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THE IMPACT OF ACCULTURATION ON THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP OF IRANIAN
IMMIGRANTS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Antioch University Santa Barbara

In partial fulfillment for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

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August 2024

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IMMIGRANTS

This dissertation, by Hassan Kalantari has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
Antioch University Santa Barbara
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF ACCULTURATION ON THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP OF IRANIAN IMMIGRANTS

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This current study will focus on the impact of acculturation on the marital relationships of Iranian Immigrants. Understanding the behaviors and values of Iranian culture and how these evolve through socialization within the context of North America is crucial, particularly given the increasing population of Iranian immigrants in the United States. Clinicians working with Iranian couples must grasp the cultural background of these couples to minimize judgment and pathologizing in order to effectively support the adjustment process. An interpretative phenomenological methodological approach was used to develop a more complete understanding of the relationship between levels of acculturation and their impact on marital relationship of Iranian immigrants. Participants were selected among the Iranian population residing in Southern California. Eight participants were selected to participate in face-to-face interviews for the present study. A phenomenological approach was utilized to organize the participants' descriptions of acculturation into meaningful units. These units of meaning formed clusters of themes that depicted how acculturation has impacted their marital relationships since their arrival in their new society. The researcher derived multiple theme clusters from the interview results, providing insights into Iranian immigrants' experiences and perceptions regarding this issue. This study may have significant implications for research, theory, and practice within this population.

The results indicated that gender differences were not a significant factor in the relationship between acculturation and marital relationships among the participants. The findings of this study suggest that, during the process of acculturation, individuals may adopt a bicultural orientation as a coping strategy within the host society. By successfully integrating aspects of both cultures, rather than solely identifying with one, individuals may better navigate acculturative stress in a healthier and more constructive manner. Future research endeavors should aim to include larger sample sizes and consider replicating the study with younger couples who have immigrated in recent years. Additionally, there is a need for further exploration into psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, alienation, loss of cultural identity, and feelings of self-identity loss among immigrant populations. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA, <https://aura.antioch.edu/> and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>.

Keywords: marital relationship, Iranian immigrants, phenomenological research, United States

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to all the immigrants facing the struggle of changing and adapting. I offer my deepest gratitude to all the Iranian-American couples who participated in this research and for their time and input.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my dissertation committee for their invaluable time and unwavering support throughout this journey. Dr. Kia-Keating, thank you for your patience, encouragement, support, and high expectations, all of which have empowered me to persist, innovate, and push my boundaries. Dr. Southern, thank you for providing me with valuable insights into all aspects of the dissertation, your encouragement, readiness, and instilling confidence in me. Dr. Mahdi, my gratitude for your patience, cooperation, unwavering support, and for giving me access to your fantastic articles regarding Iranian immigrants and their problems.

I would like to take opportunity to thanks all those who guided, assisted, and supported me during the program. To Dr. Kenny, you have been a pillar of support for me from the very beginning of the program. You have always been the safest place for me to raise problems and find support during times of crisis at the university. And I would like to sincerely thank dear Stephanie for all her unstinting help.

I wish to also dedicate this dissertation to my loving family. They have supported me throughout this process. To my son, Khashayar, who has helped me evolve through witnessing his growth into a young man in a new world. I wouldn't have learned to change without him. Last but not least, to my best friend and wife, Mehri, there are not enough words to express my love for her, her patience, unwavering support, and kindness. You will always be my best friend and partner.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

Moving to a foreign country with different customs, values, and traditions can be a learning experience, and a stress-filled one as well. Aspects of the new culture can be explored and integrated into one's lifestyle. The experience is not always as positive as one might expect. This process may be more difficult for individuals whose native culture is significantly different from the host culture that they have entered. Iranian families who live in the United States today face a built-in tension between their homeland value systems and the Westernized values that surround them. This acculturative stress can be traced back to the historical experience of Iranian families over the last few decades, the complicated history between the two countries, as well as the current geopolitical situation.

The acculturation process has significant social and psychological effects on individuals. Changes that occur in a person's environment and the demands of adaptation to them can cause high levels of stress for the individual (Berry & Kim, 1988). Researchers show that the acculturation level of Iranian immigrants tends to vary, depending on factors such as gender, educational level, age of the person upon leaving Iran, and the number of years the person has spent living in the United States (Ghaffarian, 1988; Hanassab & Ghaffarian, 1991).

Like many immigrants, Iranian immigrants have worked hard to bridge the gap between their homeland culture and what they experience in their new environment. The Iranian Studies Group at MIT compiled socioeconomic statistics from the U.S. Census data (2000) which show that Iranian-Americans are one of the most educated and successful immigrants in the United

States. Iranian immigrants are not a homogeneous group, but differ on many levels, such as age, religion, educational level, and socioeconomic status (Mostashair & Khodamhosseini, 2004).

There are constant struggles to maintain one's ethnic identity via maintenance of one traditional culture (Dasgupta, 1998). In some cultures, there is a conscious attempt to preserve certain critical attitudes, values, and behaviors characteristic of one's ethnicity. It is an expression of active involvement on the immigrant's part to control the course of their acculturation. Constant changes take place in the life of the immigrant, however, resulting in the development of a new identity. The history of one's country of origin can also have an impact on acculturation, especially if that history includes attempts at the appropriation of vastly different cultural norms.

The modernization of Iran was accelerated during the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), and his son, thanks to an oil boom which dramatically increased government revenues. Mohammad Reza Shah & Modernization Reform Program brought Western lifestyles and culture that became more noticeable among the urban-based upper- and middle- classes. In other words, "modernization" became synonymous with accepting Western cultural habits, which were based on mass consumption of Western goods and products. (Khosravi, 2003).

Iran under the Shah was characterized by rapid modernization and the development of an urban working class that had not previously existed, as rapid industrialization brought with it numerous threats to traditional values and norms (Bashiriyeh, 1984). The new system, implemented under the Shah, made it easier for new social classes to gain power, encouraged the growth of values and norms in opposition to the traditional system, and threatened to replace the dominant patriarchal pattern with more open and egalitarian interaction between the sexes (Milani, 1988). The Iranian revolution of 1979 brought an end to the Shah's reforms and spurred

a tremendous migration of Iranian families to Western nations. This immigration consisted largely of Iranians drawn from the middle and upper classes (Ghaffarian, 1987), with many of those who emigrated being essentially political refugees. This point is particularly important, given research showing that refugees experienced a great deal of unpredictability and stress in their lives, as well as a great deal of difficulty in acculturating to the new society (Liu, 1979).

Theoretical Framework

Berry's acculturation model (1987) will be used as a theoretical framework in this study. He proposed a general model conceptualizing the relationship between acculturation and stress, and suggested a number of factors that would moderate or affect this relationship. The moderating factors were defined as: (a) the nature of the larger society, (b) the type of the acculturating group, (c) the mode of acculturation, (d) demographic and social characteristics of the individual, and (e) psychological characteristics of the individual.

This model was deemed useful for summarizing what is known about the correlates of acculturation stress at the individual and the societal levels, also serving as a heuristic device for theory and policy-driven research on immigration. Berry (2004) later suggested that cross-cultural psychology has demonstrated important links between cultural context and individual behavior development. This is important because cross-cultural research can investigate what happens to individuals who develop in one cultural context and then attempt to establish their lives in another; long-term psychological consequences of the processes of acculturation, however, are highly variable.

The current model considers heritage and host culture identities as two independent dimensions. The seminal acculturation framework by Berry (1994 & 2003) distinguished between an individual's preference for maintaining one cultural heritage and engaging with the

larger society, giving way to four possible acculturation strategies: integration (i.e. both are important), separation (i.e. only cultural heritage maintenance is important), assimilation (i.e. only participation in the host society is important) and marginalization (i.e. neither is important). Of all the acculturation strategies, integration is associated with better individual psychological and socio-cultural adaptation; assimilation and separation are associated with intermediate levels, and marginalization is associated with the lowest levels of adaptation (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

The impact of immigration on Iranian marital relationships is the ultimate goal of this study, which will be explored in later chapters. An unbiased examination is crucial to address marital challenges among Iranian immigrants and offer more precise solutions to experts. This study thoroughly explores the correlation between acculturation levels and their influence on Iranian immigrant's marital relationships, examining various factors shaping this dynamic within the new society.

In Iranian society, "tradition and religion have historically played an important role in family and marriage" (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, p. 833). In the last four decades, new generations of Iranians, the spread of technology and the Internet in Iran, along with continued dissemination of Western cultural values (as a result of younger generations and technology) have resulted in a different "kind" of Iranian than those who first emigrated to the United States during the Revolution. Thus, Iranians who migrated to the United States at different times should demonstrate varying degrees of adaptation to their new environment.

With respect to the various approaches to the study of human behavior, the influence of social and environmental changes on an individual's values, beliefs, and behavior should not be

ignored. Much more research is needed to better understand the relationship between acculturation and mental health (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to examine the relationship between acculturation in general and the marital relationships of Persian immigrant families, and how they integrate their original norms with the new norms in the host country of the United States. This study seeks to show how immigration to a country, like the United States, where individuality and autonomy are highly valued, has an impact on the marital relationships of people who grew up in a traditional society with a completely different, and more collectivistic culture.

More specifically, the study also examines the relationship between the level of acculturation by Iranian men and women and its impact on their marital relationships in the United States. For this purpose, the following topics will be researched: (1.) The adaptation process and cultural challenges of Iranian immigrants and its impact on their marital relationships; (2.) Changing gender roles in the new society and their Impact on marital relationships; (3.) How well marital relationships endure the influence of various factors such as acculturation and acculturation differences within the couple; and (4.) The role of cultural, religious, and intimacy factors in marital relations among Iranian immigrants

Although Iranian immigrants are one among many diverse ethnic groups who regularly enter the United States, there may be experiences of Iranian immigrants that are applicable to immigrants from other cultures as well. Therefore, this study and its results might be helpful to clinicians who are treating individuals or families from a variety of cultural backgrounds and are interested in learning more about the way acculturation affects individuals or families psychologically. The hope is that as the knowledge and awareness of mental health

professionals' increases, they will be able to provide more culturally competent therapy to Persian immigrants who struggle with the bicultural conflicts in their marital relationships.

Outline of Remaining Chapters

Chapter two will review acculturation theory literature, emerging trends seen among Iranian families migrating to the United States in the last four decades, and the concept of marriage as well as its characteristics in Iran as a multidimensional construct. Chapter three discusses the problem statement, hypotheses, and methodology, including the description of instrumentation, procedures, and the research design.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on acculturation as it impacts on marital relationship among Iranian immigrants. The historical literature review will cover the experiences and changes in immigrants' daily lives through the acculturation process. These include changes in values, attitudes, and behaviors, in the context of Berry's Model of Acculturation Attitudes. This study is designed to help determine the impact of immigration, the degree of acceptance in the new environment, and changes in the gender role among families associated with marital relationships.

Immigration Waves Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979

After 1979, with the establishment of the Islamic Republic as a political-ideological system, Iran experienced different waves of migration: "The Iranian revolution brought an end to the Shah's reforms and spurred tremendous migration of Iranian families to Western nations. This immigration consisted largely of Iranians drawn from the middle- and upper-classes" (Ghaffarian, 1987, p.8). In the first wave, the economic and political elites of the era of the Shah, artists, members of the Baha'i faith, Jews, writers, and journalists of that period who were under arrest and trial; all of these left the country. Those who remained were executed or went to long-term prisons. The immovable properties of many of these people were confiscated by the government. The destination of this wave was mainly the United States, while some migrated to Britain, Germany, Sweden, and France.

The second wave of Iranian emigration, which took place between 1982 and 1985, included individuals affiliated with left-wing and other progressive groups who, along with ruling clerics, played an important role in overthrowing the Shah's regime. After its

establishment, the new religious government suppressed these groups and arrested, imprisoned or killed a significant number of their members: “The newly established Islamic regime launched a massive crackdown on its political opponents, and active members of these groups went into hiding, arrested, and executed to save their lives, and the rest fled the country” (Torbat, 2002, p. 276).

