Mehri Mohebbi (Mehrsa), Annulla Linders, Carla Chifos
University of Cincinnati, U.S.A.

Community Immersion, Trust-Building, and Recruitment among Hard to Reach Populations: A Case Study of Muslim Women in Detroit Metro Area

Abstract   Scholars have identified a range of factors that influence the ability of researchers to access hard-to-reach groups and the willingness of their members to participate in research. In this paper, we draw on insights from both ethnographic methods and participatory action research to demonstrate the importance of building trust in our relationships with hard-to-reach participants in research based on interviews. Such trust-building, we show, is greatly facilitated by pre-recruitment immersion that aids not only the recruitment of individual participants but also improves the quality of the data collected. These methodological concerns emerged from an interview study focusing on Muslim women's use of urban public recreational spaces in South-East Michigan. Although the first author of this paper, as a woman and a Muslim, is a formal insider in the study population, her experiences with recruitment demonstrate that the access granted by insider status is insufficient as grounds for a research relationship based on trust. This is so especially when the target population is as marginalized and embattled as the post 9/11 immigrant Muslim community. With more than two years of community immersion, however, she was able to foster enough trust to secure a large number of committed participants that spoke freely and thoughtfully about the issues at stake (78 in all).

Researchers in different fields from urban sociology to public health have faced numerous challenges when it comes to accessing and recruiting research participants from so-called hard-to-reach populations and groups. Scholars have identified a range of factors and obstacles that influence both the ability of researchers to access such groups and the willingness of their members to participate in research (Katigbak et al. 2015a; Mohebbi 2018). The present paper examines the utility of community immersion as an under-utilized recruitment tool to secure participants from hard-to-reach groups. More specifically, we address the limitations of established qualitative recruitment methods to access religious minorities, and argue that scholars, in focusing primarily on problems relating to access and

Mehri Mohebbi (Mehrsa) is a doctoral candidate in Urban and Regional Planning at the School of Planning, College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning, University of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her research and practice mainly focus on social and health disparities in urban America and qualitative research methods. For her PhD dissertation she focused on urban accessibility issues Muslim women face in Southeast Michigan, specifically social and cultural barriers Muslim women face to walk in urban neighborhoods.

email address: mohebbmi@mail.uc.edu

Annulla Linders is an Associate Professor of sociology at the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her research interests are in culture, politics, historical sociology, social movements, and qualitative sociology. Her recent publications have appeared in *Deviant Behavior, Gender & Society, Historical Sociology, Law & Society Review, Qualitative Sociology, Sociological Forum, Sociological Inquiry*, and *Social Problems*.

email address: lindera@ucmail.uc.edu

Carla Chifos is an Associate Professor in the School of Planning at the College of Design, Architecture, Arts, and Planning, University of Cincinnati, Ohio. Her work and teaching are in the area of sustainable community development with an interest in bringing culture and heritage into sustainability practice and theory.

email address: carla.chifos@uc.edu

initial contact, have not paid sufficient attention to the *quality* of the contact with participants in interview studies. Here we are drawing on insights from both ethnographic methods and participatory action research to demonstrate the importance of building trust in our relationships with hard-to-reach research participants. Such trust-building, we show, is greatly facilitated by pre-recruitment immersion that aids not only the recruitment of individual participants but also improves the quality of the data collected. In using the term quality we mean not simply, as if it were simple, issues related to the veracity of the data in relation to our own questions, but especially issues related to our ability as scholars to tap into that which is important to our participants.

The target population of the present study is Muslim women in Southeast Michigan. Due to their socio-economic characteristics, religious affiliation,

limited engagement with American society, suspicion of outsiders fostered by encounters with prejudice, and adherence to traditional gender ideologies, they are a hard-to-reach population. Therefore, any researcher interested in studying members of this community will face difficulties gaining access. The most widely used strategies for gaining access to such populations, used either singularly or in combination, are insider status and snowball sampling. This is how the first author of this study also began the research that this paper is based on. As a Muslim-born immigrant woman, she anticipated few problems recruiting Muslim women in the Detroit metro area, many of whom are also foreign-born, for an interview study on how they use public space (especially parks, walking trails, and bicycle paths). But, she quickly realized that her insider status on two important dimensions—gender and religion—was insufficient to garner enough trust and credibility in the population to secure participants. As

a result, she devised a new recruitment strategy that involved both immersion in the community of interest and an effort to engage women of the community in the project itself. This multi-pronged strategy was successful not only in terms of securing a sufficient number of participants but also in terms of trust-building. That is, as the participants got to know the first author and started trusting her as an insider, they were less guarded and more forthcoming in the interviews they participated in, both individually and, in some cases, as part of a group.

