The Role of Intimate Relationship Status, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Doing Fieldwork among Sexual–Racial Minority Refugees: An Intersectional Methodology*

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Feminist researchers from a range of disciplines have called for consolidation of intersectionality as a methodology. In this article, I contribute to the literature on intracategorical intersectional methodology by drawing on my experiences of conducting fieldwork with 19 gay male Iranian refugees in Canada. Also, by merging the research on intersectionality, sexuality, and refugee studies, I take intersectionality beyond its traditional application on the lives of women of color. I particularly focus on relations between intimate relationship status and insider status, sexuality and internal gatekeepers, and ethnicity and obtaining signed consent forms. Assuming that ethnographers, albeit marginally, participate in or become part of their participant group during fieldwork, I demonstrated the utility of intracategorical intersectional methodology for a systematic examination of power dynamics and the interactions between participants' and researchers' markers of identity. I argue that intracategorical intersectionality challenges static definitions of insiderness in qualitative research and provides researchers with nuanced and non-hegemonic analyses of research process.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, constructivism and critical research paradigms have given rise to developments in qualitative sociological research that, often through feminist methodologies, explore the impacts of gender, class, race, and ethnicity in conducting research, building trust and rapport, and gaining insider access to potential participants (Berger 2015; Naples 2013; Creswell 2012; [1998]; Oakley 2013; [1981]; Fonow and Cook 2005; Beoku-Betts 1994). More recently, feminist scholars have called for the expansion and incorporation of sexuality, nationality, age, and other relevant categories in methodological analyses and research design particularly in working with vulnerable populations (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut, and Johnson 2018; McGuffey 2013; Collins 2004; also see Ferrell's (1997) call for criminological research to consider the role of these factors and their meanings in fieldwork). This ever-expanding inclusion of interconnected categories of difference complicates the methodological challenges of understanding the interactions between these factors throughout the research process, fieldwork in particular.

To address such difficulties in conducting empirical research, some feminist researchers from a range of disciplines have called for consolidation of intersectionality not only as a theoretical framework, but also as a methodology (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Choo and Ferree 2010; Hancock 2007, 2013; MacKinnon 2013; McCall 2005; Nash 2008; Yuva-Davis 2006). Intersectionality is defined as understanding race, gender, class, ethnicity, age, and other empirically relevant categories as mutually constitutive of identities and social inequalities (Crenshaw 2018; [1989]; Collins 2015). Adopting intersectionality as methodology requires its adaption to various context-specific queries, and the development of methods that attend to mutuality and the interactive character of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and age, among other factors. Yet the development of intersectionality as a methodology applied to the fieldwork phase of doing qualitative research, that is, "the development of research designs and methods that can capture effectively all of the tenets of intersectionality theory" (Hancock 2007, 74), remains underresearched.

In this article, my primary goal is to contribute to the literature on intersectional methodology by analyzing my research methods and the ways that various categories of difference simultaneously limited and furthered my research process. I argue that intersectional methodology not only enhances our epistemologies upon analyses of interview or ethnographic data but that it can also enhance our understanding of the ways that categories of difference simultaneously facilitate and complicate access to participants during fieldwork (Collins 1986; see Beoku-Betts (1994) for a similar but limited discussion on the role of shared identities). I draw on my ethnographic fieldwork with 19 gay male Iranian refugees in Canada and, among other factors, focus on the role of intimate relationship status (Takeda 2013; Beoku-Betts 1994), (homo)sexuality (Diprose, Thomas, and Rushton 2013; Walby 2010; Irwin 2006; La Pastina 2006; Cupples 2002; Carrier 1999; Goode 1999; Plummer 1995), and ethnicity (Bucerius 2013; Sin 2007) in, respectively, gaining insider status, interacting with gatekeepers, and obtaining signed consent forms. I aim to bring the underresearched impacts of intimate relationship status and sexuality to the center of methodological analyses.

Concentrating on group-specific forms of qualitative research such as interviews and ethnography, I endorse McCall's (2005) intracategorical approach, that is, an approach where a researcher focuses on one specific social group located at the intersections of several categories to reveal the complexities of their lived experiences. This is in contrast to other approaches to intersectionality, some of which seek to debunk social categories while others explore the impacts of one category on several social groups. Although McCall's definition is often taken as an analytical lens for the analyses of interview or survey data, I suggest that it is also an approach applicable to the question of how to

conduct fieldwork with the goal of examining field interactions and limits and strengths of methods, and, consequently, improving our methods of data collection as well as institutional perceptions of conducting qualitative research.

My secondary goal is to take intersectional methodology beyond intersectionality's traditional application to race and gender in studies of women of color (Collins 2004, 2015; Hancock 2007, 2013) and to bring together the research on intersectional methodologies, sexuality, race, and refugee studies. To date, several scholars have explored the complexities of conducting research on (homo)sexuality among women of color (see, e.g., Collins 2004; Moore 2011), ethnic majority sexual minorities (Bruni 2006; Carrier 1999; McDonald 2013; Ristock 2011), and refugees, including LGBT refugees (Akin 2017; Block et al. 2012; Camminga 2019; Hynes 2003; Karimi 2018a, 2018b; MacKenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway 2007). I suggest that the case of doing fieldwork among gay Iranian male refugees, as a representative of vulnerable populations, will shed light on complexities of conducting qualitative research at the intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, gender, age, intimate relationship status, and migration-status background.

