne, 2005).

In snowball sampling, potential issues of bias and other limitations discussed in the literature (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Merton, 1972; Browne, 2005; Sturgis, 2008) have not been overlooked. Snowball sampling does have limitations which it is important to recognize, including the potential for bias that might result from those that are put forward as well as exclusions and boundaries created for those that are not (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2005; Sturgis, 2008). The potential exists for participants to put forward only those they feel will support their own position and this cannot be ruled out. However, there were instances of participants making suggestions of other participants who, once interviewed, seemed to represent completely different and sometimes opposing standpoints.

In addressing issues of validity, Faugier and Sargeant (1997) recognize potential bias as “a price which must be paid” in order to gain an understanding of participants and their particular circumstances. In addition to this, there were also limitations in terms of generalizability of findings.

3.2 Interviews

Willis (2007) describes research methods as an expression of the research paradigm. I took a qualitative approach to the research, with in-depth interviews for data collection, moving from loosely structured interviews in the pilot study and early fieldwork, to more semi-structured interviews towards the end of the study (see Serry & Liamputtong, 2017; and **In-depth Interviewing Method in this handbook**). Given the framework of Africanist Sista-hood in Britain and its recognition of both collective and individual experiences of the participants, focus groups were also planned to provide the opportunity for collective as well as individual responses (Liamputtong, 2011; **see also Focus Group Method in this handbook**). The plan was that the focus groups were to be made up of a sample of those who had already taken part in the interviews.

At the start of the research, my aim was to interview 20 women in total, at least 13 of whom would be Black and at least seven of whom would be Deaf (also recognizing the possibility that some may be both Black and Deaf). The final number of Black participants in the one to one interviews was 22. Two focus groups took place with Black women; in one of these focus groups there were an additional three women who did not take part in the one to one interviews, bringing the total Black participants to 25.

The snowball started with Black women already known to the researcher and was very successful, with participants generally providing me with the contact details of the next prospective participant after first having sought their permission.

The snowball sampling was not so successful with Deaf participants and the target number of seven was not met. Six Deaf women took part in the one to one interviews. Participants provided names but did not generally contact on my behalf first. There was, however, one exception where one Deaf participant went as far as to send out a flyer to her contact lists on my behalf which included my contact details and indeed one participant did contact me for an interview via this method. In addition, one of the participants suggested that I make a signed video of the flyer to be sent out to Deaf participants. However, although one person did respond to this video the interview did not take place in the end because of problems of a lack of availability. In addition I was not successful in my attempts to hold a focus group with Deaf Women. Participants worked in both professional and non-professional grades across the public sector.

In total, 30 participants interviews were used as one of the Deaf participants withdrew due to a conflict of interest that later developed. It is unfortunate that this was the only Deaf participant that was not white as this had added to the diversity and richness of data that was collected. In addition to the participants, I was also supported by a Black Deaf female friend

who helped develop some of the signs around the concepts being discussed. As some of the terminology was new, there was no easy equivalent in British Sign Language. Having a Black Deaf perspective on this proved invaluable in terms of dissemination presentations I have done.

As I am a qualified interpreter, I made the decision to conduct the interviews with Deaf women in sign language, bringing me closer to the participants and these were video recorded. Interviews with Black women were in spoken English and voice recorded. Some preliminary findings from the pilot study were discussed. Participants generally viewed equality and diversity policies within their organization with some level of scepticism with many using words like ‘tick box’ and ‘tokenistic’ to describe their view. There was evidence that participants held cultural and linguistic understandings of Deaf identity rather than disability. The concept of ‘workplace racial trauma’ as well as ‘chronic racial insults’ (Obasi, 2013) were discovered where the trauma of racial discrimination leads to an exit from the workplace, and the chronic racial insults being lower level acts of bias, exclusion and or stereotyping that participants experienced on a more frequent basis. Chronic racial insults are most similar to the concept of micro invalidations as described by Sue et al (2007) in their wider discussions of racial microaggressions. The Deaf participant discussions about the additional barriers they face in relation to, for example, the effects of working in English as a second language (British Sign Language being their first language), organization of interpreters, particular barriers in academia and publishing etc. were interpreted as ‘the Deaf premium’. The discussion about the advantages given to hearing, signing, colleagues was interpreted as ‘occupational circumvention’. Issues of ‘race’ were made difficult for Black participants to discuss and as such were similar to the race taboo identified by (Gordon, 2007).