How to Reach Hard-to-Reach Populations

A hard-to-reach population is a group of people that is not accessible *to the researcher* due to its race, ethnicity, value structure, language, political affiliation, geographic location, religion, criminality, or any number of other characteristics associated with the group and/or the researcher. Thus, the definition of a hard-to-reach population cannot be objectively determined, but instead is best viewed as a consequence of the interrelationship between the population and the researcher (Wahoush 2009; Sadler et al. 2010; Western et al. 2016).

Although still subject to debate, the most common solution to the problem of accessing hard-to-reach populations is to work through an "insider" or, preferably, be one yourself. But, what makes someone an insider? At the most basic level, scholars often treat major social statuses as insider/outsider categories; that is, scholars who claim membership in the status groups they study—gender groups, ethnic groups, racial groups—are insiders (Zinn 2001; Young 2008). But, as a fairly sizeable literature demonstrates,

there are numerous other group belongings, experiences, and/or characteristics that can serve insider purposes, including religion and religiosity (Widdicombe 2015; Ahmed 2016), motherhood (Brown and de Casanova 2009), experiences of domestic abuse (Malpass, Sales, and Feder 2016), length of residence (Crow, Allan, and Summers 2001), shared profession (Teusner 2016), friendship groups (Appleton 2011; Jenkins 2013), fashion modeling (Mears 2013), and criminal conviction (Earle 2014; Newbold et al. 2014).

And yet, the question of what makes someone an insider is rarely quite as simple as identifying a clear insider dimension, like race or gender, or a shared experience (Wacquant 2015). Rather, insider status is something that either emerges during "insider moments" (May 2014) or is negotiated in the interaction with research participants (Krilić 2011; Cui 2015). Thus, although scholars from a wide range of disciplines recognize the potential importance of the insider-outsider dimension when it comes to accessing a hard-to-reach population, few have found insider status to be sufficient for either gaining access in the first place or for the quality of data to be collected. Moreover, insider researchers are almost always also outsiders at least in their roles as academics (Hassan 2015; Mannay and Creaghan 2016). Nonetheless, insider status can help researchers get in the door, which is an important first step.[1]

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[1] Although the advantages that insiders typically bring to studies are well-documented, the evidence does not support a conclusion that outsiders therefore are unable to gain important insights (but see Young 2008). This can be so especially for outsider ethnographers, who sometimes use the process whereby they gain access to the communities they study to generate important insights that might be invisible to the insiders themselves (Duneier 1999; Blee 2002; Garot 2010).

When qualitative work involves interviews, the problem with hard-to-reach populations also spills over into questions of who should conduct the interviews and what the consequences of different interviewers may be. The debate is fairly extensive here, and the research conducted on these questions has not settled the debate. Nonetheless, there is by now ample evidence that, for some topics at least, the "match" between interviewers and participants matters, albeit for somewhat different reasons and in somewhat different ways (e.g., Schaeffers 1980; Blauner and Wellman 1998; Twine 2000; May 2014). For example, in a series of papers on the effects of the race of interviewers in survey studies with African Americans, Darren Davis has demonstrated that African American interviewees are negatively affected by White interviewers given pervasive distrust, increased racial consciousness, and the ever-present stereotype threat (Davis 1997a, 1997b; Davis and Silver 2003). As another example, in a study of how interviewers perceive skin color, Hill (2002) found that both White and Black interviewers report less nuanced skin tones for the respondents that are of a different race than themselves (White interviewers think Black respondents have darker skin tones than Black interviewers think, and Black interviewers think that White respondents have lighter skin tones than White interviewers think). As yet another example, Green and Linders (2016) found that the combination of racially homogeneous focus groups and race-matched facilitators produced somewhat different perceptions and understanding of racially charged comedy.

While the benefits of some form of insider status are by now widely acknowledged, they have not en-

tirely put to rest earlier concerns about the potential drawbacks of close researcher-researched relationships (Monti 1992). If the risk of "going native" has a somewhat old-fashioned ring to it, the recent controversy over Alice Goffman's *On the Run* demonstrates that the issues captured by "going native" are still very much debated (Zussman 2016), even though, in this case, part of the problem, according to some of her critics, was that she was an outsider in the community she immersed herself in (White, middle class academic, writing about poor Black men). The risks associated with her outsider positionality, in other words, are those of exploitation, sensationalism, and stereotyping. Although the debate would no doubt have taken a different turn had Goffman been an insider in the community she studied, the potential "going native" problem would not necessarily have gone away. But, it would have been different, as the notion of "double vision" so clearly captures (Jacobs 2004; Einwohner 2011). Double vision, according to Janet Jacobs (2004:227), often "obscures the boundaries between the researcher and the researched" and it involves a "blurring of subjectivity that is intensified by bonds of gender and ethnic kinship." Instead of viewing "double vision" as "a barrier to seeing clearly," Rachel Einwohner argues that rather than partially obscuring what we see, such vision, because of its ethical underpinnings, can instead help us see more clearly. Einwohner (2011:428) calls this possibility "doubled vision."