I emphasize that in line with intracategorical intersectionality's implications for fluidity of social categories, I understand my positionality in the field as an ever-changing epistemological point on a continuum (Merton 1972; see also Labaree 2002). Although I shared many similarities with my participants regarding gender, sexuality, age, and nationality, I argue that researchers' identification with a fixed position such as insider, outsider, or outsider within (Collins 1986), among other positionalities, presumes static and equally influential social statuses and neglects the continual changes in power dynamics between the researcher and the researched (Adler and Adler 1987; Christensen and Jensen 2012).

I will begin by engaging with the scholarly discussions on intersectionality to shed light on intracategorical intersectionality's usefulness as a methodology in qualitative research. Second, I will discuss the research context regarding sexuality in Iran as well as Iranian Diasporas' attitudes to homosexuality. I will also discuss my fieldwork experiences with 19 gay Iranian refugees in Vancouver, Toronto, and Ottawa. Third, I will connect the intersectional methodology with the scholarly literature on trust and insider–outsider status in qualitative research. Fourth, I will thematically lay out my discussions on intimate relationship status and trust, sexual orientation and internal gatekeepers, and ethnicity and obtaining signed consent.

Intersectionality as Methodology

In response to questions about the modalities of getting to know the knowledge that we assume to exist, constructivism and critical research

paradigms often take interpretivist epistemological standpoints as a way of grasping the meanings and implications of individuals' lived experiences (Blaikie 2000). This exploration requires certain methods, for example, interviews, surveys, and observation. It is, then, the duty of sociologists and anthropologists, among other qualitative researchers, to recognize and reflect upon the ways that interactions in research contexts impact their findings and their participants' responses (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Indeed, such practices of reflexivity have become a staple among feminist field-workers (Berger 2015; Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Cupples 2002; see England (1994) on reflexivity and researching sexual identities).

Intersectionality presents a unique methodological commitment "to assessing the interplay between human agency and systemic structures, and center[s] the tensions and contradictions of our lived experiences" (Perry 2009, 235) in the assessments of social phenomena and interactions. Intersectionality's potential in capturing the interactive dynamics of social categories of identification presents researchers with a more comprehensive tool to examine the moments in which knowledge is produced and methods through which knowledge is acquired (Hancock 2007; MacKinnon 2013). Intersectional methodology thus attends to a "more nuanced sociological understanding of how social structures and cultural representations interconnect" (Collins 2015, 5), and moves beyond the addition of multiple independent factors "toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions" (Choo and Ferree 2010; 131). Deploying intersectional methodology is not an easy task due to the ramifying numbers of categories of difference that are included in research design and analyses. McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007) have outlined two resolutions as a way forward.

McCall (2005) categorized intersectionality as anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical. Depending on the research questions and goals, these categories, respectively, address deconstructing categories of difference; comparing relationships of inequality among social groups; and focusing on a particular social group at intersections of relevant categories of difference. Intracategorical intersectional approach is particularly pertinent to the examination of the lives of one specific group as it captures "the distinct and frequently conflicting dynamics that shape the lived experience of" such social groups during the fieldwork (McCall 2005, 1780). This approach often relies on individuals' narratives to draw out power relations and social locations embodied in these individuals' lived experience (Lépinard 2014) as well as their intra-group diversities (Meyer 2012).

Similarly, Hancock (2007) takes intersectionality as an approach to *conducting* holistic empirical research on the crosscutting effects of the categories of difference in the lives of members of a particular social group. Hancock,

however, emphasizes that intersectional analysis is not based on an unlimited number of categories but rather is bound to empirical relations between categories within specific contexts. Thus, researchers should avoid predetermining a set of categories for analytical purposes and be open to and remain cognizant of the categories that emerge during interactions and knowledge production. These categories are ambivalent, and their role in limiting or facilitating access to the field is tied to the ways they intersect with other categories.

Consequently, because the researcher engaged in ethnography or other forms of long-term participant-based qualitative research becomes an affiliate member of the participant groups as a result of their close and long-term relations with the participant group, we can build on McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007) to consolidate intracategorical intersectionality as imperative to fieldwork. From this, it follows that an intracategorical analysis of field experiences is possible where and when researchers, albeit marginally and for a limited time, become affiliates and members of the participant groups: affiliates who not only experience and observe the lives of one group of participants but also consciously and systematically reflect upon such experiences with the purposes of improving field interactions, knowledge production, and modalities of institutional support for field research. This analysis of field experiences is in addition to accounting for power dynamics during the final phase of analyzing research findings.