4. Inside Looking Out or Outside Kooking In?

4.1 Situating the researcher in the research

Like Maylor (2009), being Black and being female is central to who I am as a researcher. It is also central to who I am as an individual. These aspects of my identity will always be visible and have an impact on how I am perceived by the research participants. However, given my research area, my position as a hearing person which is often taken for granted outside of my working life, also becomes much more significant in conducting the research with Deaf women. During the research with the two different groups of women, with regards to my own identity and the access that it gave me in terms of the importance of *experience* (Collins,

1998 & 2000), there were clear shifts in positioning that challenged my own location casting me both as ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ in the same research study (see also **Researcher Positionality in Cross-Cultural Research Chapter in this handbook**). I found, as Johnson-Bailey (1999) states, that the interviewer/interviewee relationships had deeper foundations and were more intimate when there were fewer margins to mitigate (Obasi, 2014)

Fawcett and Hearn (2004, p. 203) have described debates about otherness in research as something that is “ongoing, unfinished and probably unfinishable”. There has, in recent years, been a growing discourse from academics about insider and outsider debates in research (Mullings, 1999; Brayboy, 2000; Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Merriam et al., 2001; Serrant-Green 2002; Innes, 2009; Maylor, 2009; Ochieng, 2010; Gair, 2011; Obasi, 2014; Suwankhong & Liamputtong, 2015). Within these writings, researchers generally provide reflexive accounts of their own position or a summary of the literature, whether or not this is based on the remarks or interactions with participants. However, this chapter takes an original approach in that it centralizes participant perspectives on this issue in a way that adds valuable contributions to this on-going debate.

It has been argued for some time that it is impossible to separate the researcher from the research or knowledge from the knower (Andersen, 1993) and at least in qualitative PhD research, engagement with reflexivity is increasingly becoming a requirement of completion (Obasi, 2014).

According to Gair (2012, p. 137) “the notion of insider/outsider status is understood to mean the degree to which a researcher is located either within or outside a group being researched, because of her or his common lived experience or status as a member of that group”. Within her paper, Gair talked about ‘common wounds’ experienced both by researcher and participants, which was seen as a positive element to bring to the research relationship. It is clear from some of the responses from the participants that this was a position being afforded to me because of my status as a Black woman. What follows is a reflexive discussion centred on participant responses to insider/outsider perspectives on research.

There have been some examples in the literature where other Black women have discussed the way in which their identity as the researcher has formed part of the participant discussion (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Mullings, 1999; Serrant-Green, 2002; Maylor, 2009; Ochieng 2010). In my own case within this study, similar instances occurred. An example of this is demonstrated by the participant below in her discussions about who should or should not be included within the label BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic):

It is so broad right it is Black, Asian, minority ethnic so it is very very wide and there are people who use it to play a game to their advantage.....For example there is someone, there is a programme that is run to help BAME people and this guy applied to go and he says he is ethnic minority. He is Jewish; he already has an advantageous position being a white man. well I shouldn't really say it but there is nowhere for the likes of you and me to hide. If you see what I mean,...We are what it says on the tin! (Devandra², Civil servant)

There were many more similar examples where my identity formed part of the discussions, some of which are provided in other parts of the chapter.