Taken together, then, there is considerable evidence from ethnographic work in support of the assumption that researchers who can claim some sort of insider status have advantages when it comes to

securing access to hard-to-reach populations. There is also evidence from interview studies that the quality of the data we gather with the help of research participants is impacted by the affinity between the researcher and the researched. In this paper, we join a group of scholars who are persuaded that some form of insider status is crucial for our ability to examine the lives of the hard-to-reach, but also alerts us to the ways in which insider status and/or social matching is not always sufficient to avoid potential problems with access, trust, ethics, and data quality (e.g., Irwin 2006; Chong 2008). Hence, regardless of the advantages or limitations of different sampling and recruitment techniques, the success of qualitative research on hard-to-reach populations is rooted in both the depth of the researchers' knowledge about the populations and the quality of the relationships that researchers develop with members of the communities they study.

But, this does not mean that questions regarding recruitment techniques are not important. On the contrary, they are critical for the issue at hand. That is, in order for a researcher's insider status to make a difference, he/she obviously needs to come close enough to potential subjects for them to know that he/she is trustworthy. It is for this reason that scholars typically rely on snowball sampling when they work with hard-to-reach populations. It is not because snowball sampling is objectively better than other methods, but instead because it is one of the few methods, perhaps the only one, that provides access. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have arrived at somewhat different conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the method. Some scholars describe snowball sampling as a strate-

gy which provides a comfortable environment for participants and promotes trust. Other researchers are concerned about the issues of representativeness that can arise if the snowball circulates only among people who are connected by similar lives, thus reducing the diversity of the sample (Arcury and Quandt 1999; Woodley and Lockard 2016).

Other established recruitment strategies include collaborating with local and indigenous organizations in an effort to overcome some of the barriers researchers face in accessing and working with hard-to-reach population. Such collaborations cover a wide range of approaches, including community-based participatory research, co-investigations with vulnerable population, and deep engagement with key informants (Benoit et al. 2005; Blakeslee et al. 2013; Ampt and Hickman 2015; Katigbak et al. 2015a). Yet other strategies for work with hard-to-reach research subjects involve creative use of social media as a point of access (Mainsah and Morrison 2012; Martinez et al. 2014).

In this paper, we draw on and extend these insights as we report on a research project that involves an extremely hard-to-reach population: first and second generation immigrant Muslim women in the United States. The study itself is an examination of how Muslim women in the Detroit area use public recreational spaces, like parks, walking trails, and bicycle paths. As an insider researcher with a seemingly straightforward and non-sensitive project, the first author had not initially anticipated any real difficulties with recruitment. But, soon after embarking on her study, she realized that her insider status was not enough to mitigate

a basic lack of trust, even suspicion, among the women she was interested in interviewing, thus confirming that insider researchers are almost always also outsiders in some ways. The strategy she devised to solve this problem was a form of community immersion that, over time, helped build trust and establish her as an insider member of the target community (Katigbak et al. 2015b; Matsuda, Brooks, and Beeber 2016). That is, for the present interview study with members of a religious minority group as participants, community immersion by an insider/outsider researcher proved the most effective strategy to not only recruit participants but also build trust and secure their commitment to the project.

In what follows, we first briefly describe the study population that prompted the methodological challenges we discuss in this paper and then discuss the immersion and recruitment strategies that helped us gain access and secure high quality data from participants who were committed to the success of the project.

A Study of Muslim Women

Muslim women have long been portrayed as an oppressed group who face a plethora of social problems associated with their religious and gender identification (Bullock and Jafri 2000; Jackson 2010; Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010; Alsultany 2012; Eid 2014). The first author began the project with the assumption that, as a Muslim woman, she was enough of an insider to have no trouble with the recruitment process. During one year of pre-recruitment activities, her perspective gradually changed

and she came to appreciate the complexity of the notion of an insider-researcher. Her journey began with weekly visits to Dearborn, the city where the largest concentration of Arab Americans (mainly Muslims) in the United States live. As someone who was born in a Muslim country she had assumed it would be easy for her to establish relationships based on a common religious heritage, but quickly realized that Islam is practiced very differently in the Detroit Metro Area than in her native country of Iran.

In the very preliminary stages, it was therefore difficult for her to communicate with the Muslim community. This difficulty was also rooted in the socio-political situation of the Muslim community in the United States, which has long lived under a cloud of suspicion, and especially so after 9/11 (Curtis IV 2009). Although Muslims have a long history of peaceful contributions to life in North America, they quickly became "othered" as "Muslim-American" in the socio-political context after 9/11 (Tanvir Syed 2011; Mohamed 2016). As Muslims are among the most diverse of religious minorities, the term "Muslim-American" renders the extensive diversity within the Muslim community invisible (Sirin and Fine 2008). This diversity among Muslims in the United States comes from many sources, including their different countries of origin (even among Arab-Americans), incomparable cultural values, different sects of Islam, dissimilar approaches to gender relations, and varying connections with their countries of origin (Younis 2015). Misunderstandings about the Muslim community are not limited to the general public, but have also penetrated Western scholarship

about the Muslim world. For instance, the historian Samuel Huntington (2004) refers to Muslim immigrants in the West as the "Indigestible Minority."