Such application of intracategorical intersectionality on researcher–researched interactions in the field has several methodological and theoretical implications. First, similar to practices of reflexivity, it underlines the situatedness and partiality of our findings (Berger 2015; England 1994). Second, it works as a structured procedure that underscores the unequal impact of social categories and molds our multiplication and transformation of the main effects of intersectionalities into analytical interactions rather than mere descriptions (Choo and Ferree 2010). Thus, it can complement and add insight to final data analyses aside from the theoretical frameworks that the researchers may choose to make sense of their data. Third, it enables the researchers to systematically understand and strengthen their methods of data collection and their navigation of interactions during fieldwork according the existing and emerging power relations. Accordingly, it directly responds to feminist researchers' and refugee studies scholars' emphasis on building trust relations with research participants (Oakley 2013; [1981]; Eastmond 2007). Fourth, and consequently, such application of intracategorical intersectionality on fieldwork interactions allows for the improvement and development of data-driven theories in sociology and anthropology. McCall (2005, 1781) argues that "single-group studies derive their strength from the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups."

Study Background

Elsewhere I have demonstrated that sexuality in Iran is regulated through religious and governmental heterosexist discourses where femininity is depreciated against masculinity and men and women are expected to follow strict codes of masculinity and femininity (Karimi 2016, 2018a, 2018b). These patriarchal discourses inform and shape a variety of micro-level and macro-level events that result in experiences of rejection regarding non-heterosexual sexual orientations (see Massad (2008) for a historical background on gender and sexual identities in the Middle East and a critique of current Western activists' Orientalist approaches to sexual liberation in the region). These events shape intense feelings of shame, fear, and guilt among gay Iranian men—emotions that have an essential role in any postresettlement interactions, in particular with Iranians in diaspora and families back in Iran (Karimi 2018a, 2018b). As reflected in the following sections, my fieldwork among gay Iranian men was also subject to their premigration experiences.

Further, research on migrant and refugee communities has shown that postmigration changes in attitudes toward gender and sexuality are not a straightforward process (Röder 2014). In my research, I discovered that a variety of factors including racialization and marginalization in the post-9/11 era (Sadeghi 2016), adherence to home cultures (Soehl 2017), and a fear of social status loss among sexually conservative families in Iran and in exile have resulted in fixation of origin–culture attitudes toward homosexuality among heterosexual Iranian immigrants despite their successful structural assimilation (Gordon 1964). Shahidian (1999) has argued that "self-identified homosexual Iranians..., therefore, find themselves in a double migrancy/exile—once with respect to the homeland, the second with respect to the Iranian community in Canada."

Here, I must also write myself into the study (Fonow and Cook 2005). As a young researcher of Iranian background, I immigrated to Canada to pursue my Ph.D. studies. While in Iran, I had gay friends who left Iran to seek asylum in Turkey. I kept in touch with them throughout the years, and later on, I realized that some gay Iranian men have sought asylum due to their sexual orientation at the closest UN offices to Iran located in Turkey and are then resettled, often, to Canada or the United States after having been subjected to a two- to three-year-long process administered by the UN, Turkish Police, and Canadian or American embassies. It was evident from my findings that during the past decade, Canada and the United States have been the two main countries that have targeted and shown commitment to the relocation of UN-approved LGBT refugees from Turkey. More recently, however, Canada and the United States have severely limited the number of such resettlements. In justifying their

decisions as such, the former cited their commitment to the relocation of Syrian refugees while the latter mentions the recent travel ban regulations targeting nationals of several countries including Iran.

My discussions in this article are part of my doctoral dissertation research and are based on my fieldwork with 19 gay Iranian refugees who had been resettled to Canada. All participants were born and raised in Iran, had a university education (except in one case), and self-identified as gay. Participants' age range was 22 to 37. I developed an interview guide which focused on participants' experiences of life in Turkey and resettlement in Canada as well as their interactions with government services and other social groups rather than their experiences of trauma even though the latter theme was inevitably brought up during some of the interviews.

Participant recruitment in Canada proved particularly challenging because of the limited number of potential participants residing in Canada, their general unwillingness to participate in academic research because of their experiences of asylum seeking, and our shared nationality–ethnicity which signaled a potential breach of confidentiality and a possibility of exposing participants' sexual orientation to their families back in Iran. To counter these difficulties, I used snowball sampling to find participants in Toronto, Vancouver, and Ottawa. I reached out to a community activist friend who had been resettled to the United States, asking them to forward my contact information and project description to potential participants. My friend, who also became a gatekeeper, relied on his network which he had developed during his wait time in Turkey. Upon receiving potential participants' expression of interest, I communicated with them through social media and by telephone. In these initial contacts, I sent my research participation consent form and introduced myself to participants regarding my occupation, my affiliation with a Canadian university, and my close friendship with our mutual friend as well as the general theme of my research and some of the research questions.

