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**Identity, Gender and Acculturation gap; the struggle of young
Iranian immigrant women in the Netherlands**

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Abstract

Because of the increasing numbers of immigrants worldwide, research on acculturation process has important practical implications for the adaptation of immigrants and for the ways societies might work to improve adaptation. The purpose of this study was to examine the acculturation experiences of young women who emigrated from Iran to the Netherlands. The emphasis was on understanding the process of negotiating a changed sense of identity following immigration from Iran to the Netherlands. A qualitative analysis of six in-depth interviews of young women who immigrated to the Netherlands between ages of 10 to 13 years led to emergence of three themes including identity confusion, acculturation of women; double standards, and the challenge of acculturation gap. Different dimensions of these themes reflected the participants' experiences of ongoing transformations in their identity, gender-based restrictions and expectations and different acculturative trajectories and gaps which were induced by shifting cultural contexts. These findings and the implications of the study are discussed in relation to the existing literature on acculturation.

Chapter 1:

Acculturation and Changing Identities:

A framework for the Study of Iranian Women Migrants to the Netherland

Introduction

The main focus in acculturation researches is on the process of change that results from contact between two distinct cultural groups. Therefore, in this study like all other acculturation researches, the reader encounters the word "culture" frequently. Since there is no single definition of culture on which all scholars can agree (Segall 1986:523-564), it was found important to give a definition of culture that the researcher had in mind while using this concept in advance. For the purpose of this study, when I used the term of "culture" it mainly refers to a set of shared attitudes, beliefs, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a group. These characteristics have been further described in details where they used.

Acculturation involves the process of change that results from continuous and direct contact between two distinct cultural groups (Refield, Linton, & Herskovits 1936:149). Such changes occur in many different domains including attitudes, behaviours, values, social relationships, and cultural identities. Increasing numbers of immigrants worldwide has provided researchers with ample opportunities for examining the acculturation processes that immigrants undergo when moving to a socio-cultural system different from their own. Immigration often involves major life changes and the processes of adjustment to a new society can be extremely stressful and challenging (Tohidi 1993:175-217). While immigration may enhance opportunities and offer new possibilities, it is often accompanied by uprooting experiences and the difficult task of adjusting to a new cultural system and acquiring the norms and values of the mainstream society. Therefore, research on this issue has important practical implications for the adaptation of immigrants and for the ways societies might work to improve adaptation.

Most acculturation theory and research has assumed that all immigrants undergo a universal psychological process of acculturation and adaptation. Many cultural groups are often regarded in homogenous terms and the variability of the acculturation process along the lines of gender, age,

race, ethnicity, social class, and religious affiliation is frequently ignored (Bhatia & Ram 2001:1-18). In addition, most research with various immigrant groups has failed to adequately represent the perspectives and voices of immigrants in the process of acculturation and has relied heavily on quantitative methods for measuring individual's level of acculturation. The majority of studies in the area of acculturation have emphasized the end result and outcome of individuals' acculturation journey, by measuring the degree to which individuals' attitudes, behaviours, and values are affiliated with heritage and mainstream cultures (i.e., acculturation strategies) (Berry 1980:9-25,1987:491-511, 1997:9,2006:307). As a result, there has been little understanding of the crucial variations in the migratory experience and the complex process involved as immigrants navigate themselves between cultures (Bhatia & Ram 2001:1-18).

Iranian immigrants are from one of the many ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands. Following the 1979 Islamic revolution, Netherlands has been one of the country hosts for Iranian immigrants and refugees as asylum seekers. Many Iranians immigrated to the Netherlands mostly to escape two shocking changes within three years; The Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war in 1981. Similar to other ethnic groups in the Netherlands, Iranian immigrants have encountered many challenges in adapting to culture as a result of conflicting cultural norms, those of their parents and ethnic community and those of the mainstream society. While some research was performed on the adjustment experiences of Iranian immigrant women in the United States (Hanassab & Tidwell 1989, 1996; Hanassab, 1991, 1993; Tohidi 1993; Ghorashi 2003;) and Canada (Pjouhandeh 2004:), there has been little systematic investigation of the acculturation experiences of Iranian immigrant women in the Netherlands.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the acculturation experiences of women who had emigrated from Iran to the Netherlands. Through open-ended and in dept interviews, this study attempted to uncover the unique and complex processes of negotiating a changed sense of identity following immigration from Iran to the Netherlands. In this study, I aimed to investigate acculturation processes in the context of relevant social contextual variables including age, gender, and ethnicity that may influence immigrant women's acculturation experiences. A part of this study documents the ways in which family members can differ in the presence or absence of an acculturation gap, and thus highlighted individual differences where contextual and demographic variables are controlled. The methodology selected for this study allowed participants to describe the complexity and variability of their adjustment experiences. Hopefully the perspectives and voices of the women in this study helps to gain a better understanding of the acculturation challenges encountered by immigrant women in general and particularly Iranian immigrant women to expand upon existing theoretical frameworks for understanding acculturation processes.

Research Objectives& Questions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the acculturation experiences of young Iranian immigrant women in the Netherlands. Given the increasing recognition that age, gender, and ethnicity have a significant influence on the acculturation experiences of young Iranian immigrant women, this study aimed to gather detailed information to answer following questions through in-depth interviews;

- 1) What are the role of these variables (age, gender, and ethnicity) in shaping acculturation and cultural adaptation?
- 2) How the experiences of the participants' adjustment to the Dutch society reflect the complexity and multidimensionality of their acculturation process?
- 3) How intergenerational conflicts affect the acculturation experiences of the young Iranian immigrant women?

Relevance to Development Studies

Considering the fact that numbers of migrations are increasing worldwide, research on acculturation has an important theoretical and practical significance for social sciences and social policy development to explore the ways societies might work to improve adaptation. The acculturation process at the level of individuals constitutes a natural laboratory for studying the crucial questions of modern social cross-cultural and cultural psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology to answer some fundamental questions of social theory and social philosophy about the role of culture in people social functioning, the cultural and social factors that predetermine the actions of individuals, the relations between culture and people's agency, etc. The process of acculturation, when people were initially socialized in one cultural environment and then moved and started functioning in another one, offers an opportunity to research these quintessential questions of the interaction of agentic individuals with constraining and controlling social and cultural demands. Consequently, acculturation research could contribute significantly to the development of comprehensive account of "social structure/ culture versus agency" problem relevant to many social and human sciences (Chirkov 2009:95).

Methodology

Several recent studies illustrate how qualitative methods have been used in acculturation research and how they can provide information that quantitative methods cannot. The current study utilized in-depth interviewing, a qualitative research approach, to investigate to acculturation experiences of young Iranian immigrant women in Netherlands. The qualitative approach selected for this study was guided by combination of "in-depth phenomenological" interviewing proposed by Seidman (1998) and "heuristic inquiry" described by Moustakas (1990). The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to gain an understanding of the experience of individuals and the meaning they make of that experience.

According to Seidman (1998:61), individual behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed within the context in which it occurs. Thus, interviewing provides an opportunity for individuals to reconstruct their experiences within the context of their lives and to reflect on meaning of their experiences.

In heuristic research, "one seeks to obtain qualitative depictions that are the heart and depths of a person's experience-deptions, events, conversations, relationship, feelings, thoughts, values, and beliefs (Moustakas, 1990:38). Thus, the process of heuristic inquiry involves utilizing a qualitative methodology to obtain first-person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon under investigation and to delineate themes, meanings, and essences of experience. Moustakas (1990:41) outlines several stages of heuristic inquiry beginning with a of a clear research question that intimately relates to researcher's own identity and selfhood and sustains the researcher's interest and active involvement throughout the research process. The next stage of heuristic inquiry involve the construction of methods and procedures, most typically open-ended interviews, to help explicate the meanings and patterns of experiences relevant to the research question and encourage open expression and dialogue. An open dialogue allow for the participants' own views and concerns to emerge from the data, rather than being imposed by the researcher. The final stage of heuristic research involves the analysis and synthesis of research data beginning with timeless immersion in the data with intervals of rest and return to the data to gain an intimate understating of participant's experiences. This is followed by a process of identification of core

themes and patterns emerging in the research data and a creative synthesis and characterization of experience.

The qualitative methodology used in this study is suited to the purpose of this research project for several reasons. First, the qualitative approach allows for examining the acculturation process from an "emic" perspective by emphasizing the "actor's meaning" rather than "ethic" or observer-based "a priori" assumptions about what aspect of participants experiences are worthy of investigation or are significantly influenced by the process of immigration (Agar 1986:44). With the emphasis on representing participants' perspective and voices, this methodology enables participants to define what they find most relevant and important in their course of adjustment experiences to Dutch society.