4.2 Situating participants on the insider/outsider continuum

In addition to incidental references to my identity, and as I continued to think reflexively about my researcher position throughout the research, I felt it important to gain some understanding from participants as to their own perspectives on insider/outsider research. I introduced questions and discussions around sameness and difference of the researcher. Some generic responses were given and two examples are provided below:

Really it depends on the person. In an ideal world yes signing Deaf person, also their identity their experience growing up. Some might say "oh definitely Deaf" but some Deaf are 'deaf by ear' ... but are they the best representative for us Deaf signing community? Some hearing that know nothing about Deaf- definitely not!....also they must acknowledge give back something.....so hearing not allowed? I won't say that, it depends on the person and the benefit to the signing community.... Also it's difficult because Deaf education is poor. Deaf with knowledge and qualification to become researcher are few so we have not much choice. We can't wait fifty years for the education to be sorted out and Deaf become researchers because that would be too late. (Mary, Academic)

Or a Black participant response:

I would have asked myself the question can this person really get a sense of what it's like for me as a Black female only because it's a different experience although they may empathize it's a totally different experience isn't it? I would have been curious as to why a white person felt the need to explore this. I would have asked the question why is it so important for you to be doing this? So I don't think I would have ruled it

² For reasons of confidentiality and anonymity all participants have been given pseudonyms

out because I would have been curious. Because white people have done research about Black people but it's not always been successful. (Debra, Counsellor).

From these two quotes, it would appear that there is some recognition of trust that can be won or lost by the researcher. For 'insiders', the starting position is of trust that can be lost for example through the recognition of being 'deaf by ear', and therefore, showing a lack of understanding of culturally Deaf perspectives. For 'outsiders', there is recognition that trust can be won via willingness to be held to account and explain motivations for the research, or a willingness to give something back to the community the researcher is taking from. There is also recognition of the history of power and exploitation that needs at least to be acknowledged.

Whilst it is important to be able to ask difficult and challenging questions about power dynamics in researcher/researched relationships during the research process, I would say it is impossible to ask such questions without shining a spotlight on the identity of the researcher themselves. Within my own research, there were many more examples of responses where my own identity was central to the response made. This was regardless of whether I was interviewing Deaf women or Black women as seen in the examples below.

Chijioke: What do you think of hearing people doing research with Deaf people?

Louise: Honestly?

Chijioke: Yes please do

Louise: Honestly, would be better Deaf. But you alright you know background Deaf you interpreter yourself that's fine I have no problem with that. Hearing person just interested in learning? I would object to that....better that person can know and empathize (Louise, Administrator)

Similarly but relating to my identity as a Black woman:

Yes it does help because I know that you've had, well I shouldn't really assume really I shouldn't assume. It is likely that you would have gone through racist or you would have experienced some level of discrimination whereas you know one thing which I have been told over the years since I have been working for this local authority is that "no we don't understand what you're talking about because we're white" and I'm like "you're not even trying"I have worked with people who are white who put in effort to understand or can identify because of whatever experiences they may go through or in the family or a friend they can draw on that (Tochi, Social worker)

In an earlier paper (Obasi, 2014), I discussed a Deaf participant response that was more challenging in questioning the legitimacy and negative impacts of hearing on Deaf research,

but in both of these examples above, in addition to highlighting aspects of my own identity, there is also some distinction being made about those in the majority populations being discussed. They are differentiating between those who are part of the majority group (hearing people and white people) but who have some access to ‘knowledge’ of the minority group be that professionally or personally.

of the literature on insider/outsider researchers now incorporates the positive elements an ‘outsider’ position can take including objectivity, distance from participants and theoretical and practical freedom (Merton, 1972; Innes, 2009). However, this does not address one of the key advantages of ‘insider’ research being that participants are more likely to be more open in what they discuss. In interviews with Black participants where sameness rather than difference was my majority experience, it was clear that this was part of the participant perspectives on the issue. Linking back to the origins of the debate and African-American scholarly views (Innes, 2009), some of the Black participants felt that the identity of the researcher would have an impact on how they responded and the subjects they were willing to discuss as demonstrated below.