I used snowball sampling because I was working with a social group that was multiply stigmatized at the intersections of sexuality and gender identities among Iranian diaspora, and at intersections of migration status, ethnicity, and nationality in Canada. In the absence of any publically available statistics on resettled sexual minority asylum seekers, snowball sampling through the chain of referrals that depended on participants' network of friends enabled me to gain access to this population in three different localities (MacKenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway 2007; Jacobsen and Landau 2003; see Murray (2015) for a similar study of inland LGBT asylum seekers in Canada). Nevertheless, I recognize the limits of my sampling method in terms of generalizability and replicability because I may not have been able to reach individuals who were not members of my network or who were excluded due to gatekeepers' bias. This

limitation may have impacted my understanding of intragroup diversities regarding gay Iranian refugees who might have had disparate educational and financial status as well as access to social networks in comparison to my participants.

I started my fieldwork during the fall of 2016, interviewing eight participants in Vancouver. Based on initial data analysis, I realized the need to make changes to my interview guide and reconsider my openness regarding going to participants' homes for observation and interviews. Although some feminist qualitative researchers encourage adoption of intimate methods of data collection to capture accurate and less exploitive accounts (Irwin 2006; see Carrier (1999) and Goode (1999) for their accounts of sexual involvement with participants), my experience showed that researchers must be cautious with intimate methods of data collection. It is crucial to remember that while the chain of referrals in snowball sampling is efficient in providing access to participant groups, building trust, and yielding a penetrating understanding of participants' lives, any misinterpreted researcher–researched interactions are also circulated via the same chain of referrals. The latter effect can hamper and, potentially, deface the researcher and their project. In the following sections, I will discuss the ways that my presence in participants' homes could miscommunicate our interaction intentions, and place the interviewee or me as the target of sexualization, thus derailing the research activities (Kulick and Willson 2003; Walby 2010).

After revisiting my research plans, I worked with 11 other participants, in Toronto and Ottawa during the winter of 2017, conducting observations and interviews in public spaces such as cafes, parks, malls, and workplaces. I met with participants during their breaks at work as well as gatherings with heterosexual and homosexual friends. I also attended a larger gathering at the home of one participant in celebration of Persian New Year. In all such occasions, I was present and introduced to others by my participants as a friend and never as a researcher and, naturally, I did not conduct interviews. Interviews lasted for about two hours each and were complemented by detailed field notes taken after interviews. Next, and following initial data analysis, I conducted 13 one-hour follow-up interviews via telephone or Skype. I also conducted three 2-hour interviews with key participants during the fall of 2017 (total interviews $N = 35$).

I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary method to elicit respondents' narratives. Feminist researchers and scholars of refugee studies emphasize that participants' narratives, collected through various methods of narrative inquiry, life history, and semi-structured interviews, expand the scope of possible responses and allow participants to express themselves freely without being obstructed (Creswell 2012 [1998]; Eastmond 2007; Voutira and Doná 2007). In

conducting in-depth interviews, I sought feedback on my interview guide from two community members to formulate community-informed questions that centralized refugees' lives in Canada. In line with intersectional methodology, I aimed to capture contextualized life stories with a particular focus on how sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and class were referred to during fieldwork and throughout diverse narratives of "refugee experience" (Eastmond 2007). Although personal narratives may not adequately capture and explain all crucial factors impacting social interactions, individuals' understandings of these social interactions are essential for interpreting and analyzing their choices. These experiences are always situationally remembered and narrated in light of present and future life. It should be noted that except for one interview in English, I conducted interviews in participants' native language, that is, Farsi, to mitigate potential harmful power dynamics stemming from second-language skills (Block et al. 2012; Edwards 1998), even though all participants had a good command of the English language.

Insider versus Outsider

Much has been written on building trust and close relations with respondents to gain access to scientifically valid insider knowledge (Labaree 2002) which is somewhat inaccessible to outsiders. Merton (1972) defines the outsider–insider divide as an epistemological issue due to the differentials in accessing knowledge and the types of knowledge accessed. He writes of "insider truths that counter Outsider untruths and Outsider truths that counter Insider untruths" (Merton 1972, 11). Based on this divide, Adler and Adler (1987) suggest that researchers are either peripheral to the participant group or active members who can choose to partially or fully commit to the group's values. Merton (1972, 22), however, emphasizes that "we are all, of course, both Insiders and Outsiders, members of some groups and, sometimes derivatively, not of others," because it is "the crucial fact of social structure that individuals have not a single status but a status set: a complement of variously interrelated statuses which interact to affect both their behavior and perspectives." Anthropologists and feminists have also underlined that researchers should not assume a totality in their researcher positions given that social boundaries are permeable (Oakley 2013; [1981]). Geertz (1973) urges researchers to simultaneously experience the *near* through belonging to groups and the *distant* by recognizing the categories that make them outsiders.