Second, the qualitative approach allows the researcher to shift focus from measuring acculturation "outcomes" or "end results" to examining the complex processes involved in participants acculturation journey. In order to explore the complexity of the acculturation process, it necessary to ask open-ended questions that could uncover the meanings and essence of experience (Phinney, 2010:353). The open-ended inquiry in qualitative research provides an opportunity for participants to describe the important variations in their adaption to the Dutch society and multidimensionality of their acculturation experiences.

Finally, the qualitative methodology is appropriate for exploring how different social and contextual factors influence the adjustment experiences of immigrants. The open-ended inquiry allows participants to delineate the influences of pre-migration experiences, social class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and racism and prejudice in the mainstream society in shaping their experiences of adjustment to the Dutch society. In-depth interviewing also enables participants not only to describe their adaptive difficulties but also their resources and strengths in adjusting to the Dutch society.

Limitations of the Study

In general, qualitative methods limit the number of participants that can be studied comparing to quantitative methods. Because of the smaller samples, qualitative studies are typically carried out in a single location, involving a single immigrant group, with participants of a limited age range and that in general limit the diversity of the study group.

One significant limitation of this study relates to the composition of the group of participants. While all efforts were made to recruit participants of diverse backgrounds in the Iranian community, only those who identified with the Muslim religion and were of Persian ethnicity volunteered to participate in the study which categorized them in the group of dominant majority. Different **Ethnic and religious groups** may have different experiences. Therefore, their experiences may not reflect the experiences of those Iranians who experienced marginalization within the society of Iran because of their ethnic and religious affiliations in Iran.

All of the participants indicated coming from large **urban centers** in Iran, therefore the experiences of women from smaller towns and **rural areas** may be different. All of the women also indicated migrating to Rotterdam and The Hague which are among the cities of the Netherlands with great cultural diversity, thus it is likely that women living in other parts of the Netherlands may have different adjustment experiences.

Also, all women of this study identified as heterosexual. Given the prevalent myth of free **sexuality** in the Western societies, Shahidian (1999:91) argues that in Iranian communities homosexuality is seen as a "chosen" behaviour, acquired from the "bad influence" of the Western society. As a result, those who identify as homosexuals more probably distance themselves from the

community to avoid being ostracized. Therefore, the findings of this study do not reflect the experiences of those who experience oppression as women, as Iranians, and as lesbians.

Acculturation gap was one of the final themes which was described and analyzed based on one of the member of each family. For sure, the data on this part could have been more accurate and fruitful if **other members of the family** and especially the parents were included in this study to share their points of views on their acculturation degree and intergenerational gap within their families. However, for this reason it was tried to avoid assessing the effect of acculturation gap on family relations and this theme was mainly described as a part of participants' experiences during acculturation process.

Chapter Two:

The Theoretical Framework of Acculturation Models

Acculturation can broadly be defined as a process of behavioural and attitudinal change that results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous direct contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder 2001:501; Sam & Berry 2006:307; Chirkov 2009:97), and has been noted as an important predictor of adaptation for immigrants (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993:396-399).

Theoretical Models of Acculturation

Although acculturation has served as a central variable of interest in theoretical and practical significance for social sciences and social policy development in the past few decades, there has been a growing controversy regarding the conceptualization and measurement of the acculturation process. In the following sections, a critical review of the different theoretical models of acculturation is presented.

Unidimensional Model

Early theoretical models of acculturation were based on the assumption that change in cultural identity takes place along a single continuum, ranging from the immersion in the person's culture of origin to the immersion in the dominant or host culture (e.g., Cuéllar et al., Harris, & Jaso, 1980:200-215; Gordon, 1995:91-1001). More specifically, acculturating individuals were perceived as undergoing the process of discarding the attitudes and behaviours of their culture of origin while simultaneously adopting those of the mainstream culture. In other words, based on this theory, the nature of the acculturation process involves a loss in one cultural domain as the individual moves toward another cultural domain. Therefore, in time, ethnic groups would lose their distinctive cultural identity and be absorbed by the dominant culture (Gans 1979:11-13; Gordon 1964:245; Park 1928: 882-893).

Based on this unidirectional conception of acculturation, which includes assimilation theoretical models, as individuals move toward the dominant culture, they lose aspects of their original culture

and consequently the more immigrant individuals retain their native cultural identity, the more they will experience difficulties in adjusting to the mainstream culture. This review of acculturation as assimilation has informed much of the research on cultural change. The majority of such investigations have used demographic variables, such as generational status, age at the immigration, the number of years lived in the new country, proportion of life spent in the new country, and place of education as proxy measures of acculturation (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus 2000:50-63).

The most noted limitation associated with the unidimensional model is that although this model provides a parsimonious approach to measuring acculturation, it confounds the adherence to the dominant culture with the maintenance of the culture of origin (Cortés 1994:54-67; Cuéllar et al. 1995 275-304; Marín & Gamba 1996:298-312; Ryder et al., 1991:590). Also, it fails to account for numerous individual differences, and other factors that may influence adaptation to the new culture. Such factors may include the degree of pre-migration exposure to the mainstream culture, living in an ethnic neighbourhood, language education, and frequency of contact with individuals in the mainstream society (Ryder et al., 2000:49-65). It is hard to say that immigrants themselves are responsible for their failure or success in assimilating to the mainstream society as the unidimensional model assumed but it may be that these variables and not ethnic group membership have a greater impact on the psychological and social adjustment of immigrants (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal 1997:372-375). Moreover, the unidimensional model of acculturation fails to account for the fact that the mainstream society is also transformed by the presence of culturally distinctive immigrants (Sayegh & Larsy, 1993:100-109).

Bidimensional Model

In contrast to the unidimensional perspective, theorists who adopt a bidimensional perspective posit that the acculturation process can be more completely understood when heritage and mainstream cultural identities are seen as being relatively independent of one another (e.g., Berry 1980:14-22; Celano & Tyler 1990:375-382; Laframboise, Coleman, & Gerton 1993:399-402; Oetting & Beauvais 1991:660-683; Ramirez 1984:80-90; Sanchez & Fernandez 1993:647-657; Sayegh, & Larsy 1993:105-109; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez 1980:357-362; Zak 1973:894-900). This competing perspective argues that acculturation consists of two distinct independent dimensions, adherence to the dominant culture and maintenance of the culture of origin (Birman 1994: 269; Oetting & Beauvais 1991:674). Thus, the two processes of retaining the values of the culture of origin and

adopting mainstream values can develop separately along orthogonal dimensions rather than a one continuum and in opposition to each other (Pajouhandeh 2004:9).

One of the most influential and extensively researched bidimensional approaches to acculturation has been John Berry's acculturation framework. Berry (Berry 1980:9-25, 1987:491-511, 1996:296-298, 1997: 9) has identified four strategies of acculturation depending on which group (the dominant or non-dominant) is being considered: " **(A) Assimilation**, when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures, **(B) Separation**, when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others, **(C) Integration**; when there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups, **(D) Marginalization**, when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)."

Berry and his associates have conducted numerous studies to assess the acculturation strategies utilized by various acculturating groups (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1978:491-511; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki 1989:185-206; Krishnan & Berry 1992:187-212). The findings of these studies revealed that integration was the preferred mode of acculturation, followed either by assimilation or separation, whereas marginalization was the least preferred acculturation strategy. These studies also found that immigrants who adopt integration strategies are less likely to be affected by acculturative stress. In contrast, those who adopt separation or marginalization strategies experienced the greatest levels of acculturative stress, with assimilation leading to intermediate levels (Berry 1987:41-52).

Although Berry's fourfold typology of acculturation strategies has generated a number of studies that have advanced understanding of the acculturative processes, it has been criticized on a number of conceptual grounds. One major criticism of Berry's model of acculturation is related to the concepts of integration and marginalization. Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh 2001:41-56 contend that integration may not be an attainable outcome of the acculturation process for many aspects of cultural changes involving religion and fundamental alterations to value systems. Furthermore, these four underlying strategies are based on the assumption that individuals are free to choose their own acculturation patterns (Berry&Sam 1996:299-314). This notion of free choice can be challenged by the fact that in some societies, acculturating groups may be forced or discouraged from acquiring and interacting

with the dominant culture. Therefore, marginalization, for example, is not a preference or a decided choice, but a situation of discrepancy between preference and reality (Rudmin 2003:11-37).