The third wave of migration was between 1990 and 1998. The political system in Iran changed after several political developments, including the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the Iran-Iraq war: The moderate president at this time (Rafsanjani) was a leading proponent for tempering the diplomatic response to the West and supported a low-key approach to communication with the United States in an effort to avoid unnecessary conflict & (Sundquis, 2013, p. 30). In this third wave, middle-class and affluent families made up the majority of immigrants. Unlike the two previous waves of immigrants, these people were not forced to leave Iran, but voluntarily migrated to Western countries to achieve a better standard of living and greater prosperity. Countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia became major destinations for these Iranians.

The fourth wave of immigration followed the waves of politicization of Iranian society, which manifested itself in full during the protests against the 2009 election results. The original intent of the Green Movement was simply to protest the fraudulent electoral process. (Sundquis, 2013, p.32). Society entered a new political era and peaceful demonstrations spread throughout the country. The government issued an explicit order to suppress the protesters. After these events, a relatively large group of political and social activists, journalists, writers, artists, and even athletes left the country to avoid being arrested. It should be noted that in all these four decades even until today, talented people, due to various social, civil, economic, and political

pressures, constantly emigrated abroad: “The continued political oppression and the interference of the Islamic republic in peoples’ private affairs subsequently pushed a greater number of Iranians to migrate” (Torbat, 2002, p.276).

It would be somewhat of an understatement to say that Iranians go through difficult times when they immigrate to the United States. Many of them, along with their families and children, endured many hardships to reach America. They experience a variety of issues and problems in adapting to the new environment. To better understand these challenges, the concept of acculturation, Berry’s Acculturation Strategies, and the life experiences of Iranian immigrant families in Iran and the United States will be explained in various ways.

A Brief History of the Study of Acculturation

Acculturation was described by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz (1936) as a process represented by all the changes that occur as a result of individuals from two distinct cultures coming into continuous, first-hand contact with one another. In other words, the process of acculturation involves changes and experiences within the immigrant’s daily life that are the result of the immigrant’s contact with new cultural groups. As Cole (2020) says, Acculturation is a process of cultural contact and exchange through which a person or group comes to adopt certain values and practices of a culture that is not originally their own, to a greater or lesser extent. The result is that the original culture of the person or group remains, but it is changed by this process. Such experiences may result changes in values, attitudes, and behaviors.

New immigrants are also vulnerable to the loss of their traditional patterns of support and resources (Pliskin, 1987). From David L. Sam’s (2006) perspective, acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change that results from the continuing contact between people of different cultural backgrounds. Sam (2006) proposes that such an occurrence takes

place at two distinct levels, the individual psychological level and the cultural group level. First, the individual psychological level: the kinds of changes taking place might involve identity, values, attitudes, and behavior (Sam, 2006). Whereas with the cultural group level, changes might be in either the group's social structure, its economic base, or its political organization (Sam, 2006). In its simplest sense, "acculturation" covers all of these changes. The contact of cultures and resulting changes are what has collectively come to be known as acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006).

Historically, the process was recognized prior to the 20th century: John Wesley Powell was director of the Bureau of Ethnology at the Smithsonian Institution, where he supported linguistic and sociological research and publications, from 1880 to 1883. Powell was the first person identified as using the word 'acculturation' in the English language as indicating a change in cultural patterns when different cultural groups are in contact with one another. In addition, Powell (1883) suggested that 'acculturation' referred to psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation. McGee (1898), working from an anthropological perspective, defined acculturation as the process of exchange and mutual improvement by which societies advanced from savagery to barbarianism, to civilization, and, finally, to enlightenment.

From a sociological perspective, Simons (1901) regarded acculturation to be a two-way process of "reciprocal accommodation". In his history of acculturation in psychology, Rudmin (2003) credited G. Stanley Hall (1904) as possibly the first psychologist to write about the topic, although it was over 50 years after Hall's mention of acculturation that psychologists became fully interested in this field of inquiry. Acculturation was originally introduced as a group-level phenomenon (Linton, 1949; Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936); early discussions around the concept, however, also recognized it on the individual level.

In 1967, Graves proposed the concept of psychological acculturation, which refers to changes that the individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures, or of participating in the acculturation that one's cultural or ethnic group is undergoing. Furthermore, it is important to make a distinction between group-level and individual-level changes. Berry (1990) indicated that the kinds of changes that take place at the two levels are often different. This distinction is particularly important, considering individual variation in cultural identification, attitudes, and behavior (Berry, 1990; Sam & Berry, 1997).

At the group level, changes might be in either the group's social structure, its economic base, or its political organization. At the individual level, the kinds of changes taking place might be in identity, values, attitudes, and behavior. In addition, the rate at which changes take place within one individual may be different from that within other individuals (Sam & Berry, 2006). The field of acculturation research has evolved significantly over the years. Theoretically, researchers have moved from conceptualization and measuring acculturation as a linear process, that is, a process in which change consists of assimilating into the dominant culture, to a bilinear process in which change occurs at two levels, which are within the culture of origin and within the host culture.

To better understand how acculturation change occurs, the two main schools of thought around assimilation and acculturation will be briefly discussed. The most important point of assimilation theory is that over time and with increasing contact between the foreigner and host members, the foreigner will become more and more like the host members. These changes are thought to be linear and uniform (i.e. straight-line assimilation). However, while this process might have worked for early groups of immigrants coming to the United States, the straight-line assimilation hypothesis has been questioned as it does not appear to be the case for current waves

of immigrants and their children (Berry & Sam, 2006).

It is important to consider the structures and historical context of United States immigration patterns in order to better understand how immigration policies and demographic changes can impact acculturation studies, and how racial structures in the United States can shape a person's acculturation (Nguyen, 2006). Due to the different policies of different governments at different times, Kohn (2015) states that diversity in the United States is a result of changing immigration policies that have alternatively opened and closed doors to different populations.

Two authors who have studied the immigration phases in the United States, Martin and Midgley (2003), found that the United States has undergone three major phases in immigration policy. First was the Laissez-Faire phase (1780-1875), a time of frontier expansion, when the United States welcomed immigrants to help settle a vast country (Martin & Midgley, 2003). Second came the phase of Qualitative Restrictions (1875-1920), when the United States barred certain types of foreigners, such as those who were classified as Chinese or 'unskilled workers' (Martin & Midgley, 2003). More recently, the phase of Quantitative Restrictions (1921-Present Day), the United States has set quotas for those wishing to immigrate, focusing initially on those with certain national origins, and most recently (from 1965 to the present) on family reunification and employer preferences (Martin & Midgley, 2003).

Currently, immigrants from countries around the world settle in the U.S., bringing with them the values and customs of their own cultures. Today's ethnic minority populations of the United States tend to be more diverse with regard to color, class, and country of origin, in contrast to the immigrants who arrived in the 1800s and 1900s (mainly from Europe).

Berry's Acculturation Strategies

From the psychological acculturation point of view, the Berry framework (1987) has received the most attention. Berry suggested that the acculturation process proceeds according to the degree to which the individual simultaneously participates in the cultural life of the new society and maintains his or her original cultural identity. In other words, immigrants are faced with two fundamental questions: "Is it of value to maintain my cultural heritage?" and "Is it of value to maintain a relationship with these new groups?". Based on one's answers to these questions, according to Berry, there will be four possible different outcomes on how an immigrant deals with life in a new environment, which he collectively called acculturation strategies:

1. Separation (only maintenance of one's own cultural heritage is of importance)
2. Assimilation (only positive relations with other groups are important)
3. Integration (it is important both to maintain one's own cultural identity and to have positive relations with other groups), and
4. Marginalization (neither outcome is important).

Table 1

Acculturation Attitudes from Berry's Fourfold Model

Questions	Integration	Assimilation	Separation	Marginalization
Desir to have positive relationship with other groups in society	Yes	Yes	No	NO
Desire to maintain cultural heritage	Yes	No	Yes	No

Table 1 shows the four acculturation attitudes in Berry's Model of Acculturation Attitudes. In Berry's (1980) model of acculturation, individuals can adopt several alternative orientations to their heritage and to their host cultures.

The important point is that these outcomes are not ends in themselves. Since acculturation is a continuous process, an individual may adopt different strategies at different times in order to deal with different life issues. These different strategies do not necessarily lead to a point where one can think of the individual as being fully 'integrated'. Berry's work established a relationship between an individual's perception of the importance of maintaining contact with home and host cultural groups and the level of acculturation that he or she demonstrated. Berry (1989) associated each of the four acculturation attitudes with differing levels of acculturative stress and adaptation difficulties. The most negative acculturation stress is related to marginalized or separated attitudes. These immigrants see accepting the positive aspects of another culture as synonymous with losing their identity and therefore see intercultural experiences as a threat. Individuals with these acculturation attitudes are believed to be more likely to see intercultural experiences as threatening (Berry et al., 1987, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). In contrast, an integrated acculturation attitude, which amounts to interest in both maintaining contact with one's home culture and extending contact to one's host culture, is associated with less acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987, 1989; Berry & Kim, 1988; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, researchers predominantly viewed individuals' orientation toward their cultural group and the larger society as two opposite ends of a continuum. According to this one-dimensional perspective, the extent of one's level of loss of

ethnic culture was an indicator of one's level of acculturation into the larger society. Berry (1980 & 2003) proposed an alternative two-dimensional model of acculturation in which retention of the original culture exists independently of orientation towards the larger society. This two-dimensional model is broader than the one-dimensional perspective, and has been supported by empirical studies among different cultural groups. Early research assumed that immigrants would inevitably be absorbed into the receiving society by a unilinear, unidirectional process (Gordon, 1964). Beginning in the 1970s, however, Berry (1974 & 1980) proposed that there are two independent dimensions underlying the process of acculturation, the individuals' links to their cultures of origin, and their links to their societies of settlement. These links can be manifested in a number of ways, including preferences for involvement in the two cultures (termed "acculturation attitudes"), and the behaviors in which immigrants engage (for example, their language knowledge and use, and their social relationships) (Berry, 1974 & 1980). Phinney (1990) proposed a similar two-dimensional model of acculturation. He argued that there were two independent dimensions underlying peoples' cultural identity, individuals may have independent identities both with respect to their cultures of origin, and to their societies of settlement (Phinney, 1990). This bi-dimensional conception has been presented frequently in the literature (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation attitudes were found to relate to a number of adjustment-related outcomes. One is termed "psychological adaptation," which includes personal well-being and good mental health. The second, "sociocultural adaptation," refers to the individual's social competence in managing daily life in the intercultural setting, or within the transitional experience (Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). The acculturation process has significant social, as well as psychological, effects on individuals. Making contact with a new society often

means having to deal with different cultural traditions, different social norms, different rules and laws, and sometimes a different language (Berry, 2003). These drastic changes in a person's environment and the demands of adaptation to it can cause high levels of stress for the individual, which Berry and Kim (1988) called "acculturative stress."

The impact on the individual, however, will be different for different groups. Because minorities in the U.S. have different histories and different issues related to the acculturation process, their relationship will vary depending on the group that will be studied. Interaction of different cultures and the effects and consequences of this interaction are not the same for all individuals and groups. People who migrate from one country to another with a different culture, when interacting with the host society, will, to varying degrees accept its behaviors, languages, beliefs, values, social institutions and technologies. The outcome of these cultural conflicts is not known in advance and the effect of immigration on family relationships, mental health, and marital relationships is different for each person. The extent of this impact depends on age, gender, education, degree of adaptation to the new environment, length of stay in the new society and various cultural factors. "The consequences of this process for the well-being of individuals are not straightforward" (Sam and Berry, 2010).

The Iranian Immigration Experience

To learn more about the various effects of these differences on family life, marital relationships, and psychological conditions of Iranian immigrants, a brief overview of some issues, including religion, family, marriage, rights of men and women in marriage, the role of gender in the family, Iranian culture and tradition in the country of origin can be helpful. Iran's history has always been a scene of conflict between religion and secularism, tradition and modernity, therefore, the impact of these factors on the family is not negligible.

