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Abstract

This article advances understanding of researcher positionality in cross-cultural consumer research by introducing the *Positionality Spectrum,* a dynamic framework that captures the fluid, situational and affective nature of researcher positionality. Drawing on collaborative autoethnography and qualitative interviews with 32 British, Nigerian and Nigerian immigrant households, we demonstrate how researchers experience shifting *moments of insiderness, outsiderness* and *in-betweenness* across the research process. The findings challenge fixed or linear conceptions of positionality, highlighting the value of multicultural research teams in enhancing reflexivity and interpretive rigour. We offer practical guidance for navigating power, identity and cultural complexity in research with marginalised communities and foreground positionality as relational, temporal and ethically consequential, supporting more inclusive and epistemically just research practices.

Key Words: Insider-Outsider; Researcher Positionality; Cross-Cultural Research; Marginalised Consumers; Collaborative Autoethnography; Underrepresented Consumers

Introduction

As societies have become more multicultural and globally interconnected, cross-cultural consumer research has grown not only in importance but in ethical complexity (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2021). While methods in cross-cultural consumer research have become more sophisticated, little attention has been paid to the positionality of researchers in relation to how their intersecting positionalities shape access, interpretation and representation of consumers, particularly when studying marginalised communities. Existing frameworks often reduce researcher positionality to static insider–outsider binaries or linear continuums, failing to account for its emotional, situational and shifting nature. This article responds to this gap, proposing a dynamic reconceptualisation: the *Positionality Spectrum,* a dynamic framework that captures the fluid and affective dimensions of participant and researcher identity across the research process. Drawing on collaborative autoethnography and interviews with British, Nigerian and Nigerian immigrant households, we propose a rethinking of positionality that supports more reflexive, inclusive and ethically responsible consumer research.

While the growth of cross-cultural consumer research reflects an increased awareness of global diversity, it also raises critical questions about how researchers position themselves in relation to the communities they study, particularly when those communities are marginalised or historically underrepresented. In such contexts, positionality, defined as the 'degree to which a researcher is located within or outside the investigated community' or group because of shared (or lack of) experience, knowledge or characteristics with its members (Gair, 2012, p.139), is central to how knowledge is accessed, co-constructed and represented. Positionality encompasses multiple intersecting dimensions such as race, gender, class, culture and lived experience, that shape researcher-participant rapport building, data interpretation and negotiation of power (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Yip, 2024).

Dominant models treat positionality as fixed or map it onto a linear insider–outsider continuum (e.g. Banks, 1998), failing to capture the shifting, relational and emotionally charged nature of researcher–participant dynamics (Barnes, 2021; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Yip, 2024). We argue that positionality is not static, but lived and negotiated, evolving across the research process in response to relational dynamics and contextual cues. By interrogating this fluidity, we challenge conventional methodological assumptions and call for a more nuanced, situated understanding that recognises the emotional, reflexive and power-laden nature of researcher-participant relationships. Existing studies on researcher positionality highlight the simultaneity (how intersecting identities coexist), and positional negotiation (how researchers continually navigate their stance relative to participants). Schulz (2021), however, takes this further, viewing participants as dynamic agents who actively shape, and at times control, the research encounter. This positions the researcher-participant relationship as more ethically and practically reciprocal than often acknowledged in the literature.

The article makes notable theoretical, methodological and practitioner contributions. Firstly, it introduces the *Positionality Spectrum,* a conceptual framework that reconceptualises researcher positionality as fluid, episodic and affectively co-produced, challenging static and linear insider–outsider models in cross-cultural consumer research. It recognises positionality as a dynamic, situational and affective process and celebrates the fluidity with which researchers navigate identity, power and connection across the research process. This contribution advances a more critical and reflexive understanding of researcher-participant dynamics by foregrounding the temporal and affective dimensions of positionality, which we term *moments of insiderness*, *outsiderness* and *in-betweenness.* We illustrate how these shift across the research process and are shaped by our shared experiences (researcher-participant; researcher-researcher), emotional resonance and contextual cues. Second, a methodological contribution is made through drawing on collaborative autoethnography to demonstrate how

positional reflexivity can be collectively enacted to enrich interpretation, reduce cultural bias and improve ethical engagement with marginalised consumer groups. Drawing on our study that explores the household food consumption of British, Nigerian and Nigerian immigrants, with the first author being a Nigerian immigrant living in the UK having grown up in Nigeria and the second author British-born, we illustrate how multicultural research teams can enhance reflexivity, reduce interpretive bias and improve rigour in qualitative studies involving marginalised consumer groups. Third, a practical and ethical contribution is made through providing a researcher toolbox and practical guidance for managing relational tensions, power dynamics and cultural overfamiliarity in cross-cultural research, supporting more inclusive and ethically responsible research practices.

The article is set as follows. First, we review existent literature on researcher positionality, focusing on insider and outsider positionality before exploring this in the context of marginalised communities. The methodological approach adopted is then discussed before the findings are presented. The article then concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practitioner implications of the study, outlining the limitations of the research and future research directions.

Theoretical Background

In qualitative research, it is critical for researchers to recognise and reflect on their positionality in their relationships with participants given the direct and intimate roles a researcher can assume in the research process. Positionality shapes access and rapport with participants, as well as data collection and analysis, and can also impact how findings are interpreted and reported (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Hall et al., 2023). Researchers therefore need to be mindful of how their own, and others' positionality and cultural ways of knowing can be

dangerous to the communities they are studying (Milner IV, 2007). It is important therefore that researchers are aware of, and make allowances for, locating their views, values and beliefs about the research topic, design, data collection and interpretation (Holmes, 2020). Despite the growing interest in reflexivity, in marketing and consumer research, there remains a lack of research into how researchers position themselves within the research context, and how this positionality shapes methodological choices, particularly in relation to data analysis and the conclusions drawn (Dean et al., 2017, p. 273).

Insider-Outsider Positionality

Foundational discussions of positionality in anthropology and sociology focused on positionality through a dichotomous lens, whereby researchers are located either as *insiders* (members of the studied community or social group of the population of interest) or *outsiders* (non-members) (Burns et al., 2012; Gair, 2012; Merriam et al., 2001).

An insider perspective is widely recognised to have many benefits, including the researcher sharing linguistical, cultural and/or other identity features and experiences with members of the studied population (Chavez, 2008). Insider status can also facilitate greater researcher acceptance by participants, making it easier to access and recruit participants and expediate rapport and trust building. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that this can lead to richer data collection, with participants more openly engaging with the research process being less suspicious of the researcher and their motives. The potential benefits of insider status are also evident in research with marginalised groups, such as immigrants and ethnic minorities (Ademolu, 2024; Hall et al., 2023; Morosanu, 2015; Ross, 2017). These include ease of entry, expediating participant access, recruitment and rapport building (Berger, 2015). Researchers as "insiders" are often considered to be able to get privileged access to hard-to-reach groups and to bring insightful knowledge to the research process through their shared commonalities

with participants (the researched) that might not be possible if the researcher were an "outsider" (Morosanu, 2015; Taylor, 2011). One of the main critiques of insider status is the researchers' familiarity with the participants' lived experiences and reality can cause them to overlook or misinterpret data or participants may struggle to disclose their perspective in sensitive topics, where their perspective may differ from the "expected" norm, particularly where the research topic is sensitive (Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014).

Proponents of outsider research, conversely, often focus on the benefits of maintaining objectivity in the research process fostered by unfamiliarity with the studied population. Berger (2015), for example, suggests that an outsider perspective prevents role confusion and partiality of views. Conducting research as an outsider can free the researcher from group expectations and loyalties, empowering them to ask novel questions and challenge previously held explanations or understandings (Chhabra, 2020). An outsider perspective thus has the potential to enhance understanding of the social realities of marginalised communities (Bridges, 2001) by relying on *verstehen,* a sociological construct where we understand and interpret human behaviour from others' points of view, to empathetically amplify disempowered voices through rigorous explication of the social phenomena being studied (Tucker, 1965).

The outsider perspective is well critiqued (Serrant-Green, 2002). Arguments often centre on the assumed lack of intimate knowledge of the peculiarities of the studied group, with the researcher lacking shared commonalities and identity markers with participants (Chhabra, 2020; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Mohler & Rudman, 2022). Outsider researchers are often perceived to lack the ability to understand a participant's lived experiences and to accurately convey their stories and views. Other criticisms levelled at outsider researchers include the potential to foster exploitative and discriminatory behaviour, with the view that having the groups' views articulated by an outsider could be disempowering to the studied population, especially where participants are a marginalised or underrepresented group (Bridges, 2001).

We build on this by exploring the complex and evolving role of the researcher as both an Indigenous insider and an external outsider in cross-cultural research, and how the changing role of the researcher might affect positionality and influence the research process.