Improving Acculturation Models

Several investigators have attempted to conceptualize acculturation as multidimensional construct involving cultural change such as changes in behaviour, language/communication, attitudes, customs, values, self-identification, preferences, and identity to acknowledge individual differences in broader dimensions. Many investigators have incorporated these dimensions into their conceptual frameworks for examining the acculturation process. For example, Szapocznik (1980:353-365) Rio, Prez-Vidal, Kurtines, Hervis, and Santisteban (1986:303-330) focused on values and behaviours of immigrant individuals to measure their level of acculturation. This model was based on the assumption that individuals will learn the behaviours needed to survive in the mainstream society before they acquire the values of the dominant culture. Kim (1979:448) argued that the level of acculturation is effectively assessed by the degree of facility one has in various methods of communication in the language of the dominant culture.

Smither (1982:63-66) proposed a multivariate model called socioanalytic theory for understanding acculturation processes. This model focused on the relationship between personality characteristics and society to measure how this interaction affects role choice and success at role performance. Padilla (1980) also indicated that the acculturation process exist in five dimensions including language familiarity, cultural heritage, ethnic identity, interethnic interaction, and interethnic distance. In a more recent study, Safdar, Lay and Struthers (2003:560-577), proposed a multidimensional model of acculturation, focusing on the influence of ethnicity, social support, bicultural competence and psychological well-being of immigrants in predicting successful acculturation.

Given the multidimensional nature of the acculturation process, measurement of cultural change based on a single indicator or even a group of strongly related variables are believed to be inadequate (Cuellar, Harris & Jasso 1980:199-217, Laroche, Kim, Hui & Joy 1996:114-131). For example, Cuellar et al. (1980) proposed that because acculturation is an intricate process involving change along cultural, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions, it is not effectively measured with a single index or score.

Despite this advancement in research, most acculturation studies continue to focus on one or two dimensions as primary measures of cultural change. Moreover, common usage of many existing acculturation measures still reflects a one-dimensional conceptualization (Felix-Ortiz, Newcomb & Myers 1994:99-115). For example, while some measures are designed to assess multiple domains of acculturation, the typical use of this measure involves placing individuals on a continuum from heritage cultural identification to Western identification, thereby endorsing the one-dimensional models of acculturation (Abe-Kim, Okazaki & Gato, 2001:236-243).

In light of the limitations evident in traditional concept and measures of acculturation, Bhatia and Ram (2001:1-18) call for a re-examination of the concept of acculturation in cross-cultural psychology, especially with respect to non-Western, non-European immigrants. These authors argue that the dominant views of acculturation (i.e., Berry's acculturation framework) are based on the assumption that all individuals and groups manifest the same kind of psychological operation during the acculturation process. According to Bhatia and Ram (2009:147-148) universal notions of culture and self fails to explain the challenges accompanying the acculturation process within a diasporic world where an immigrant cannot freely choose whether they want to assimilate, become marginalized or integrated within the larger society and it minimize the inequalities and injustices faced by many non-European immigrants as a result of their nationality, race, or gender. Drawing from postcolonial and Diaspora theories, Bhatia and Ram (2009:148) call for more situated analyses that involves continuous, contested, negotiations that will forever be in progress as an immigrant grapples with his/her place in the larger structures of the history, culture, and politics.

In light of recent theoretical developments that suggest that acculturation involves complex and multidimensional processes, that the acculturation process is not necessarily a universal process for all immigrants, and that the development of an immigrant identity is likely to be influenced by the larger socio-cultural and political contexts, it is important to examine the unique combination of social contextual variables e.g., age, gender, social class, ethnicity, race, pre-migration experiences, religion, etc) that may influence acculturation experiences. However, majority of the research in the area of acculturation has been male-centered and the guiding assumption has been that immigrant women's experiences are identical to men or simply not important enough to warrant inclusion. Therefore, in this study acculturation experiences of young Iranian immigrant women in Netherlands are examined to address some of the important social contextual variables that might influence the acculturation process including age, gender, and ethnicity.

Chapter Three:

Source of Data and Procedures

This research has used qualitative method using 12 in-depth interviews using a single sample of six Iranian immigrant women. In the following sections detailed information about the characteristics and background of the participants' of this study, the procedure that have followed before and during the interviews and finally the process of data analysis is provided.

Research participants

Data for this study has been collected from 12 in-depth interviews with six Iranian immigrant/refugee women who arrived to the Netherlands after the age of 10 and resided in the Netherlands for at least eight years since immigrating. Participants age ranged from 19 to 26 years, with two participants age 19, one age 22, two ages 24, and one age 26. The mean age was 22.65 years. Age of arrival to the Netherland ranged between the ages of 10 to 13, with two women arriving to the Netherlands at age 10, one at age 11, and three at age 13. The mean age of arrival was 11.74 years. Participants arrived in the Netherlands between the years 1995 to 2000 and the length of residence in the Netherlands ranged between 10 to 15 years with a mean of 11.4 years. All participants were university student. Five participants lived with their parents at the time; just one participant was living independently. One participant was married but her husband still living in Iran, two participants were in a romantic relationship, and three were not currently in romantic relationships. Four participants were the first child of their family.

Many of participants were living in Iran before coming to the Netherlands. Two of the participants expressed having lived in one or more European countries for a period of time less than one year, before coming to the Netherlands. Two of participant stated that they had the opportunity to visit the Netherland for a short period of time before their family's decision of immigrating to the Netherland. Most participants indicated that their parents decision to leave Iran was a sort of shock to them since they were not involved in the decision making till the very end stage of moving. One participant stated that she was told that the journey to the Netherlands was just a holiday and visit relatives. All participants left Iran while they were elementary/middle school student and noted leaving their school's friend was sort of heart-breaking to them at those days. Participants described a variety of reasons that their families decided to leave Iran. These included efforts to avoid the

post-war economic troubles. In addition to dissatisfaction with Iranian political, social, and educational system. Most left Iran in hope of achieving higher quality and life condition in terms of political, economic security, education and employment. Most of participants stated that they had relatives and other family members in the Netherlands before they came to the country. Two participants claimed that they came to the Netherlands legally by the sponsorship of the professional status or family members who were already residing in the Netherlands for years. One stated that they had the United States citizenship before coming to the Netherlands and that was how they were allowed to enter the country. The other three refused to explain in details how they entered the country but all claimed that at the time of interview they were legal residence of the Netherlands. All participants came from the urban parts of Iran. Several participants indicated that they had a little knowledge of English and no knowledge of Dutch before coming to the Netherlands.

Most participants described that they had a relatively comfortable lifestyle and belonged to middle to upper-middle class families in Iran. Most participants indicated that they were not enabling to maintain a middle class lifestyle in the Netherlands because their parents could not hold a proper-paid job in the new society. Mothers who were primarily homemakers in Iran now entered the work force in the Netherlands to contribute financially to the household. However due to language and cultural barriers the opportunities for finding paid employment were limited.

All participants identified themselves in terms of religion statute as Muslim. However, they all indicated belonging to nearly secular families and minimally attached to Islamic religious practices, even though they confronted strong pressures to practice the Muslim religion while they were living in Iran. One of the participant's parents became Christian while they were living in the Netherlands but she claimed that she was not affected at all. In the Netherlands, participants varied in the degree of their identification with the Muslim religion, but they all stated that they do not want to be recognised by their Muslim identity.

Participants identified a part of reasons for contribute in this research. For most of participants the experience of immigration was especially challenging; and they hoped that sharing their experiences would support other immigrants who have also struggled with similar issues in their process of adjustment to the Dutch society. Two of participants remarked that they were particularly distressed about the gender discrimination they encountered from their family and Iranian community and hoped that their experiences would be heard and understood by others.

Three participants perceived these interviews as a way of releasing their emotions and stress that they were challenging at home with their parents about cultural differences of culture of origin and the mainstream culture during years of living in the Netherlands. For all of participants, the motivation to participate in this study was to gain a better understanding of social studies points of views in the immigration process.

Procedure

Participants for this study has been selected through research criteria; from different Iranian communities mainly in Den Haag, Rotterdam and Zoetermeer. The criteria have been applied to select participants for this study was their current age, age of arrival to the Netherlands, socio-economic status (before and after arrival to the Netherlands), family structure and religion. First the participants selected based on criteria, they were fully informed about the purpose of this research. They also asked to be honest about the date of birth and the arrival age to the Netherlands. Interested and appropriate candidates were invited for schedule their time for the first session of interview. Participants informed about coming to two interviews and be open for extra session in the case of needed extra information. Some participants who agreed to be interviewed asked if they can introduce other potential participants who were interested to participate in this research. One participant was interviewed; however, the data from her interview were excluded from analysis since she was either unable or not motivated to talk in Farsi and data from her was mainly based on translation that I preferred to exclude to keep the harmony of the data.