In the pre-revolutionary period of 1979, although religion played a significant role in formulation of some civil laws and traditional ceremonies, it had a much lesser role in shaping social life in major cities especially among educated populations. On the contrary, modernity and secular values played a larger role in structure of social life. The hijab was not mandatory, and men and women were not required to observe Islamic norms when it came to their overall appearance. On the other hand, due to a historical conflict between Iranian tradition and religion, which has existed since the advent of Islam in Iran, it has been a kind of confrontation between Iranian tradition and culture with sharia (Islamic religious law). This confrontation still exists today when looking at Islamic dress, polygamy, legal issues in marriage, and civil law.

Religion In Iran's History

In terms of religion, Iran, unlike many Islamic countries, is majority Shi'ite. This branch of Islam differs from Sunni which is dominant in many Arab countries. These differences are on a variety of issues, including women's clothing, some civil laws, religious rites and interactions with culture and tradition. When the Arabs invaded Iran, Iranians were forced to accept the Islamic religion and Islamic rules and norms became merged into Iranian culture. "Islam had been an essentially Arab religion and was, therefore, alien to Iranian culture and history" (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2016, p. 13). Iranians opted for a new branch of Islam, called Shi'ism, which "Iranians saw Shi'a as the more advanced branch of Islam" (Moqadam, 2009, p. 47). Ninety-eight percent of the Iranian population is Muslim and the rest are Zoroastrian, Christian, Jewish, and Baha'i. "The Iranian culture, a member of the Indo-European family, has developed over the past 25 hundred years. Contacts with many nations and cultures, continuous interactions with Western societies" (Davari, 2018, p.5) Several regions in Iran have their own ethnic

characteristics, including their own language. "The Iranians retained their own language and culture while equipping themselves with the weapons of Islam" (Litvak, 2020, p.9).

As polygamy is acceptable in Islam, it is permitted in Iran, however, serious changes in civil law in 1960, along with various other cultural-developmental factors, have caused a decline both in terms of prevalence and social acceptance: "In 1956 at the time of the first census of Iran, about 10 out of 1000 married men in Iran, were married to two women" (Momeni, 1975, p. 453). This figure indicates a low rate of practicing polygyny in Iran at a time when traditional values and support were strong: "Even though the practice of polygyny was limited, the 1967 Family Protection Law sought to prevent polygamy by requiring the consent of the first wife" (Bagley, 1997, p.18).

Marriage in Ancient Iranian Culture

In Iran, as in other societies, the definition and characteristics of marriage should be examined along with the history of that country. Historically when we look at the definition of marriage in Iran, the role of religion and tradition can be further understood. Kameli (2008), an Iranian researcher states that Zoroastrians in ancient Iran made marriage vows for life and divorce was rare. In case of conflict or disagreement, the couple's families and priests helped to resolve the conflict. He added that unavoidable divorce brought shame and dishonor to the families (Kameli, 2008). Islam also discourages divorce and considers it as the last resort for couples who cannot continue a healthy relationship in the traditional definition (Kameli, 2008). Asadnick (2009), another Iranian theorist, also explains that "in traditional Iranian culture, many Iranian couples endure a problematic marriage for the sake of the family and self-sacrifice of personal freedoms has always been highly valued in traditional Iranian culture" (p.33). Marriage laws have historically been a point of contention between religion, tradition, and

modernization: “Marriage was basically a religious act and was recorded by a local religious trustee. In 1930, along with other changes introduced by the modernizing government of Reza Shah, the recording of vital events (birth, marriage, divorce, and death) became secular” (Aghajanian, 2001, p. 218).

Intimacy

Sternberg (1987) defined intimacy as those feelings in a relationship that promote closeness, bondedness, and connectedness. Intimacy is a process that occurs over time and is never completed or fully accomplished. Intimate experiences are elusive and unpredictable phenomena that may occur spontaneously; an intimate relationship may take time and effort to maintain. Olson and Schaefer (1981) identified five types of intimacy (emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational) in their creation and validation of the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships or PAIR Inventory.

1. Emotional Intimacy: Emotional intimacy is an important area of intimate relationships. Olson and Shafer (1981) defined it as an aspect of relationships wherein people have the freedom to feel close to another person and share ideas, opinions, and perspectives openly on a given issue. This dimension of intimacy also requires a supportive, understanding, and non-defensive environment.

2. Intellectual Intimacy: Intellectual intimacy is the experience of sharing ideas, talking about events in one’s life, and discussing job-related issues and current affairs in the context of a close relationship (Olson & Shafer, 1981).

3. Social Intimacy: Social intimacy refers to the experiences people have that are related to the commonality they share in the arena of a supportive social network and friendship.

4. Sexual Intimacy: Sexual intimacy consists of the experiences of receiving and sharing affection, touching, physical closeness, and sexual activity.

5. Recreational Intimacy: The last dimension of intimacy is recreational intimacy, where people share their experiences of interest in pastimes or mutual participation in sporting events, hobbies, or involvement in any general recreational and leisure activity.

Research and theory suggest that intimacy development is not an end result but a lifelong process influenced by many factors. Recognizing that individuals differ in their depth and extent of intimacy development, some people seem to struggle in forming deep and rewarding intimate relationships with a primary partner, while others can form rich, complex connections with an intimate other. Intimacy is not limited to one's partner and is necessary in other kinds of relationships, requiring many kinds of communication, including language. Due to life-altering aspects such as continuing education, employment, or choice of career, learning a new language is a complex and challenging endeavor that can become even more distressing for immigrants who are dealing with challenges involving both life and immigration, as well as acculturation.

Tradition and Iranian Family

Historically, collectivism has heavily characterized Iranian culture (Safdar, Lay, Struthers, 2003). The individual's total life is dominated by family and family relationships, and individuals rely on family connections for position, security, influence, and power. The traditional Iranian family unit is patriarchal and the mother's role depends on the relationship that she has built over time with family; even so, parents are the central "unit" within the family: "Parents play an important role in Iran, especially in the case of the marriages of their children, which must be by agreement of the parents" (Behnam, 1985, p.560). This interaction can be felt in all areas of life, especially in social and personal life, including marriage.

The importance of family for an Iranian immigrant is not limited to the interior of Iran, but this role is always respected, especially when they migrate. Helping each other and striving for the comfort of the whole family is a well-established concept for the Iranian families. Ali Akbar Mahdi, a professor at CSUN University in Los Angeles, states in his extensive research on Iranian immigrants and the problems they face in the new society: “family plays a central role in Iranian society and it is the institution to which the individual relates the most and from which he or she receives his or her identity” (Mahdi, 1999, p. 13). The value and credibility of the family in Iranian culture does not diminish with immigration and moving away from Iran. The family is “central to the social status of the individual and serves as the foundation of social life in Iran, is not lost on the Iranian immigrants who have left their homeland” (Mahdi, 1999, p.13). Mahdi (1999) also added that, “the family continues to serve as a familiar refuge against the unfamiliar world of the host society” (p.18).

Modernization and Islamic Revolution of 1979

The negative consequences of the 1979 Islamic Revolution were not only the source of restrictions imposed upon Iranian women and Iranian society as a whole, they also hindered the growth of Iranian civilization and culture. Before the revolution, Iran had extensive economic, cultural, and scientific relations with Western countries, which benefited the people of the country in all social and cultural fields. Iranians, like many other societies, benefited from Western ideals. As Banani (1961) states; the initial impact of Western culture started in Iran in the first half of the 19th century and developed to a full-scale westernization of Iranian society in the 1970s. The rich oil resources of Iran and the Shah's government, which cultivated relationships with the West, were important factors in exploiting Western ideals: "Political centralization and exportation of oil facilitated some industrial development and modernization

of the infrastructure” (Lapidus, 1988, p.321). Due to globalization, the Internet and the constant exchange of daily scientific, cultural, political and social information with the outside world, different generations of Iranians combine their experiences from the years before and after the revolution with current knowledge and plan for a better life.

Nevertheless, cultural expectations are changing in Iran like in other societies, since Iranian society has been moving toward modernity: "Many rapid global changes that are occurring have had an impact on patterns of marriage in developing countries” (Delkhamoush, 2007, p.301). Arian Rostami (2014), an Iranian researcher, believes that Iranian society has been shifting towards modernity and that Iranian families, although caught between religion and traditional culture and modernity, are also changing structurally and functionally. He adds that these developments have not penetrated all levels of society and that traditional religion and culture remain strong (Rostami, 2014).

Challenges Faced by Iranian Immigrant Families in America

Most Iranian immigrants have settled where they have family members or friends to help them with the transition and to provide financial and psychological support. “Immigrants are often attracted to areas where they have family contacts or where they know they will find others similar to them” (Nourian, 2012, p.22). Although Iranian immigrants have settled in different states in recent years, California has the largest number of Iranians overall (Casacchia, 2013): "More than half of the Iranians who were part of the first wave of migration settled in California, which has a Mediterranean climate similar to that of their homeland" (Casacchia, 2013, p.18). After a few years from the time of their move to the United States, many Iranians have been able to acquire the necessary education, licenses, or other qualifications to either continue their professions or begin new ones.

Immigrants, who by choice or circumstance find themselves in a foreign environment where they must handle difficult situations, go through the process of acculturation in order to cope with the demands of a new culture (Hanassab, 1994 p. 18). Numerous factors, such as an unfamiliarity with the language, the loss of a previous job position, and lack of family coordination affect immigrant acculturation. Individuals and families experience a variety of stresses when relocating to a new country. These stressors, as reported by Zangeneh (2004), may lead to parent-child conflict, children's behavioral and school problems, financial problems, substance abuse, depression, and family breakdown.

Moreover, since the respective cultures of the countries of origin and of destination are vastly different, the adjustment may become even more difficult. Upon arrival in a new country, even under the most favorable of conditions: “peoples’ coping skills are challenged when they leave behind a familiar environment for an unknown location with different cultural values and traditions” (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p.119). They may find it especially difficult to face the challenges of a “feeling of not belonging in the host society, learning a new language, and finding new friends and relationships to replace the void of the friends and relatives left behind in their home country” (Flaherty, 1999; Lucas, 1997). These differences cover a wide range of a new immigrant's lives. In addition, one of the factors that was particularly stressful for Iranian immigrants after the 1979 Islamic Revolution was the political relationship between Iran and the United States, which has been constantly tense since then. This tension made the entry of Iranian immigrants to the United States much more difficult than in many other countries.

Cultural Challenges

Iranian families, after enduring various political, social, cultural, and economic pressures in Iran, when they enter the United States, find themselves in a completely different society from the country in which they grew up and lived for many years. In Ali Akbar Mahdi's (1999), *Comparing Life in Iran and the United States for an Immigrant*, it is argued that the new environment is quite different and that many aspects of the traditional Iranian family are challenged under the socio-economic conditions of life in the United States. Additionally, the speed and intensity of change is very high and makes it difficult to respond without personal hardship and cultural harassment. He concludes that even immigrants who are determined to maintain their indigenous socio-cultural patterns force themselves to conform to the structural and cultural requirements of their host community (Mahdi, 1999). The process of migrating and adapting to new circumstances can be easy or difficult due to factors such as social support, gender, age, language skills, level of education, religious beliefs, and the reasoning behind the migration. "Immigration can challenge previous patterns and lifestyles to various degrees, depending on different factors such as age, gender, education level, and amount of time away from their country of origin" (Dion & Dion, 2001; Ghaffarian, 1987; Hanassab & Ghaffarian, 1991; Hanassab & Tidwell, 1989). In exchange for better living conditions, they inevitably pay the costs, the most important aspects of which are "enduring cultural pressures, feeling homesick, facing an identity crisis, psychological problems, and the different effects on their marital and family life" (Ghaffarian, 1998, p. 39). Immigration is one of the biggest changes in an individual's life because it affects all aspects of his/her life. New jobs, new languages, new places, new laws and cultures, even positivity and acceptance for immigrants can be stressful.