Present-day qualitative researchers across disciplines recognize that our insider–outsider identities are fluid products of rapport-building and power negotiations that, at any moment during the fieldwork, put us somewhere on a continuum ranging from a stranger to a familiar native (Beoku-Betts 1994; Bucerius 2013; Lammers 2007; McDonald 2013). Intersectional methodology

not only confirms that traditional ethnic- or gender-matching strategies are insufficient since they are based on static understandings of identities (Collins 1986; Yuva-Davis 1994), but also reminds us that categories of difference act in tandem in marking our insider–outsider status. During the early stages of my fieldwork, I expected that I would have easy access to insider knowledge because of my similarities with my participants regarding ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, class, and age. I expected, and it was later proved to be the case, that respondents' experiences of asylum seeking and wait times for refugee applications in Turkey could put a rift between participants and me. I was concerned about this rift not only because of my limited grasp of their lives in Turkey but also because my participants could perceive my immigration background as an international student, rather than an asylum seekers, as a form of privilege that could indicate potential power hierarchies during the fieldwork. However, I soon learned that I could not single out any particular categories of difference as ultimate markers of insiderness or outsiderness. Similar to Cam-minga's (2019) and Beoku-Betts' (1994) fieldwork experience, I realized that categories of difference do not have equal impact on interactions and that they operated in combination to both facilitate and complicate (or even prevent) access to participants. For example, shared nationality, ethnicity, language, inti-mate relationship status, and sexuality facilitated my access to participants, while shared nationality, ethnicity, and refugee backgrounds often complicated obtaining signed consent forms.

   I argue that intersectional methodology must draw our attention to the ways participants' sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and other markers of identity intersect with those of the researchers (Archer 2002) and shape "the nature of [the] researcher-researched relationship, which, in turn, affects the information that participants are willing to share" (Berger 2015; 220). Since the researcher, albeit marginally and for a limited time, participates in and becomes part of the researched group, it is reasonable to account for the tensions and contradictions that result from the researcher–researched interactions (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Choo and Ferree 2010). During my fieldwork, it was evident that the intersecting effects of the categories of difference also impacted my strate-gies, actions, and verbal and physical expressions, which in turn affected partic-ipants' responses (Walby 2010), erotic desires (Diprose, Thomas, and Rushton 2013; Grenz 2005), and willingness to (dis)continue participation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This multiplication of interactions between categories of difference had two main implications for my research: First, my participants and I were coproducing knowledge and codetermining interpretations of this knowledge; and second, I could not predetermine which factors would play constructive or debilitating roles in rapport-building (Bucerius 2013). For

instance, I had not thought about the role of intimate relationship status, which proved decisive in building trust and gaining access to information.

Thus, I refrain from identifying with a fixed research position as outsider, insider, outsider within (Collins 1986), or trusted outsider (Bucerius 2013), among other positionalities, not only because such a position is fluid and dynamic but also because it is partly determined by the participants, for some of whom I was a trusted, educated friend asked for advice on career and personal matters (Holland and Ramazanoglu 1994), while for some others I was merely a Ph.D. student-researcher and a potential sexual partner.

Intimate Relationship Status and Rapport

I began my research on Iranian gay refugees' resettlement and integration experiences at the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, class, and migration background. I used questions such as the following: How can discrimination/prejudice against sexual–racial minority refugees be addressed in host communities? Do sexual–racial minority refugees require a unique program that addresses their resettlement needs regarding language and professional training, housing, and health issues? How effective is Canadian Orientation Abroad predeparture training provided by Immigration Refugees Citizenship Canada in Turkey, and what is its impact on settlement outcomes? Initially, I had insufficient knowledge of the high levels of depression and isolation experienced by Iranian gay men. I was underprepared for exploring such issues and for dealing with the consequences of researching refugee populations who find themselves at the margins of Canadian society, Iranian diaspora, and mainstream white-majority LGBT groups (Block et al. 2012).

I responded to and filed a lengthy ethics form for my university's research ethics board in preparation for *predicting* and managing possible harms to my informants. The form was exclusively concerned with informants' safety and anonymity as well as the type and scope of the collected data. It seemed that the form as such was mainly concerned with and targeted traditional modes of conducting biological or psychological research on human and non-human subjects and that the ethics board perceived qualitative researchers as ever-empowered and the researched as infinitely vulnerable to researcher's inquiry. The form did not include nor provided guidelines on any available mental health support resources for field-workers who might be exposed to physical and mental perils in the field (Hanson and Richards 2019; Campbell 2013; see Mahmood (2008) for a disturbing but revealing account of how she was assaulted, beaten, and raped during her fieldwork). Ethics of writing and responsibilities of publishing are also subject to ethics boards' scrutiny and, in the case of my project, such responsibilities became more complicated (Damianakis and Woodford 2012; Ellis 2007) because two months after I had finished the first phase

of my fieldwork, one of the men whom I had expected to participate in the next phase of this study committed suicide, in Vancouver.

Ironically, however, my participants' social isolation played a major role in their willingness to share their intimate stories with me, after both they and I had used various strategies to build trust. This sense of isolation was rooted in being cut off from families back in Iran, losing friends through the asylum and resettlement process, and discovering that, in contrast to their expectations, their love relationships had become "non-existing," as one participant said.