Inquiry process

Participants were asked to take part in two interview sessions each may last about two hours. The time between the first and the second interview was about one month. Interviews were held in apace chosen by the participant. Four of the interviews for two participants were conducted at their home, as they preferred, whereas the remainder of the interviews were held in a public places mainly at the library of Erasmus Medical Center (Erasmus MC, Rotterdam) and Institute of Social Studies (ISS, Den Haag). One interview occurs in participant's father's restaurant during closing hours. At the beginning of the first interview, participants were fully informed about the research process, including the purpose of the research project. Participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions or to voice their concerns throughout the research process. All participants spoke primarily in Farsi, occasionally using Dutch words or phrases when they felt necessary either when they did not know the proper word in Farsi or sometimes to further clarify their experiences.

In the first interview, participants were provided with an information letter and a consent form, which they were required to sign if they agreed to be interviewed. Participants were also given the option of requesting a summary of results upon completion of the research study by providing their contact information. In addition, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire consisting of items such as the participant's current age, educational level, occupation, religion, age and date of entry to the Netherlands, and length of residence in the Netherlands. After establishing consent to participate, the interview process began by providing participants with information regarding the researcher's interests and motivation in undertaking this research. Participants were also invited to describe their motivation to participate in the study and a brief general talk mainly about their emigration to the Netherlands to create an atmosphere of respect, trust, and sharing.

The interviews were conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews. A number of questions were prepared by the researcher, but the researcher was flexible and ready to change the order of the set questions and left plenty of space for spontaneous questions, as well as silences, which invites participants to freely discuss what they perceive, is most relevant to the research question. Of course an interview schedule was used to guide the interview process. At the outset of the interview, participants were asked a central question, "What have been your experiences of adjustment to the Dutch society?" The remaining questions followed with respect to issues

identified by participants. The checklist topics were probed only if participants did not discuss them on their own. Where appropriate, the researcher shared her own experiences to validate participant's experiences and to encourage disclosure. Few of interview questions were modified as additional questions or concerns emerged from participants' reflections about their experiences of adjustment to the Dutch society. Participants were further provided with an opportunity to discuss any other relevant issues that may not have been addressed by interview questions.

The second interviews took place about one month after the first interview. The primary purpose of the second interviews was to enable further explorations and/ or clarification of issues or themes discussed in the first interview. But a new question was emerged after the first interview with the participants when they kept highlighting the gap they were challenging between their way of thinking and making decisions and those of their parents. Therefore, participants were asked questions concerning general family dynamics and the effect of acculturative differences on family relations. Participants were also provided with an opportunity to discuss new issues or concerns that were not addressed in the first interview. Fortunately, all participants take part in a second interview which gave the researcher to further discuss and clarify main issues that were emerging from the primarily data and the new emerged questions.

This part of the research was performed mainly by reading the descriptive summary to participants by the researcher since most of the participants did not feel comfortable reading in English or Farsi. This process allowed the researcher to share the meanings and themes that were derived and to seek participants' assessment of the researcher's understanding of their experiences. Except one of the participants which did not attend this meeting noting time constraints, who were provided a short talk on phone, the rest of participants took part in the meeting and made few modifications and deletions in their descriptive.

Data Analysis

The initial stage of analysis involved the reading of each interview transcript and compiling interview summaries. The process of preparing of summaries allowed the researcher to reflect on participants' experiences and to record initial insights and ideas that emerged. These were then summarized into a document highlighting areas of relevance in participants' experiences of acculturation.

In the second stage the highlighting areas were required to be judged that what components of interview transcripts were significant and "meaningful" and were relevant to the research goals. When it was difficult to discern the significance of particular passages, the researcher highlighted those segments for further examination (Seidman, 1998:).

In the next step, several initial categories and subcategories of experience began to emerge. Each category included the relevant passages and quotations across the six participants. As the researcher engaged with reading and rereading passages under each category, new insights and ideas emerged.

The final stage of analysis was then to examine all subcategories under a category to determine whether they represented a larger overriding theme that more adequately captured participants' experiences. This process of examining each category led to the emergence of four overarching themes and related sub themes.

Chapter Four:

Acculturation and Transformation in Identity

This chapter describes the participants' experiences of ongoing transformations in the acculturation process with the main focus on three major issues of identity, gender relations, and acculturation gap. Participants shared their experiences that how they struggle in their daily life in making decisions about the distinctions between "right" and "wrong" as they encountered contradictory expectations of the Dutch and Iranian cultures. Many participants indicated that how the conflicts of the two cultures have made them confused and scared of her identical signature in the future. Marjan, for example, described: "I always think that what I would be in next 10 or 20 years if I follow the way that my parents dreamed about it for me. I might end up like Mrs. nobody...and then what? That makes me scared."

"Adjusting to "Double Standards"

The first main theme is that of identity confusion, which reflects participants' experiences of ongoing transformations in their identity, induced by shifting cultural contexts. One way of studying the acculturation process is focusing on *social cognition* (e.g., Wong-Rieger, 1984:153-184). This line of research investigates cognitive elements, such as cultural identity, attitudes toward members of the new culture and changes in values as part of the acculturation process. This theme emerged to gain a deep description of the participants' experiences and the dynamics of their negotiation of their old and new identities, which should lead to understanding of the meanings that immigrants construct for their functioning in a new society. Here, I tried to reflect some of the challenges and stressors that the participants faced and described in their daily life caused by conflicting expectations of the Dutch and Iranian cultures.

Both Neda and Sahar, for example, indicated feeling confused about deciding what the "right" thing is to do, given the conflicting expectation of Iranian and Dutch cultures.

Like the most important thing is probably the culture shock that you get trying to determine between the Iranian values that you obtain from your upbringing, from your family and what you are exposed to in the new environment. A lot of times, I get really confused. What is right, what is wrong? ... According to our culture it is wrong, bad and taboo, but it is completely

accepted here. I am only 20 years and I came here ten years ago. My parents tell me you are young and inexperienced but when I see my classmates they have the freedom that I may just dream about....So who is right? That is one of the challenges that I face every day. (Neda)

I cannot decide which way is right. I grew up in the Iranian culture that I do not appreciate it at all. I accepted many things that I was not agree with just because of my parents and when I was complaining about them, they were blaming the society, I mean Iran. Now that we are living here, they say that we are Iranian and we have to respect our norms. I don't want to live like this; I like to keep the bests of the both societies. I don't know! (Sahar)

Both Sahar and Neda further noted the ongoing sense of discomfort and struggle they experienced as they encountered contradictory expectations of the Dutch and Iranian cultures. Sahar indicated, " I feel that I waste too much energy to figure out what is right, I have to think in two very different ways to make a decision and most of the time I cannot see myself in the decisions that I make and sometimes I feel I'm being torn apart."

Several participants provided examples of the many different areas of their life in which they experienced being torn apart by conflicting expectations. As Samira indicated, "The thing is that we have to consider "double-standard" for all aspects of our lives, sometimes I feel that I cannot define who I am, that makes me scared.

Social Activities; the Feeling of Isolation

Participants described struggling to make their own decisions about what to do or how to behave with regards to social activities, independent living, marriage, and career choices. Social activities were one of the domain in which participants experienced being torn apart by conflicting expectations.

Nasim, for example, described daily experiences of feeling discomfort about being isolated from her peers because of his father.

"My friends usually go out at weekends to have drinks and chat. I am young and I like to join them once a while, but my father thinks that girls who attend to these kinds of activities are not "good girls". I went with them so many times and nothing bad happened, we had drinks, enjoyed the music and had lots of fun, but every time that I want to go I have to lie to my dad, I usually say that I am going to study at one of my friend's house or library. I feel guilty and bad

when I am with my friends but according to the Dutch culture I have not done anything wrong, of course I lied to my dad but you know I should not feel guilty to enjoy a night out at weekends with my friends, right? I don't want to be isolated from my Dutch friends' community because of him." Nasim said.

Nasim further discussed how she struggles to make her father understand the way she would like to spend her time outside of home, or to engage in activities that are considered more acceptable activities to do within the Dutch context. For example she described that socializing with her friends or going to a nightclub are activities, which her father considers unacceptable.