This fixed insider/outsider rhetoric, as introduced earlier, has been increasingly critiqued for oversimplifying the complex nature of researcher identities, with the call for researchers to move beyond the insider-outsider dichotomy to recognise the fluidity of the researcher's positionality (Barnes, 2021; Milligan, 2016). Dwyer and Buckle (2009), for example, argue that a researcher can occupy both positions of insider and outsider rather than being one or the other. Conversely, Banks (1998), as illustrated in Figure 1, conceptualises insider-outsider positionality to be on a continuum based on a researcher's intellectual, cultural and social distance to the Indigenous community being studied. In exploring how researchers in multicultural settings negotiate their social identities, Kipnis and colleagues (2021), similar to Banks (1998), put forward a Researcher Cultural Positionality (RCP) framework, positing there to be three forms of researcher positionality on a continuum of insiderness and outsiderness: *the total Indigenous insider, the partial insider* and the *outsider*. They recognise that a researchers' position shifts during the inquiry process, reflecting the varying degrees of connection and understanding the researcher possesses within the studied cultural context and how this can shift throughout the research process. Kipnis et al. also extend the work of Sheppard (2002), on socio-spatial positionality, which accounts for both *social* (e.g., nationality, race) and *spatial* (e.g., familiarity with the local context) dimensions, with researchers' identity affiliations recognised as being multi-faceted and influenced by socio-cultural factors.

Figure 1: Researcher Positionality Continuum

Adapted from Banks (1998, p.8)

While prior models such as Banks' (1998) continuum and Kipnis et al.'s (2021) RCP framework have advanced understandings of researcher identity, they remain limited in accounting for the complex fluid, moment-to-moment affective shifts experienced in fieldwork. In that, such models often treat identity markers as stable and linear reference points, underemphasising the emotional, relational and situational nature of researcher-participant interactions. In contrast, Barnes (2021), inspired by the work of Kezar (2002, p.96) that 'people make meaning from various aspects of their...multiple overlapping identities' and Miller's (1997) call for researchers to recognise the impact of multifaceted researcher roles, proposes that researchers can be positioned "in-between". Where, instead of switching between insider-outsider status, the inbetweener embraces the ambiguity and duality of this position, rather than rejecting the duality of being "trapped" between insider/outsider positions. Barnes (2021) conceptualises this position as liquid, acknowledging the researcher's capacity to hold multiple, shifting identities across time and context.

There remains, however, a lack of empirical exploration, particularly in consumer research, of how these in-between positions affect stages of the research process, from access and recruitment to data interpretation and reporting. Appau et al. (2020) support this view, reflecting that researchers can shift from outsider to insider as familiarity with a participant develops, particularly in ethnographic research, demonstrating the fluid nature of positionality.

Approaching research with fixed positionality therefore risks overlooking the dynamic and evolving nature of the researcher-participant relationship. Scholars, including Carling et al. (2014), Chereni (2014) and Ross (2017) advocate for researchers taking a more nuanced and situational approach to researcher positionality, recognising that it is shaped by complex, context-specific factors such as appearance, language, religion and life experiences.

Scholars have called for a more dynamic and intersectional understanding of positionality that recognises researchers can occupy multiple, shifting positions across the research process (Barnes, 2021; Manohar et al., 2017). In that rather than being fixed, positionality is socially constructed and context-dependent, influenced by the interplay of identity markers and relational dynamics, and recognises that researchers can occupy multiple, shifting positions (Anthias, 2002; Kipnis et al., 2021). A researcher for example may be an insider in terms of ethnicity but an outsider in terms of class or gender, with these statuses evolving over time and in different research contexts. Some scholars also associate the insider versus outsider lens with the *emic* and *etic* perspectives developed by Pike (1954; as cited in Harris, 1976) in their study of human behaviour across different cultural and social settings. An emic perspective explores the specific characteristics from within a single cultural or social context, with the etic adopting an objective outsider perspective (Ademolu, 2024; Olive, 2014). The etic view is largely associated with cross-cultural research, being conducted from the perspective of an objective detached outsider (Markee, 2013).

Conversely, scholars caution that ethnoracialised "sameness" and/or other shared characteristics with the studied population do not automatically translate to authentic and critical awareness of participants' lived experiences or grant automatic unencumbered access (Ademolu, 2024; Gair, 2012; Mohler & Rudman, 2022). In that the routine and ordinary aspects of everyday life essential to interpretation may be overlooked and go unnoticed due to insider overfamiliarity (Chavez, 2008; Merriam et al., 2001). Non-cultural distinctions between the

researcher and researched tend to be highlighted when studying one's own people with socio-cultural aspects sometimes overlooked or ignored, being deemed "uninteresting" (Chereni, 2014). Awareness of shared understandings can also be problematic, having the potential to curtail the discussion of important or sensitive concepts in an explicit or comfortable manner, thus, adversely impacting data quality (Ross, 2017). This suggests that outsider status or lack of shared features can better serve to foster active and open engagement through critical reflexivity. Bhopal (2009) recounts contrasting experiences, whereby a researcher's distance from, and difference with the research topic and participants can aid disclosure and rapport building - accentuating the challenges that can be associated with "insider" status as discussed at the start of this section.

Chiseri-Strater (1996, p.116) also point out that 'positionality includes the ethnographer's given attributes such as race, nationality, and gender which are fixed or culturally ascribed', with other attributes, such as political views, personal life-history and experiences being more fluid, subjective and contextual. This further demonstrates the need to recognise that not all aspects of positionality are fixed. Not all scholars, however, view attributes such as race, nationality and gender as fixed. Inspired by the work of Hall (2014; 2020), we acknowledge the ruptures, discontinuities and uniqueness of researcher and participant self-identity, considering all "categories" as fluid, liquid and contextual. Researchers must therefore continually reflect on how they inhabit and position themselves throughout the research process, including in relation to the research topic, context and the participants (Holmes, 2020).

Amplifying Marginalised Voices in Consumer Research

Ademolu (2024) notes that in researching underrepresented groups, such as immigrants and ethnic minorities, the presumption of shared distinctiveness between researcher and participant still confers some degree of status privileges on the researcher. In a study of families of African descent, Ochieng (2010) for example, argues for the importance of insider status, stating that shared experiences of racism, labour inequalities and other struggles endured by African immigrants living in the UK might not have been brought to light if the by a researcher had had no knowledge or experience of immigration.

Historically, marginalised groups have predominately been studied by white, male, Anglo-American researchers within methodological frameworks underpinned by Eurocentric paradigms embedded in colonialism (e.g. Swadenner & Mutua, 2008). Additionally, earlier cross-disciplinary research was based overwhelmingly on Western populations (Broesch et al., 2020). Minoritised and Indigenous people were often "othered" or characterised as inferior (Kwaymullina, 2016). Consequently, an "us" versus "them" dichotomy influenced early studies of marginalised groups, which was further reinforced by the researcher's worldview (etic story), steeped in the dominant Eurocentric academic narrative, being imposed on the emic or localised stories being told (Beals et al., 2020). The harmful impact of an imposed Western etic on the authentic narrative or stories of marginalised communities has therefore long been criticised and challenged (Kwaymullina, 2016).

The socio-historical context of researching marginalised groups therefore presents unique challenges for "outsider" researchers. Song and Parker (1995) highlight the difficulties faced by white, middle-class feminist researchers in their relationship with Black female participants regarding participant access, labour-intensive recruitment methods, power issues and misconceptions around research intent. This is further highlighted in the work of Smith (2021), an Indigenous Māori academic, who conveys how the term "research" is almost perceived as abhorrent amongst Indigenous people. The imperative to diversify the research

landscape has led to burgeoning co-ethnic studies involving researchers and participants from minoritised and Indigenous backgrounds - drawing attention to the authentic social realities in marginalised communities (e.g., Bone et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2013; Rodas et al., 2021). Beals and colleagues (2020) describe this shift as researchers from “othered worlds” returning to research their “own people”, 'possessing special attributes that are not available to the “traditional” researcher' (p.596).

Despite growing recognition of the need for ethnoracial sameness in the study of minoritised groups, with scholars attributing ease of participant access and rapport building with participants to shared ethnic (insider) status (e.g. Ochieng, 2010), there are scarce co-ethnic researcher accounts of navigating the complexities and tensions associated with researching one’s own people. Interestingly, Morosanu’s (2015) research challenges the viewpoint that shared researcher-participant ethnicity is the most influential commonality shaping the research process. Morosanu reveals that non-ethnic factors, like occupation, migration status and gender, significantly impacted their study of Romanian migrants, with building research relationships and sense-making of participants’ stories not primarily dependent on the shared ethnic background of a researcher and participant. It is therefore critical to acknowledge the intersections of our own, and participants’ identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, race and class) to understand how we negotiate and navigate our intersectionality.

Intersectionality highlights systems of domination, such as privilege and oppression that sustain and reinforce the existing status quo, providing a crucial perspective that can transform our understanding of marketing and consumption (Gopaldas, 2013; Yuval-Davis, 2016). According to Elkanova and Steinfield (2024), intersectionality theory advocates for a more thorough and critical examination of the structures and power dynamics that lead to overlapping oppressions and privileges. Thus, it is vital that we acknowledge and reflect on the impact of power dynamics and inequalities in society and research.

Crenshaw's (1989, p.149) foundational work highlights intersectionality as 'a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking'. Intersectionality fosters understanding of participants' multiple, inseparable and intersecting identities that shape their lived experiences (Couture et al., 2012). Rinallo et al. (2023) advocate for marketers embracing intersectionality, exploring how factors such as race, gender, sexuality and religion/spirituality intersect in shaping consumer identity and market practices.