Muslim women in the Detroit Metro Area come from different sects in Islam, which directly or indirectly affect their interactions with the whole community. This paper draws on an interview study with a diverse group of 78 Muslim women living in the Detroit area of Michigan (mainly in Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Detroit, Novi, Ann Arbor, Canton, and Farmington Hills).

The Importance of Being a Hijabi Researcher

It was the first author's personal experiences as an immigrant Muslim woman that inspired her to explore the ways Muslim women deal with the new cultural and social setting that is the United States and seek to determine the extent to which they live their lives at the margins of their new society or as integrated members of the larger community. Her Urban Planning background led her to mainly focus on how being a religious minority—Muslim women in this case—can affect one's access to urban amenities. Her journey began with a personal contact with a Lebanese Muslim woman from the Detroit Metro Area. This initial encounter with the Muslim community revealed some of the challenges that Muslim women face when it comes to using public space and these early insights shaped the foundation of the study.

Being a hijabi researcher was the key to gaining initial access to the local Muslim community and attracting attention to the study. Besides wearing hijab,

two other factors played important roles in both the pre-recruitment phase and the actual recruitment of participants: first, the first author's religious affiliation and, second, her country of origin. Wearing hijab made it possible for the first author to participate in numerous religious activities, communicate with key religious figures, and experience a Muslim woman's daily life in the Detroit Metro Area. After the completion of a long pre-recruitment phase, data gathering started in July 2015 (mid-Ramadan, the Islamic holy month). During this month, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Ramadan has three sacred nights called "Nights of Power," during which Muslims stay awake the whole night and pray till the exact time when the sun rises. These nights are very important to Muslims which means attendance at the events at the local mosque was high, thus increasing our access to women in the community. The first author participated in prayers with other Muslim women while also providing them with a brief description of the study. Some women expressed interest in the study, although only a few contacted the first author after the events. The other factor that facilitated recruitment, the first author's Iranian background, was somewhat more surprising. But, her recruitment experiences suggest that it helped attract many women to the study and also played a role in the trust-building process. This is so for two main reasons; first, Iranians belong to the same sect of Islam that the majority belong to in the Detroit area (Shia) and, second, Iran supports Middle Eastern people who come from and/or live in conflict zones, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. However, this same positionality also made it more difficult to recruit Muslim women from a few other countries (such as Egypt) (see: Figure 1).

Figure 1. The first author as a hijabi researcher interviewing a Muslim women in a local public space.

Those three nights of religious participation eased the first author's access to a wider circle of Muslim women by creating opportunities to connect to a group of young Muslim women. This first group introduced the first author to three local centers serving mainly young Muslim women where she met additional Muslim women. Other recruitment venues included public spaces (mosques, cafe shops, parks, trails, and libraries), non-governmental organizations, and interviewees' homes (family gatherings, individual meetings). Similar to other studies on Muslim women, the place where interviews were conducted was chosen by study participants based on their convenience and comfort (Ali 2013).

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the women's experiences with social and public spaces. Participants narrated their stories as Muslim women and told stories about how they lived their lives in the United States. Some women shared their experiences of being identified as an "exotic other" (Tanvir Syed 2011) by both neighbors and strangers. Others talked about the "implicit bias" they face in everyday life by their non-Muslim neighbors (Cashin 2010). The implicit and explicit bias that Muslims face creates the foundation of a discriminatory social system (Hamdani 2005). In the case of this study, Muslim women's fear of discrimination made not only the recruitment process challenging but also the interviews themselves. In all interviews, and considering the advice of other researchers that dress matters (Talukdar and Linders 2012), the first author followed the Islamic dress code to show her respect for the study participants' values, as almost all study participants were covered. But, being a hijabi researcher involves more than dressing respectfully. It also means establishing sufficient trust to gather meaningful data. In what follows, we describe in greater detail the elements of the unfolding research process that, we think, can benefit other scholars who study hard-to-reach populations.

Recruitment Steps

The misrepresentation of the Muslim community in the United States has influenced qualitative researches in two distinct ways. In some instances, it has encouraged Muslims to participate in research focusing on Muslims' social lives so as to present both Islam and themselves in a positive light (Tariq-Munir 2014). But, many other researchers

have had difficulties recruiting Muslims for qualitative projects (Williams and Vashi 2007; Mohammadi, Jones, and Evans 2008; Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron 2011). Daily experiences of micro-aggression have had macro-level consequences for life in Muslim communities, and have increased the social mistrust between minority and majority groups (Wing Sue et al. 2007; Wing Sue 2010; Shenoy-Packer 2015).