Shamim on the other hand described her experiences with the cultural conflicts as below:

I usually avoid being involved with my friends' social activities because I do not have the nerve to bring up the case at our house. It usually causes a lot of argue between my dad and my mom because they have disagreements on ways of Dutch socializing. My father went to university in England and he is more open about "western social activities" than my mom. So although my dad does not mind that I enjoy some quality time with my friends, I usually cannot go because of her. And to be honest I am 24 and after 14 years of being in the Netherlands I do not have any close Dutch friends.

Independent Living

Independent living was another domain in which participants experienced being torn apart by contradictory expectations. Several participants described struggling to make their decisions regarding moving away and living independently from their families. Marjan, for example, described feeling torn about moving away from her family given all they have done for her and how much they need her help, even though she, at times, feels exhausted by demanding family responsibilities.

I sometimes think of moving out but at the same time I think it would be too selfish, I know that my parents risked their lives for me to have a better future and now I must compensate. They are not very good with the language and if I leave them, I make their life harder and that is not fair to them, I don't know, maybe that is because of our Iranian culture, we scarifies a lot for each other.

Shamim also discussed feeling divided between moving away from her family and doing what she wants to do, and staying with her family because of her family's close attachment to her.

I am the last child of our family and the only daughter. I have two elder brothers that have got married years ago and they are not living in the Netherlands. I guess that's why my parents are really attached to me and if I want to go and live for myself it's like that I am abandoning them, especially that they are quite old and I am also worry that if something happens to them while I am not with them, I might feel guilty for the rest of my life. It is another part of our Persian culture, I know so many other people with the same status in our city that are living apart with no problems or pressure of guilt.

Marriage

For several participants, an additional domain of their life in which they experienced ambivalence, involved their struggles to make their decisions regarding marriage. Shamim, for example, spoke about how complicated it has become for her to make decisions regarding the appropriate time to get married, as she is exposed to conflicting ideas by the Dutch and Iranian cultures.

In Iran, there is a certain age for girls to get married which in my mind it is too early, I don't know, what I am saying is that you have to feel ready and fall in love in order to get married and it doesn't matter if you are 20 or 30, I mean the readiness could not be just based on your age. And that is how my Dutch friends do it. But in our Iranian culture if you don't get married at a certain age it will translate to that you were not desirable enough to attract a suitable guy, and that is another stress that I feel floating between two cultures [Dutch and Iranian cultures].

She further stated that:

It is not that I don't want to have a family or child, but I feel I am still dealing with the process of changing, I don't know if it is true for every other girls or for some of them, but I feel that I did not build enough to have my own family at the moment, who knows who I will be in the next year? Maybe my mind will totally change about my standards for marriage next year and then what should I do?

Marjan had encountered conflicts which were caused by facing two different cultures, the ethnic culture of his father and the culture of mainstream society regarding the process of marriage.

I started a relationship with an Iranian guy who was born in the Netherlands. I can say he was more Dutch than Iranian. Our relationship was going very well and I thought that we might have a future together. But from the very beginning my father asked me repetitively when we are planning to get married. After a year he [his boyfriend] suggested me to live together for a while to see if things work out with us, my parents disagreed and suggested to get married before starting to live together and that is how we were broken. These things are very complicated; we even have disagreements with Iranian-oriented second generations. It is too complicated.

Career Choice

Another domain in which participants experienced feeling confused about their identity by conflicting expectations was in pursuing their academic and professional goals. Neda, for example, spoke about her continuing struggle to do what she loves to do rather than what her parents saw as "good" for her in order to have a good future.

You are not really forced as Dutch kids to do...you do what you want to do. You do what you like and what you think that you might be good at and if it doesn't go well as you wished you change it in the middle and go and try another thing. In the Netherlands and many other countries I guess, there are tones of possibilities as career choices that might be suitable for you. But for Iranians you might be either a doctor or an engineer, otherwise it means that you were not smart enough to be one. I always wish to be a dancer, when we came to the Netherlands, I thought I can follow it professionally but you know what my parents think? In their mind there is no difference between a dancer and a prostitute, I am sorry to say that, but that is the reality, I cannot even dream about it, or I must leave my family forever.

She further explained that this wrong image of a woman as a dancer was taken from past days of Iran, before Islamic revolution, that dancers of clubs were paid to have sex with some members of the audience after their performances. She described fearing that she might end up denying herself and things she would like to do in the future because of what she is expected to do.

Samira indicated that pursuing higher level of education is something that is expected from her by her Iranian family friends, yet it is not necessarily the case in Dutch families.

If you get education here or not is not a big deal. ... Yes, I know that it could be an advantage for some kind of jobs, but if you don't get it, it doesn't mean that you will be jobless or you might die out of hunger. In our family and many other Iranian families, parents are ashamed of children who do not have university degree. My sister, for instance, wants to be a doctor, I know she is very smart and I am sure that she will make it, but it is very annoying when your parents underestimate you just because you do not want to be a doctor!

Concluding Remarks of “The Question of Identity”

In summary, the theme of identity confusion reflects participants' experiences of their daily struggles in making decision about what to do, or how to behave, as they encountered contradictory expectations of the Dutch and Iranian cultures. Their descriptions highlight the ambivalence and confusion they experienced in making their decisions in several different domains of their lives, including the type of social activities that were appropriate to engage in, whether to live independently or live with their families, the appropriate time to get married, and the type of educational and career choices that were acceptable.

Chapter Five:

Acculturation and Gender Relations

The second main theme that emerged is the gender aspect of acculturation. This aspect of acculturation is mainly discussed here as an assumption of vulnerability of female gender and more restricted standards for female siblings in Iranian culture and their conflicts with culture of the mainstream society.

Female as a “Vulnerable Creature”?

One way in which participants felt the conflict between two cultures (the Iranian and Dutch cultures) was the sight of Iranian culture of women as a vulnerable gender and in need of protection from getting hurt and from being taken advantage of. Several participants described instances in which they were perceived as more vulnerable than men. They discussed their discomfort with being perceived in this way and in some cases challenged their family's view of them as more vulnerable. Sahar, for example, described how her father's view of her as more vulnerable seemed to justify his sexist values and practices.

I remember the very early days that we came to the Netherlands and our life was not good, I mean we had a better economical status in Iran comparing to the Netherlands. So often I was complaining that why we came here and my father kept telling me that if I stayed in Iran, I had to wear veil and I could not win the competition over men to get a job and I would have been dependent on a man for my whole life...and now that we are here [The Netherlands] he exerts those sexist values. He wants to protect every single aspect of my life with the excuse that women are more vulnerable creature. Sometimes I feel I am still living in Iran...

Some of the participants noted how they were seen as more vulnerable in their sexual relationships with men in their social life. Neda, for example, challenged her mother's view of her as vulnerable to being sexually taken advantage of when on a date.

I have a younger brother who is 18; he is allowed to do "everything" and goes "everywhere" whenever he wants. But if I want to go out with my boyfriend, I am warned by my mom for being sexually abused by him, every time, believes me every time...

She further stated that she feels upset knowing that their parents no longer be concerned about her when she gets married. "I know it is not because they are worried about me but they just care about the "honor" of the family." The later statement of Shamim further confirms the idea of women being seen as more vulnerable without the protection of a male figure, such as a father or husband.

I am married, my husband is not here, it is a long story but my point is even if we were in Iran, I should have lived in my own house. But now when I tell them that I want to move out and have my own place, they disagree. They say if your husband was here it was another story but now we are responsible to take care of you.

Gender and sexual behaviour

The other factor that many participants described having experienced differential treatment was gender-related standards regarding their sexual expression. Participants described that they faced stronger prohibitions against dating or being engaged in premarital sex, compared to their male siblings. They also revealed that based on their Persian culture and believes women's sexuality should be controlled and women should conceal their sexual desire from themselves and others.

When it comes to this stuff, I don't appreciate our culture [her ethnic culture] at all. We never talk about sex or sexual desires at home. My father still doesn't like me to watch the movies with sexual scenes. He doesn't go to cinema with me because of the same reason, it makes him really uncomfortable. (Marjan)

Oh sex...it kept hidden in Iranian lives. When we arrived to the Netherlands we were living in a room, all of us. At nights when we wanted to sleep my parents were keeping the largest distance from each other. I've never seen them even kissing...Now you know how they think about sex. The most sexual things that we discuss at home are the jokes that my brother says, nothing more. My mom doesn't like me to even laugh at those jokes [she laughed]. (Neda)

Gender and Inequality

Some of the participants shared their discomfort that they encountered because of an unequal attitude of their parents between them and their male siblings due to gender which according to them is mainly originated from their ethnic culture. Nasim, for example, described how his brother explorations, or those of other Iranian men in their relatives, were explicitly encouraged and how men have greater freedom with respect to dating and engaging sexual activity.