Because you are from the same background it makes it easier to say the thing, that like sometimes you have almost hidden racism. Nobody is going to understand that unless you have been there you know like there are some things that you wouldn’t feel open in saying because people would think “oh you have got a chip on your shoulder why would you think that?” Of course yes definitely it makes a difference I would have taken part in the interview but my answers would have been different. It’s almost like when you have these diversity groups and ultimately the diversity champion is always normally white or you have these groups and people are asking you things and you are guarded you are guarded against what you say (MJ, Civil Servant)

Or another example:

I think it makes a lot of difference to me because I felt here that I could say exactly what I have said today and not feel bad about that because I think I know you would understand or you know you can empathize and I felt comfortable within that because I know that you wouldn’t be judging what I have said or making your own assumptions about it whereas I think if it wasn’t a Black woman for me I don’t think I would I wouldn’t have been as open I would have been more reserved because I probably wouldn’t have trusted them as much so yeah for me it makes a lot of difference. (Chemma, Community Worker)

This aspect of the debate was not present in the narratives of Deaf participants but in considering Deaf cultural discourse, it may be premature to conclude that it was not a perspective that they shared. Hearing research with Deaf people in and of itself can create boundaries and limitations that impact on responses. My position as a Black female researcher and specifically a Black female hearing researcher was an integral part of the research as demonstrated by the participant responses discussed. If Deaf participants held similar perspectives about the *importance of experience* of the researcher in enabling wider and deeper responses, it is more likely that they would share this perspective with a Deaf rather than hearing researcher. Using the theoretical framework allows me to recognize that lack of *experience* may create limitations or require further validation and turning to Deaf cultural discourse and the specific history of hearing on Deaf research raises my awareness of the forms these limitations may take.

Fluidity in insider/outsider experiences is now an established element of academic debates (Mullings, 1999; Innes, 2009; Ochieng, 2010; Obasi, 2014). Whilst carrying out the research with Black women, I would describe my position as one which was mostly an ‘insider’ position, but this was not a fixed constant position it was accompanied by moments and situations of difference. For different reasons to Ochieng (2010), I found that I was cast as both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ within the same interview. The participant below was reflecting on bereavement and the inadequacies of the allowances made within her workplace, which she felt did not take account to of her cultural bereavement practices.

But things like in the West Indian community if somebody dies they have a dead house, from the minute they die to the minute they are buried and that can be a week. So when you get special leave if it’s the mum and dad or close relative you get three days but in reality well you know you need more days.....

Chijioke: So what happens in that ‘dead house’ then what does that mean?

Well that’s when people are allowed to visit the dead house so when my dad died we had to keep food on the go 24 hours a day, alcohol and hospitality so there’s always somebody in so people can pay their respects and when they come they often leave money or they’ll bring some kind of food or something like that, to feed other people so it is from when they die to when they’re buried and people come round and tell stories. And people just like for a week or so come to the dead house so you see people “oh I’ve just heard and I’ve travelled from...” and its things like the funeral, as I understand it in the British culture, you’re invited to a funeral but in the West Indian one you can have 300 people because everybody comes. (Sharon, Social Worker)

My ethnic origin is Nigerian and although there are similar aspects of this in relation to cultural burial processes in my own culture, I was not familiar with the name it was given so felt the need to probe deeper. Similarly, many of the participants dipped in and out of patois on occasion or made gestures that were culturally specific to African Caribbean cultures and in a way that there was an expectation that I would understand. Although I am not part of those cultures and so would probably be classed as an outsider by many academic theorists, I am used to hearing patois from within my social circles. As such, I was able to understand the patois that was spoken to me and most of the cultural references that were made. Young Jr (2004) talks about the advantages outsider status may bring to the research interview when outsiders probe deeper. Had I been an insider on this occasion there may have been no need to probe for an elaboration on the meaning of the “dead house” because of an assumed knowledge. Indeed in some other interviews there were probably situations where I did not probe and therefore missed the opportunity for elaboration on a specific point. However, it is also clear from some of the responses that the perception of sameness or insider status did facilitate more freedom of expression, trust and wider discussion than would have occurred in ‘outsider’ research.