Gender Roles

Gender power expresses itself differently in a hierarchical and collectivist society such as Iran. In Iranian families, the men are the traditional breadwinners and heads of the family, whereas the women's roles are traditionally limited to being wives and mothers. As Pakzad (1994) states, in Iran, men have much more property than women because women inherit less of their parents' property, and also own only a small portion of their husband's property after his death. An Iranian researcher, Aghajanian (2001) explains that it is obvious the process of Islamic revival demanded more from women than men, and the different demands from women to change or return to traditional and religious practices that have been a source of great stress for them. Given the history of Iran and the important role of women in various social, political, and cultural spheres before the 1979 revolution, these restrictions created a permanent dissatisfaction for Iranian women that continues to this day. Of course, due to the change of norms and patterns in Iranian families, as well as due to the possibility of higher education for Iranian women, and difficult economic conditions, the desire to work and earn money has increased among Iranian women, and today many Iranian women are working outside of the house.

When an Iranian family enters a new and completely different society like the United States, it carries all the beliefs, rules, rights of individuals, traditional and religious values, and most importantly gender roles, that are very different from the values, laws, and rights of the host society. These differences can be the source of many pressures and psychological problems, and various consequences for the married life of immigrants:

“Of the changes an immigrant has to face, changes in the family and gender roles are the most difficult and consequential ones because they involve not only changes in the identity and behavior of individual immigrants but also in relationships with their intimates. The most

significant among these changes is the role reversal for members of the family.” (Mahdi, 1999, p. 13).

Change of gender roles in the new society is one of the biggest challenges for Iranian immigrants and one of the important factors for psychological pressure on their families (Lindsey, 2015). As Lindsey states: “given the drastic changes in male-female relationships around the world in the past three decades, gender roles have become increasingly a contested site of power, thus open to discursive and situational conflicts and negotiations” (Lindsey, 2015, p.21). Certainly, the concept of gender roles is not fixed and predetermined, considering the diverse characteristics of individuals, their education levels, understanding of cooperation, love, and friendship, and the emergence of new generations in Iran. Moreover, factors like the role of the Internet and social media contribute to the evolving nature of gender roles within the host society.

Summary

In general terms, acculturation can be defined as the process of cultural change and adaptation that results from the interaction of individuals from different cultures. During the process of acculturation, immigrants may face two types of challenges including adapting to the beliefs, values, and expectations of new groups, as well as maintaining one's individual and inherited beliefs and values. The difference between current norms and values in the community of origin and destination is one of the most challenging factors influencing the retention of immigrants. Individual and social identities can change during the process of acculturation. Although acculturation can be almost inevitable and stressful. How one re-establishes, or maintains, one's previous values and beliefs is essential to mental health. When an immigrant is exposed to the socio-cultural ideas of the new environment, he or she may not be able to cope

with stress or pressure, resulting in identity disorder, alienation, and, consequently, psychological and social damages.

After a detailed study of Berry's Model of Acculturation Attitudes, the waves of Iranian immigration in the last four decades have been briefly examined. The role of religion, tradition, culture and family and the role of gender in family life and marital relationship in Iran have been reviewed and the impact of all these factors on the acceptance of new culture and its reinforcing and inhibiting factors will be researched and discussed in future chapters. Iranian society, although it had a revolution in 1979, that marked a turning point in the process of modernization, and changed the fabric of the society and economy of Iran (Aghajanian, 2000).

A great deal of research has been done on the impact of immigration on Iranian families which is very instructive, but little research has been done on the impact of the new society on marital relationships. This research becomes important when considering the different and serious changes in social, demographic, political and cultural norms after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Therefore, mental health professionals need to understand this populations' experiences and the impact of acculturation on their decisions regarding romantic relationships in order to provide culturally appropriate psychotherapy.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Chapter Overview

Many articles have written about acculturation and the impact it has had on Persian immigrants, but very little research has focused on the impact of migration on Persian immigrants' marital relationships, especially after the 1979 Revolution. As reflected in the previous literature, there are various ways that people attempt to navigate through the acculturation process. According to Pessary and Mahler (2003), and Suarez-Orozco and Qin (2006), gender is an influential factor of immigrant life. Transnational immigration impacts men and women differently, and it alters interactions between them. In order to find answers to the questions of this research, which has its own unique complexities, this proposed project utilized a qualitative research methodology. Because qualitative research captures complex realities (Strauss, 1987), it is an appropriate approach for investigating the research questions of this proposed project. After a brief explanation of qualitative research and phenomenological approach, this chapter outlines the research method used in the proposed study for data collection and analysis. It provides details about the population of interest, selection of participants, data processing procedures, the instrument used to collect the data, and the process of data analysis. The chapter concludes by discussing issues pertaining to ethical assurances.

Research Design

Qualitative research is a set of procedures, such as observations or interviews, each of which helps the researcher obtain relevant information about the subject of study. Qualitative research pays attention to culture, values, ideological and behavioral foundations, and language, and attempts to understand the feelings, motivations, and emotions of the interviewees, which are very important.

In qualitative research, the interviewer tries to obtain the reality as seen and experienced by the respondents in addition to interpreting the interpretations people give of themselves and others. “Qualitative research is a broad umbrella term for research methodologies that describe and explain persons’ experiences, behaviors, interactions and social contexts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 213). By using this method, the researcher aims to study the reality from the inside rather than the outside (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, the researcher may modify their hypothesis and methodology as more information is obtained.

What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology attempts to describe the lived experience of a phenomenon from the perspective of a specific group of people who have experienced that phenomenon and semi-structured interviews are a common phenomenological tool used to gather data (Tehrani, 2015). Based on data obtained from interviews and important propositions, sentences and terms about the phenomenon are identified. Main themes are then identified and finally, the researcher combines the themes and writes a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (Tehrani, 2015).

Population of Interest

The population of interest for this proposed study are Iranian immigrants who were married when they immigrated to the United States. To ensure that these people are familiar with the American culture, this proposed study conducted on Iranians who have lived in the United States for more than five years. Due to the significant changes that have taken place since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, e.g. the expansion of the Internet, the ability to instantly communicate with individuals in other parts of the world, the emergence of new generations, fundamental changes in the belief system of people, especially youth, and various waves of

migration in the four decades since the revolution, efforts were made to ensure these changes are identified by the interviewer. Therefore, prospective participants likely diverse in different aspects and most importantly, there was gender differences, which included interviews from men and women.

Participants and Sample

Great care was taken to recruit, collect data, and interact with participants in culturally sensitive ways. Participants for this study were selected from a population of Iranian immigrants living in Southern California who were married before the migration. They were recruited from Iranian communities, organizations, personal networks and chain referrals. Chain referrals rely "on a series of participant referrals to others who have experienced the phenomenon of interest" (Penrod, 2003, p.101) A total of eight people, including two couples and four divorcees, were individually interviewed in this study. This study has done through purposeful sampling and based on specific criteria. It will be purposeful because, given the exclusivity of the research, this sample should reflect those characteristics as much as possible. Therefore, gender, length of residence in the United States, marriage, being from different generations, different waves of immigration, education, and cultural diversity were considered for selecting the sample.

Various inclusion and exclusion criteria were set up for the participants. The inclusion criterion includes:

1. Participants were Iranian-born women and men who were married before the migration.
2. They were between 18-70 years of age.
3. They have been living in the United States for at least 5 years.
4. They were able to communicate in English (conversational ability).

Exclusion criteria include:

1. Participants who did not have a sufficient understanding of the English language.
2. Participants who were experiencing issues of abuse and/or significant mental health concerns.

Excluding participants with mental health and abuse issues was to maintain the privacy and safety of the participants and the exclusion of non-English speaking participants was to reduce the possibilities of misunderstanding the interview questions and conversations regarding experiences with marital relationship and immigration and their views on this topic.

Data Collection Strategy

The primary method for data collection was a semi-structured interview. Given that individuals from Iranian culture are very conservative, and that they may be sensitive about talking about their marital relationship even in front of their spouses, these interviews were conducted one-on-one so that the interviewee felt more comfortable. Specifically, Iranian women were able to put family and cultural considerations aside and express themselves freely during the interview without fear of judgment. Prior to the interview, the interviewer explained the purpose of the interview in detail to the interviewee. The interviewer explained to the interviewee that there are no right or wrong answers and that their efforts are greatly appreciated. Moreover, the interviewee was informed that their participation in the proposed study may be beneficial for other Iranian immigrants. For example, the interviewee's experiences may help other Iranian immigrants cope with the challenges that immigrants tend to experience when immigrating from Iran.

The interviews were recorded by a good quality tape recorder, allowing the interviewer to easily transcribe them for later analysis. Prior to each interview, the interviewer sent the consent

form via email to the interviewee and the interviewee returned it to the interviewer via email or via mail after signing it. The interview only took place after the consent form was received. All participants in the proposed study were anonymous and voluntary. The researcher informed participants that their responses were identified by number only and that there was no identifying information in any of the research materials thus, ensuring their participation remained completely anonymous.

Interview Instrument

Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to introduce a topic and guide the discussion by asking more specific questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In this proposed project, the main goal of each individual interview was to understand each participant's personal lived experiences, in addition to their beliefs and attitudes about immigrating from Iran to the United States (Kvale, 1996). In semi-structured interviews, despite knowing what the research topic is about, the researcher usually guides the interview by asking specific questions geared towards addressing the research topic. “Semi-structured interviews allow a researcher to introduce a topic and guide the discussion by asking more specific questions” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). By asking specific questions the interviewer wants to know what the interviewee has experienced in his or her life. According to Kvale (1996), the main goal of each individual interview should be to understand each participant’ personal lived experiences, not only their beliefs or attitudes about the topic.

To better achieve the research goals, the researcher used an interview guide that includes questions, interview objectives, and specific topics about immigrating from Iran. Based on the characteristics of the interviewee, the researcher began the interview by asking general questions in order to build rapport and allow the interviewee to feel comfortable. The full list of

interview questions is provided in Appendix A. General questions including things such as: Tell me about your job and education in Iran and America, or Do you see any changes in your marital relationship compared to before migration? These questions were sometimes followed by sub-questions, which would depend on the responses received. Approximately 10 demographic questions were asked, which are listed in Appendix A. Some of the demographic information can contribute to analysis; For example, the level of education or cultural and social beliefs can play an effective role in solving marital problems.

Upon asking these general questions, the interviewer began asking specific questions related to immigrating from Iran. The interviewer was flexible and able to alter the questions so that they are relevant to the interviewee's life. By using interpretative phenomenology, it is important for the researcher to be aware of the cultural issues of the participants and interact with them with respect and honor. It is possible that the participants may not want to disclose sensitive and negative information about their spouse and family due to various cultural, religious, and traditional reasons. Because of the cultural congruence between interviewer and interviewee, there is likely an unspoken understanding that I understand and support these values.

Data Analysis

The method that is used in the analysis of qualitative data includes coding the data, combining the codes into broader concepts and themes, and interpreting the results (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis process began while the interviews were being conducted. Each interview was reviewed several times by the interviewer and transcribed for data analysis. The researcher created a specific research file in which the concepts and themes that were extracted from the different interviews were continuously categorized. This classification continued and

general and common concepts were identified. To analyze the interviews, each transcript was read several times and was coded. In order to maintain the integrity of the study, the transcribed interviews were re-read and re-analyzed to find common pattern and themes. Any reoccurring themes and patterns were grouped together. All the topics were re-examined and the researcher was ensured that all research topics and questions were addressed appropriately so that interpretations and conclusions were made. Once the data was analyzed and evaluated, this stage of the research has been completed, and the researcher notified all research participants that the study was concluded. The researcher personally thanked the participants for taking part in this study and sent a card demonstrating appreciation for the time they have taken to be involved in the current study.