I have three brothers and I am the only girl of our family. My mom and also my dad encourage my brothers to have girls around, my mom always says it is good that they have experiences; she means sexual relationships, before they get married. Otherwise they fall in love with a "wrong girl" and they [her parents] cannot do anything. But if I want to have sex, for the same reason, oh god it is a taboo.... My mom says if I want to get married with a good guy, I should have not sex till then, I guess she has no clue how these rules does not applied to the Dutch culture, she doesn't know that having sex before marriage doesn't make you a "bad girl" in the Netherlands. I have Dutch friends with very good families. They can easily talk about this stuff at home at least with their mother, but the only sexual thing that I discussed with my mom was me having my first period....when my parents deal about this stuff with my brothers they are like totally different people, I mean they talk like open-minded people, you know they are very westernized but for me it is like we are living in a small village in Iran, "no sex before marriage"!

I am being questioned for everything that I do and everywhere that I go. Even if I am at school my mom calls me so many times and asks me questions about what I am doing and what I am into. Right now you have seen that she called me two times to make sure if I am still with you...but my brother can go out with girls and my mom cannot even ask her who these girls are, because he doesn't like to be questioned...and it is accepted. (Sahar)

Sahar and some other participants further stated that no matter what their parents' attitude toward sexual expression is, it should be equal for them and their male siblings

Samira indicated that how the experience of sexual expression of her elder sister caused her to suppress her sexual desires.

I have an older sister that had some experiences of having boyfriend when she was a teenager. At first she was trying to hide the fact that she had boyfriend and I also had to be supportive that our parents don't find out about it. But since they had found out we had a lot of drama...they [the parents and her sister] were fighting like every day at home and made my life miserable for a long time. I don't want to make my younger sister go through the same experience as I did and that is why I was never involved in a relationship...I hate his boyfriends, I feel I hate all the guys, sometimes I think I will die alone.

Concluding Remarks of "Acculturation and Gender Relation"

Overall, participants' descriptions highlight the centrality of gender to their experiences within Iranian and Dutch cultural contexts. Their descriptions also reveal that they engaged in a critical examination of sexist values and practices that they encountered within both Iranian and Dutch cultures. Evident in their descriptions is the desire to not be confined by gender role expectations and to be treated equally and irrespective of their gender. According to the participants their parents justified controlling their daughter's sexual behaviour by reminding their daughters that they were concerned about the negative attitudes they would encounter in Iranian community. More specifically, they feared that their lack of control over their daughter's sexual behaviour would greatly damage their reputation and negatively impact their chances for getting married in the future. A few participants indicated that they were confronting their parents "old-fashion ideology" about sexual behaviours of Iranian culture because they were far from the social changes of Iran. Sahar, for example, said:

I am still in touch with many of my old friends that I had in Iran. They have boyfriends and for many of them their parents are aware of the fact that they have sexual relationships. My parents are living their lives with the Iranian culture that they have in mind from ten years ago. The Iranian culture has changed a lot during these years, I think if we were living in Iran I had more freedom...I don't know, maybe not.

Chapter Six:

Acculturation Gap

Another theme that emerged in this study was the acculturation gap which is caused by difference in patterns of acculturation of parents and their children and may lead children face distinctive challenges in family adjustment. This theme came to my attention after summarizing the first interviews, when I noticed that the participants were challenging many conflicts that had raised because of the changes in cultural attitudes, values, and behaviours that result from contact between two distinct cultures and that is how acculturation gap has been conceptualized by many scholars (Berry, trimble, & Olmedo, 1986: 291-324; Phinney, 1990). Therefore the second interview started with the main question that how participants judge the acculturation degree of them and that of their parents. All participants indicated that they are more Dutch than their parents.

If I want to choose which culture I prefer better, I would say Dutch, because I have given more freedom to express myself for different aspects of who I am. I like the fact that I can say what I want to say, but that in my Iranian culture translate to being rude. You have to accept what your parents say, you have to agree with them all the time about everything [in Iranian culture]...(Nasim)

Iranian culture is good when you are in Iran. I always say that to my parents, when I am in the Netherlands I want to live like a Dutch, I like to go to the restaurants and other public places that they go, so many of my friends say that the Dutch TV is the worst but I like to watch that, my parent never watch TV or any show in Dutch. They prefer to watch some Iranian movies that they have watched a thousand times but nothing in Dutch. (Neda)

I feel more comfortable when I am in a Dutch community rather than an Iranian one. Within the Iranian one I am always worry about my attitudes and about others' [other Iranians] judgments; my parents are also more critical of my behaviour when we are with other Iranians. I guess that makes me more Dutch than an Iranian, right? (Shamim)

I guess I would be something in between, I like to keep bests of the both [both cultures], but yes, if I want to compare, for sure I am more Dutch than them [her parents], they still have difficulties in the language [Dutch language]... (Sahar)

Elder Siblings; Being Less Assimilated?

Later, the participants were asked to share differences (if there is any) that had encountered in acculturation process and those of the other members of their family. Those participants who were the elder child of the family seemed to had faced an additional pressure to comply with parental rules and cultural practices that was not shared by younger children. Such was the case with Samira, 22, who emigrated from Iran when age 12. Samira has two, sisters aged 27 and 14 years. The older sister is not living with them anymore and she is the eldest child at home. Samira's behaviour was closely monitored by her parents growing up because as the elder daughter, she was expected to serve as a role model to her younger sister. She said,

They want me to behave really good and more obedient so that my younger sister can follow my footsteps and learn from me... When I was 14, at the same age that one of my sisters is now, they didn't let me go out. My father had told me that a good girl should be at home before sunset [she laughed]...They were stricter on me when I was at her age than they are with her. They would say, "If you don't respect and obey us, she [her younger sister] won't."

According to our participants, parents often expected their eldest child to stay home with them, where they might watch together television programs in their heritage language or discuss family matters or having other Iranian friends and relatives around. Younger siblings, who were typically more independent and assimilated, were given more freedom to go out. It seemed that parents became more lenient with their later-born children, which according to Pyke (2005:501-502) might be because of their own acculturation over time or to fatigue in enforcing strict standards especially when younger assimilated siblings resisted parental rules. Sahar has grown accustomed to spending more time at home with her parents and still living with them while her younger brother left them to live independent two years ago. She said:

"I am more traditional when it comes to spending time with my parents whereas my brother likes to live alone and spend more time with his friends. Once I discussed to leave home and live my own life, it was such a disaster, my mom cried and did not talk to me for a week, I felt guilty

and I stayed with them. I think my parents lean on me and expect me to stay home with them because I am the oldest.”

Language competence

Furthermore, the participants who were the eldest child of the family indicated that the language gap between their parents and the younger siblings brought them another pressure in family relations and in the process of acculturation. Marjan, for example, stated that her younger sisters used the communication gap to resist parental directives but since she can fluently speak in Farsi, she is almost the only child of the family who was disciplined based on Iranian culture.

My sisters cannot understand Farsi very well and they can barely speak in Farsi. My parents' Dutch level of knowledge is the same as my sisters' Farsi. So, they cannot get involved in a discussion with a same language and I guess that's why my parents prefer to do not argue with them. They are living totally different lives comparing to me without being questioned. Although, my parents ask me to help them discipline my sisters, but I really don't like it because I do not approve their way, sometimes they [her parents] get mad at me, but I don't care.
(Marjan)

Samira, shared her worries about her relationship with her younger sister since their parents made her to be involved in discipline her because her parents cannot communicate with her younger sister any more.

“I don't know if it is because of the generation gap or is just as easy as language matter, but my parents cannot deal with my sister's stuff anymore. They make me spying on her and she knows about it. She does not feel that close to me as she used to and that really hurts.”

In the other hand, those participants who were not the eldest child of the family were not completely happy to be left out of the center of family interaction and felt excluded from the close units of understanding and communication. Sometimes language gaps were to blame. Sometimes the parenting style of mother of the family was questioned by the participant. Nasim, for example,

envied the closeness her older brother shares with their mother. Nasim is not included in their close relationship, largely because she is not as fluent as her elder brother is in Farsi. She explained,

Like when they're in the kitchen talking, or when we are in an Iranian restaurant or a wedding, I know if I tried to be involved in their talk, it would stop immediately, I wouldn't fit in. Sometimes I wish it was different. I guess [it would be] if I spoke Farsi better.

