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Abstract

The main question that is addressed in this presentation is how we can interpret the situation of sexual relations in the context of higher education in Iran. The article is formed as an autoethnography, focusing on the relationship between sexuality and university in post-revolutionary Iran. Data are gathered from my own lived experiences at university both as a student and as a lecturer during about 25 years of academic life and interpreted by the technique of systematic introspection. I explore specific problems regarding sexuality at Iranian universities, such as sexual harassment and the relationship between male university professors and their female students. I conclude with a set of questions that require further investigations. The whole article, however, can be regarded as the process of the transformation from a sexually ignorant typical Iranian male student to a more or less gender-sensitive Iranian male university professor.

Keywords

Sexuality, Sexual Harassment, University, Iran Higher Education, Autoethnography

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An Autoethnographic Narrative of the Relationship between Sexuality and University in Post-Revolutionary Iran

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The main question that is addressed in this presentation is how we can interpret the situation of sexual relations in the context of higher education in Iran. The article is formed as an autoethnography, focusing on the relationship between sexuality and university in post-revolutionary Iran. Data are gathered from my own lived experiences at university both as a student and as a lecturer during about 25 years of academic life and interpreted by the technique of systematic introspection. I explore specific problems regarding sexuality at Iranian universities, such as sexual harassment and the relationship between male university professors and their female students. I conclude with a set of questions that require further investigations. The whole article, however, can be regarded as the process of the transformation from a sexually ignorant typical Iranian male student to a more or less gender-sensitive Iranian male university professor. Keywords: Sexuality, Sexual Harassment, University, Iran Higher Education, Autoethnography

Introduction

The development and growth of the higher education system in Iran after the 1979 revolution, including the increased number of universities, students and faculty, has raised new issues in current discussions among researchers as well as policy-makers (Hamdheidari, Agahi & Papzan, 2008). One of these issues is the “feminization of Iranian higher education” (Shavarini, 2005) and the related issues associated with the increasing presence of women in Iran’s universities (Rezaei, 2012; Rezai-Rashti 2015; Rezai-Rashti & James 2009). Focusing on “gender” aspects, most of the studies have failed to address “sexuality” and its relationship to Iranian higher education settings. In addition, there has often been a gap between academic actors’ personal experiences and the sophisticated analyses found in most studies about Iranian higher education and its gender/sexual implications. Consequently, the questions about how academic actors experience university and how they interpret their experiences remain unanswered.

Hence, the main question in this study is how, from the perspective of an academic actor, the situation of higher education and its relationship to sexuality and sexual relations can be interpreted. The goal of this article is, first, to give voice to one of the academic actors’ lived experiences and interpretations of the relationship between university and sexuality in Iran, and second, situate those experiences and interpretations into the wider socio-cultural and political context of Iran’s higher education.

Methodology

The qualitative methodological approach used in this study is autoethnography. According to the principles of this approach, “the life of the researcher becomes a conscious part of what is studied” (Ellis, 2008a, p. 48). The researcher tries to “connect the

autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2008a, p. 48). Trahar (2009) has explained how this method can be applied to higher education studies. Two good examples of using autoethnography in higher education research are Richards (2015) and Naficy (2018), the latter addresses the case of Iran.

Another aspect of the methodology applied in this research is its “narrative” character. In fact, not only have I contextualized autoethnography within the methodological tradition of ethnography, as Ellis (2004, p. 25) puts it, but also, I have tried to construct a narrative by telling the story of my academic life regarding sexuality. Thus, the narrative character of this research required to combine data/description with interpretation/analysis. I intentionally avoided separating the data/description from interpretation/analysis. Instead, I tried to construct a “narrative” consisting of both data/description and analysis/interpretation. This, in my view, is the true application of the methodology called “ethnographic novel” (Ellis, 2004). According to this kind of methodology, the outcome of research should be so homogeneous that it secures its narrative character. This is the case even with more necessity in “auto”-ethnographic works, as of mine. The same applies to the theoretical or conceptual framework: “theory is *not* an add-on to story,” and “stories *are* theories that we use to understand experience” (Adams, 2015, p. 90). Again, I intentionally avoided mentioning any theory on which my research might be based. Theories have been interwoven into my narrative account, and this is because of my long-term reflections about the subject. In other words, if I had not been informed by theories (for example gender or sexuality theories), I could not approach such a subject in the first place. So, according to the methodology, not only is there no need to mention those theories, but also it is better to hide the theoretical foundations behind the narrative tools and settings.