This topic was repeatedly discussed in all interviews. It seemed to me that in combination with our shared ethnicity, language, gender, and sexuality, intimate relationship status (see Takeda (2013) on the methodologically restrictive role of intimate relationship status), that is, being single for long periods at a time and, as one participant said, unable to "have stable relationships with Canadian gay men," was playing a major, unexpected role in ascribing me as an insider who can understand the difficulties of living in Canada as an Iranian gay man. I found that such combination of shared identities occasionally excused our differences in terms of migration backgrounds by shifting the researcher–researched status from, respectively, Iranian gay man versus Iranian gay refugee to a common identity of Iranian gay men (Camminga 2019). To capitalize on such combination of shared identities, I decided not to explicitly reveal my intimate relationship status unless I was directly asked about it.

Throughout the fieldwork, participants asked me various questions about my personal life, for example, which city in Iran I was from, how I immigrated to Canada, and regarding ties with my parents and siblings; I had to divulge some information about myself to gain their trust (Berger 2015; Oakley 2013; [1981]; Walby 2010). I was never asked if I am married or have ever been in a relationship during my life in Canada. Of 19 respondents, all were single at the time of my fieldwork, except one participant who had been dating a white Canadian gay man for over two years. There was a consensus among participants that, as one participant said, "It seems that only we [Iranians] understand and want that family-type lifestyle." I did not explicitly talk about my intimate relationship status with participants because I feared that having been in a long-term relationship with a white man at the time of fieldwork would jeopardize my access to participants' stories (Bruni 2006; McDonald 2013). My intimate relationship status perceived by participants as yet another Iranian gay man who is presumably single, not by choice, proved to be a prominent point of identification which had both facilitating and challenging methodological consequences (Camminga 2019).

On the one hand, my ascribed status at the intersections of intimate relationship status, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity had a "demarginalizing" (MacKinnon 2013) effect in the sense that it transformed my identity from an

outsider at the margins of the Iranian gay community in Canada to an included insider who not only had similar experiences of life in Canada but also, as a researcher, had the ability to listen to and document these stories and grievances, and communicate them to the wider public. I had thus become a witness, and my conversations with participants had become moments of raising grievances (Roberts 2014). Qualitative researchers have already demonstrated multiply marginalized groups' willingness to participate in research to share their stories, sometimes in the form of confessions (Grenz 2005), because they do not have access to enough people in their circles who are open to listening to and documenting their life stories, listeners who become "the minor historian for people who otherwise would have no history" (Bucerius 2013, 698).

Further, my ascribed status at the intersections of intimate relationship status, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity indicated strong similarities and less power inequality between participants and me as a group (McCall 2005). This brought about expectations of reciprocity and friendship which, at times, complicated the difficulties of data collection. I found myself choosing and moving between an ethical duty to respond to courtesies and warmth, an academic obligation to maintain intellectual distance to collect data (Bucerius 2013; Merton 1972; Roberts 2014), and a personal instinct to protect my integrity without signaling wrong messages. Finding the right response to participants' stories filled with elements of mental distress and physical abuse —torture in one case—was challenging since I had to maintain rapport through a display of compassionate understanding while also keeping a poker face to manage participants' mental–emotional attachment to me as a result of disclosing their very intimate experiences. During the interviews and gatherings, I could sense that participants' comments on loneliness and isolation were mixed with erotic desires and projections of their needs onto me (Grenz 2005) since they saw me as a compassionate listener who is potentially sexually and romantically available. One participant, for example, brought up some of his sexual encounters in Canada and finished his short monologue by saying "but I never imagined myself being in long-term relations with those types of guys! I always see myself with … [someone with] some cultural similarities, someone like yourself."

In the following section, I will discuss how, on several occasions, the crosscutting influences of categories of difference, gender, and sexuality, in particular, forged power dynamics (Choo and Ferree 2010) that put me in a vulnerable position and restricted my access to certain group members. In particular, I will delineate one interaction which best represents a moment of ethical complexity with regard to gatekeeping and data collection.

Sexual Orientation and the Internal Gatekeeper

I found participants through a mutual friend and snowball sampling. Coincidentally, I had mutual friends from Iran with four of the recruited participants in Canada. This sampling method of using friendship contacts made it futile to evade questions about my sexuality. Several times, both before and during the meetings with participants, I was asked "Are you gay yourself?" or "[Name removed] told me you are gay too, [you] guys know each other, no?" In contrast to La Pastina (2006), who hid his sexual orientation during fieldwork, my answer was positive, for several reasons. Previous research shows that shared sexual orientation, in combination with other factors, facilitates rapport and access to community knowledge in working with sexual minorities (Plummer 1995; Roberts 2014). Also, from the beginning of my research, I realized that my participants felt distrust toward my project because of their refugee backgrounds and experiences with asylum. This meant any vague answers to their questions would damage the trust relations. Also, I could not use predetermined neutral answers such as "I have slept with all kinds of people" (see Walby 2010) to avoid giving a direct response because I was aware that, according to participants' and my cultural values, such answers might depict me as promiscuous and therefore not respectable. The intersecting effects of sampling method, sexuality, and ethnic culture (Choo and Ferree 2010) limited my options in addressing participants' inquiries regarding my sexuality, and on several occasions put participants at an advantage. One of them used his power to play the role of an internal gatekeeper, to block my access to three of his friends who had previously accepted to participate in the study (more on this below).