My mom prefers to talk over phone with my sister in-law or my aunt rather than me when I am at home right in front of her. She calls them and talk, mainly gossip about our other Iranian friends, for hours. I cannot gossip in Farsi. You know, the issues that they gossip about are not interesting to me. If I want to try, and I actually did, the conversation will be over in five minutes and then we become silent. Not that I am mean but I just tried to be more close to my mom. (Nasim)

Shamim indicated that she thinks she communicates better with his father "because he's more open". She added that his father tended to be more lax with her and focused on the emotional rather than instrumental aspects of his fatherhood.

It's strange that I feel more related to my father as a girl comparing to my mom, but he listens to my stories better, even though he might not be agree to what I am telling him, but he tries to understand. He's more open [than her mom]. If I say the stuff to my mom she starts to argue, sometimes my father helps me out and then they start to argue about me. That's why I usually try to talk with my dad privately, when she [her mother] is not around.

Final Words: Benefits of Acculturative Differences in the Immigrants' Families

Usita and Blieszner (2002:269) pointed out that there is a tendency in the immigration literature to focus on problems, resulting in overly negative depictions of immigrant families without attention to their strengths. To avoid this bias, the participants were also asked to describe any benefits their family derived from acculturative differences among the member of their families and any appreciation they might feel for their differences. Several participants reported that their experiences that have been through during years of being in a new society provided them with

certain advantages. They described living in two very different societies gives them the sense of confidence and power that they can survive better in a non-optimal and difficult situation.

Sometimes when I look at my life and remember the past, the things that I have been through, I feel strong. I know that I had so many difficult days in my life, and they are not over, I will have difficulties later in my life as well, but I am lucky to be this experienced at this age. Problems will be easier to be solved when you are more experienced, I hope. (Samira)

When I am talking to my friends, I mean my white Dutch friends, and we are discussing about things, I feel wiser. I can be happier in many difficult situations than them and I think that is because of my past. (Shamim)

Several participants stated that despite the tension with their parents in the acculturation process, they still appreciate their cultural influence. Sahar, for example, said, "It helps us to see the other side." She added that their acculturative differences are especially helpful to understand other immigrants better:

I like the fact that I can relate to other Iranians or other immigrants easier than my Dutch friends. You know, I feel for them. We share so many similar experiences and that helps to be close to many other people in the Netherlands. When you know another culture it is like you know another language, even if you don't appreciate it, it facilitates the communication [She smiled].

A few participants appreciate the sense of responsibility and concern their parents directed toward them. They indicated that even though they expressed immense resentment toward their parents' traditionalism, they also valued their sense of obligation toward them. Neda, for example, indicated that although she prefers to be independent and live her own life, she is nonetheless grateful that her parents offer their support. She said,

Because of their Iranian values, they have a mentality where they have to take care of me. They always say, "If you need help, you just come to me." The sense that they will be supportive and feel responsible for ever [she smiled] is very pleasant. So in that way I appreciate their thoughts.

Marjan also explained,

I know that their [her parents'] behaviour sometimes could be really annoying and seems overprotective but the idea of having their supports for ever is such a relief. The feeling that you are not alone and are taken care of is really sweet. Having the idea that they ...you know... [She had tears in her eyes and stopped talking].

Concluding Remarks of “Acculturation Gap”

In summary, the theme of Acculturation Gap reflects participants' experiences of acculturative dissonance in the sample immigrant families. Participants revealed several dimensions of this experience, including different roles, language competence, and parental treatment of older and younger siblings contributed to their acculturative differences. Overall, participants' descriptions of these various dimensions highlighted an existence of family tension created by cultural gaps between parents and (more) assimilated children. In particular, elder children were more prone to be treated and discipline based on the culture of origin comparing to the younger siblings which were more assimilated. However, it is impossible to ascertain from the current study the extent to which the greater freedom, independence, rebellion, and affection associated with later-born siblings is due to the forces of assimilation or birth order and differential parental treatment, especially since their siblings were not interviewed. As the data provide only a snapshot view of the relationships among family members, it is unclear how these cultural gaps will affect family dynamics and quality of their relationships. For sure, more research that directly compares acculturative gaps among family members is needed to ascertain whether this pattern is widespread in immigrant families, but some of the tensions and differences that were brought up by the participants of this study are consistent with the results of a study of Pyke (2005:504-507) which addressed acculturative differences among siblings in Asian immigrant families.

Although the current study highlights the many kinds of conflicts and tensions associated with acculturative dissonance of parents and children, but I found it pleasant to end the interviews with giving the participants the opportunity to think and define some of the ways that they appreciate when members of the family follow different pathways of acculturation in our final words.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion

The degree an individual experiences acculturation has been found to be contingent on a number of factors including their motivation for migrating (e.g., voluntary or involuntary), individual factors, cultural factors, and factors related to the migrant experience (Berry, 2001:617-619). Berry (2001:619) has suggested that each individual migrant's idiosyncratic demographical and psychological characteristics influence their acculturation. Individual factors include age, gender, education and socioeconomic status as well as language acquisition ability. These individual factors have in common the ability to increase familiarity with the new culture and lower the amount of uncertainty experienced. For example, younger immigrants, who tend to acculturate faster than their parents, may experience conflicts between their parents' cultural values and those of the host culture (Triandis, 1994:189) or there is evidence related to females being at higher risk for problems than males (Moghadam, Ditto, & Taylor, 1990:348).

The Question of Identity

An important aspect of the young women's experiences of adjustment to the Dutch society was captured by the overarching theme of the identity confusion. The identity confusion represents the young women's experiences of transformations in their identity, induced by shifting cultural contexts. Given that immigration exposed these young women to new and contradictory ideas and experiences, their descriptions demonstrate that their identities were floating in state between the two cultures. In particular, the experience of immigration has compelled them to a question and re-examine previously internalized values and expectations of Iranian family and community in light of the new cultural context. Their descriptions reflect their ongoing struggles with shifting cultural expectations and the contradictions, complexities, and uncertainties regarding their identity.

Postmodern and postcolonial conceptualizations of immigrant identity development suggest that identity is a dynamic and shifting concept that is embedded within a larger socio-cultural context (Bhatia & Ram 2009:141). They argue that in contrast to the traditional view of acculturation

concepts such as "integration" as an optimal acculturation strategy (Berry & Sam 1997:10), the notion of "diasporas" have become increasingly utilized to understand immigrant experiences. "Diaspora studies", refers to immigrant communities who distinctly attempt to maintain connections and commitments to their homeland and recognize themselves and act as a collective community (Toloya 1996:28). Bhatia and Ram suggest that the experiences of many non-European diasporic communities represent the sense of constantly negotiating between past and present, tradition and modernity, and the self and other. However, such negotiations have not been adequately recognized or understood in many existing models of acculturation. They argue that in a period of increasing globalization, the rapid creation of multinationals, the formation of diasporic communities, massive flows of transmigration, and border crossings, acculturation becomes increasingly complicated. Rather than thinking of immigrants as moving in a linear trajectory from culture A to culture B, (Hermans and Kempen 1998:1117) they suggest we should think of acculturation and identity issues as contested and mixing and moving. In consistent with this argument, the young women's experiences which were described in the former chapter reflect continuous back and forth negotiations between incompatible cultural expectations of Iranian and Dutch cultures. The following sections discuss the central dimensions of the participants' descriptions in relation to the research literature.

One important dimension of the Identity Confusion revealed by the young women in this study was daily experiences of negotiating between here and there by conflicting expectations of Iranian and Dutch cultures. The exposure to contradictory expectations often left them confused and uncertain about what to do or how to behave in several different domains of their life. In particular, they questioned and were questioning themselves about the type of social activities that were appropriate to engage in, whether to live independently or remain with their families, the appropriate time to get married, and the type of educational and career choices that were acceptable. Several researchers have suggested that immigrants' identities are often caught between two different and often contradictory systems of values and beliefs, some identities relate to membership in the host culture, and others reflect attachment to values of their heritage culture. The experience of feeling caught between the two cultures can often lead to confusion in role expectations, values, and identity (Padilla & Perez 2003:42-44; Nekby& Rodin 2007:23-24; Espin 1999:164). The young women in this study similarly described their discomfort and uncertainty in distinction between "right" and "wrong" toward their behaviours in several areas of their life given the contradictory

expectations of the Dutch society and those of Iranian family and community. That is what some participants shared as a threat to their individuals' identity which may caused them "isolated" or marginalized from the mainstream communities. These findings are consistent with the results of a study with young immigrant women in Canada, that suggest many young Iranian women feel "confused and torn apart" between the cultural values of their parents and those of the mainstream Canadian cultures (Pajouhandeh 2004:92).