The main body of data was gathered from my own lived experiences at university both as a student and as a lecturer during over 25 years of academic life. In addition, some memories on the part of my students and colleagues as well as some online materials regarding sexuality at universities are included in the data. The interpretation/analysis of data, which is interwoven with data/description, is done through the technique of “systematic sociological introspection” (Ellis, 2008a, p. 51). So, the whole article is the story of my academic life both as a student and as a professor who is a male, Tehrani, middle-class citizen of Iran.

Setting the Scene

There is a common memory among Iranians of a popular animation series called *The Red Hat and The Cousin*. It is meaningful to Iranians because they can relate it to the distinguished voice of the main characters in this series. In one of the episodes, there is a dialogue between The Red Hat and The Cousin. The Red Hat, dressed formally and carrying a formal briefcase, enters the scene in a happy, joyful mood. It seems he wants to go somewhere:

The Cousin: where are you going?

The Red Hat: to the university.

The Cousin: why to the University?

The Red Hat: to fall in love.

The Cousin: to fall in love at the university? They go to university to learn.

The Red Hat: Says who? Everyone goes there to fall in love.

Behind this naive and simple dialogue, lies a deep and serious question: do we have to perceive university in Iran within the framework of sexual relations? Does it have no function but being a place where one can fall in love? What about knowledge, education and research? It seems the above dialogue reflects how the public sees the university in Iran. The public image of

university has found its way from the labyrinth of culture and society into a very popular animated TV series and then mirrored into our minds.

This may stimulate reflecting on university as an institution in the light of sexual relations. It did trigger me the first time I saw the dialogue scene. I deeply reviewed why I, myself, decided to enter the university both as a student and as a professor. Did I, in my subconscious, see the university as a place to fall in love? Do I? Was the Red Hat right that everyone goes to university for the same reason? By “falling in love” I mean all the aspects of human relations that can fall into the general category of “sexuality” (both mental and physical); sexuality also includes power relations, social status and roles, psychological and sociological consequences, and the like – this is often referred to as “gender” “in opposition to the concept of ‘sex’” in behavioral and social sciences (Edgar, 2008, p. 139). So, sexuality in its broadest sense in an institutional context called “university” is under question.

These questions encouraged me to contemplate and dig into myself. I started reviewing memories of the time I was a university student and accounting a new narrative of how I perceived it regarding sexuality in those times. I also tried to review my position as a so-called professor with the same view and understand what features this position has and how I am playing this role now that I have a different position at university, the role that embodies male authority besides a professor’s authority. Are there any hidden motivations or subconscious drives behind this role and the relevant awareness attached to it? What follows is a brief account of those diggings.

Pre-University Background

I remember when I entered university immediately after high school and started to major in philosophy. I was a 19-year-old boy from a family that was more or less religious, a family that evolved during the incidents after the 1979 revolution and war. My father, once a clergyman, was a political activist imprisoned both before and after the revolution. He was (and is) knowledgeable and authoritative about history and Iranian and Islamic literature. Suffered by the hardship of the time, he reconsidered his religious worldview, but he is still principled in moralities independent from religion and in fact, also a captive of norms and conventions related to sexuality and sexual morality. He prioritized himself and his beliefs over his family. My mother, a traditional woman, grew up in a rural environment, migrated to the capital and some other major cities with my father. She was and still is dedicated to religious obligations, and – unlike my father – fully devoted to her family and especially her children. She has been suffering the difficulties of accompanying her idealist husband, while her own ideal being the prosperity of her children. Despite all her differences from my father, she was similar to him at least in one aspect: she was strictly serious regarding sexual conventions and morality of the time and had no plan for educating her children regarding sexuality. I, on the verge of entering the university, was the educational outcome of such a couple.

The essence of my formal education at school was no different, yet even stricter, since I went to religious primary schools such as Alavi and Refah and an ordinary high school like most of the high schools of the time. Religious schools have played a major role in social and political arenas in Iran. Their emergence and activities date back to the 1950s and 1960s, and their educational goal mainly relies on religious education along with technical and natural sciences. Severity in performing religious practices, including more religious lessons in the syllabus, careful supervision on students’ clothing and behavior and monitoring them in case they disobey religious codes and orders, along with emphasis on technical sciences to prepare them enter universities and major in natural and technical sciences were all significant parts of their curriculum. Pupils in such schools, who later entered universities to become “Muslim engineers,” had significant roles in promoting ideological goals of the Islamic Revolution.