While the primary concern of feminist researchers working with vulnerable populations is to diminish power inequality between the researcher and the researched to preclude any harm to participants (Bell 2002; Ellis 2007; Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Irwin 2006; MacKenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway 2007), the ways researchers may be harmed or abused are severely underresearched (Bucerius 2013; Diprose, Thomas, and Rushton 2013; Grenz 2005; Hanson and Richards 2019). During the initial phase of my fieldwork in Vancouver, I was invited to participants' homes to conduct the interviews. Although I was aware of the risks of being alone with participants in their homes (Irwin 2006; Takeda 2013), I once accepted the invitation. This participant was much older than me and had "lived as a straight married man" in Iran, as he said. During the interview, I discovered that he was of a lower-middle-class and minority Arab ethnic background, from the south of Iran. His experiences at the intersections of ethnicity, age, migration background, and previous intimate relationship status were of great importance to my research findings; however, the combination of

these factors gave rise to expressions of patriarchal masculinity aimed at domination of the interview, and ensuing inappropriate text messages and sexual requests (Archer 2002; Diprose, Thomas, and Rushton 2013; Pini 2005).

Participant
Where are you from? Tehran, no?

Me   Yes, but my grandparent moved there from another . . .

Participant
[laugh] Does not matter, you have a different life in Tehran. . . life in the south of Iran is very different, tough. . .

Me   I guess, I have been there, though! Your experiences. . .

Participant: You have been there for a few days. I lived there. It is tough; I lived in poverty, and did not have access to the internet when I was younger. . . I followed the traditions and got married like a man; we almost had a kid. . . one day I realized that life was not for me and got a divorce. I found gay friends there. . . but was attacked once by some gang people in a park. . .

The above excerpt from my interview with this participant shows both my attempts to alleviate the tension in the conversation and the participant's drive to validate his power position at the intersections of gender, ethnicity, age, class, and experiences of asylum as well as heterosexual marriage. It seemed that overcoming the burdens of a marginalized life at the intersections of these factors had endowed him with characteristics of Iranian patriarchal hegemonic masculinity, while he invoked my age and education, my life in the capital city, and my supposedly middle-class background, all of which could be symbols of agreeable life, to ascribe to me the status of subordinate masculinity (Connell 2005). I left the interview feeling intimidated and conflicted. Then, after a few hours, he started sending me messages implying sexual requests. I tried to neutralize the intentions behind his texts by replying in a non-sexual and indifferent tone, because I was afraid that if faced with blatant rejection, he might ask his friends to boycott my research. After two days and as the content and tone of his messages became more direct and pressing, I asked him not to make any further contact with me. In a matter of a few hours, three of his friends canceled their participation in the project. After this incident, I decided not to conduct any further interviews alone with participants in their homes, which resulted in losing a few more participants.

As mentioned earlier, snowball sampling may limit researchers' access to certain individuals due to gatekeepers' bias against the researcher or individual

community members. Any tension with participants who also bring in more participants exacerbates such limits regarding access to participants and knowledge production (McKeganey and Bloor 1991; Reeves 2010). In my project, the participant discussed above invoked several categories of difference to put himself in a position of power and limit my access to other participants. While some qualitative researchers have argued that the gestures and attitudes of sexuality among men who have sex with men are not determined by the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity (Dowsett et al. 2008; see also Walby 2010), I underline the insufficiency of single-axis analyses and emphasize the importance of intersectional methodology to examine the interactive nature of forces that shape productive and perilous social interactions during fieldwork (Irwin 2006; Kulick and Willson 2003).

Ethnicity and Consent

Indeed, application of the intersectional methodology to research on multiply marginalized groups has yet to include refugees, and researchers' experiences of doing research among them (Fonow and Cook 2005). Refugee studies scholars have explored numerous intersecting issues in working with refugees, including consent, confidentiality, trust and mistrust, harms, and human rights and social justice (Block et al. 2012; Eastmond 2007; Hynes 2003; MacKenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway 2007; Raghallaigh 2013). These studies mostly take "refugee" as a homogenous category and fall short of discussing the issues mentioned above at the intersection of the researched–researcher's ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and other empirically relevant factors. FitzGerald and Arar (2018), for instance, have recently reviewed the literature on sociology of refugee and have, surprisingly, presented refugee as an ontologically given category rather an analytical "rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations" (Malkki 1995).