5. Connecting to Africanist Sista-Hood in Britain

5.1 Names, self-naming and naming identity

The emancipatory elements of Africanist Sista-hood in Britain have built within them recognition of the need to validate counter constructions to that of the majority. In Deaf cultural discourse, Ladd (2003), Padden and Humphries (2005), Hole (2007), Bahan (2008) and Young and Hunt (2011) have written about the way that majority hearing constructions of Deaf people as disabled are privileged over those articulated by Deaf people themselves. There is also recognition from Collins and Solomos that we need to acknowledge not just the identity that is imposed on us but also that which we choose. Included within this is often the position of resistance and the use of agency against the dominant constructions which in and of itself can lead to mobilization of collectives (Collins & Solomos, 2010). None of the participants in the study described themselves or the wider Deaf community as disabled. Their identity was articulated in relation to their culture, their language and affiliation with other Deaf people as discussed by this participant during the pilot.

I’m a Deaf BSL user part of the Deaf world. culture, language all of that is included that is part of it. Hearing? Not much. Most of my hearing friends are interpreters really so I’m not really hearing led I am more Deaf led.My needs my access needs

are different from disabled people.....who for example may use a wheelchair..... Or blind need Braille and they are visible disabilities my needs are not visible. (Erica, Social Worker).

For both participant groups, discussions on identity were interesting and complex and the value in self-naming and validation came through.

Chijioke: what is your ethnic origin?

It depends on the question really; If you mean how I identify or how government label me? If forced to choose I would tick “White British” but if Deaf was there as an option I would choose that. (Mary, Academic)

This response provides a clear link to the work of Lane (2005) and Eckert (2005, 2010), in which they make the case for culturally Deaf people to be recognized as an ethnic group in their own right. Lane provides justification for this perspective by measuring the position of Deaf people or ‘Deaf-world’ against the criteria set out for what constitutes an ethnic group, including issues of language, values, community, history and art amongst others (Lane, 2005). Interestingly, Mary had no reservations about her nationality being British, which shows there was a clear distinction being made for her own identification as a member of a Deaf ethnic group. Anthias (2010) makes the point that ideational identity can exist alongside legal or judicial identity. Given the power behind anything in the Western world that occupies a legal status, the fight for recognition of Deaf people beyond disability remains an arduous task. Surely, within any emancipatory research, it is perspectives of participants that should be prioritized in how these identities are validated.

Within the interviews and focus groups, there were some discussions of identity and names of some of the Black participants and the way in which the anglicized names they had inherited impacted on their working lives. Within the framework of Africanist Sista-hood, there is recognition of the way in which collective identities of our (an)Sistas can have an impact on our individual identities today. The branding of our enslaved (an)Sistas that took place centuries ago still carries legacies for some Black women in Britain today. This was an issue that was discussed in both focus groups in strikingly similar ways.

Focus group 1

Participant 1: I occasionally get it “oh you didn’t sound Black on the phone”

Participant 2: So how does Black sound like?

Participant1: I should have said “a whaa g’on? Ya ready for me come see ya now?”

(In patois). (Raucous laughter all round).

Focus Group 2

I used to be a housing officer they would open the door and they would say “oh you don’t sound Black on the phone”... I said oh well what do Black people sound like? You know, they expect you to have this yardy speech or something or speak like a Jamaican you know.

Other similar examples were given by participants where this was either verbalized by service users or colleagues or where the reception received by the Black staff made them think that similar assumptions had taken place. This also provides validation for the Africanist elements within the framework which links back in some way to African heritage or ‘African descent’ as one participant described her ethnic origin. There were instances like those above where Africanist links were implicit, and others where explicit connections were reflected on.

Chijioke: What is your ethnic origin?