Anthias (2002), in the context of the complex identity negotiations of marginalised consumers, argues that consumers' identities are shaped through social context, interactions and lived experiences. These intersecting identities do not merely coexist but interact in ways that produce distinct, situated experiences. Building on this, researchers must move beyond simply acknowledging difference or similarity and instead examine how their own and participants' identities intersect within broader systems of power (Castro, 2021). Intersectionality, in this sense, is not just a theoretical lens but a reflexive practice. Rodriguez and Ridgway (2023) call for greater nuance in exploring how aspects of our identity, such as race, gender and class, shape the experiences of both researchers and participants, framing these differences as politically charged and constantly negotiated. Following this perspective, we recognise that both our experiences, as a researcher, and those of our participants, are shaped at the intersection of power and oppression in ways that cannot be explained through the additive crossing of identities alone (Uduehi et al., 2024, p.3).

Complexities of navigating researcher positionality are also demonstrated when studying "extreme" groups, such as extremist political parties or anti-minority movements in Western and non-Western contexts, where the researcher remains neither a complete insider nor outsider (Pilkington, 2016). Yet, the interaction between multiple social roles and identities

of the researcher and researched (e.g., gender, class, age, political belief, religion) can engender bonds in unlikely situations, supporting the researcher in finding common ground even where those being researched have morally indefensible and opposing views to the researcher (Deodhar, 2021).

The researcher's role as knowledge creator and interpreter of participants' narratives creates a power dynamic that cannot be ignored and further necessitates the need for critical awareness and analysis of researcher positioning (Berger, 2015; Bhopal, 2009; Kipnis et al., 2021; Shaw et al., 2020). Involving participants in the interpretation process, sharing research findings with them and employing empathy and friendship have been suggested as ways to decrease this power imbalance (Bhopal, 2009). Participants also wield a level of power in the research relationship through controlling access and disclosure to their data (Anyan, 2013). Researchers therefore need to engage in reflection to continuously challenge, renegotiate and modify their subjectivities (Ademolu, 2024).

Reflexivity 'informs, develops and shapes positionality' (Holmes, 2020, p.3) and is a continuous internal dialogue and self-critique of a researcher's positionality (Dowling, 2006; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). Whereby the researcher reflects on how their experience(s), thoughts and behaviours have the potential to impact the research process and phenomenon being studied. It is therefore critical for researchers to engage in ongoing reflexivity to ensure participants' voices are listened to and amplified, whilst regulating the effects of their power and positionality on the credibility of findings to enhance academic rigour (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity is crucial across the research process from conception, formulation of research questions to reporting the findings. In that it can facilitate researchers to address negative effects of the power dynamic in the researcher-participant relationship by positioning the researcher in a non-exploitative and compassionate position in relation to participants (Hall et al., 2023; Pillow, 2003). Increased complexities and tensions in the researcher-participant

relationship when researching marginalised groups further necessitates the need to engage in critical reflexivity to ensure appropriate interpretation of participants' voices (Bhopal, 2009).

Building on this, Castro (2021) reframes researcher reflexivity as an emancipatory practice - one that can bring internalised biases, silent identities and institutional complicity to the surface. Through intersectional reflexivity, Castro shifts the focus from demographic representation to a deeper interrogation of how identities shift within specific contexts, especially in cultures that reward conformity or silence. This approach reinforces the idea that experiential knowledge is not only situated but also political and relational. Reflexivity, then, becomes not just a process of introspection but an ethical commitment to accountability - making visible who is included, excluded or marginalised in the production of knowledge, including fellow researchers and participants.

While calls to recognise the fluidity of positionality have gained momentum, the literature remains underdeveloped in key areas. First, there is a lack of nuanced engagement with the role of the researcher in the context of cross-cultural consumer research, particularly across the research process where a researcher occupies both insider and outsider positions. Existent literature also often treats reflexivity as a generic methodological imperative, without fully addressing how complex positionalities might shape the ethical, epistemological and relational dimensions of research practice. In addition, despite the increased recognition of co-ethnic studies, few studies critically examine how culturally diverse researchers navigate power, representation and knowledge co-production across cultural boundaries. This article addresses these gaps by examining the dynamic and situated role of researchers in multicultural research settings through exploring participants' household food consumption practices.

Methodology

This article adopts an autoethnographic approach, drawing on the two authors' personal reflections as researchers from two different ethnoracial backgrounds. While the central focus is on our own experiences, reflexive insights are contextualised through empirical examples from the wider study to illustrate positionality in action to enable a richer understanding of how positionality shapes the research process. Following ethical approval by Sheffield Hallam University's Ethics Committee (ID: ER49319546), an empirical study comprising 32 semi-structured dyadic interviews with British- and Nigerian-born consumers were undertaken, to understand their attitudes and behaviours around household food consumption. The dyads were made up of 16 mothers and their adult children (15 daughters; one son) with responsibility for food provisioning in their households.

A cross-cultural study allowed each researcher to be positioned as an Indigenous insider and an external outsider at different points in the research process (Banks, 1998). It is imperative to recognise that when taking a cross-cultural approach that some cultures cannot (and should not) be compared with each other (Ember et al., 1998). The diversity and distinctiveness of some cultures means that they need to be understood in their own terms. We therefore do not explicitly compare Nigerian and British cultures, rather, we focus on the findings in relation to what they reveal about the positionality of the researchers and the implications of this on the research process. Engaging in continual reflection throughout the research process on the intricacies and complexities of our own positionality.

The first author, a Nigerian female immigrant living in the United Kingdom (UK), according to Banks (1998) is an *Indigenous insider* to Nigerian immigrant participants, an *Indigenous outsider* to the participants living in Nigeria and an e*xternal outsider* to British-born participants. The second author, a British-born female living in the UK, was an *Indigenous insider* to the British-born participants and *external outsider* to all Nigerian participants with no lived experience or socialisation within their community.

The choice to focus on British and Nigerian culture came instinctively considering the two authors are Nigerian-born and British-born and both mothers. The first author, a Nigerian mother is navigating the complexities of immigrating to the UK and studying as a mature student, whilst balancing work with raising a family, which have significantly influenced her household food provisioning and eating habits and aroused personal curiosity regarding whether other Nigerian immigrant mothers share her experiences. The second author, a British-born mother is navigating the complexities of juggling work with the role of caregiver to two young children, sharing responsibility for household food provisioning with her husband.

It is well-established that the family household is viewed as both the primary consumption site and the locus for value transmission (Barni et al., 2013). It is where personal values and cultural norms collide to shape individual consumption practices and behaviours (Paddock, 2017; Scaglioni et al., 2018). To get a clearer understanding of how food consumption attitudes and behaviours are intergenerationally transmitted within the context of culture, the study sought to examine the experiences of individuals in charge of household food provisioning across the following cultures: British, Nigerian and Nigerian immigrants living in the UK. Although the study aimed to recruit both male and female participants, only one male (an adult son) reported responsibility for household food provisioning.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were purposively recruited using convenience sampling. From the beginning of the study, the first author considered herself an insider to the Nigerian immigrant participants. The privileges and advantages associated with being an insider were crucial in accessing and

recruiting the Nigerian participants through the first author leveraging her social networks and contacts within the Nigerian community in the UK and Nigeria to recruit participants.

Easier participant access and recruitment are well-documented as potential benefits of being an insider, yet some studies caution that access is not automatically guaranteed based on shared characteristics, particularly when researching marginalised communities (Morosanu, 2015). The first author quickly realised that she had overestimated the impact of her ethnoracial insider position in facilitating access and recruitment of participants, with this proving to be more difficult and time-consuming than anticipated. Phoenix (1994) describes a similar experience when recruiting Black participants, where despite ethnoracial sameness, participant access and recruitment were difficult due to the historical context of researching Black people in America with negative experiences of community misrepresentation and participant maltreatment associated with minoritised research. Perseverance in access and recruitment ensured five Nigerian dyads were eventually identified through the first authors' network within the Nigerian community followed by snowball sampling, with it being relatively easy to establish rapport with these participants during interviews.

In contrast, recruiting white British participants as an ethnoracial "outsider" was less challenging than anticipated. The first author capitalised on her membership of a diverse yet predominantly white religious organisation in South-East England to gain access to the initial participants who fitted the sampling criteria. To this group, the researcher was an insider on religious grounds, sharing the same faith. Approval to approach members with information about the study was granted by a key figure within the religious community who acted as a "gatekeeper". Studies show that access to members of a social group, especially minoritised communities, can be made easier by using gatekeepers - a community representative (or organisation) who is familiar with and has a good understanding of the socio-cultural norms, values and practices of the group (Bashir, 2023). For example, Bhopal (2010) gained access to

Roma female participants through an education support agency (the gatekeeper) for nomadic families. Once permission was granted, contact with potential participants was established via email, phone call and/or physical meetings. Three dyadic interviews were conducted through this organisation, with snowball sampling and contacts introduced from the researchers' social networks used for the remaining interviews. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour fifteen minutes. All participants signed consent forms prior to the data collection, providing consent for their data to be published with the use of pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

During the research design stage, the intention was to collect data through observations and in-depth interviews. This, however, was discarded in a pilot study after being met with strong opposition from several participants who felt that they would be opening themselves up to scrutiny by exposing an intimate aspect of their lives to observation by a "stranger" - this was especially strong in the Nigerian participants where there was sameness in terms of gender, race and ethnicity to the first author.

Semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted with the mother-adult child dyads by the first author. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, with all names given culturally appropriate pseudonyms, which was made easier through having British and Nigerian cultural insiders within the research team (Lahman et al., 2023).

The researchers conducted data analysis independently, reading each transcript in its entirety to gain a sense of the whole then coding each transcript using open and axial coding. The researchers then met to share their initial analysis, exploring similarities and differences in their interpretations. These meetings were audio recorded and transcribed, with this data drawn on in the reporting of the research findings. This approach is consistent with Lincoln and Guba

(1985), who suggest that to improve the credibility of research findings, researchers should obtain multiple perspectives when analysing qualitative data to improve the quality and credibility of the inquiry process. During data analysis, there were areas where the researchers felt further clarification on the data would be beneficial to ensure the data were interpreted appropriately. Having built a strong rapport with the participants this enabled the first author to revisit these participants to clarify their responses and to validate or challenge the researchers' interpretations.

In bridging the gap between the authors' individual interpretations and that of the collective, we drew on a core principle of autoethnography, reflexive exploration of personal experiences, to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural context of the study (Ellis, 2011). We also reflected on the impact of our personal backgrounds on participant interaction and data interpretation. Taking inspiration from Dallolio's (2023) autoethnographic approach to presenting their findings, we build on this, presenting our findings as a collaborative autoethnography (Chang, 2021).

To illustrate the intricacies, opportunities and challenges of researcher positionality in cross-cultural research with a multicultural research team we present the findings through three case studies: 1. Nigerian mother-daughter immigrants living in the UK; 2. a British mother-daughter; and, 3. a British mother and adult daughter married to a Nigerian immigrant. The first case study provided particularly rich insights from participants who were both Nigerian and immigrants in the UK, enabling an exploration of the intricacies of researcher positionality in cross-cultural research, it is therefore presented in greater depth. As an early case in the research process, it also played a foundational role in shaping the study's design, recruitment strategies and data interpretation, while also amplifying marginalised consumers' voices. The subsequent cases, though more concise, build upon and reinforce these core themes.

Findings

Consistent with existing research, the first author's status as a Nigerian immigrant mother and the presumption of shared distinctiveness while engaging with other Nigerian immigrants conferred status privileges (Ademolu, 2024; Morosanu, 2015; Ochieng, 2010). This was observed by the second researcher when the researchers met to discuss their interpretations of the data, reflecting on the first author's use of the pronouns "we" and "our" when posing questions to ethnoracial insider participants, with these participants then responding with more familiarity to her questions, using phrases that demonstrated a connection, such as "as you know", which was not reflected in the ethnoracial outsider interviews.

The Nigerian participants also used culturally sensitive slang and colloquialisms, and on occasion spoke in a native language or broken language without inhibition, owing to the assumption of a shared understanding associated with the researcher's shared ethnoracial status. This revealed a sense of familiarity and acceptance between the researcher and participants based on shared experiences and empathy, with the researcher being "one of them". Usage of such pronouns and phrases can evoke a sense of camaraderie with participants, facilitating trust, openness and rapport building through a shared language that can lead to richer and more authentic descriptions and narratives, thus improving data quality (Chhabra, 2020).

The second author also noted how the first author appeared more relaxed in interviews with Nigerian participants. This led the first author to reflect on the interview process, where she noted that her comfort level was higher towards the Nigerian participants as she was more conscious with her use of language with the British dyads to avoid misconceptions that could lead to wrong or partial misinterpretations by herself and/or participants. Whilst the use of

collective pronouns and shared language fostered rapport, the authors also reflected that it risked positioning participants within a shared narrative that could suppress divergence or discomfort with dominant cultural expectations, creating expectations of sameness between the researcher and participant, potentially discouraging disclosures that deviate from perceived group norms.

The ethnoracial insider/outsider positioning of the researcher also shaped what questions were (and were not) asked, and how the data were coded and interpreted. This was seen in some of the Nigerian participants' discussions of swallow food (a staple African food that is swallowed and not chewed and is often served alongside soups and stews). The first author, as an ethnoracial insider, instantly knew what participants were referring to, and therefore did not ask probing questions. The second author, having no prior knowledge of swallow food would perhaps have asked further questions to clarify what swallow food is and how it is consumed. Contra to this, with the British participants, where the first author was an ethnoracial outsider, they sought clarification on consumption practices, such as following a particular diet like Slimming World.

We now present the three dyads that illustrate the complexities of researcher positionality in cross-cultural research.

Case One: Ebele (Mother) and Chikodi (Daughter) - Nigerian Immigrants in the UK

Ebele immigrated to the UK six years ago from Nigeria with her husband and three children. Chikodi, who is now in her twenties is Ebele's only daughter and is a university undergraduate student who works part-time. In this case the first author was the ethnoracial "insider" as a Nigerian immigrant in the UK and the second author an ethnoracial "outsider" as a UK citizen since birth, with both being "insiders" with respect to being mothers and adult daughters.

In cases such as this where the first author was an ethnoracial insider, she established a good relationship with the participants from the outset. In critically reflecting on the data, the second author as an ethnoracial outsider, observed that the first author subconsciously applied cultural cues, such as referring to Elders – the mother and her husband in this case by their title (Mrs/Mr) and using their full name throughout as a sign of respect. This is something the second author was not culturally aware of and would not have known to do, which could have potentially offended participants from the offset. This is consistent with literature on the culture of respect toward Elders and authoritative figures in many African societies, like Nigeria that are largely collectivist, ranking high on power distance measures (Szilagyi, 2013).

First author: *Okay…welcome Mrs Ebele and Chikodi to this interview.*

The sense of "sameness" between the first author and Nigerian-born participants, particularly those who had immigrated to the UK was observed by the second author. In that the first author had been through a similar life experience having experienced challenges and struggles associated with immigrating to a new country and trying to adjust culturally and geographically whilst supporting children. There was an openness in discussing how long they had lived in the country and the struggles they faced adjusting to aspects of life in the UK, especially as a family with children, navigating the school system, weather and food.

Ebele*: It has not been easy handling children, we are new here...*

This highlights how shared lived experience, specifically the first author's status as a Nigerian immigrant raising teenage children in the UK, was a powerful point of connection that enabled a deep rapport and trust to be built during data collection. The second author's analysis revealed that this perceived commonality facilitated participants' openness and comfort, underscoring how researcher-participant can have a momentary connection of insiderness that can emerge not just through shared identity categories (e.g. ethnicity or gender)

but also through shared life experiences (e.g. shared experiences, lifestyle, hobbies). This supports the proposition that positionality is shaped by contextual and affective alignment, which, as illustrated here, can foster authentic connections that encourage participants to open up and willingly disclose personal insights.

Ebele's family's food consumption and behaviours predominately followed Nigerian culture with limited external host country influences. The research team agreed in their coding of the data that Ebele put in significant effort to purchase Nigerian food items, such as directly importing them. The second author, as an external outsider, however, coded Ebele's sense of commitment to the family's Nigerian roots and sense of identity and attachment Ebele felt from her habituated food choices, something that was second nature to the first author.

> **Ebele:** *...that's the thing I don't even think I even cook non-Nigerian meals…because growing up we are used to Nigerian meals if that makes sense…because we all came here when we were at a certain age and our taste buds were adapted* [to Nigerian meals] *so switching is not a thing…I cook Nigerian meals*

In the interview with Ebele and Chikodi, Ebele also describes how her children disliked consuming beans when growing up and her frustrations of encouraging them to increase their consumption of beans. Ebele inferred to the "belief" held by many Nigerian parents, especially mothers, about the positive impact of consuming a high bean diet on a child's development, particularly a child's height. The first author had grown up with this belief, which shaped her personal relationship with beans and how she encouraged her own children to consume beans - this moment instigated a feeling of shared insiderness and a connection in common with the participant.

Ebele: ...*they all do not like beans…and you know we were told to encourage our kids to eat beans, so I was not trying to be wicked*

The second author, as a socio-cultural outsider, did not read into the text in the same way, not knowing the significance of beans in Nigerian culture. To mitigate the risk associated with blurring boundaries, the first author continually assessed her positionality to avoid projecting personal understanding and biases onto the participants' narrative (Berger, 2015). As noted in this example, however, this is not always possible when conducting cross-cultural research. There were several examples like this in the interviews, where the second author as a cultural outsider analysing the data was able to further interrogate the data, supporting the first author as a socio-cultural insider with deeper critical reflection on their position, thus ensuring thorough interrogation of the data.