In the study we report on here, the recruitment process turned out to be more complicated than we had anticipated. This was so in large part because, as several of the Muslim women mentioned in the interviews, they believe that their community is under surveillance and tight security. This meant that the formal insider status that the first author represented as a Muslim-born woman, although it gave her initial access to the community, was not enough to gain the trust of potential participants.

This became evident when, initially, the first author tried to recruit women in public spaces, as the following excerpt from her field notes illustrate.
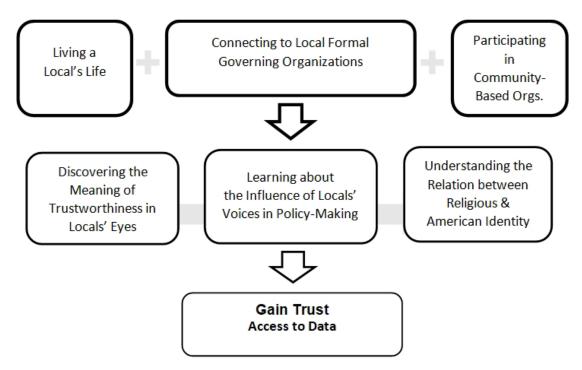
> During a morning walk in a public park in East Dearborn, seven Muslim women expressed their interest to participate in the interview study. They are originally from Yemen and Iraq; four of them do not speak English, so I asked a local Arab teacher to help me to better communicate with them. Interviews went well for the few first questions; however, in the middle of the interview and for the questions on the public's image of Muslims, six of the women changed their mind and asked me to void their interviews. They ended their conversation with complaints about me trying to solve a problem which does not exist: "Everything is great, we don't have any problem… Do you want to find a problem?"

Later on, one of the key informants explained that, given high levels of mistrust in the community, the women most likely were afraid that the first author was working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and hence could not be trusted with any information that signaled even the slightest opposition to life in the United States.

In order to establish trust with prospective interview subjects, an almost two and a half year long pre-recruitment process was completed in the form of community immersion. This long process of trust-building involved participation in almost twenty family ceremonies related to local Muslims; five major interfaith ceremonies (The Bridge, Islamic House of Wisdom, etc.); meetings and workshops related to Dearborn Health Initiative; ten Islamic ceremonies and fundraising events; and several lectures on the project in local mosques. In early 2013, the first author started to participate in local religious and cultural activities. She contacted several local religious and cultural organizations. Her familiarity with the Shia sect in Islam eased her access to Shia centers and after a few months, she was connected to other groups within the Muslim community (Mohebbi 2018). In late 2015, she initiated an eight-month interview study. At that moment, she had numerous connections with local key sectors and actors. The pre-recruitment process helped secure support from local leaders, and several put up flyers about the project on their social media pages and asked their members to participate. Without their help, the process of trust-building would likely have ended

in failure, and without community immersion it is unlikely that any of the local groups and organizations would have supported the project. The first author also contacted persons who were related to groups with different political orientations related to Middle East issues in order to gain a wider range of participants with different levels of attachment to American identity. This lengthy recruitment process was a means to establish trustworthiness in the eyes of members of the local Muslim community.

Graph 1. Major goals and strategies in pre-recruitment process.

Source: Self-elaboration.

Social Media: A Pivotal Means to Recruit Muslim Women

The term "social media" captures a plethora of internet-based services that create a platform for online exchange of data and communication with distinct social groups. As such, it is a useful tool by which to interact with a wide range of groups from governmental sectors to grassroots organizations. Qualitative researchers have utilized numerous aspects of social media (Dewing 2010; Evans-Cowley and Hollander 2010; Hallam 2013). Of particular interest here is the use of social media to dig into unknown and hidden dimensions of a community and build trust with potential study participants (Cain 2011; Eytan et al. 2011; Afzalan and Muller 2014; Weslowski 2014; Afzalan and Evans-Cowley 2015).

The dynamism of social media makes it possible for researchers to gain insights into the complexities of a community and also to encourage public engagement (Evans-Cowley and Hollander 2010;

Hallam 2013). In the context of this study, social media helped provide potential study participants with background information about the interview study. It also gave them an opportunity to communicate with each other and the researcher about the research topic through online group discussion and one-on-one Q and A conversations. In this sense, the use of social media accelerated the process of trust-building with potential study participants, as other studies too have observed (Safko and Brake 2009; Calefato, Lanubile, and Novielli 2016).

For instance, conversations with Muslim women about their urban accessibility issues, which was the broad focus of the research project, began in a Facebook group. The first author used the same language as the other group members and referred to Quran and Haidth (religious scripture of Shia) to suggest that Muslim women can have an active lifestyle, and walk or bike in public spaces designated for such activities. In the pre-recruitment phase, a wide variety of virtual platforms were utilized, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Those were primarily used as tools to interact with Muslim women and identify different religious groups and cultural distinctions within the Muslim community. The first twenty participants were recruited via a Facebook group of Muslim women. The activities of this group are focused on spreading Islamic values by sharing Muslim women's everyday spiritual experiences. Those virtual conversations led to face-to-face meetings with a handful of Muslim women who later served as informants for the study. Interviews were first conducted with Lebanese Shia women and then with Syrian, Pakistani, Hindi, Iraqi, Yemeni, and Iranian women. Through

social media, the first author was invited to numerous local ceremonies by a wide range of social media groups and community leaders. Mid-Sha'baan and Nights of Power ceremonies were among the most significant Islamic ceremonies that effectively expanded the study network.