Most administrators of the post-revolution bureaucracy in Iranian government were chosen from among these religious school graduates. The number of such schools remarkably increased after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, though the whole educational system in Iran has transformed into a machine to produce Muslims committed to the revolution and the political system. Sexual education is missing in such schools, it can be even said that they promote family and public values and norms regarding sexuality in the society which leads to more sexist attitudes. The fact that my official education was formed in such schools highlights my sexual ignorance in those years. (Rajaei, 2007, pp. 147-148) has offered a brief account of modern religious schools.) In short, formal and informal pre-university education, all in all, made me a subject lacking any sexual consciousness and action, with a heavy burden of taboos and bans over sexuality in its broadest definition.

Lack of sexual education and the burden of taboos were not my only provisions on entering university; I had benefited from my father's knowledge and lived experiences. In fact, the reason for my great interest in philosophy came from spending my teenage years in his big library and breathing in the enriched cultural atmosphere that he had built. I would sit quietly in circles held in our home with my father and his friends and carefully listen to their discussions in wonder. My father's friends still talk about my behavior at that time with thrill and enthusiasm. From early childhood, I breathed and developed in such a diversified and culturally pluralized intellectual atmosphere, since my father's friends were of a diverse intellectual and political continuum. However, there always was something missing in the topics discussed in those circles: sexuality. The only knowledge I had about sexuality was gained by reading some books in his library, classical novels and books that were mainly on sexual psychology, and nothing more. Almost no woman attended those intellectual circles in our home. Our family gatherings were also gender segregated.

Becoming a University Student

I entered university, Azad University, Tehran, the North Branch. Islamic Azad University, which was established about five years after the 1979 revolution to meet the growing demands in higher education (demands which state universities could not fulfil), has a more or less different social and cultural atmosphere than other public universities. Such a distinguishing atmosphere was more perceived in the 1980s and 1990s, the main reason being its somewhat independence from the government in financial and administrative aspects. Since the beginning students had to pay to study at Azad Universities, so student admission is not as severe as what we see in state universities. As a result, there was a wider diversity in students' cultural and social backgrounds especially in the 1980s and 1990s compared to public universities. This distinction is also seen in sexual aspects with male and female students "mixing" more freely than other universities. For anyone, including me, who entered such universities in the early 90s, experiencing exposure to such an atmosphere full of sexuality, is considered as a big cultural shock.

Suddenly I found myself in an environment quite different from what I had experienced. Although I knew beforehand that university classes were co-ed, I had no understanding and lived experience of that integration. As a boy of 19 with the mentioned background, I had a vague and bi-dimensional enthusiasm inside. On one hand I had consciously chosen philosophy as my major and was so eagerly willing to learn. On the other hand, being a young boy who had recently become physically and sexually mature though sexually uneducated along with all the limitations and prohibitions, I felt totally excited facing a co-gendered environment. These two kinds of enthusiasm came into conflict. University environment was also adding fuel to it. I realized that I was in an environment full of sexuality, having no experience, knowledge and skills to overcome my inner disquiet and stop seeing university as a mere

atmosphere of sexual and gendered implications. I did not study the first three terms properly, and attended classes with vague but powerful sexual passion, awkwardly sought the girls' attention by participating in class discussions and doing other activities outside the classroom context. Not only did I not have a clear-cut and vivid plan to start up a friendship and make contact with the opposite sex, but also was incapable of choosing one over the other. Something, however, motivated me to attract female students' attention. Now looking back at that situation of mine, I find it ridiculously pitiful. Even my decision to study better after failing a couple of courses was not devoid of sexual drives, supposedly I intended to attract the girls' attention by getting high grades. I was not after any relationship with sexual implications. In fact, I was afraid to be judged the way I judged others. Being among male classmates who were more or less like me reinforced this immature behavior. Now I can say that all these were manifestations of my sexual ignorance.