A prominent theme in the data was the significance of social and cultural structures, particularly among Nigerian participants. The first author's shared cultural background was vital in interpreting these dynamics. For instance, traditional patriarchal norms, as seen in cases like Ebele and Chikodi, positioned men as providers and "heads" of the household, often receiving preferential meals in terms of ingredients, portion size, and presentation. Women were primarily responsible for childcare and food provisioning, with culinary skills viewed as essential to a young woman's upbringing (Chukwudera, 2024; Makama, 2013). While globalisation, formal education and media exposure have expanded women's economic roles, leading to a rise in dual-income households (World Bank, n.d.), traditional gender norms remain influential. This was evident in the immigrant households studied, where all women interviewed were working mothers yet retained primary responsibility for food provisioning. This is illustrated in Ebele describing her need to purchase and cook special meals for her husband, something the first author was familiar with, but the second author less so. At first, the first author viewed these gender roles as normative, given her own cultural background. It

was through team-based comparison that she became aware of how she might have overlooked participants', like Ebele's possible tensions or resistances towards their gendered roles. This was reflected in the data analysis and interpretation with the second author noting Ebele's prioritisation of her husband's food preferences and his need for traditionally prepared meals over her (and her children's) preferences:

> **Ebele:** *...I must cook soup for my husband*
>
> **Ebele:** *...for now I am concerned about my husband*

Ebele's husband's food preferences are central to the food choices within her household:

> **Ebele:** *No…. more of African food because my husband does not really like rice…and he makes sure to eat his swallow (traditional Nigerian pudding served with a soup and eaten by hand) meals….so mostly African food*

The conversations between the authors when talking through their data analysis and interpretation led the first author to reflect on her upbringing. The first author grew up in a traditional Nigerian household with clearly defined gender roles, where girls were expected to take on domestic responsibilities, such as cleaning, shopping and cooking from the age of eight to prepare for their future roles as wives and mothers. This background gave her a shared cultural identity and experience with participants like Ebele and Chikodi, helping to establish common ground during the research. This facilitated a deep understanding and appreciation of the food provisioning and consumption practices in their household that were heavily influenced by their shared cultural upbringing. Working as a diverse research team supported the first author to recognise what she might take for granted and be overfamiliar with, and thus the areas she might potentially brush over during the interview and data analysis. This led the first author to recognise the importance of eliciting more comprehensive and detailed

explanations about familiar food practices to avoid incorrect assumptions, particularly that her lived experiences were the same as each participant's (Bhopal, 2010).

Prior to this project the second author had little understanding of patriarchal systems and gendered roles. She was therefore conscious that this could lead to misrepresentation and incorrect interpretation of the data. When meeting to discuss their analysis, it was interesting to see the difference in the codes between the two authors' transcripts on patriarchy. Through the process of independently coding the transcripts, this revealed that the second author had placed more emphasis on the role of gender in the household food provisions in the Nigerian cases, such as Ebele. For example, in this extract the second author coded this for cooking being a gendered "female" role in this Nigerian household, with the first author not coding this.

Interviewer (first author): *So, who does the cooking in the house?*

Chikodi: *My mum does most of the cooking but then if she's at work or I want to make something before she gets back then I cook…I cook sometimes but she's the main chef*

The cases of Nigerian immigrants living in the UK illustrate how ethnoracial sameness between researcher and participant can enhance comfort and rapport but also obscure probing on culturally taken-for-granted practices unless mediated by reflexive awareness. The case of Ebele and Chikodi therefore demonstrates the value of building a diverse research team to interpret and interrogate the data, with a cultural insider playing a pivotal role in leading on the access, recruitment and data collection to support participants so they feel comfortable in opening up to the researchers.

Case Two: Laura (mother) and Becky (daughter) - British-Nigerian Household

Laura is divorced and lives on her own and is trying to lose weight through following a weight management programme. Becky, Laura's adult daughter is married to a Nigerian immigrant, with Becky always having lived in the UK. Becky and her husband have both been married once before and have children from previous relationships. This case illustrates the complexities and fluidity of navigating insider-outsider status, with the first author being an insider to Becky's husband and the second author sharing a similar upbringing to Laura and Becky but being an outsider in relation to aspects of their current lifestyles.

Becky highlights how her husband regularly cooks traditional Nigerian meals, ordering specific Nigerian "treats" online and purchasing items from ethnic supermarkets when visiting larger cities in the UK. This is consistent with literature that suggests a strong link between cultural identity and food (Brown, 2010; Oswald, 1999), with migrant food consumption being driven by a desire for the taste of the familiar and to feel a sense of nostalgia and belonging to home culture (Brown, 2010; Reilly & Wallendorf, 1987).

> **Becky:** *...with my husband being Nigerian, he likes the plantain chips and the Guinness Malta or the super malt, so a lot of the time in our town, because obviously he's moved from a city into a smaller town, there is no shops here where he can purchase these, because obviously they're imported.*

The second author observed the lengths Becky's husband goes to obtain Nigerian ingredients, something they had no familiarity with. This is however something the first author has firsthand experience of and overlooked in the interpretation of the data seeing it as part of everyday life and nothing special. These observations led the researchers to reflect on their relationship with food, and how this compared to participants, such as Laura, Becky and Becky's husband. In comparison to Becky's husband, the first author recognised they were more adventurous, being a "food crawler", eager to explore different cuisines and food cultures,

yet, maintaining a strong preference for Nigerian cuisine. Similarly to Becky's husband, the first author understood the emotional attachment and comfort that comes with food from home and routinely purchases ethnic food items at a higher cost compared to British food items. The researchers reflected that if they had been part of a monocultural research team, this level of critical reflection and introspection, which led to deeper interrogation of the data would have been missed.

In contrast to the Nigerian immigrant households, such as in case one, while collecting and analysing data from British participants, a dislike of and ambivalence towards cooking repeatedly emerged. Laura and Becky, for example, revealed a sharp contrast to the gendered roles in Nigerian households where societal norms place the responsibility of household food provisioning onto women. Laura narrates how her previous husband would cook meals before she returned from work:

> **Laura:** *It was a case of whatever goes in the oven, quick and easy really. Yeah, like I said my husband used to cook as well and so he'd cook mainly before I got home from work and things like that. But I have never done any baking or anything like that. It's not something that I enjoy, cooking.*

The case illustrates that researcher positionality is not solely determined by shared demographic and/or identity markers (e.g., ethnicity or gender), but is also shaped by lifestyle practices and values, that can create unexpected moments of connection or disconnection in the research process. The first author as an ethnoracial outsider connected with Laura and her daughter, Becky, based on their shared gender and roles as a mother. At the same time, she felt unfamiliar with regards to the family's food practices and attitude towards cooking family meals, which were in sharp contrast to her cultural upbringing where the role of women was as home keepers. The second author as an ethnoracial insider and insider relating to gender,

motherhood and cultural upbringing, felt contrasting moments of insiderness where she connected with Laura and Becky in that her husband shares cooking responsibilities, and moments of disconnect where she struggled to relate to their dislike of cooking. This illustrates how researcher positionality is more complex than a fixed insider-outsider dichotomy. Rather, a researcher's position is fluid, moving between insider and outsider at various points throughout the research process. In that the researchers felt moments of immense connection with the experiences and perspectives shared by participants, with these moments sometimes being fleeting and other times lasting longer. The researchers were also able to concurrently hold positions of connection and disconnection with participants.

Case Three: Maria (Mother) and Chloe (Daughter) - British Household

Maria, a British mother in her sixties, lives alone with her husband. Chloe, Maria's daughter, is a schoolteacher and married with no children. Here, the second author was an ethnoracial insider having been born in the UK, and the first author an ethnoracial outsider as a Nigerian immigrant in the UK, with both researchers again sharing common ground with the participants in relation to being mothers and adult daughters themselves.

Participants' descriptions of food prompted the researchers to critically reflect on how their own positionality influenced their interpretation of the language and meanings participants used to describe their food consumption. Maria, for example, discussed "beige" food:

> **Maria:** *...he's* [describing husband] *more of a beige, beige food person, and I'm not.*

This led the authors to reflect on their interpretations of terms such as “beige” food and where differences were found to check understanding beyond the research team:

First author: *I would have thought of, maybe something that’s not interesting.*

Second author: *To me, beige food is the colour of the food, often comfort food like chips that’s creamy or beige in colour and its sometimes seen as being comforting or what kids eat a lot of.*

First author: *You know that she referred to sausage rolls, sandwiches as beige food. Whereas from where I'm coming from that's not beige food. That's, yeah, that is strictly a treat.*

Many of the British participants also described seasonal eating habits, wanting more comfort and “hearty” cooked meals in the winter and lighter meals, like salad in the summer:

Maria: *In the winter we're about the same and make things like shepherd's pies and like lasagnas and roast dinners and things like that...but more in the summer…I just want to have a salad.*

From an ethnoracial outsider perspective this was not something the first author had previously encountered. The second author, sharing a similar perspective to the participants coded this as “seasonal eating habits”, yet the first author, was an outsider at this moment, which led to deeper interrogation during the interview and when analysing the data around how external environmental factors, such as weather impacted participants’, like Maria and Chloe’s household food consumption practices. This further illustrates the need to interrogate and understand the research phenomena from multiple perspectives to ensure taken-for-granted assumptions are questioned.