For a long time I was African Caribbean and then there was, I go through phases and would just tick African and wouldn’t tick the Caribbean bit I was kind of like so distant from that bit..... but I have come full circle again and I’ve gone to African-Caribbean because I think that helps me to understand where I have come from. I think if I just pretend that there isn’t a Caribbean element I lose some of my history and my history is that my grandma was dual heritage,... my great grandfather was French and you can see through the ages and you can see through the colouring of some of my family members and all of us are not the same skin colour even my brother and sisters we are all different and I think some time you have to, if you don’t grab hold of that history that is Caribbean you forget that you have another side to your history and that’s the reason. (Marlene, Social Work Manager)

For Deaf participants too, there was recognition of individual and collective identity that existed simultaneously. The participant below when discussing researcher positioning is talking not just of her own identity, but an identity linking back to a Deaf history of oppression exclusion and discrimination. Again, the framework points the analysis in the direction of historical significances, but it is the theoretical alliance with Deaf cultural discourse that provides the detail and implication of that specific Deaf history and its links to the present day.

The Deaf community through history experience discrimination, for example, Milan³-discrimination, cochlear implants- discrimination. Because society and governments only respect us for research, research what for? Research **on** me for your benefit then future what? Eradicate Deaf for the philosophy utilitarianism- for the benefit of the greater good compared to the few. The Deaf community is small and hearing society is the majority so that's why. (Mary Academic)

From these very interesting, complex and history steeped responses, it becomes clear that, as individuals, it is not always possible to be or be seen as separate from our histories, which is an important factor regularly overshadowed by poststructuralist and post-race perspectives currently flooding academic debates. Although the concept of agency should not be excluded from any academic debates about collectivity and connectivity in identity, those histories will still have an impact on our everyday lives regardless of the extent to which they are acknowledged. Those impacts are not always constant and vary to differing degrees and in differing situations.

5.2 Space and place in Africanist sista-hood

Atewologon and Singh (2010), in their study of black professionals' workplace identity, talk of the way participants recognized a differentiation between a "black British" and "black in Britain" identity. This was also an issue that was echoed by participants in one of the focus groups where the general view was expressed by the participant below:

I think there is a scale in terms of you can be Black and have an English accent and you can be Black and have an African accent and the English accent will be treated better than the African accent. (Focus Group 2)

Similar issues came out in the analysis of the participants individual interviews, three of which were born in Africa, and of those, two of them were born in countries subject to the apartheid system. When asked about their identity, their view included the base line position of being considered as a human. Though interviewed separately and unknown to each other, part of their responses on the issue provided quite similar perspectives:

Sometimes there have been times when I am filling forms in I will actually leave it blank or sometimes I have been naughty enough to write human being. (Makosi, Social Worker)

³ The Milan congress of 1880 is well known in Deaf communities for having had a detrimental impact on the education of Deaf children because of the decision that was made to ban sign language in deaf schools (See Ladd 2003 for comprehensive review).

Or another participant

I just identify myself as a person really, I would say just as a human being who has every right to be here! (Jain, Support Worker)

Within the framework of Africanist Sista-hood **in Britain**, there is the recognition of the need to be flexible enough in moving away from the notion of Britishness which for some is unobtainable and for others is not an aspect of their identity they readily wish to showcase. At the basic level, as Black women, we all have in common the experience of being Black women 'in Britain', whilst recognizing the diversity of experiences this encompasses, the focus become one of location rather nationality. This provides a further welcome divergence from the terminology of Black British feminism and the Britishness this encompasses.

The framework recognizes the way in which as Black women our spaces are heavily regulated and policed. Within the narratives, there was evidence of different coping strategies employed to deal with this, some of which were influenced by some of the symbiotic relationships related to 'race', gender, and the social spaces occupied by Deaf people.

Three of the five Deaf participants in the study talked in detail about the working relationship with other hearing professionals who can sign. A central theme within the Africanist Sista-hood framework is the concept of '*knowing without knowing*' taken from Reynold's analysis of Collins' work on Black feminist thought . For the three Deaf participants, this was a significant issue that seemed to cause them problems in the workplace on a regular basis. The hearing signing colleagues who were afforded this position of knowing without knowing were sometimes seen as the instigators as in the first example provided below. But in others examples, the issue was that the hearing signing colleagues were seen by the wider organization to have '*knowledge*' of Deaf people, their language and or culture, and that they were the preferable source through which to access this *knowledge* even where the Deaf participant was the obvious person to contact as in the second example provided below.