I also consorted with some of the professors who had anti-feminine ideas. Following them, I believed there was no point in women studying philosophy. Philosophy was assumed by us to be a major for men only. Consequently, I did not take what my female classmates said or wrote seriously. There was a professor with a constant humiliating behavior with girls, and indirectly he got boys to follow his attitude. I should say I was one of those boys. I approved of his words and behavior. He explicitly addressed girls and said, "You waste your time majoring in this field. This is no place for you. Philosophy is for men. Go do your cooking." He also was very generous with boys when it came to scoring. Constantly emphasizing on how philosophers like Nietzsche were against women, he used Nietzsche's anti-feminine views as a whiplash over the female students. He would sarcastically say, "A girl is either a university student or beautiful!" Hearing such things made boys (including me) somehow sexistically overjoyed. Sexual fantasies of a typically Iranian man were hidden under the cover of his and our philosophical and intellectual-like remarks. Even some of our female classmates, despite being humiliated, agreed with him and, by denying their own femininity, tried to find a place for themselves under his hegemony. That professor really welcomed such female students. As we found out later, he married one of them.

All in all, the values and norms dominating the human relations inside the university intensified the gender gap and thus reinforced our sexual ignorance. In absence of cultural and social activities among students (i.e., extra-curricular activities), which could have alleviated the intensity of the problem, we as the students of the mid-90s generation could not free ourselves from the misogynous and sexist norms or beliefs. Inadvertently, I was reinforcing the social structures reproducing sexual oppressions on the one hand, and at the same time, was victimized and objectified by such structures and the oppression resulting from it on the other hand. This was the overall situation of Iranian university that I experienced.

Beginning of Positive but Inadequate Changes

The situation I described above was not the whole story of the university and me. I continued university education in master's degree, and this was not devoid of unconscious sexual motivations. At the same time significant changes were taking place in political and social spheres in Iran. The changes were commonly associated with the "reformist movement," which resulted in the election of Mohammad Khatami as the president in 1997. Khatami's presidency in turn reinforced the reformist changes. These changes had great effects on universities too. There emerged this collective awareness about university that university can also have social and cultural functions beside its educational ones. With the help and guidance of some higher-educational authorities in Khatami's reformist administration, a new scope was defined and opened in universities in which students got the chance to culturally, socially and politically flourish. Unofficial and extra-curricular activities on the part of students gained

recognition to some extent. Thus, the chance of interaction among young men and women in the university increased and the hope for communications less affected by unconscious drives, norms or values enhanced.

Even so, there was still a long way for the changes to infiltrate into the depth of our collective unconsciousness and leave profound effects on institutional and non-institutional structural levels pertinent to sexuality; there were also major cultural, social and political obstacles on the way to such reformistic changes. At the political level, for the first time in post-revolutionary Iran, there appeared an undeniable gap in the official structure of Iranian government. The non-elective so-called conservatory section of the government resisted against the elective reformist section, the former being unofficially but actually supported by the Supreme Leader and the latter led by the president and his administration. The gap caused major political conflicts which by chance started and flared up by the Student Protests in 1999. At the social level, resistance against the changes was still fueled by religious norms and beliefs, most important of which related to gender and sexual relations. Struggle over compulsory veiling (*hijab*) was, and still is, the climax of social and political conflicts regarding gender and sexuality. Universities were one of the most important focal points of these conflicts. A major body of students not only wanted a freer atmosphere to regulate their own gender and sexual relations, but also took actions to achieve it. These students often were in danger of disciplinary reactions, either by university authorities or by juridical officials outside the university. Despite all these obstacles and difficulties, changes were taking place positively but inadequately.

While doing my masters' degree I was greatly influenced by such changes. Through more or less open media of the early reformist period, I read about general discussions about sexuality. Besides, along with my academic line of studies, I got familiar with some philosophical and social theories about sexuality. In students' circles and in classroom discussions, the issues of sexuality gradually transformed into a problem for me and hence slowly moved from my unconscious into a conscious level. However, these were all on a theoretical rather than practical level. The problem of sexuality was not actually unraveled for me, yet the impact of this intellectual and theoretical transformation helped me have a more conscious control over my immature talk and behavior regarding sexuality. No longer did I see everything with sexual implications, less did I condemn others' behavior. I avoided judgments based on sexually-oriented projections. Reflecting deeply about myself, I realized where the problem of being sexually uneducated lay and what the solution could be. I can say, I have started a journey since those years regarding sexuality which still continues. The beginning of the journey was mainly introspective, gradually continued to the outer level, and finally has reached to the social action level and now it manifests itself in the form of academic research. Every stage of this odyssey both solved problems and created new questions. Every stage has both shed a beam of light on dark sides of my inner and outer world and cast new shadows on other hidden dimensions which demand theoretical and practical endeavors on the part of me as a university professor.