Acculturation and Gender Relations

Another issue that was noted by the participants of this study was the restrictions that young women Iranian immigrant were encountered on the basis of their gender. Gender has also been found to affect the outcome of the immigrants' acculturation. As previously was shown by the work of scholars there is evidence related to females being at higher risk for problems than males which may depend on the different treatment of women in the host country compared with the country of origin. When there is a major difference between the host culture and the culture of origin, women may attempt to adopt new roles in the host society which may cause them to experience conflicts with their own native culture and traditional roles (Moghadam, Ditto, & Taylor 1990:347). Although, the centrality of gender in the majority experience has been noted by several researchers (Espin 1997, 1999; Tohidi 1993, Stevens et al. 2007), but, to my knowledge, the gender-related phenomena of acculturation was among the very first studies to address this issue of the young women Iranian immigrants in the Netherlands.

The descriptions of the young women in this study indicated that their struggles to adapt to a new cultural environment were especially complicated by gender-based cultural prescriptions. Related to this, women in this study indicated that they were much more restricted in their freedom, have to obey more rules, and are much more tied to the home than men. This might affect the acculturation attitudes of young women if the culture which is more appreciated at home is more close to their culture of origin, particularly if there is a significant contrast between that culture and the host culture. Previously, there were some evidences of gender difference perspective of acculturation attitudes that suggest male immigrants were found to have a higher level of language acculturation comparing to women (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001:24; Wood & Eagly 2010:640). Since the gender role has become more egalitarian in recent years (Wood & Eagly, 2010:630), it is important to address how differently women and men are influenced by the values of the origin and host culture in their

acculturation process. Including the fact that other researchers who have examined gender differences in traditional attitudes contend that women are more eager to leave traditional norms and acculturate at a faster pace than men (Hojat et al. 2000:428;Zhang, Mandl, & Wang 2011: 126), these restrictions might make the acculturation process more frustrating and stressful for them than it could be.

Another gender-based issue that was brought up with the participants as a restriction forced by the original culture conflicting with the mainstream culture was a defined desirable sexual behaviours for women. They draw contrasts between their own values concerning virginity and sexuality, which might be caused by the influence of mainstream society or the universal cultural changes, and their parents' generation. Irrespective of their actual sexual experiences, and privately held views, the young women stated that wanting to be a virgin bride is no longer acceptable public narratives. These findings are consistent with the results of a study with young Turkish adults in Turkey (Ozyegin, 2009:113-120).

Also the participants revealed that they tried to remain silent about their relationship or avoided to have one to escape arguing with their parents, meanwhile their male sibling had no prohibition in their relationships. According to them, male siblings are inclined to enjoy more power and authority because of their gender. Some of the participants added that even they parents were not enabled to value the norms of the mainstream society about sexual behaviour and activities at least they should have ruled out them and their male siblings equally. This can draw attention to the evolving awareness of the young women of gender equality which is enforced to be practiced in the mainstream society conflicting with the origin culture.

A few participants noted that although their parents tried to treat them dominantly with the gender-perspective values of the origin culture they (their parents) are not aware of social and cultural changes that have been occurred since they left their homeland. Meanwhile, they are far from the changes that are happening in the mainstream culture because of the lack of communications mainly due to lack of language proficiency and/or restricted networks in the major society. This might create more complex discrepancies in values between children and their parents as a result of differences in acculturative degree among family members not only because of the mismatches of the culture of origin and the host culture but also those of that had occurred because

of the dynamic and changes within the ethnic culture. This issue is addressed more in details in the next part of our discussion.

Acculturation Gap

Another issue which were emerged in the later interviews was the matter of acculturation gap. The focus was on gaps, conflicts, and tensions that acculturative differences create between generations, including the frustration of children who feel their parents' traditional values and rules are out of touch with the reality of their lives in the Netherlands. In general, Iranian society tends to stress norms of collectivist obligation to one's family and society whereas Western societies, especially the Netherlands, emphasize individualism and independence. Children of Iranian immigrants must juggle these two distinct cultural systems and confront the conflicts, contradictions, and tensions that they can create in their lives. The kind of tensions observed in immigrant families could resemble tensions that would have occurred if the family had never left the homeland. Nonetheless, scholars have noted that immigration and exposure to western cultural precepts can accelerate and exacerbate such tensions (Kibria, 1993; Min, 1998). Furthermore, when these tensions and conflicts arise in the host country, they tend to be framed in terms of the conflict between ethnic retention and acculturation and thus take on an entirely different meaning than they would in the homeland. In the current study, the subjective experience of young Iranian women in immigrant families was described which frame the differences in terms of differential patterns of acculturation.

Increasingly, researchers have not only been interested in how acculturation influences individual health and wellness (Pawliuk et al., 1996:111-121), but also in how the acculturation process influences family relationships in immigrant families (Gil & Vega 1996:440-453; Hwang & Wood, 2009:123-138; Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000:341-350; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Portes & Zhao 1993:74-96). This category of study emerged after the first interview with the participants when they kept highlighting the gap they were challenging between their way of thinking and making decisions and those of their parents. The process of acculturation may create discrepancies in values between children and adults that affect family relationships (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder 2006:313-316). Some researchers have specifically examined acculturation gaps, which are thought to develop between parents and children and negatively affect family relationships (Lau et al., 2005:367-375; Sluzki 1979:367).

Several of the young Iranian women of this study revealed that their parents were especially expecting them to behave, adopt and uphold the ethnic values and practices of their parents. They were also expected to be more obedient and respectful toward parents and rarely expressing disagreements whereas the later-born children, which based on the definition of Berry and Sam (1997:297) were more assimilated, were described as disinterested in or ignorant about ethnic practices, less involved with family members, and rebellious. In such cases, a gap between the other child and the parents might be less problematic for different reasons. First, since the parents could feel confident that the cultural traditions would be maintained by at least one child, they are fairly less strict about their other children's appreciation of the culture of origin (Phinney 2010:353). Also, it could be that parents became more lenient with their later-born children because of their own acculturation over time or to fatigue in enforcing strict standards especially when younger assimilated siblings resisted parental rules (Pyke 2005:501-502). There is evidence from developmental research that in some cases parents tolerate or even approve of differences (Goodenow 1993:174-176).

According to participants' descriptions acculturation gaps had also caused language and communication difficulties among family members, which in turn might affect the bonding, process (as previously described by Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003:127) or create new roles for some children in the families to facilitate the communication and to assist the parents to discipline other children of the family. According to two participants of this study language gap between them and their mothers made them to be less involved in daily conversations at home. In such cases, some younger, more assimilated children were found themselves less related to at least one of their parents. However, it is difficult to make a conclusion if the language accounts for the distance in their relationship since the quality of family relations is a more complex issue and it is better to be analyzed as a multifactorial concept (Ho 2010:29; Merali 2002:59). Many participants of this study indicated that as the older siblings they were frequently asked to translate conversations between parents, who spoke little Dutch, and younger siblings, who spoke little Farsi to explain parental rules and values. According to them, this affects the nature and tone of their relationship with their younger siblings. Although the role of disciplinarian and cultural preservationist may provide elder siblings with power and authority, it undermines sibling solidarity. It bothers Samira, for example, that she does not have a close relationship with her sister as she used to have as a result of assisting her parents to explore what she is into.

In this study acculturation gaps between participants and their parents and the one between the participants and their elder/younger siblings were not aimed to assess the quality of family relationships. Rather, it aimed to highlight the factors that might have affected the differences that the participants of this study had experienced through the acculturative process.

Usita and Blieszner (2002:269) pointed out that there is a tendency in the immigration literature to focus on problems, resulting in overly negative depictions of immigrant families without attention to their strengths. To avoid this bias, at the very end of the final interviews the participants were also asked to describe any benefits their family derived from acculturative differences among the member of their families and any appreciation they might feel for their differences. Almost all the participants appreciated some factors that they have obtained because of the different level of acculturative degree between them and their family members, including; the cultural knowledge, knowledge of an extra language, the sense of power, and the sense of fulfilled support and protection.

For sure, more systematic study is needed that captures the range of benefits, as well as conflicts and tensions, associated with acculturative dissonance in immigrant families, and to ascertain how such variation serves as an adaptive strategy. To sum, the current study has opened up a number of important avenues for future research. Given the paucity of research on the experiences of Iranian immigrants in the Netherlands, it is hoped that the current study will be followed by additional qualitative investigations into how ethnicity, age, social class, religion, and gender may impact acculturation experiences. Doing so will enable the development of more precise theories that more accurately represent the realities of acculturating individuals.

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