Four of them [hearing, signing colleagues] meetings, networking no Deaf involvement.... Them represent us? No thank you! You have to be Deaf. Must Deaf because of experience. We know what we want. Networking is brilliant but bring Deaf or Deaf go by themselves with interpreter. ... They don't share the information with us because we are second class.... I wanted to say if it wasn't for us Deaf you wouldn't have those brilliant jobs.... They are climbing their ladders on our backs! (Janet, Academic)

One of the participants here discusses the way in which her efforts to tackle a personal issue with the human resources section was discussed with another hearing, signing colleague and therefore circumventing the need for direct contact.

They should involve Deaf directly. For example I went to see Susan [a hearing HR representative] for something....she came back asked Tammy [a hearing signing colleague] about it. I ask her why not ask Susan to ask me herself? She said it was to save time so (Facial expression what can I do?)...she should ask them to ask me.

(Carol, Academic)

Whatever the case, these approaches leave the Deaf person feeling devalued in terms of their professional status but also further strengthens the power relationships that exist in the workplace between signing hearing people and their Deaf colleagues. Hearing signing colleagues by accepting this approach, act as enablers to the circumvention then either wittingly or unwittingly become gatekeepers to the information that should rightfully be gained or passed on via direct access to the Deaf person themselves. A further issue is whether these power advantages are acknowledged, challenged or perpetuated by the hearing colleagues in question.

Issues regarding physical spaces occupied by Black women in the workplace were also discussed in some of the interviews and focus groups. The examples below, however, demonstrates the ways in which the pressure of our hyper-visibility can force us to self-management it. This participant provides an explanation of the reasons and the manner in which she tries to self-regulate her position of hyper-visibility.

When Rena (Black participant) comes to my organization and Pat (Black participant) I just shush them straight away....I do it because I don't want to be looked at or be noticed to be honest, and I put myself on mute I say it all the time when I go to work I put myself on mute I can't be who I am. (Focus group 2)

I have written in an earlier paper Obasi (2013) about the ways in which hyper-visibility and invisibility can exist in the same person and within the study a participant summarized the issues very well in relation to the collective identity of Black people in her community. Having contributed to discussion about the frustration of trying to progress services for Black community members her conclusion was as follows:

I always say that as the Black community we are the visible invisibles, we are visible by our skin colour but invisible when it comes to services and that's a real battle (Focus Group 2).

6. Conclusions and Future Directions

Creswell (2007) and Liamputtong (2010) recognize that the position of the researcher has an impact on every stage of the research process, and the same is recognized within this study. My own personal position as a researcher had an impact on what I chose to study, how I chose to study it, who I chose to study it with and the framework I chose to use. From the contributions of the participants, it seems that my personal and professional identity also had an impact on the interactions that occurred. The framework of Africanist Sista-hood in Britain, while building on existing works, helps create a deep level of analysis of the data when connections are made to collective, historical and individual experiences. In working in collaboration with Deaf cultural discourse with its attempts to foreground counter constructions of language, culture and or ethnicity, I also leave space for further contributions from others researching with other social groups. Working with other social groups may necessitate different theoretical alliances and emancipatory approaches.

Johnson-Bailey (1999, p. 669), when carrying out research with other Black women, acknowledges some of the dividing lines between researcher and researched, but concludes that “there were many more times when the experience of a Black woman interviewing a Black woman was advantageous”. From the data collected in my own study, it would also appear that this was the majority view both of the participants as well as myself as the researcher.

Deaf women, for the most part, also expressed a preference for Deaf researchers as well as setting parameters within which hearing researchers can work. As outsider hearing researchers there are mitigations that can be introduced such as interviewing in sign language and incorporating participants in shaping the research, but the position of ‘partial knowledge’ or ‘professional knowledge’ held by hearing signing researchers can be a double edged sword and one that has been used against Deaf people in the form of oppression and exploitation. It is difficult to see a way in which our identity as hearing researchers can have the same majority advantageous position which would be gained from Deaf with Deaf research.

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