The Role of a University Professor

Remembering the talk and behavior of that professor in my student years regarding female students, this question occurred to me: how can a university professor reproduce sexually oppressive relations or on the contrary try to lessen its depth and severity? This question became salient when I started to have a role as a professor at university myself. It has been seven years since I started teaching at university. It had been 10 years since I graduated with a MA degree, and as I recounted above, in those years I was involved with the issue of sexuality, both theoretically and practically. On the theoretical level, I gained more profound

knowledge about most discussions over sexuality and I can say, at least on the theoretical level, earned enough sexually related sensitivity to confront sexuality both on individual and social levels. Moreover, I gained several practical experiences regarding sexual matters and no longer was I the immature and uneducated ignorant young boy while doing my BA and MA. The combination of these practical experiences, gender sensitivity and theoretical knowledge altogether helped me manage my relationships with my students regarding sexuality in a way devoid of oppressive and sexist relations. Being careful about my words and behavior, I try to prevent any negative impulses similar to the ones we received from some professors during the years I was a student. I always avoid hasty judgments pointing to students' gender and sexuality in any way. In almost all my classes, I do my best to reduce the immense and deep gap between male and female students and help them come together in a lucid and more or less healthy atmosphere. I emphasize in my classes the importance and necessity of living a happy life and its priority over scientific profession, and at the same time try to consider it in my own educational practices.

I believe that high quality knowledge, research, and education would never be achieved without proper sexual education. Therefore, without condemning anyone, I have tried to help male students who unknowingly had "sexist" talk or behavior become aware of what they actually are doing and trigger contemplating the issue deeply. Yet, I am not sure how much I have received self-awareness and repeatedly ask myself if I still have some degree of unawareness in me regarding sexuality. Has my role as a university professor resulted in prompting any sexist talk or behavior that I myself am negligent of its causes and consequences? Also I wonder if this amount of sexual/gender awareness and sensitivity in me has resulted in successful interactions in the classroom. How can I make sure I have reduced the gender/sexual gap or whether my students have grasped the depth of my lessons?

These questions gain more significance beside the phenomena I have confronted in these seven years. Some of them were my own observations, I heard about some others through reports in media, and some were narrations from my students and colleagues at university. Moreover, I have personal experiences of my own female students' behavior toward myself. All these phenomena and experiences occurred inside the framework of professor-student relations. My sensitivity to the relations between male professors and female students made such phenomena visible and questionable for me. Hereby I mention some of these phenomena.

The Problem of Academic Sexual Harassment in Iran

In some Iranian media, especially virtual social networks, voluminous amounts of reports with the title such as "male professor's abuse of a female student" have been published. There are even groups, pages, and channels in Facebook, Internet, and Telegram to report such abuses (Telegram is an important and very popular social media and messenger in Iran which has recently been filtered by a local court's judicial order after long debates and serious challenges between different parts of government over its filtering. In general, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and the like are always matters of challenge between the government and the civil society in Iran). The focal point of most of such records is that a professor relying on his authoritative academic position has abused female students sexually or has intended to do so. The means for such abuse were mainly scoring, examination, classroom attendance, and the kind. In some of these reports, the names of people and places were also mentioned. For instance, in Parvaresh's Telegram channels and Tayefi's website, reports and narrations of male professors' sexist behavior towards female students can be found (Parvaresh, 2017; Tayefi, 2017). One of the narrations in Tayefi's report reads:

He would call and ask me to talk about sex. When I talked to him disrespectfully, he said he had many connections and that he would put me in jail right then. Threats and threats.... bastard....

Another one asked me to go to his office. Then an indecent proposal and....

(Female student at University of Applied Science and Technology)

We can find voluminous amounts of reports and news items simply by googling “professors abusing students.” In social networks you can even come across taped telephone or face-to-face conversations in which a professor knowing the student welcomes a better score, tries to persuade her to have a sexual affair with him. In case the student refuses, threats may follow.