Ethical Assurances

The proposed study adhered to the research standards set forth by the American Psychological Association in order to safeguard the welfare and privacy of the participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study. All participants were fully informed about the extent of their involvement and signed informed consent forms, which was indicated their right to refuse to be in the study and/or stop participating at any time. All participants were reassured that confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld. Further, participants' names and other identifying information were not appeared on any research material, in order to maintain confidentiality. Also, all participants were provided with the researcher's contact information so they may review the results of the study if they choose to do so.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Overview of Results

In this chapter, the results of the study will be reported. The following outline will be used: participants' general background information, table of participants' demographic information, participants' individual descriptions, and the major themes derived from the data. In order to protect the real identity of the participants, a pseudonym has been assigned to each interviewee. Participants were identified by the following names: Monica, Sophia, Mary, Lisa, Keven, Erick, Steven, and Mike. Each participant's story presents a unique view of her or his experience as they acculturated to life in America. A realistic understanding of oneself and individual needs, revision of past thoughts and beliefs, the ups and downs of migration and coexistence with the new society have different effects on every immigrant that manifests itself in their marital relationships. In order to discover these main themes, an interpretive phenomenological analysis was performed on each of the people's stories.

Theme I. Cultural Challenges, Adaptation, and Awareness

The first theme that emerged from the review of the various interviews was the issue of cultural challenges, adaptation, and awareness of the participants regarding the impact of these issues on their marital relationships. What was heard in almost all interviews was willingness, awareness, acceptance, openness, compromise, and understanding of the different culture of the host society. Certainly, these inclinations do not equate to a complete acceptance or assimilation into the norms of the host society; rather, they possess their own unique complexities. It was very clear to almost all the interviewees that they were looking for a compromise between two cultures and did not believe in rejecting this or that culture. The participants were aware of the cultural differences, especially in family and marital relationship.

They were also aware of the advantages of the integration of two cultures to varying degrees, and expressed different complications in accepting it, which were sometimes accompanied by serious contradictions. For example, they were aware of the collective nature of Iranian culture and the individualistic parts of Western culture, but each of them showed different approaches to applying and practicing it in their married life. While the aim of adapting to the new environment was to strengthen marital relationships, the process was not universally easy. For some, it resulted in various challenges, including separation and divorce, influenced by numerous factors. Migration exposes individuals to new situations, prompting a reevaluation of values, experiences, and roles. Consequently, family members may find themselves in conflict. Migrating from a society such as Iran, where individuality has a limited role, to an individualistic society like America, can induce an identity crisis, thereby adversely affecting marital relationships.

Mike, aged 50, who taught English alongside his wife in a high school in a city in the west of Iran, shares the following insights on how to navigate the challenges of adapting to a new society:

Based on my familiarity with life in the Western world through my friends and relatives, I was already acquainted with concepts such as individual rights, and other important issues in western life. However, I soon realized that merely being familiar with these principles wasn't sufficient to adapt to American society; I had to put them into practice once again. Fortunately, my wife, who was well-educated and versed in these concepts, and we both supported each other in adjusting to the new society. Our mutual goal was to ensure that life's challenges wouldn't adversely affect our marital relationship and friendship.

Another participant, Mary, aged 59 shared her thoughts on adapting to the new society:

Unfortunately, many Iranian men remain entrenched in their traditional beliefs even after relocating to the West, often resisting change even if it would benefit their families. Conversely, they view women's adaptation to the new environment and culture as a form of westernization or loss of authenticity. Regrettably, this dynamic led to the dissolution of my marriage after 25 years.

Sofia, another participant, offered her perspective on cultural differences and strategies for adapting to the new society, as well as the integration of cultures and its impact on marital relations:

I believe that by upholding our individual, moral, and family values while embracing the positive aspects of American culture, we can thrive. In my opinion, no culture is flawless, and we have the opportunity to glean valuable aspects from different cultures.

Kevin expressed concerns about the lack of coordination with his wife in adapting to the new conditions of life in America:

Adapting to a new culture and society becomes more manageable when we refrain from fanaticism and the belief that our culture is inherently superior to others. In the initial years of immigration, rather than focusing on learning English, my wife devoted her time to studying Persian books and delving into Iranian history, all while taking care of our children.

Monica, who was an accountant for a trading company in Iran, said:

However, adapting to the new environment necessitates a profound and rich cultural background. I noticed that many of my friends who immigrated to America held misconceptions about individualism. In their endeavors to assert their rights, they exhibited behaviors that clashed with our Iranian family culture. Consequently, their family lives encountered turmoil and disintegration in a relatively short span of time.

Eric spoke about the challenges after immigration:

We had a fulfilling life in Iran, where I worked as a chemical engineer ...However, at the urging of my wife, who had all her family members in America, we decided to immigrate. Adjusting to a new language was challenging for me, and I found employment at an Iranian restaurant. ... As our children went off to university, my wife initiated a divorce, leaving me devastated....

Steven 48 years old, who was a mechanical engineer in Iran:

Compromising and adapting to the new culture and society wasn't easy for us. Despite having relatives and friends already living here, the language barrier made the process prolonged.....Coming from a vastly different cultural background than America, life here presented numerous challenges.

Regarding the theme of cultural challenge, awareness, and adaptation, the interviews with the participants unveiled candid discussions about their challenges, acceptance, awareness, and the

outcomes of their efforts to adapt to the new society. They recounted their experiences of living in the United States of America and underscored the diverse impacts it had on their marital relationships.

Theme II. Marital Relationship and Gender Roles

Another significant theme extracted from the participants' transcripts was the issue of gender roles among Iranian immigrants. This topic holds importance as it is deeply rooted in Iranian tradition and religion, which faces significant challenges within the American Iranian community. Participants highlighted both the positive and negative roles associated with these gender roles. It is important to note that with the passage of time, education, and the exposure of Iranian society to egalitarian values through social media, this issue is not as prevalent among the people as it was in the past. For many immigrants, within a short span, an individual becomes immersed in other social relations where the family structure and the dynamics between men and women undergo significant changes. Traditional gender roles in Iran pose a challenge for Iranian immigrant families. Some male immigrants find themselves gradually relinquishing the role of the primary breadwinner within the Iranian family due to job scarcity, often accepting employment unrelated to their expertise.

Consequently, women, compelled to work due to living circumstances, may increasingly delegate household and childcare responsibilities to their husbands. These shifts, compounded by legal protections for women in the new environment, can contribute to heightened marital conflicts: "The loss of some of the traditional roles and privileges in marital relationships has had devastating effects on some of them, especially on those who have been brought up with a conservative outlook and have a low socio-economic status" (Mahdi, A. A. 1999, p.16). Indeed, these issues often arise among couples who hold differing views on gender roles. If men

reevaluate their beliefs and women collaborate with them, it can positively impact their marital relationship. Migration has provided a subset of men with enhanced opportunities and improved conditions for upward socioeconomic mobility through education or job advancements.

However, for others, migration signifies a loss of power and identity. The level of integration into the new society and the impact of emerging family life patterns play a crucial role in elevating Iranian women's expectations for equality and equal rights within the family: "A significant portion of Iranian immigrant women originates from the urban and modern middle class of society." (Darvishpour, M. 2002) Some individuals possessed outstanding educational qualifications in Iran, while others pursued university education in America, even in middle age, continuing their previous fields of study. This has diminished their economic dependence on their husbands.

Despite the challenges of immigration, the circumstances for Iranian women have improved in many aspects. Consequently, they exhibit a more positive attitude towards the new society and its norms. They recognize the potential for changing their situation in this new environment: "It seems that women demonstrate a higher degree of adjustment to their new roles than men. Of those women who have reported satisfaction with their experiences in the host society" (Mahdi, A. A. 1999). Iranians tend to strongly adhere to their historical and cultural roots, striving to reconcile the Asian collectivism and family traditions of their homeland with the individualism and secularism prevalent in American society. Steven, aged 48, who arrived in America with his wife and had a solid education and enjoyed a comfortable life in Iran. However, in the United States, he currently works as a taxi driver:

In Iran, I held the belief that a woman's role should not be confined solely to housekeeping. I have consistently supported my wife in her pursuit of education and

personal growth. Presently, my wife earns twice as much as I do, and we manage all our finances jointly through a shared account. I attribute the success of our married life to our mutual understanding of social and family matters.

Eric, who grew up in a traditional family in western Iran said:

...I believe that adopting aspects of Western culture did not benefit my family and our marital relationship. When my wife started earning more than me, our marital problems escalated. She began spending money on her personal desires without considering our family's expenses. Often, she would invite her relatives over without consulting me, resulting in additional financial strain on our family. Furthermore, she went to Las Vegas with her relatives without seeking my permission and spent a significant amount of money on her friends and relatives.

As Foner, N. (2014, p.116?) says; “Obviously, immigrants do not exactly reproduce their old cultural patterns when they move to a new land; but these patterns continue to have a powerful influence in shaping family values and norms as well as actual patterns of behavior that develop in the new setting.” This point is evident in the remarks of Sofia, who formerly served as an English teacher in Iran and possesses a strong passion for historical studies:

Fortunately, my husband was already acquainted with various concepts concerning individual and social rights long before our emigration, and he upheld them even after relocating. I believe that as women, we should also possess a thorough understanding of individual rights within the context of family and marital relations. While I am an

individual with my own rights, I am also part of a marriage and not solely independent. As a woman, it's important for me to understand how to honor my Iranian culture while also considering the benefits to both my family and marital relationship when incorporating aspects of Western culture.

Mary recounted her negative experience of her adjustment in America:

Once I completed my education and began earning more than my husband, our relationship encountered difficulties. He started asserting control over all financial matters, including my personal expenses, and even attempted to regulate my interactions with friends. He expressed concern about our jointly owned house, fearing that American laws grant women excessive rights.

Lisa who is nurse in a hospital in Los Angeles said:

My husband was arrested by the police due to his behavior. He often refers to the family and social laws in this country as being biased against men because they prevent him from continuing his previous actions.

Monica: My husband respects my rights and never infringes upon them. Despite earning almost twice as much as him, I contribute all my income to our joint account. However, my husband takes sole responsibility for managing all expenses and financial matters.

Other participants shared their view about gender roles.

“Potential changes in gender roles due to migration need not be viewed as problematic.

In fact, such changes may even enhance the relationship by fostering greater adaptability and mutual support. “(Mike)

“When we oversimplify the notion of individual rights, it can lead to complexities in marital relationships. My wife underwent a significant transformation after starting work at a kindergarten. She insisted on us living separately” (Keven)

Theme III. Marital Survivability and Influential Factors

The third issue that emerged in the interviews with the participants was the survival of marital relationships and the factors influencing them during migration. In Iran, these factors may differ because of the family-oriented culture, where couples are influenced by the extended family in various ways. The family system in Iran has significant effects on couples, whereas in immigration, the decision-making center for family life typically shifts to the couple itself. Consequently, what contributes to the survival of marital relationships may vary compared to the dynamics in Iran." The literature on collective cultures such as Iranian culture emphasizes interconnectedness and interdependence between family members as well as their community" (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Trumbull, 1999).

Iranian culture is indeed family-oriented and places a significant emphasis on maintaining strong family bonds. "Marriage binds not only two people but two families. The family determines the social status of the individual and serves as the foundation of both social

life and social support" (Azadarmaki et al., 2000; Mohsényi and Pourreza, 2003). In Iran, for instance, the mother-in-law holds considerable authority in the marriage and the lives of the couple. Sonpar (2005) suggests that the mother-in-law will usually have more authority at the beginning of a marriage, and some of this power will shift to the new bride when she has children.

Throughout the participants' interviews, all participants highlighted various factors that could contribute to the survival of married life during migration, although some ultimately experienced separation and divorce. Migration experiences varied among the participants. Some had the support of family members, acquaintances, or friends who had already immigrated to America, while others lacked such assistance entirely. Social support and social leverage networks composed of ties that offer social leverage help individuals to "get ahead" or change their opportunity structure. Ties that offer leverage can promote upward mobility by providing access to education, training, and employment. Large, dispersed, and heterogeneous (interclass) social networks increase the opportunity for advancement (Burt 1987; Wellman and Gulia 1999).