Interpretation of the term “quick food” by both authors was also explored, with this arising repeatedly in British cases, including Maria and Chloe; and Laura and Becky:

Chloe: *...whereas once, twice a week, it’s a quick shove in the oven like pizza*

Maria: *...because I go out in the evenings, so I always want a quick meal*

Laura: ...*generally it* [evening meals] *would be something I did throw in the oven which would be quick and easy. You can leave it in the oven and get on with something, then get back to it.*

Becky: *Yes, like I say, convenience food. So, it* [evening meal] *would be ready meals, or something simple like not necessarily microwave ready meals, but things I could just put in the oven.*

Reflecting on the interpretation of quick, convenient meals the first author reflected that these meals are not common in Nigerian food culture - this is supported in the data in that this did not feature in any interviews with Nigerian participants. The first author reflected that to her, quick food in Nigeria is generally associated with pastries known as snacks, street food items or the popular instant noodles known locally as “Indomie” rather than full meals. In contrast, the second author’s interpretation of quick food was akin to the perception held by the British participants, including frozen food items and quick oven meals. Both authors, however, shared a similar interpretation with respect to “quick food” being associated with unhealthy food, with some participants referring to this type of food as “rubbish”:

Becky: *It might even be a frozen jacket potato – you know, something that is quick and convenient...Kiev's, burgers, you know.*

Laura: *...fish fingers and chips and all that rubbish*

Shared social roles (e.g., motherhood) alone do not ensure cultural understanding, in that interpretive gaps can persist or emerge in moments where language, metaphors and cultural norms diverge. This underscores the value of collaborative analysis in cross-cultural research and demonstrates the importance of forming a multicultural team to ensure appropriate interpretations and intensive probing of the data (Yin, 2009) to overcome some of the challenges of insider/outsider researcher positionality, such as overfamiliarity or lack of socio-cultural sensitivity (Irvine et al., 2008). It also reiterates the need for a more nuanced approach to researcher positionality, moving beyond a fixed insider-outsider binary to reflect that the location of the researcher, in relation to the inquiry process, changes at various points during the research process.

Emergent Propositions on Researcher Positionality

Taken together, the findings challenge dominant framings of researcher positionality and show the interpretive value of moments of insiderness, outsiderness, and the spaces in between. The findings illustrate how reflexivity is not only an individual practice but a dialogic, team-based process that enriches the analysis of cross-cultural research encounters. Drawn from our findings, we offer the following propositions that extend theoretical understandings of researcher positionality beyond the work of Banks (1998), Barnes (2021) and Kipnis et al. (2021), and offer practical guidance for qualitative researchers navigating cross-cultural and marginalised contexts:

- Positionality is dynamic and context-sensitive, the researcher shifts between moments of insiderness, in-betweenness and outsiderness across the research process and within research encounters.

- Shared ethnoracial identity can facilitate rapport and access, but might also risk overfamiliarity and uncritical assumptions, thus requires deliberate reflexivity.
- Collaborative autoethnography enhances interpretive rigour by surfacing tensions in positionality and enabling deeper team-based reflexivity.
- Multicultural research teams provide epistemological checks and cultural sensitivity that monocultural research teams may lack.
- Revisiting participants for interpretive clarification foregrounds participants as epistemic partners rather than passive data sources, de-emphasises hierarchical researcher-participant dynamics and strengthens credibility by engaging participants in sense-making, particularly during moments of potential overfamiliarity or cultural assumption and supports researchers prioritise the integrity of participants' voices.
- Reflexivity must be sustained throughout the research process, not merely at the beginning, during data collection or during data analysis.

Discussion

Our findings echo the growing consensus in the literature (e.g., Appau et al., 2020; Barnes, 2021) that researcher positionality should not be conceptualised as a static binary. Instead, we illustrate that positionality is a fluid and multifaceted construct, shaped by shifting social identities and contextual dynamics throughout the research process. Researchers assume multifarious identities and roles in relation to each participant, not just across but within research encounters at different points in the research process, particularly during recruitment, data collection and analysis. Understanding how these shifting identities intersect is essential for examining how researchers influence the production of knowledge (Uduehi et al., 2024). Reflexivity must therefore extend beyond individual self-awareness to include the collective

dynamics of the research team. This requires active reflection of the researchers' positionality in relation to their own assumptions and perceptions (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020), including how they locate themselves in relation to each participant and one another. It is therefore imperative that researchers adopt a more nuanced approach to negotiate the ambiguities and fluidity of their positionality, recognising that they occupy a transient status, moving between insider-inbetweener-outsider status (Barnes, 2021; Breen, 2007; Merriam et al., 2001).

While Banks (1998) conceptualises insider-outsider positionality on a continuum, we demonstrate that these positions are not only multiple but also transient. In that they are experienced moment-to-moment depending on relational cues, shared experiences and cultural reference points (e.g., food norms, immigration and childhood stories). This adds nuance to static typologies of researcher identity and reveals that insider status extends beyond ethnoracial sameness. Non-ethnic similarities, such as being a mother, sharing a faith, living in a similar location and having similar interests can all induce what we term, *moments of insiderness*. *Moments of insiderness* are situational episodes where the researcher and participant connect meaningfully, finding common ground with one another. These moments can be fleeting or long lasting and when occurring during recruitment and data collection support participants to feel comfortable in the inquiry process, enhancing researcher-participant trust and rapport, thus facilitating richer data collection.

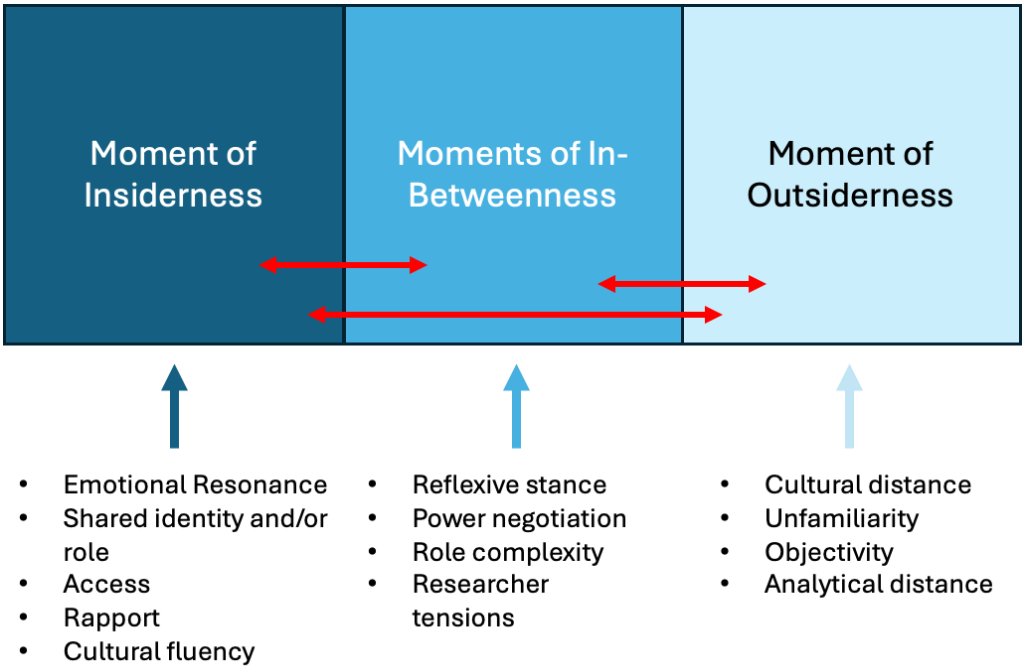
Throughout the research process a researcher moves between *moments of insiderness, w*here they feel a strong connection with the participant, and *moments of outsiderness*, where they feel disconnected from the participant, with such moments being fluid and co-existent, even within the same interaction. This builds on Barnes' (2021) concept of the liquid inbetweener, where the researcher embraces being on an insider/outsider continuum but recognises the role of socio-spatial positionality (Kipnis et al., 2021; Sheppard, 2002). In that these shifts between insiderness and outsiderness are not linear; researchers can simultaneously

experience connection (insiderness) and disconnection (outsiderness) to participants. Recognising this simultaneity provides a more nuanced lens for understanding researcher-participant and researcher-researcher dynamics and mitigates the limitations of positionality as a static construct. We build on Barnes' (2021) liquid inbetweener which conceptualises positionality as a space of in-betweenness, with our notion of *moments of insiderness* which foregrounds the episodic, situational and affective quality of positionality. Our findings illustrate how the middle ground is not static, as we put forward that researchers experience rapid transitions and even simultaneous states of insiderness and outsiderness within a single encounter, thus we introduce a temporal and interactional lens to the theorisation of positionality.

Kipnis et al. (2021) present positionality as a socio-spatial continuum, which we take further, illustrating that positionality shifts within and across encounters in response to emotional and relational connections between the researcher and participant as well as members of the research team. We introduce a Positionality Spectrum (Figure 2) with a temporal and emotional dimension that allows researchers to inhabit simultaneous insider-outsider states within a single research encounter and conceptualises the researcher's position as dynamic and context-sensitive across the research process. Researchers can move along this spectrum, from *moments of insiderness*, through simultaneous insider-outsider states (or "in-betweenness"), to *moments of outsiderness* based on the relational, socio-cultural and epistemological conditions of each research interaction. *Moments of insiderness* are characterised by shared cultural and/or social identity markers, increased participant openness and strong rapport, with moments of outsiderness reflecting cultural unfamiliarity, greater interpretive distance and acknowledging ethical or power-related hesitations researchers on the "outside" may encounter. The in-between state involves holding multiple, perhaps conflicting, positionalities with fluidity, and role tension being pronounced. Figure 2 visualises how these

positions are not mutually exclusive and can co-exist within a single research encounter. It also underscores the need for *continuous reflexive negotiation,* individually and collectively within research teams to ensure robust, ethical and culturally sensitive knowledge production.