I have also heard from some of my female students that a professor once intended to have an affair with a student by trying to establish an emotional relationship with her and abuse her sexually. In one of the cases a student quit university for some time and had no intention to come back to university. The mental, emotional and even social impact on that student was so severe that she could not help crying while trying to relate what she went through.

There are also cases reported by some of my colleagues. Students were abused and suffered severely. What is even worse and sadder is that the professors, whose speech and conduct I find very sexist, talked recklessly with no remorse about their memories of how they took sexual advantage of their female students. Nothing stops them in male locker rooms to embellish stories about their conquests with sensual pleasure. They even conspire and may suggest a female student to each other or inform each other of how she might react to their indecent proposals. They know “backdoors” well and share them with their peers who share common interests. They proudly talk in detail about their dialogues and affairs they had with girls, how they enjoyed life all the years. There are a wide variety of such professors: non-religious, religious and even those in clerical clothes. They have several religious, moral and functional excuses for what they do.

Challenging the Victim/Perpetrator Myth

Sexual and gender abuse has other aspects, too, and is not limited to professors abusing their students. In a sexist atmosphere, full of oppression, some sexual victims and objects have their own strategies to take advantage of such an atmosphere and thus turn into subjects who benefit the objectifying situation. With an instinctual inkling and acumen, some female students try to benefit from sexist attitudes of some professors in order to achieve their goals and objectives. They believe professors’ sexiest view is a weak point they can employ to get what they want. There is a frequently heard cliché by female students saying: “That professor is generous in scoring when you flirt with him.” Sexual abuse on the part of female students ranges from simple flirting to having emotional or sexual affairs. Amongst their goals and objectives are changing absences into presences, gaining scores and/or approving weak or undone assignments inside the academic settings, and getting emotional, social, and/or financial supports outside the university.

I myself have experienced some examples of this phenomenon in early years of working as a university professor when I had no clear definition of teaching principles and methods of my own. I used to emphasize students’ regular attendance in the classroom and cared a lot more about examinations and scoring. Some female students, apparently out of habit or some instinctual perception, tried to compensate for their laziness and not studying by deceiving me sexually. They did so by groveling with flirtations, making excuses to see or talk to me, texting me with hidden or obvious sexual implications, even approaching me physically. Later, after defining and modifying my own teaching methods and eliminating the problems of attendance, examinations and scoring, I observed fewer of these behaviors, and I can say no longer do I

experience them. In my own developed teaching methods, that are based on the principles of my higher-educational philosophy, the final aim of higher education in humanities and social sciences is to enhance moral and critical competencies of the students. I try to create a moral atmosphere in my classes in which the students can freely and responsibly make moral judgments about their own actions and situations related to their majors and courses. I do not force them to attend the classes, I do not take exams, and I do not score them. Instead, I want them to make self-evaluations in an interactive and communicative environment all throughout the term. In my experience, both the processes and the products of my teaching methods are exciting and outstanding. I think that, through such methods, the true meaning of the concept of “learning” realizes, and the number of instances of any malfunctioned relationship between male professors and female students decreases. This is the case especially in the current socio-educational context of Iranian universities.

All these educational practices of mine, however, do not and must not prevent me from reflecting more deeply upon the nature of male professor/female student relations. Challenging the victim/perpetrator myth is a step forward to accomplish this task. Although academic sexual harassment might be explained in terms of a professor as the perpetrator and a female student as the victim, the model can be inverted and even transposed occasionally. But it must be said that, challenging the victim/perpetrator model does not reduce the burden of responsibility of sexist atmosphere of Iranian universities from the shoulders of male professors, including me. Sexism does still stand and resist. Male professors ought to be more cautious, even in the cases they might feel to be victims or in the cases with no instrumental implications.

Non-Instrumental Situations

The relationship between a professor and a student in educational and scientific framework does not seem to be always instrumental. According to my own experiences and some hearsay, we sometimes see them to have real emotional feelings for each other, and even fall in deep love. This love can be one-sided or mutual, on the part of the professor or the student. But it is important to notice that in most cases such a situation has a negative impact on educational and scientific procedures of both sides. In most cases we observe negative impacts on personal and social lives of both. But there have been some rare instances in which positive aspects of such situations outweighed the negative ones and thus pure human relations were formed and a professor-student relationship started to become a true emotional one. These cases are, however, very rare and cannot be generalized at all. They can be considered as exceptions rather than a rule.