There are a variety of different pre-migration characteristics and conditions likely to influence the subsequent adaptation of immigrants. As Goldlust, J., & Richmond, A. H. (1974) suggest: Among the most important in an advanced industrial society, will be education, technical training, age on arrival, marital status, and size of family, prior knowledge of the language of the receiving society will be important. More than half of the participants had obtained higher education in Iran or pursued further education upon arrival in America. For some, marital difficulties began in Iran and were exacerbated by initial challenges in adapting to the new society. Some participants migrated with a clear goal and were relatively prepared in terms of financial means, while others simply sought to leave the country.

Trauma after migration can manifest as migrants and refugees encounter barriers to accessing essential services like education and healthcare. Additionally, financial challenges and substandard living conditions may contribute to the post-migration trauma experienced by individuals in these vulnerable populations. and as Darvishpour, M. (2002) says: Trauma after migration can manifest as migrants and refugees encounter barriers to accessing essential services like education and healthcare. Additionally, financial challenges and substandard living conditions may contribute to the post-migration trauma experienced by individuals in these vulnerable populations. For some, relations improved upon arrival, allowing them to adapt to the new society more easily, while others encountered various challenges. Approximately half of the participants sought psychological assistance to aid their married life, while others declined for diverse reasons. In the following, we will examine the statements of the participants along with brief explanations.

Steven discusses the importance of having a shared goal, and state of their relationship:

Several factors contribute to the maintenance of a healthy marital relationship following immigration. Did both individuals migrate for the same purpose, and what was the state of their relationship prior to migration? My spouse and I immigrated to America with the dual aims of furthering our education and enhancing the well-being of our children.

Monica discusses resolving family issues through consultations with psychologists, as well as the importance of having a profession and expertise before immigrating:

If you possess specialized skills in a particular profession and immigrate to America with adequate financial resources, resolving marital conflicts during the immigration process can enable you to support each other in nurturing familial warmth. My husband and I

consulted a psychologist regarding our children's treatment, and one of them has been receiving therapy for anxiety for a while.

Eric discusses his challenges, such as not knowing English, lacking a shared goal with his wife regarding the reason for immigrating, struggling to find a job similar to those in Iran, and experiencing a lack of understanding between himself and his wife. He also mentioned his view about counseling in America.

The initial years of living in America were extremely difficult for me. Despite holding a prestigious job in Iran, my lack of proficiency in English led me to work in an Iranian restaurant for several years. It felt as though my wife and I were inhabiting separate worlds, lacking a shared understanding of our goals and purpose in life. Eventually, we made the painful decision to separate. I believe psychologists in America cannot solve marital problems for Iranians and only in wasting money.

Sofia discusses her advantages, including being fluent in English before immigrating, receiving family support, pursuing further education, and drawing inspiration from historically sociable Iranian women.

Before immigrating to America, I had a good command of English, which allowed me to work in a kindergarten during the initial months while we stayed at my brother's house. Meanwhile, my mother took care of the children while I was at work. My husband found employment in my brother's workshop, while I attended college classes in the evening. I drew inspiration from my mother's teachings about the resilience of women in our

history. I reminded myself that I, too, could bring about significant changes in my life and for my family, no matter the challenges.

Mike reflects on his unfulfilled dreams of continuing his costly education, providing more opportunities for his wife and child's education, and the comprehensive support received from his wife's family.

I am grateful to acknowledge that without the support of my wife's family, we wouldn't be in the favorable position we are today. Their assistance provided us with a level of comfort akin to living in a hotel. While my wife dedicated herself to her studies, I initially worked in my brother-in-law's workshop before venturing into business. I started with a grocery store, later transitioning to a bakery, and eventually, I established and continue to operate a gas station. Although I harbored aspirations to pursue further education, my greatest source of happiness stems from the fact that both my child and wife were able to attain higher education in America.

Keven discusses the lack of understanding and cooperation from his wife, the trauma experienced before, during, and after migration, the inadequacy of financial resources, and the size of the family.

I believe that mutual support between couples, which unfortunately I have never experienced, is crucial. Not having initial capital is indeed for settling in a new society, the lack of understanding between partners and ongoing marital issues, particularly during the challenging process of immigration with three young

children and the traumas of temporary stays in multiple countries along the way, can significantly complicate matters.

Mary discusses the lack of understanding in the marital relationship, the absence of a common goal, marital disputes, Counseling, and the lack of social support

When we arrived in America, I proposed to my husband that, considering our financial situation, we could both pursue further education. However, he disagreed and instead opted to work long hours as a taxi driver. We lacked friends or relatives in America. When I secured a job, I encouraged him to pursue his studies. Unfortunately, he developed an addiction to alcohol and falsely accused me of having an affair with a colleague. I've suggested to my husband multiple times to seek counseling with a psychologist, but he kept postponing it.

Lisa discusses her decision to continue her studies, lack of common goals, family disputes, her husband's lack of coordination, education, counseling, and ultimately, their divorce.

If migration is not planned with a shared goal for the couple, it can lead to numerous challenges in the marital relationship. Personally, I was aware that my studies in Iran would eventually lead to employment opportunities in America, so I made an effort to learn English to some extent beforehand. I've attended individual and group therapy sessions numerous times to address my own issues. I became self-sufficient and secured a job in a hospital. Unfortunately, I reached a point where I could no longer continue living with my spouse.

It was fascinating to hear from the participants in this study about their experiences. The transformations that took place during immigration and living in America compared to before immigration were evident in their thoughts and perspectives. They accurately identified the factors that can influence the success or failure of a marital relationship in immigration and discussed the process of compromise with the host society and their personal growth.

Theme IV. Religion, Culture, Intimacy, and Marital Relationships

The fourth and final theme extracted from the participants' transcripts was the influence of religion and Iranian culture on marital intimacy. Numerous studies have supported the notion that, across cultures, humans have an innate need and drive to form and maintain intimate relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Maslow, 1954). Weingarten (1992) conceptualized intimacy as a quality of a particular interaction rather than as a relationship, and defined intimate interaction as “occurring when people share meaning or co-create meaning and they are able to coordinate their action to reflect their mutual meaning-making” (p.47). Hatfield (1988) suggested that intimacy involves a process in which people try to become close and explore their similarities and differences in feelings, thoughts, and behavior.

The most extensive and refined conceptual definitions purport intimacy to be “a mutual need satisfaction” (Clinebell & Clinebell, 1970) and closeness to another human being on a variety of levels (Dahms, 1972). Clinebell and Clinebell identified several facets of intimacy, including sexual, emotional, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, conflict, commitment, spiritual, and communication intimacy. While their definitions lack theoretical conceptual clarity, Dahms proposed a conceptual hierarchy of three dimensions of intimacy: intellectual, physical, and emotional. Dahms (1972) taught that intimacy consists of multiple elements that develop in a hierarchical, stage-like pattern. This pattern begins with intellectual intimacy

(conversation and self-disclosure), progresses to physical intimacy (holding hands, hugging, and sexuality), and finally leads to emotional intimacy (availability, support, and emotional expressiveness and responsiveness).

Apart from the extent to which the majority of young people in Iran today pay attention to this issue, generally, in Iran, the legalization of sexual relations for men and women is legitimized by marriage, and women are expected to maintain their virginity before marriage. The culture and religious teachings have played a significant role in shaping Iranian women's perceptions of gender and sexuality. Many Iranian women consider satisfying their husband's sexual needs as part of their role in the marital relationship, influenced by these cultural norms. Aghaei's study (1995) revealed that Iranian women perceive sexual intimacy with their husbands as a significant factor in their marriages, indicating its importance in the marital context. In a study examining a subset of Iranian women residing in Australia and their perspectives on sexuality, it was discovered that while some women considered it religiously acceptable to be sexually available to their husbands, others did not. They recognized that their choices regarding sexual intimacy were personal (Khoei et al., 2017).

While this study was conducted abroad, recent research by sociologists indicates that even though some older generations of Iranian women may hold such views, younger generations may not necessarily share the same perspective. Researchers should exercise caution in generalizing all Iranian women within a religious framework, recognizing the diversity of beliefs and attitudes within this population. The phenomenon of 'white marriage' occurs among young heterosexual middle-class Iranian women and men, who choose to live together without religious or legal documentation (Aghajanian, et al., 2018; Golestaneh, 2019; Mahboobi, 2016; Ghodosi & Bayat, 2014). Iranians describe unmarried, cohabitating couples as living in a 'white

marriage'. The growing number of white marriages in Iran has provoked official media condemnation and increased public discussion about commitment (Golestaneh, M., 2022).

For Iranians, the ideal marital relationship is rooted in concepts such as "love, passion, friendship, and mercy" (Omran, 1992). This issue should not be overlooked: in Iranian culture, the definitions of love, passion, and friendship differ somewhat from those in the West. In the Iranian context, passion and friendship within a marital relationship entail both partners being considerate and empathetic towards each other, aiming to achieve the ultimate goal of peace within the marital bond (Omran, 1992). In Iranian marriages, the notion of mercy encompasses qualities such as understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness toward one's spouse. (Omran, 1992). Intimacy is a continuous process that evolves over time and is never truly finished or perfected. It involves elusive and unpredictable experiences that may arise spontaneously, requiring both time and effort to nurture. Intimacy development is not a destination but rather a lifelong journey influenced by numerous factors. Individuals vary in their ability to cultivate deep and fulfilling intimate connections, with some finding it challenging while others excel in forming rich and complex relationships with their partners.

We will review the participants' perspectives on their understanding of marital relations, the impact of religion and culture on intimacy between couples, and other related aspects of this topic.

“Intimacy in marital relationships cannot be confined to a narrow framework. It encompasses a broad and profound meaning. I believe that attending to and addressing the diverse needs of one another can serve as a nearly accurate definition of intimacy. This understanding is shaped by individuals through their family upbringing, personal

experiences, cultural teachings, and acquired knowledge, which they then apply within their marital relationships. **(Steven)**

When reflecting on the challenging early years of immigration, I recall my steadfast commitment to honoring the marriage covenant as a married woman, diligently fulfilling my various marital obligations in the new environment. In Iran, religion and culture are intertwined, imparting valuable teachings about intimacy in marital relationships.

(Monica)

“I believe that honoring and attending to one's spouse's needs is a lesson passed down from our ancestors and families, and it should remain a priority even when immigrating to another country. The teachings ingrained in us by our families are invaluable, and it's crucial to uphold them regardless of the circumstances.” **(Eric)**

“In the initial years of immigration, couples often face numerous challenges and busy schedules as they work to stabilize family life through various occupations.

Consequently, they may find it difficult to fully address each other's diverse personal needs. However, fostering a shared understanding of life's circumstances, engaging in healthy conversations, and making efforts to empathize with one another can be highly beneficial. I endeavored to fulfill my commitments as a married woman to the best of my ability. However, it's important to recognize that intimacy extends beyond mere sexual relations and encompasses a much broader significance.” **(Sofia)**

“For much of my life, I didn't feel particularly connected to religion, yet I possessed ample knowledge about Iranian culture, especially concerning marital relations. I firmly believe that intimacy cannot be narrowly interpreted. While the sexual aspect of my relationship with my wife was strong before immigrating, living with my wife's family during the initial three years of immigration brought it to its lowest point. However, in my personal view, intimacy encompasses a much broader definition. Despite these challenges, my love for my wife remained unaffected. I believe that intimacy between couples transcends the limited concepts often associated with specific issues, representing a far more beautiful and encompassing concept.” **(Mike)**

“From a young age, I learned about intimacy in marital relationships through the teachings of my family, as well as religious and cultural education. Despite my father's limited education, he consistently demonstrated respect towards my mother throughout their lives. Regrettably, I did not experience the same level of respect from my wife in my own marriage. Throughout the immigration process, intimacy and mutual respect between us dwindled day by day until we ultimately decided to separate.” **(Keven)**

“In Iran, the relationship between my spouse and me was stronger compared to our experiences during immigration. The challenges we faced in our new environment gradually eroded the warmth in our relationship, leading to a decline in intimacy. Eventually, my husband's struggle with alcohol addiction, along with other issues, replaced the love and respect we once shared.” **(Mary)**

“In the initial years of marriage in Iran, I experienced love, respect, and intimacy in my married life. However, as time passed, both in Iran and during immigration, our lives became entangled in serious disputes. Here in America, the situation escalated to the point where my husband was arrested for physical abuse, ultimately leading to our divorce.” **(Lisa)**

When considering the sentiments expressed by these participants regarding the concept of marital relationships, intimacy, friendship, companionship, and mutual trust, it appears as though even after facing years of challenges related to immigration and integrating into a new society and culture, their spirits remain beautiful and free from resentment and dissatisfaction. Today, influenced by the culture of the host society, they can articulate more beautiful definitions of concepts such as love, affection, friendship, intimacy, and companionship than they could in the past. The outcome of this study revealed four main themes. Participants were given the opportunity to share insights into the impact of immigration and acculturation on marital relationships. The researcher aimed to explore both the positive and negative outcomes of acculturation from the participants' perspectives without bias.