Recruitment Barriers

This study benefited from an innovative sampling and recruitment method and gatekeeper strategy (Goodman 2011). As we have already discussed, in order to start the recruitment process, it was essential to make cultural connections with community members and find the right gatekeepers to secure a diverse group of participants (Read and Bartkowski 2000; Shirazi and Mishra 2010; Siraj 2012). Based on the first author's familiarity with Shia Islam and the fact that the vast majority of the target population are Shia, the recruitment efforts started with a Shia group and then extended to Sunni groups. The first author started with social media and later on she set up face-to-face appointments with Muslim women in the Detroit Metro Area.

The study flyer, delivered to potential study participants and gatekeepers, emphasized the absence of Muslim women among the key players in local and regional planning projects related to urban accessibility. It was meant as an important step towards encouraging Muslim women to start articulating and expressing what they need in case of urban accessibility. And most of the Muslim women we talked to gave the impression that they cared deeply about the study subject, thus facilitating the recruitment process.

Not altogether surprisingly, the groups we struggled the most to recruit were Muslim women who could not speak English and poor Muslim women. These groups mainly lived in isolated urban neighborhoods where Muslims are in the majority. The above mentioned factors along with the first author's position as a non-local, well-educated, English-speaking woman made it necessary to locate proper gatekeepers who could help us gain access to these groups of women. One of the major gatekeepers was the *Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services* (ACCESS), the most influential local non-governmental organization focusing on Arab American social and health issues. The director of the organization, Mona Makki, introduced the first author to the staff, who helped ease her access to the customers of the center, the vast majority of whom are fairly recent Muslim immigrants or refugees from the Middle East. The first author had permission to talk to Muslim women in the lobby area and ask them if they were interested in participating in the interview study. Additional women were also recruited by ACCESS staff. As most ACCESS clients are poor and/or do not speak English, this gatekeeper greatly facilitated the recruitment of women with these experiences. This group of study participants also included recently arrived Middle Eastern Arab refugees. Two main reasons were mentioned by participants as the primary motivations for them to agree to be a part of the study: their level of trust in ACCESS and the effectiveness of ACCESS in promoting their life quality. They mainly saw this study as a motor for change in their community. ACCESS was only one of numerous local organizations that eased access to the Muslim community during the pre-recruitment and recruitment phases. In order to better illustrate the different recruitment strategies used for this study, below we briefly relate three recruitment stories that capture some of the key points we have made in this paper (see also Table 1).

Table 1. Selected pre-recruitment research procedure.

Pre-recruitment Research Procedure	Definition and Purpose	Process
Active Participation in Religious Ceremonies	A process of facilitation that was utilized to ease access to the Muslim community and help build trust with Muslim women	- Identify Muslim women's social and religious values - Understand Muslim women's social experiences - Communicate with participants in their own language - Find mediators from the Muslim community who can facilitate communication with community members and leaders
Identify Gatekeepers	Individuals or organizations that are trusted by Muslim women and can validate the trustworthiness of the researcher	Establish relationships with a range of local community leaders (from local religious leaders to influential community members and local key figures) to ensure diversity among the participants
Participant Observation in Interfaith Activities	A process of trust-building between the researcher and community members while observing intergroup relationships among religious minority members and the rest of the community	- Phase I: Understand the importance and necessity of interfaith activities through social media discussions - Phase II: Identify key local leaders for interfaith events - Phase III: Participate in interfaith ceremonies to understand how relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims are built
Individual Discussions with Muslim Women	Trust-building at the personal level to lessen the caution that characterized the initial responses by Muslim women to the study	A micro-level trust-building strategy to provide the researcher with an in-depth understanding of Muslim women's varied social experiences

Source: Self-elaboration.

Recruitment Stories

Story of Recruitment in a Public Park: It started in a local park in a majority Muslim neighborhood in East Dearborn (Ford Woods Park). Recruiting and interviewing in public parks had initially seemed like a good idea, but soon turned into a challenge. It was during an interview with a Yemeni woman sitting on a bench beside the pool that the difficulties of this strategy first became clear. Kids were playing in the pool and mothers were walking and chatting under a tree in the middle of the park. In the middle of the interview, a basketball hit the first author and it caused a temporary problem for her. This incident helped us decipher some of the hidden cultural and social factors, in this case, kin/ethnic social support, that can impede interviews. Similar studies on minority groups have also found that acculturalization and "ethnic social support" can work as a defensive reaction by minorities against racial/ethnic discrimination (Noh and Kaspar 2003). In this study, the interviewed woman knew the man who hit the first author with a basketball, but she did not say his name most likely to prevent any repercussion for one of her people. It depicted a new image of a close-knit Muslim community where neighbors defend neighbors against the possibility of sanctions. Another woman, Kamalah from West Africa, had agreed to be interviewed when the first author asked her in the park, but changed her mind a few questions into the interview. Much later, when the first author was more immersed in the field, they met again in the mosque, and this time Kamalah decided she wanted to participate. Such incidents point to the importance of community immersion as a key element in trust-building.