An instance of this last phenomenon has happened to me as a professor. I will conclude my narrative by giving a brief account of it. In my early years of teaching at university, I had a talented and hard-working female student. Like many other professors, I both encourage my good students to pursue knowledge more seriously and reward them for their academic efforts in proper educational ways. One of my ways to do so is appointing one of them as my assistant in the class to act as an educational bridge between the students and me. I put them in charge, for example, to collect papers or to assist me in classroom tasks. As usual, I appointed that student as my assistant in that specific class too, but she misinterpreted and assumed that I had some emotional inclinations towards her beyond that of a student-professor relationship. She attended my classes the following semesters although she was not officially my student anymore. She would ask my opinions about lessons and subject matters much more than an ordinary student. She regularly contacted me in person, called or emailed me to ask scientific questions.

For a while, I was unaware of her assumption and intention, so that I related all her actions to her desire to learn. Gradually she started to talk about her personal issues and family

problems. Since my students' lives are important for me as a professor, I felt responsible to listen to her and help her as far as I could. Since she was repeatedly approaching me, it became obvious that she had particular feelings for me. Knowing she had no intention to use her sexuality as an instrument to get better grades, I tried to distance myself from her and prevent any emotional damage or trauma to her. Apparently, she had no intention to relinquish her goal. She had shared her secret with some of her friends and they in turn had spread rumors in the whole faculty while I was unaware of what was going on around me. She finally sent one of her classmates to me as her messenger of love assuming I did not know of her love and if I had I would have had a positive response. Hearing her friend, I found myself in an unfortunate predicament. Here I avoid going into details of what I went through and managed to get myself out of that unpleasant situation after all the tensions. Truthfully, I have no idea what that girl went through emotionally and how she got through it. But ever since, this important yet fearsome question does not abandon me: why did that happen and more importantly what role did I have in it? Had I subconsciously or unknowingly done or said something to plant such an assumption in that girl's mind? Should I doubt my maturity in sexuality? Was I the main reason for what happened? What social order may cause such phenomena? Or, as I said in the beginning of my narrative, did that girl come to university "to fall in love" as the Red Hat, and all her efforts lied in her emotional and sexual drives? What was she deprived of by her family and pre-university education which caused her to imperil her academic career in that way?

Some Questions for Further Inquiries

Viewing what happened to me from different perspectives raises serious questions. First of all, what would have happened if I had emotional feelings for her beyond student-professor relationships? Did I have the right to pursue my feelings and take the relationship to a deeper emotional level? Or did I have to restrain my feelings and repress my emotions? Which way would be of moral value? Can we arrive at any general rule by answering this question and prescribe it to other situations and people? Second, if such feelings had developed in me, to what extent would it have been devoid of power relations between a professor and a student? How could I ever be sure such a feeling emerged from deep real me and was not a passing fancy which could be satisfied thanks to the power relations?

The severity and dreadfulness of such questions becomes sharper to me when I think of the future: what should I do if I encounter such a situation again? What way should I take if one day, for any reason, some feeling for a female student develops in me, either with or without her inclinations or efforts? What is the borderline between sexual assault (including sexual exploitation, discrimination and abuse) resulting from sexist and patriarchal relations and structures on one hand, and emotional actions on the other hand? Moreover, what should be the criterion in judging who was the sexual subject or object in my experience with that female student? In other words, how can we distinguish the perpetrator and the victim? In my narrative, I wrote as if I was the victim and the girl were the perpetrator, as if I was exposed to more damage and suffering than her. Was it really so?

Such questions and other ones connected to certain situations were my major motives to carry on more research on the relation between university and sexuality especially in Iran's higher education settings. As I stated in the beginning and according to the methodological principles of auto-ethnography, my presence in every bit of this account is guaranteed until the end of it. I hope any would-be reader feels my thorough presence in it. Such a feeling is essential in understanding my narrative, especially because everyone can put themselves in the situation similar to what is narrated.

Situations in which the relation between sexuality and academic atmosphere becomes problematic are not rare and unfamiliar ones surrounding only a small number of readers. We

Iranians all live in a more or less similar social structure, and have more or less similar historical, educational and political experiences. We have somewhat equal drives, desires and ventures. And more importantly, we share the same cultural destiny in the future. So it is quite fair to expose ourselves to real and serious criticism. Bright and broad horizons would open to us only through such criticisms.

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