As I mentioned above, my ascribed status at the intersections of intimate relationship status, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity generally facilitated my access to participants and their stories. However, this process of gaining trust and collecting data led to several complications, particularly around obtaining signed consent forms and confidentiality (Thorne 1980). My participants were adamant in inspecting my research project and my intentions, and in refusing to sign any consent forms for their participation in the research. It seems they did not want to provide any handwritten documentation as evidence of their involvement in my study, even though they allowed me to voice-record the interviews. According to one of my main interlocutors, my participants' concerns surrounding how I might (mis)use their signatures, and their stories, were mainly informed by our shared ethnic and national cultures. Primarily, due to

the absence of social research at societal or community levels and the absence of liberal-democratic procedures governing citizens' rights in Iran (Karimi 2018a, 2018b), the concept of voluntary and informed consent as defined and required by many ethics boards in academia in the Western World was far from familiar to my participants (Hugman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway 2011). When I asked one participant to read and sign the consent form, he responded, "I do not need to read these things! You said this [is] about my life and refugee experiences, and I am here." A few participants were familiar with the concepts of privacy rights and informed consent after years of living in Canada and handling bureaucratic procedures, yet they too refused to sign the consent forms.

Second, because of our shared ethnic and national backgrounds and my ties to Iran, participants were adamantly concerned about an increased risk of their signatures and stories being leaked to their families back in Iran. The apparent contradiction between refusing to sign consent forms and allowing me to record the interviews made me ask myself if my participants would have refused the consent forms had I been of a different racial or national background. The literature on Iranian diaspora and my own experiences of conducting research with Iranian immigrants attest to the fact that because of decades of sociopolitical instabilities and systematic corruptions, Iranians, both inside and outside their home country, suffer from a generalized sense of social distrust as well as lack of sociopolitical commitment to social and community activities (Karimi and Bucerius 2017). Accordingly, Iranian immigrants, including gay Iranian refugees, display skepticism and distrust, particularly toward other Iranian nationals. In a similar vein, other researchers have underlined the ways that ethnic matching may present researchers with more dilemmas, ranging from the researched community's expectations from the researcher to follow and commit to community's often traditional norms (Beoku-Betts 1994), to unwillingness to participate in a study because of prejudice toward co-ethnics or greater generalized trust toward outsider researchers who have no local links to the participant community (Sin 2007; Osanami Törngren and Ngeh 2017).

In sum, shared ethnicity and nationality combined with sexuality, age, and gender facilitated data collection in my fieldwork, while shared ethnicity and nationality combined with refugee experiences challenged obtaining signed consent forms and exploration of issues related to political matters. Exploring these contradictory effects of the intersecting categories of difference is paramount in intersectional methodology as it requires researchers to be alert to the need for intersectional analysis of disparate interactions of categories of difference (Meyer 2012), instead of approaching ethnicity, gender, refugee backgrounds, and class, among others, as independent analytical factors (Choo and Ferree 2010).

Conclusion

In this article, I drew on fieldwork experiences with gay Iranian refugees in Canada to contribute to feminist studies that have called for consolidation of intersectional methodological analyses and research design. I specifically focused on research questions that explore the lives of one specific social group and, accordingly, bolstered intracategorical intersectionality as the best practice toward a nuanced sociological understanding of the interconnectedness of social structures and cultural representations and the multiplication of their main effects into interactions. On the assumption that ethnographers to some extent participate in or become affiliates of their participant group, albeit marginally and for a limited time, I demonstrated the utility of intracategorical intersectional methodology in supporting but also going beyond reflexivity by enabling researchers to systematically reflect upon the ways that participants' markers of identity intersect with researchers', and upon power dynamics and the knowledge that is produced. Intracategorical intersectional methodology challenges any static definition of insiderness versus outsiderness by underscoring the fluidity of identities as well as their disparate impacts on field interactions.

Further, I argued that intersectionality as methodology requires the development of context-specific methods that attend to the mutuality and the interactive character of race, gender, class, ethnicity, refugee backgrounds, and age, among other factors. Above all, intersectional methodology cautions researchers to be mindful of the unexpected categories of difference that may emerge during fieldwork. There is thus a need for more accounts of the ways that categories of difference emerge, and the ways the researched and the researcher draw on the intersectional effect of these categories to pursue their goals during research. That shared identities both facilitate and constrain access to field and data collection is not limited to the sociological studies of refugees or sexual minorities and, indeed, intersectional methodology can be fruitfully applied to qualitative research and fieldwork in other (sub)disciplines.

In closing, and according to the lessons learned from my fieldwork experience with regard to the lack of proper institutional training provided to researchers in addressing mental, emotional, and physical stresses experienced by the researchers, I invite qualitative researchers and research ethics boards to expand the scope of potential fieldwork stressors to not only include the possible harms to informants but also provide experiential and theoretical trainings on risk management as well as guidelines on any available mental health support resources for researchers who engage in social science fieldwork. Specifically, the latter theme could include strategies such as preparation of instructional manuals for field-workers at all ranks, trainings provided to graduate students during courses such as qualitative methods, and inclusion of

therapists or psychologists on ethics boards or possibilities of collaboration between ethics board members and mental health service providers. I also emphasize the need for university ethics boards to update and design discipline-specific ethics forms to address the risks of conducting research for the researched as well as the researcher.

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ENDNOTES

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