Figure 2 – Positionality Spectrum



Where existing models of researcher positionality emphasise static categories or linear continua (e.g., Banks, 1998), the Positionality Spectrum provides a relational and temporal reworking that accounts for fluctuating, co-existing states of insiderness, in-betweenness and outsiderness. This not only challenges existing typologies but offers a flexible model applicable across a range of intercultural and marginalised research settings, making it especially relevant for reflexive marketing scholars and cross-cultural management research. The Positionality Spectrum offers a temporally sensitive, relational and power-aware framework that reorients how researchers conceptualise (and reconceptualise) their roles, engage with participants, and co-construct meaning across the research process.

Practically, our findings support a more ethically engaged research process, advocating for participant revisits and member checking as tools of epistemic equity, whereby participants are treated as co-interpreters rather than passive data sources. Together, these interventions reorient cross-cultural consumer research toward more inclusive, reflexive and power-conscious practices, raising both the ethical and analytical standards of research with marginalised communities. In doing so, we build on the work of Carling et al. (2014), Rodriguez and Ridgway (2023) and Schulz (2021), positioning the researcher-participant relationship as co-constructed, reciprocal and fluid, recognising the importance of embedding an 'intersectional lens into reflexive efforts' to understand how researcher experiences are 'riddled with both privilege and disadvantage' (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023, p.1273).

A key contribution of this study lies in the formation of a diverse, multicultural research team. This enriched all stages of the research process, from research design to data interpretation, by bringing together different cultural perspectives. The case studies, such as Ebele and Chikodi illustrate how research team diversity can challenge individual assumptions, mitigate potential bias and enhance analytical depth. Inclusion of an ethnoracial insider and outsider ensured that cultural sensitivity was embedded across the research process, including in research design, participant recruitment and data collection. Having two researchers, one from a similar socio-cultural background to the participants facilitated trust-building and with access to communities and the other from a different socio-cultural background to provide critical distance, helping to avoid overfamiliarity. This complementary dynamic was fundamental in data analysis, allowing for a broader interpretive lens and reducing the risk of disregarding culturally significant insights that might otherwise seem mundane or irrelevant to an "insider".

Researchers must also engage in continuous critical reflection, actively interrogating how their identities and assumptions shape data collection, interpretation and reporting. This

includes evaluating how their presence influences rapport with participants, as well as the ethical implications of interpreting and representing participant voices (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2009, p.675). Reflexivity must be understood as a practice of accountability, not merely introspection. From the outset, the researchers reflected on how to negotiate overfamiliarity when encountering *moments of insiderness,* particularly during data collection, without losing the connection or rapport built with the participant. We recognise, that asking probing and/or follow-up questions can aggravate participants and potentially impact rapport building (DeLyser, 2001). As researchers we need to be careful not to block out or assume understanding due to overfamiliarity with those we are researching (Cloke et al., 2000). The researchers reflecting on this, similarly Ochieng (2010) acknowledge that we can never fully understand the experiences of others. Asking probing questions and checking understanding with participants during the interview is critical to ensure findings reflect and represent participants, with this being particularly important during moments of insiderness where researchers might hesitate to ask clarifying questions assuming mutual understanding. When the researcher is familiar with a construct, such as swallow food, and it would seem out of character to ask follow-up questions we recommend, similarly to Chavez (2008), that researchers spend time in the participant briefing (and reiterating this later in the data collection), to inform participants about how they will be asking questions and that these are not due to ignorance but are to ensure accurate interpretation. Through implementing this strategy qualitative researchers can maintain a rapport with participants whilst upholding methodological rigour.

We recognise that there are constraints on researchers' abilities to engage in ongoing critical reflection whilst conducting an interview with a participant. There are always questions that we as researchers wish we had asked with hindsight. This led to the need to revisit a few of the dyads to ask further questions. For example, follow-up questions were not asked about swallow food in relation to how, when and what the households consumed, which came to light

as an area where further data were required. Through building a strong rapport and trust with participants, all were happy to take part in a short second interview, which enabled the researchers to collect further data and check their interpretation of the data.

Taking a collaborative autoethnographic approach to analysing the data (Chang, 2021) allowed us to demonstrate how researcher positionality operates on multiple levels, between researchers and participants, and within the research team itself. By engaging in shared reflexivity, we illustrate that positionality is a complex relational and dynamic process, shaped by shifting identities and power dynamics. To support future researchers in navigating the complexities we propose a practical Researcher Positionality Toolbox (Table 1). This resource offers stage-by-stage guidance for applying reflexivity and managing positional tensions in cross-cultural research settings.

Table 1: Researcher Positionality Toolbox for Cross-Cultural Research

Stage	Researcher Positionality Considerations	Practical Techniques and Approaches	Implications
1: Problem Identification	• Have all members of the research team identified and critically reflected on their situatedness in relation to the research topic? • Is the research topic most suited to being studied at a distance or in proximity? • What areas of relational tensions might be conferred by the researchers' cultural positionality, and what are the potential implications of these for the research (Kipnis et al., 2021)? • Are there marginalised and/or oppressed perspectives to the subject of study? • What are the researcher teams' initial assumptions in relation to aspects of the research? (Bourke, 2014). • How can power hierarchies be mitigated during problem identification?	**All members of research team:** • Continuous self-reflection of assumptions and biases in relation to the research topic. • Consider participatory research approaches to identify the research problem. • Engage with members of the wider community (focus groups, pilot informal interviews, gatekeepers) to prevent contextual myopia. • Consult existing literature, socio-cultural "insiders", community leaders/gatekeepers, local experts to learn more about the cultural context of study and build socio-cultural competence. • Transparency about research goals and utilisation of knowledge.	• Mitigation of over reliance on researcher assumptions and biases. • Appropriate contextualisation of research topic based on a pluralistic and nuanced understanding of the study phenomena (Kipnis et al., 2021). • Improved representation of the socio-cultural realities of those being studied.
2: Research Design	• How is the researcher positioned in the research design (e.g., Indigenous insider, partial insider, external outsider)? o What are the potential implications of this on the research process?	• Use culturally appropriate frameworks and approaches (e.g. philosophical, theoretical and methodological) that align with cultural schema e.g. the concept of Ubuntu in Southern Africa (Khupe and Keane, 2017). • Conduct a pilot study and/or engage members of	• Empowerment of participants through inclusive research design. • Mitigate difficulties in participant recruitment. • Identify and mitigate

	• How might the researcher's previous experiences and knowledge impact, and potentially bias, the research design? • How will the research team ensure that the unique viewpoint(s) of each participant are heard and not overlooked (e.g. due to familiarity or lack of cultural insight)? • Where might tensions arise between the researcher and those being researched? • How can power hierarchies be mitigated during the design stage?	the target population in conversations to gauge the suitability of the research study (e.g. to ensure participants are comfortable with the data collection techniques, location of the interview and interviewer approach). • Data collection instruments designed to elicit individual perspectives. For example, consideration of introspective data collection methods such as visual data production techniques (photo-elicitation and collage production) particularly for researchers considered as insiders to 'suspend preconceptions of familiar territory' thereby facilitating an understanding of the unique viewpoints of participants (Many, 2010, p.91). • Ensure cultural sensitivity by respecting local norms and values • Participatory approaches to reduce the power imbalance such as involving of community members in data collection.	potential sources of relational and psychological tensions with research collaborators and participant.
3: Access and recruitment	• In what ways might researcher positionality interact with the positionality of other study collaborators (e.g. members of the research team and/or external stakeholders involved in the research such as gatekeepers) and participants?	• Openly acknowledge and document positionality with collaborators and participants and the associated biases and/or misinterpretations that may occur at the initial stages of data collection. • Involvement of a bilingual or multicultural research team to foster cultural clarity and avoid	• Support researchers in accessing the target population and successfully recruiting participants.

	• Does our positionality facilitate and/or inhibit us in accessing the target population? If so, in what ways and how might this impact subsequent stages of the research process? • Have we considered culturally sensitive language and behaviours that might discourage participants from taking part in the research? • Are power imbalances de-emphasised?	misconceptions during data collection. • Use open probing and follow-up questions that show a willingness to understand each participant's cultural and individual realities and brief participants at the start and end of data collection that you will be doing this to check understanding. • Ensure research team undertakes intercultural training and sensitisation prior to data collection. • **"Insider":** Review all recruitment material to ensure it is culturally sensitive to the population being studied. • **"Outsider":** Review recruitment material to ensure it is clear and unbiased. • Identify and approach appropriate gatekeepers (e.g. authority figures and organisations, well-connected individuals within the community) to facilitate access to participants. Consider the socio-cultural sensitives in doing so. • Respect and highlight local culture e.g. addressing Elders with a title, taking part in local activities.	
4: Data collection	• How might researcher positionality shape interactions and responses with participants? • How might we use culturally sensitive language and behaviours to build a	• Ensure participants are clearly briefed on what is required in the research and how their data will be used. • Begin the data collection process (interviews/focus groups/observations) by asking	• Establishment of rapport and trust with participants that ensures participants' voices are heard and rich insight elicited.