Story of Recruitment at Religious Centers: The first author gave a lecture in one of the local conservative mosques (conservative centers in this study refer to religious centers in which Muslims are encouraged indirectly to celebrate their religious identity over national identity) during the festivities surrounding the three Nights of Power. During the pre-recruitment process, she made connections with local Muslim activists, and one of those connections was an Arab man who was actively engaged in the empowerment of the Muslim community in the Detroit Metro Area. He encouraged the first author to participate in the three night ceremonies and asked her to give a lecture and talk about the project and its extended benefits for the whole community. The first author gave a 20-minute talk to Muslim men and women while introducing herself and her connections with the University of Michigan. Talking directly to Muslim men and women was a great opportunity to introduce the study and briefly describe its potential benefits for the whole community. As men play a pivotal role in Islamic families, their presence and acceptance of the study would encourage more Muslim women to consider participating. Talking about the study in a religious center also helped build trust between the researcher and community members. Moreover, being a hijabi researcher and working as a visiting scholar at a local prestigious university encouraged Muslim women to consider the first author as a trustworthy researcher. Study participants mentioned the University of Michigan as a respectful and credible academic sector in the eyes of the Muslim community.

On one occasion at the center she participated in a Shia mourning ceremony for Imam Hossein (third

sacred figure in Shia sect). It was held in one of the major Shia religious centers in the area. She tried to celebrate this sacred month with local Muslims to express her respect for their values. Accepting responsibilities in these ceremonies and showing the locals that she is a member of the community, put her closer to an insider's position. She tried to be "with" the potential study participants as much as she could, which meant simultaneously playing the role of insider and outsider (Hall 1990; Aoki 1996). While at the center, several women approached the first author about her research and pressed her on how it might benefit the Muslim community. In so doing, they also more or less subtly tried to educate the first author about some of the challenges they experienced as Muslim women living in the Detroit area. A young woman from Iran, Sarah, for example, described her discomfort with the external American world; she said:

> I don't like to go shopping for a bunch of reasons, for example, the music there disturbs me and makes me feel uncomfortable. Also, the photos and advertisement make me feel uncomfortable, specifically when I'm with my [kids]…I can be a college professor too because of my degree, but I don't feel comfortable because boys and girls sit in a class. I prefer to teach girls.

Thus, being situated somewhere closer to an insider position broadened her understanding of the diversity among women in the Detroit area Muslim communities (Dwyer and Buckle 2009), and also made it possible for the women to share aspects of their lives that they had been unwilling to divulge before they had developed trust for the first author. And yet, getting closer to an insider's view was not an

easily achieved goal, despite the fact that the first author in many ways began the study as an "insider" in the way qualitative scholars often talk about the term—a Muslim woman, studying other Muslim women. Instead, the first author spent more than two years interacting with the community, to the extent that Muslim women started calling her a "Dearborn Lady."

Story of Recruitment at Interviewees' Home and Beyond: During Ramadan 2015, an Iranian Muslim family had an *Iftar* gathering with friends and family members. This gathering included the first author, who had met them in a local mosque during the pre-recruitment process in early 2014. *Iftar* is the evening meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset, and the fact that they invited the first author to join them demonstrates that they had come to completely trust her and also support her research. In a meeting with the researcher, they mentioned the study subject as a critical concern of Muslim women in the Detroit Metro Area. This belief encouraged them to take responsibility for the study and help recruit participants. The first author interviewed three Muslim women in this home and another five interview appointments were set up during one of those parties.

It was not surprising to the first author that Iranian Muslim women wear the hijab for different reasons, including pleasing God and respecting family tradition. The women in the family who invited the first author into their home were among the Muslims who accept hijab as a family tradition. This is in contrast to other participants, like the Lebanese Muslim women, who were religiously committed to

the hijab. For instance, one of the Lebanese participants left Dubai because as a hijabi, she could not find work related to her expertise. She said, "I am stuck in Dearborn because I want to keep my hijab."