Participants' Background Information

The participants in this study were between the ages of 43 and 68. All of the participants were married in Iran and immigrated to the U.S. after 10 to 15 years of their marriage and are living in U.S. more than 10 years. One had a marriage arranged by her parents while living in Iran. One of the 8 participants identified with the Baha'i religion, one Jewish, two Armenian, two Muslims, two Kurds who identified as Atheists. Participants' education levels ranged from

high school to master level degrees, and all participants' household income levels were \$60,000 or greater.

The following is a brief demographic description of each participant. Each description includes age, years married, age when they immigrated to the United States, religion, education level, and annual household income. Participant's pseudonyms are used in order to protect participants' confidentiality.

Participant: **Eric**

Eric is 68 years old. He emigrated from Iran at when he was 42 and has been married for 36 years. (Separated now) He was the only participant in an arranged marriage while living in Iran. He identified himself as a Jewish. His highest level of education is a Master's degree. His annual household income was reported as over \$60,000. He has three children, and three grandchildren.

Participant: **Keven**

Keven is 60 years old. He emigrated from Iran when he was 35. He has been married for 35 years and married in the United States. He identifies as a Baha'i. His highest level of education is a Bachelor's degree, and reports his annual income as over \$75,000. He has three children, and two grandchildren.

Participant: **Mary**

Mary is 59 years old and emigrated from Iran to the United States at age 34. She has been married for 38 years and got married in Iran. She identifies as a Muslim but states that she is no longer practicing. Her level of education is Bachelor's degree and reports her annual household income as over \$65,000. She has two children.

Participant: **Lisa**

Lisa is 55 years old. She emigrated from Iran at the age of 34. She has been married for 31 years and married in Iran. She identifies herself as a Muslim and her highest level of education is Master's degree. Her annual household income is reported as \$60,000-\$75,000. She has two children.

Participant: **Monica**

Monica is 46 years old. She immigrated to the United States at the age of 30. She has been married for 26 years. She identifies as Armenian-Iranian. Her highest level of education is a Master's degree. Her annual household income is \$70,000. She has two children.

Participant: **Steven**

Steven is 48 years old. He immigrated to the United States at the age of 32. He has been married for 26 years. He identifies himself as Armenian-Iranian. His highest level of education is a Bachelor's degree. His reported annual household income is \$65,000-\$75,000. He has two children.

Participant: **Sofia**

Sofia is 43 years old. She emigrated from Iran at the age of 30 and has been married for over 23 years. She married in Iran prior to coming to the U.S. She identifies herself as an Atheist. Her highest level of education is a Doctoral degree. Her annual household income is over \$120,000. She has two children.

Participant: **Mike**

Mike is 50 years old. He immigrated to the United States when she was 37 years old. He has been married for 23 years. His highest level of education is a Master's degree. He identifies himself as an Atheist. His annual household income is over \$65,000. She has two children.

Table 2*Participant Demographic Summary*

Name	Age	Age at Immigration USA	Years in USA	Years Married	Religion	Education	Household Income	Children
Eric	68	42	26	36	Jewish	Masters	>60,000	3
Keven	60	35	25	35	Baha'i.	Bachelor	>75,000	2
Mary	59	34	25	38	Muslim	Bachelor	>65,000	2
Lisa	55	34	21	31	Muslim	Master	>65,000	2
Monica	46	30	16	26	Armenian	Master	>70,000	2
Steven	48	32	16	26	Armenian	Bachelor	>65,000	2
Sofia	43	30	13	23	Atheist	Doctoral	>120,000	2
Mike	50	37	13	23	Atheist	Master	>65,000	2

Table 3***Participants' Acculturation Attitudes from Berry's Fourfold Model***

Questions	Integration	Assimilation	Separation	Marginalization
Is it Desirable to have positive relationship with other group in society?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Is it desirable to maintain cultural heritage?	Yes	No	Yes	No
Participant: Eric			X	
Participant: Keven	X			
Participant: Lisa	X			
Participant: Mary	X			
Participant: Mike	X			
Participant: Monica	X			
Participant: Sofia	X			
Participant: Steven	X			

Observations

This researcher made several observations throughout the study. Four of the participants were 10, 14, 15, and 23 years old when the Islamic Revolution took place in 1979, and three participants were 1, 3, and 5 years old, while the last one was born 2 years after the revolution. All of them displayed a willingness to discuss various issues in Iran, as well as topics related to psychology, for half an hour to an hour after the interviews concluded. The researcher sensed their satisfaction with the interview process and their enthusiasm to potentially contribute to this research.

Even after the interviews concluded and the recording stopped, except for the two participants who did not adhere to any religion, the others refrained from using the word "sex"

when discussing intimacy. When they spoke about love, they described it beyond mere sexual and physical attractions. All of the participants maintained regular contact with their families and relatives in Iran and engaged in discussions about the intellectual growth of the youth, especially women, within the society. When asked if they would consider returning to Iran if fundamental and desired changes were made, all the women and two of the men answered this question negatively, while the other two entertained the possibility of returning to Iran.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the experiences of Iranian immigrants in marriage through their perspectives and how acculturation effects immigrant marriage dynamics. It illuminates how Iranian women and men define the impact of migration on their marital relationship and their roles in maintaining the safety and success of their marriages, even if such efforts do not yield the desired results in some cases.

This chapter will analyze the findings of this study in light of the research presented in the literature review. The participants in this study were women and men who immigrated to the United States after getting married in Iran. The purpose of this selection was to include participants who had spent the majority of their formative years in Iran, thereby retaining a significant portion of their cultural identity.

The participants were given an opportunity to provide information about the important factors that have impacted their marital relationships during the years they have lived in the new society. Without exception, all participants discussed the advantages of the collective culture that shapes their nature, while also expressing their views on the benefits of the individualistic culture prevalent in the West. They defined acculturation in the new society in a manner conducive to their marital relationships, employing a blend of collective and individualistic cultural aspects to ensure the success of their marriages.

With the exception of one participant, the eldest, whose marriage ultimately ended in divorce, all others highlighted the importance of individualism and maintaining personal boundaries as significant aspects of Western culture. Simultaneously, they praised the positive aspects of collective culture, such as familial support and assistance in their children's education

and marriage endeavors: “Obviously, immigrants do not exactly reproduce their old cultural patterns when they move to a new land; but these patterns continue to have a powerful influence in shaping family values and norms as well as actual patterns of behavior that develop in the new setting.” (Foner, N. 2014 p.111).

They did not view acculturation as a negation of either Iranian or Western culture but rather spoke of their life experiences in navigating the compromise and coexistence of these two cultural paradigms. One of the participants emphasized the importance of not seeking to determine which culture is superior but rather focusing on identifying the positive aspects of both cultures and integrating them into one's life to enhance family dynamics. Another participant expressed a different perspective, stating, “I don't understand the idea that our culture should become like Americans. Despite living in America for twenty years, our social interactions primarily remained within the Iranian community, including our relatives. Even our children raised in the U.S. had fewer American friends and mostly interacted with Iranians”. He emphasized the importance of not needing to fully assimilate into Western culture but rather learning and adopting its positive aspects while preserving our own cultural values.

This learning process occurred in various settings such as work, school, and social environments. Based on what many researchers (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Foner, 1997; Rouse, 1991) are saying, immigrants, faced with new circumstances in the United States will find that many beliefs, values, and cultural symbols as well as behavior patterns will inevitably change. While some former beliefs and social institutions persist intact, they may change, if only subtly, in form and function in the new environment.

When speaking about the issue of gender roles, only one participant considered it a contributing factor to problems in their marital relationship and expressed dissatisfaction with the

evolving role of women in the new society. He believed that women's rights laws in the West aimed to satisfy women's desire for power, which he viewed as a negative factor in marital relations. Additionally, he felt that these laws reduced the role of men in the family and in parenting. Research has shown that “The narrowing of the power gap between Iranian immigrant men and women, and the disturbance of the previous power balance, is more pronounced, particularly in families where women transitioned from being housewives in Iran to pursuing education and employment after immigration” (Darvishpour, M. 2002 p.24). Various interesting points were raised on this matter, which will be elaborated upon below.

Those who had a positive attitude towards this phenomenon acknowledged the benefits of women assuming responsibility for certain aspects of life and acknowledged their ability to contribute to improving life overall. They also felt that even before immigrating, they recognized the positive effects of the evolving role of women in Western society, and they were in agreement with their spouses on this matter. Two female participants emphasized the significant social roles of Iranian women throughout history and stressed the importance of women playing their social role in any society. Aghaie (1995), explains that Iranian women value independence and use it as an indicator of how strong they are in their role as a woman. These statements confirm the research of Rassam (1984) and Ebadi (2006) which indicates that Middle Eastern women have great influence and play a large role in society.

All the females participating in this research pursued further education in America and now hold positions in nursing, management, high school teaching, and pharmaceuticals, while none of the men did. However, they attribute this difference primarily to being occupied with work and providing for family expenses. According to the suggestions made by the participants, women have adapted to the new society more quickly and are more motivated to compromise

and coexist with new experiences. “Despite the challenges of immigration, the circumstances for Iranian women have improved in many aspects. Consequently, they exhibit a more positive attitude towards the new society and its norms” (Molana, H. H. 2020 p.69).

Additionally, women have recognized their new roles within the framework of cooperation, aiming to support men in building their lives and helping to alleviate the pressure of providing for household expenses on men: “The proliferation of individualism within immigrant families does not necessarily result in separation; rather, it can contribute to increased equality between men and women within the family” (Shirpak, K. R., 2011, p.711). However, some Iranian men perceive this phenomenon to be a power grab by women who are exploiting the civil laws of the new society to their advantage.

A noteworthy point in this section is the misconception about immigrant women, particularly those from Iran, only become aware of their social and individual rights upon immigrating to America. According to the few participants, this notion is not entirely accurate. In relation to this matter. Darvishpour (2002) says that the prevailing perception of migrant women as passive victims of their culture and environment hinders a comprehensive understanding of the sources of their power, and, he continues, such an attitude overlooks the fact that immigrant men and women of the same nationality are not a homogeneous group, and some of them have more favorable conditions for the development of equal relationships than others. Historically, and throughout the entire period after the Islamic Revolution, which imposed many restrictions on Iranian women, they have consistently been at the forefront of social protests against the government. A recent example of this is the Iranian women's movement last year, known as "Women, Life, and Freedom."

The participants' opinions regarding the influence of culture, religion, and intimacy in marital relationships contained interesting points. In this context, aside from the two participants who directly mentioned the word "sex," the rest of the participants, including those two individuals, primarily discussed concepts such as intimacy, companionship, tolerance, compromise, and "marital relations," highlighting their significance in marital relationships. For instance, one female participant shared their perspective on intimacy in relationships: "When I think back to the challenging early years of immigration, I remember my unwavering dedication to upholding the marriage covenant as a married woman, diligently fulfilling my various marital duties in the new environment. Religion and culture are deeply intertwined in Iran, offering valuable teachings about intimacy in marital relationships. I strongly believe in maintaining loyalty to my spouse even during the most trying times of my life". These findings support Omran (1992), who described the importance of tolerance and understanding toward one's spouse in order to make the relationship work.