	rapport with participants? • In what ways might my positionality influence how I interact with the participants, and in what way(s) might this impact the data collected? • Am I engaging as an equal or reinforcing power hierarchies?	contextual/background questions to familiarise yourself with participants. • **"Insider":** Ensure culturally sensitive language and behaviours are used to establish and build trust and rapport with the participant(s). Reflect with other "insiders" to check your understanding is consistent with others. • **"Outsider":** ensure sensitisation through open discussions with trusted socio-cultural insiders to ensure appropriate cultural behaviours are used when collecting data to ensure participants are treated respectfully (e.g. use of title when addressing Nigerian Elders). • Use of non-verbal and verbal mirroring techniques during data collection. • Ensure diversity of participant sample. • Avoid authoritative behaviour or gestures that reinforce power imbalance (e.g., reflective journal to reflect on your behaviour during data collection with this reviewed by another member of the team).	• Documenting experiences allows researchers to highlight the dynamic and fluid nature of positionality and supports the process of moving through moments of insiderness, outsiderness and in-betweenness throughout the research process (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023).
5: Data interpretation and analysis	• Does data interpretation account for socio-cultural nuances? • Are marginalised/oppressed voices amplified? • How might the research teams' positionality influence data analysis and	• Independent analysis from at least two researchers, followed by peer debriefing and member checking of themes to interrogate researchers' interpretations and reflect on their own positionality. • Bracketing – all researchers should identify and acknowledge the	• Amplification of participants' voices. • Reconciliation of divergent interpretations (Kipnis et al., 2021). • Awareness of positionality shifts and

	interpretation? What steps have been taken to limit/overcome this? • How can power hierarchies be navigated during data interpretation and analysis?	preconceptions, biases and assumptions they bring to the data analysis and interpretation. • Consult socio-cultural insiders to avoid misinterpretation. • Where contradictions or tensions arise in the interpretation of participants' accounts, researchers should not "smooth" these out but retain the messiness (Castro, 2021).	identification of potential sources of interpretation bias/blind spots (Kipnis et al., 2021). • Retaining the "messiness" in participants' accounts and researchers' interpretations is not a flaw it is a sign of authenticity and the complexity of participants' lived experiences (Castro, 2021).
6: Reporting Data (e.g. journal articles)	• Are marginalised/oppressed voices amplified? • Are research findings appropriately contextualised? • How might the research teams' positionality impact how the data are reported? ○ How have the research team sort to mitigate this? • Is the positionality of the research team clearly acknowledged within published work? • Have power imbalances been addressed?	• Ensure research team diversity, particularly in data interpretation and review of findings and conclusions. • Ensure use of direct quotes to capture cultural nuances/individual perspectives. • Consideration of cultural sensitivities when reporting/publishing. • Focus on reporting diverse perspectives/interpretations to avoid generalising individual experiences and/or amplifying certain voices/themes (e.g. those in line with one's preconceptions/personal experiences). • Incorporate reflexive commentaries that acknowledge the (potential) influence of the researcher on how themes emerged (Castro, 2021). • **"Insider":** Acknowledge cultural insiderness.	• Ensure participants' voices are amplified appropriately. • Incorporating reflexive commentaries to the data adds depth to the analysis, building trust in the research process (Castro, 2021).

		• **"Outsider":** Ensure transparency in reporting "outsider" status, acknowledging potential limitations associated with socio-cultural outsiderness and the approaches taken to address this (e.g. multicultural research team) and highlight moments of insiderness (where relevant).	

Understanding the social and cultural structures prevalent among marginalised groups is crucial throughout the research process. In the context of this study, ethnoracial insider status facilitated sensitivity to the participants' perspectives and encouraged empathic understanding during recruitment and data collection (Chhabra, 2020). Thus, in seeking to understand cross-cultural household food consumption of British, Nigerian and Nigerian immigrant consumers, inclusion of a scholar with lived experience of both cultures was critical. This responds to calls for the decolonisation of the research process especially in studying marginalised, Indigenous or previously colonised groups (Swadener & Mutua, 2008). In that most existing research is linked to Eurocentric methodologies with strong connections to European colonialism, with ethnic minorities having long criticised the impact of a Eurocentric research process on their cultures and communities (Kwaymullina, 2016). Taking this approach to building the research team and the practice of reflecting on the impact of each researcher's positionality on each stage of the research process helped to ensure that cultural nuances were not overlooked but further explored, interrogated and articulated authentically.

Several methodological implications stem from the study. Firstly, the study reframes reflexivity as a collective process, moving from an individual act to a team-based dialogic practice. This reconceptualisation strengthens the rigour of cross-cultural research by embedding multiple perspectives in the interpretation process. Secondly, we illustrate how

diversity within the research team not only facilitates access and cultural appropriateness but functions as a methodological strategy for reducing bias, enhancing interpretive accuracy and mitigating overfamiliarity as a cultural "insider". We demonstrate the value of drawing on a collaborative autoethnographic approach to enable positional tensions to be surfaced and to enhance interpretive reflexivity. We propose that collaborative autoethnography in cross-cultural research teams provides a mechanism for surfacing unspoken cultural assumptions and enriching interpretive reflexivity.

The study also has significant practitioner implications, including enhancing cultural sensitivity in consumer research where organisations are working with culturally diverse and/or marginalised groups. It also illustrates the importance of diversity within organisations, showing how mixed positionalities can enhance rapport building, reduce bias and deepen understanding of localised consumption practices. The insights gained from the study on the household food practices of Nigerian, Nigerian immigrant and British families also provides culturally grounded narratives that can support more authentic and inclusive marketing in sectors, such as food retail. The findings therefore have implications for market research, government organisations and public sector organisations in shaping trust, engagement and building stronger relationships with consumers. For example, organisations conducting consumer research with marginalised communities should draw on the Positionality Spectrum and Toolbox to train researchers in building authentic rapport, adapting language and avoiding overfamiliar assumptions that might suppress disclosure.

The study also offers a framework that has the potential to significantly influence methodological norms beyond consumer research. Through building on Carling et al.'s (2014) advocation that researchers need to take a more nuanced and situational approach to researcher positionality, we conceptualise positionality as episodic and situational and moving through moments of insiderness, outsiderness and in-betweenness, challenging dominant static models

and providing a more dynamic and context-sensitive lens for qualitative inquiry. The proposed Positionality Spectrum (Figure 2) and researcher positionality toolbox (Table 1) not only advance theory but offer practical tools for reflexive engagement that can be adopted by research teams across disciplines and research ethics committees on cross-cultural research or research on marginalised groups. In addition, the study contributes to decolonial research practices, and has practical relevance for marketing practitioners, NGOs and policymakers working to engage meaningfully with underrepresented communities. In reframing reflexivity as a collaborative and ongoing process, the framework also encourages more ethical, inclusive and impactful research design in consumer culture and related disciplines.

Limitations and Future Research

Methodologically, the researchers and participants were predominately women and mothers with adult children, except for one dyad which was a mother and adult son. Involving a male researcher and recruiting more male participants could provide another perspective on the research topic, allowing for further critical reflection on researching gender. Future research could look to build an even more diverse team (e.g. gender, life stage, culture, class).

A limitation of the research process, and consequently an area for future research is that it cannot be concluded from the data that research data collected by a researcher with ethnoracial "sameness" were richer than data collected by an ethnic "outsider". Future research should look for data to be collected by an Indigenous insider and external outsider to understand how ethnoracial "sameness" might impact the data collection process.

The relevance of finding common ground between the researcher and the researched should also not be limited to cross-cultural studies or research of underrepresented communities, it should be adopted in studies in other areas of consumer research and the wider

social sciences. Future research should also look to build on our study through co-creating knowledge with participants as collaborators, with participants involved in the analysis and interpretation of their data to ensure their voices are heard and accurately interpreted and amplified.

Conclusion

The article challenges the traditional binary view of insider versus outsider positionality, demonstrating that researchers can simultaneously occupy multiple positional roles. This fluidity necessitates ongoing reflexivity, not only individually, but collectively within the research team. The case studies reveal how a diverse research team can enhance cultural sensitivity, strengthen rapport with participants and support more robust interpretation of data by mitigating the blind spots that arise from both cultural familiarity and outsider distance. Through our conceptualisation of *moments of insiderness* and *moments of outsiderness*, we push forward existing work on reflexivity (e.g., Berger, 2015; Holmes, 2020), offering a richer account of how positionality dynamically shifts throughout the research process. We contribute to consumer research by reconceptualising researcher positionality as dynamic, situational and co-constructed, rather than fixed or binary. We introduce the Positionality Spectrum, a novel conceptual framework that captures how researchers move through fluid moments of insiderness, outsiderness and in-betweenness across the research process, adding temporal, relational and emotional depth to existing understandings of positionality in cross-cultural research.

Methodologically, we demonstrate the value of collaborative autoethnography and team-based reflexivity as tools to enhance interpretive rigour, particularly in multicultural research teams. Further to this we demonstrate how revisiting participants and engaging in

member checking are not simply techniques for validation, but support researchers in redistributing interpretive power and strengthening the reliability and accuracy of the data, which are particularly important in research with marginalised consumers.

The article also offers a Researcher Positionality Toolbox to support scholars and practitioners in navigating the ethical and methodological complexities of cross-cultural qualitative research with marginalised and underrepresented consumer groups. Finally, we illustrate how as consumer researchers, our ability to find common ground with participants lies not in eliminating difference, but in embracing positionality as a critical lens that shapes how we listen, learn and represent and amplify consumers' voices.

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