Furthermore, the first author's active participations in local events helped her being accepted by the community. In official meetings and events, she wore hijab to respect the Muslim community, but during many unofficial occasions and in her personal life, she was not covered. At first glance, this might seem to undermine the researcher's claims to authenticity, but interestingly it did not challenge her credibility. On the contrary, most study participants appreciated the gesture as a sign of respect for the Muslim community and it encouraged them to articulate their own experiences with the hijab. Kamalah, for example, offered the following analysis of how non-Muslims interpret the hijab:

> I think my hijab can either be something that's very defensive for people, they might be defensive about it because of the media and how the media portrays Muslim women; or it could come like the sense of "Oh, she is oppressed" or "Oh, she is not educated." Because of the unfortunate…the stereotypes that are associated with hijab. Yeah, I think people frequently do have this notion, so as soon as they see me in hijab, they assume I am an extremist, but I'm really not those kind[s] of things.

Taken together, these varied recruitment experiences show that, for studies involving religious minority groups and other hard-to-reach populations, it is not enough to be a "formal" insider (defined by major social categories), which otherwise is the most common solution to the problem. Rather, in order to secure high quality data, you must also immerse yourself in the community, a tactic borrowed from ethnography and participatory action research, but for very different reasons.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have reflected on our evolving strategy of using community immersion in an interview study with Muslim women in the Detroit Metro Area and the importance of trust-building processes to secure interview data. We draw three main conclusions from the study. The first conclusion is related to the extent to which community immersion can ease access to hard-to-reach participants in interview studies. In this research, the first author used participant observation as a tool to immerse herself in the community. Community immersion is not usually used in interview studies, but our experiences demonstrate the significant role community immersion can play in research that targets hard-to-reach populations and/or addresses sensitive issues. Community immersion is an effective strategy to identify gatekeepers and ease communication with religious minority groups. Two main characteristics of the target population could not have been properly understood without community immersion: first, the religious diversity among Muslim women and, second, the social barriers Muslim women face in their daily lives. Without the pre-recruitment process and community immersion, in other words, the study would have failed to capture the full range of experiences that characterize women in the Muslim community.

The second conclusion relates to the role of social media in the pre-recruitment process. In the pres-

ent study, social media, more specifically, Facebook, played a pivotal role in exploring the meaning of community for the target group. The use of social media in this study, then, gave invaluable insights into the Muslim community in the Detroit Metro Area. Many of the face-to-face interactions and communications were initiated through social media activities in open or private social/religious Facebook groups. Social media also provided opportunities to get involved in virtual religious/social activities, including, especially, interfaith activities. Face-to-face interactions among people affiliated with distinct religious identities require specific communication skills and mindset, which make real life connections less productive for underrepresented populations, specifically minorities with limited language skills. This barrier was overcome by using social media as a platform to maximize participation. In this study, the first author's ability to communicate in Arabic made it easier to understand the target group's values. Moreover, the majority of Facebook groups that the first author actively participated in were religious groups devoted to discussing spiritual experiences. The first author's familiarity with local religious vocabulary and values was another influential factor that helped her find common ground with the target group.

Lastly, although the first author was born and raised among Muslims and understands their values, her fellow Arab participant-assistants were influential both in trust-building and data collection. For uncountable time-sensitive reasons (recent hate crimes, terrorist acts, tight security, and presidential election debates), plus the above-mentioned concerns, the trust-building process was intense and time-consuming. And yet, we still had some difficulties recruiting Muslim women who were further marginalized by poverty and language difficulties. When the first author started the pre-recruitment process, she was known as an Iranian Shia woman; this title gave her enough credibility to effectively communicate with Muslim women and participate in Islamic events. Considering the fact that there are differences between the Persian and Arabic Islamic cultures, she communicated with local Muslim women on a daily basis to better understand their social values and priorities. These constant interactions helped her develop a deeper insider perspective than her formal category membership—a Muslim woman—would allow her.

The latter point is perhaps the most critical lesson for any researcher who works with religious minorities, specifically Muslims. Muslim minorities in the Detroit Metro Area, like other Muslims in Western countries, are fearful of misrepresentation in scholarly publication and public media alike. To overcome this fear and create a research environment that inspires trust, researchers must be self-conscious about their positionality and do what is necessary to gain an insider's perspective and develop sufficient trust through community immersion to overcome the caution and wariness that characterize this community.

Acknowledgements

Michigan, Transportation Research Center (UMTRI) and the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS). We would like to thank Ms. Mona Makki (executive director of the ACCESS), Dr. Fatina Abdrabboh (director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee [ADC] Michigan), Mrs. Jennifer Elahi (the Islamic House of Wisdom), and Mr. Dave Norwood (sustainability coordinator of the City of Dearborn, Mayor's Office) for their valuable support during the pre-recruitment process. The authors would like to thank a Facebook group of Muslim women called Shia Sister's Café; this group has played a significant role in the process of Community-Driven Issue Selection. We also express our special gratitude to Mrs. Zahra Jianpanah, Miss Mariam Mohsen, and Mr. Rashid Baydoun for their valuable contributions to the recruitment process, specifically in Ramadan 2015 and 2016. Lastly, this study was aided by several honest and warm meetings with Muslim women in Dearborn and Dearborn Heights, but as most of them were also study participants, we cannot name them here.

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