Some participants regarded intimacy as stemming from religious teachings, while others viewed it as a product of Iranian culture, which emphasizes fulfilling men's "needs" as one of women's marital duties. Nearly all participants, without drawing comparisons with Western culture, did not prioritize sex highly in marital relationships. Instead, they considered it alongside intimacy, affection, love, and care. They believed that a successful marital relationship encompasses more than just sexual intimacy. For instance, some participants mentioned experiencing a lack of sexual intimacy in the initial years of immigration due to various challenges. However, they believed that this did not signify a problem in their marital relationship. Instead, they emphasized that the overall health of the relationship extended beyond sexual relations.

Another theme extracted from the participants' interviews was the topic of marital relationship survival and the influential factors contributing to it. Almost all participants highlighted the significance of understanding, cooperation, mutual growth, healthy communication, mutual respect, and love. Another significant factor was the alignment of the couple's migration goals, often involving some degree of pre-planning. For many participants, ensuring the educational future and well-being of their children, as well as continuing their own education, emerged as important migration objectives. Omran (1992) found that the goal of many immigrants is to raise healthy children., developing their children's moral character, bringing the children up to be loyal to the family, and to increase the reputation and status of the family within their community.

Having a higher education or a desire to pursue further education, along with possessing professional expertise, was another factor emphasized by the participants, which they believed to be crucial for integration into the host society. Another significant issue is the presence of various social supports from family members, friends, or relatives during the early years of immigration, along with sufficient financial resources, which the participants considered to be effective factors in their adjustment to the new environment. As Dominguez & Watkins (2003) found among their respondents, the kind of social capital that generates opportunities for mobility can emerge from networks that provide advice and encouragement to get ahead.

According to the participants in the research, acquiring proficiency in English to be accepted more readily in the new society, along with gaining familiarity with the lifestyle and culture of the host society through various means, helps alleviate the pressures of the early years of immigration and contributes to the sustainability of married life. Darvishpour, M. (2002). elucidates this in the following manner, Knowing the English language, and getting to know the

lifestyle and culture of the host society in different ways, according to the participants in the research, helps to reduce the pressure of the first years of life in immigration and helps to survive married life. Solving various marital problems by seeking guidance from a psychologist was particularly emphasized by all the female participants as crucial for the survival of the family and marital relationship during migration. And the last but important point is the quality of the marital relationship before migration, as well as how couples handle various challenges encountered during the migration process. Most participants emphasized the significance of these factors in influencing the marital relationship during migration. Based on what Darvishpour, M. (2002). says; That trauma before migration can be a significant factor influencing individuals' decisions to leave their homes, and during the migration process, and trauma after migration such as barriers to accessing essential services like education and healthcare.

Strengths and Limitations of this Study

This study included 8 participants aged between 43 and 68 years old. While these participants provided valuable insights, incorporating a larger sample size, especially younger individuals who have immigrated to America within the last 5-6 years, could potentially offer slightly different perspectives. Considering the evolving social landscape, generational shifts, and the pervasive influence of the internet and social media, exploring the viewpoints of the younger generation may provide additional nuanced insights into the experiences of Iranian immigrants in America. Another notable aspect is that each participant reported an annual income ranging from 60 to 120 thousand dollars. Furthermore, all participants resided in major cities in Iran before immigrating. In terms of education, three individuals held bachelor's degrees, four held master's degrees, and one held a doctorate. It is worth considering that had

they lacked formal education, their backgrounds might have differed, potentially impacting the study outcomes.

Furthermore, while all participants were interviewed individually, it's noteworthy that four of them were married. Consequently, their accounts of marital life conditions may have been influenced by their personal perspectives. Additionally, participants who were divorced or living separately may have provided different insights had their spouses been interviewed instead. Another point to consider is that although all participants were fluent in English, some seemed to struggle with using certain words specific to the Persian language. Conducting the interviews in Persian would have made it challenging to translate everything accurately into English.

The final point to note is that while participants' reactions at the end of the interviews seemed to indicate a sense of trust in the researcher, it's important to consider the historical and cultural context of Iran. In Iran, there is a tendency to view others with suspicion due to historical and cultural factors. Therefore, a researcher without prior acquaintance with the participants may perceive a certain degree of low confidence.

With respect to the various approaches to the study of human behavior, the influence of social and environmental changes on an individual's values, beliefs, and behavior should not be ignored. Much more research is needed to better understand the relationship between acculturation and mental health.

Contribution to the Field of Psychology

This study can assist clinical professionals in paying closer attention to crucial aspects of marital relationships among Iranian immigrants. It provides insights into their perspectives on the factors contributing to marital success or failure and the significant elements influencing

family dynamics. By evaluating their viewpoints, clinicians can tailor their approaches to meet the needs of Iranian immigrant couples better. When Iranian men and women refrain from using the term "sex" in conversations with others or define love in ways divergent from Western interpretations, it is essential not to attribute this solely to their shyness. Rather, it is imperative to recognize the roots of these attitudes within their unique cultural context. By understanding and respecting these cultural nuances, clinicians can assist individuals in addressing their underlying emotional and psychological challenges more effectively.

Understanding the collective culture of immigrant Iranians requires a nuanced approach. Clinicians should strive to familiarize themselves with both the positive and negative aspects of various cultural norms, including religion, culture, tradition, history, and life experiences. By incorporating these cultural insights into therapeutic interventions, clinicians can offer more tailored and culturally sensitive support to Iranian immigrant families navigating marital challenges. This research serves as a stepping stone in this endeavor, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between culture and marital dynamics within this population.

Conclusions

The current study aims to explore the acculturation experiences of Iranian-American families living in the Los Angeles, California area. However, it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations of this study. Despite the growing number of immigrants moving to the U.S., there has been limited research conducted on this specific population and subject matter.

The current study investigated the correlation between acculturation and its influence on the marital relationships of Iranian couples residing in the U.S. The findings revealed that there

were no significant gender differences concerning in how acculturation impacted their marital relationships.

The findings of this study demonstrated that during the acculturation process, individuals may adopt a bicultural orientation as a means of adapting to the host society. This approach involves successfully integrating aspects of both cultures rather than exclusively adhering to one or the other. By incorporating elements from both societies, individuals can effectively function in multiple cultural contexts and manage acculturative stress in a more adaptive and constructive manner. Before making any broad generalizations, it's important to consider the characteristics of the population sample in this study. Participants were required to be between 18 and 70 years old and have sufficient English proficiency to participate in the research. They were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate, so caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings based on this representative sample.

Additionally, it's worth noting that the responses gathered during the interviews may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Participants may have attempted to present themselves in a favorable light and minimize their problems. Therefore, while the insights gained from the interviews are valuable, they should be interpreted with this potential bias in mind.

As the primary interviewer of this research, my interest in this topic was sparked many years ago through my interactions with numerous Iranian families in Los Angeles, stemming from my work conditions. Hearing their stories of immigration to America seeking a better life revealed the varied impacts of this experience on their marital relationships. This led me to contemplate the potential benefits of conducting research on this subject, with the aim of offering insights that could improve the lives of those currently residing in America or considering immigration in the future. My aspiration is to contribute to the existing literature by shedding

light on the lived experiences of Iranian immigrants, providing a platform for their voices to be heard and their stories to be shared. Through this research, I hope to offer valuable insights that can inform future studies, policies, and interventions aimed at supporting immigrant families and promoting their well-being in the host country.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Dear participants,

I wanted to introduce myself before providing an introduction to this study. I am an Iranian-American man married to an Iranian-American woman for nearly 35 years. We immigrated to the United States approximately 26 years ago. I am conducting this study to shed light on the experiences of Iranian couples regarding the impact of immigration on their marital relationships after moving to the United States. I hope that the information gathered from this study will offer mental health counselors a deeper understanding of Iranian immigrants and Iranian culture. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact me via phone or email throughout the study if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Hassan Kalantari

xxxxxx@xxxxxxxx.xxx

xxx-xxx-xxxx

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

Title: The Impact of Acculturation on Marital Relationship of Iranian Immigrants

Investigator: Hassan Kalantari

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Brett Kia-Keating

1. I understand that this study is of a research nature. It may offer no direct benefit to me.
2. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to enter it or may withdraw at any time without creating any harmful consequences to myself. I understand also that the investigator may drop me at any time from the study.
3. The purpose of this study is: The Impact of Acculturation on Marital Relationship of Iranian Immigrants
4. As a participant in the study, I will be asked to take part in the following procedures:
Participants in the study will take 60 to 90 minutes of my time and will take place in mutually agreed upon location.

5. The risks, discomforts and inconveniences of the above procedures:

The primary risk associated with participating in this study is the potential compromise of your confidential responses. To mitigate this risk, every precaution will be taken to safeguard your privacy. Your anonymity will be preserved by excluding your name and any personal details from the interview record. Additionally, this consent form will be securely stored separately from the written transcript of your responses. The interview will be audio-recorded, and your answers will be transcribed into a document. Both the recording and document will be stored in a locked cabinet. If any data is stored digitally, it will be password protected. In the event that the

research findings are published or presented at conferences, no identifiable information will be disclosed.

6. The possible benefits of the procedure might be:

This research offers participants the chance to share their immigration experiences, providing valuable insights for those considering or recently undertaking immigration to America. By sharing how they navigated challenges in the new society and benefited from the positive aspects of acculturation, participants can help others understand both the rewards and pitfalls of the process. Additionally, by exploring the negative factors impacting their marital relationships, participants can develop strategies to address them more effectively.

7. Information about the study was discussed with me by Hassan Kalantari. If I have further questions, I can call him at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

8. Though the purpose of this study is primarily to fulfill my requirement to complete a formal research project as a dissertation at Antioch University, I also intend to include the data and results of the study in future scholarly publications and presentations. Our confidentiality agreement, as articulated above, will be effective in all cases of data sharing; If you have any questions about the study, you may contact to Hassan Kalantari at xxx-xxx-xxxx or via email at xxxxxx@xxxxxxx.xxx

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If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact to: Dr. Brett Kia-Keating, Ed.D., M.A., M.Ed. xxx-xxx-xxxx

Date: _____ Signed: _____

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

- At What age did you come to America?
- How long have you been married?
- How long have you been in the United States of America.
- Did you have children when you immigrated? If so, how many, and what age
- Were you fluent in English before immigrating?
- What is the highest degree or level of education you have attained?
- What were your job and lifestyle like in Iran, and how do they compare to here?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) What factors led to your decision to immigrate to the United States, and how has your social and economic lifestyle been in Iran?

- 2) In your view, what factors contributed to a successful marital relationship when you got married, and have your perspectives evolved since living in America for several years?

- 3) As you're aware, the roles of married men and women in Iran generally differ from those in America. If feasible, discuss how these roles have evolved and their impact on marital relationships.

- 4) Have you experienced a positive or negative change in your marital relationship since arriving in the United States, and could you elaborate on the reasons for that change?

- 5)- How do you perceive the influence of spirituality and religion on the well-being and development of marital relationships?

- 6) What is your opinion on the role of sexual relationships, and intimacy in marriage? Could you explain your experience after years of living in America?

- 7) Is it advisable to preserve one's cultural heritage? How do you perceive its positive or negative impact on the marital relationship?

8) Could you please explain your experience in adapting to the social and cultural norms of the new society? is it considered favorable or unfavorable to foster relations with other groups in society?

9) How was your social support in America, and could you share your experiences adjusting to life in the United States?

10) How do you assess the significance of financial resources, expertise, education, and social networks, including support from family, friends, and relatives, in facilitating adaptation to a new society?

11) Could you discuss the positive or negative impacts of residing in American society on your marital relationship?

12) Drawing from your immigration experiences, what factors contribute to fostering positive growth in a marriage?

13) How do you assess the impact of psychological counseling on the well-being of marital relationships?

14) Do you have any points you believe are crucial for this research but were not addressed during this discussion?

15) Do you have any suggestions for future research endeavors?