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**Shared Values, Different Paths: First-Generation Iranian Men's and
Women's Perceptions of the Cultural Production of an "Educated Person"**

by

Shiva Sadeghi

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

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این چرخ و فلک که ما درو حیرانیم
فانوس خیال ازو مثالی دانیم
خودشید چراغدان و عالم فانوس
ما چون صوریمر کاندرو حیرانیم

*We are no other than a moving row,
Of visionary shapes that come and go,
Round with this sun illumined Lantern held,
In midnight by the master of the show.*

(Omar Khayyam)

Abstract

In this dissertation, I examined the lived experiences of eight first-generation Iranian immigrants (six women and two men) enrolled as full-time undergraduate students in predominantly English institutions of higher education in Montreal. Using the key principles of phenomenology and critical ethnography, and through a series of open-ended, in-depth interviews, I explored the situated meanings of education in the lives of these men and women. The findings of my study show that the participants' perceptions of higher education seemed to be greatly influenced by their cultural values and beliefs. They perceived "education" as social and cultural capital which secures their status and prestige within their families and communities. They also identified economic advancement, upward social mobility, personal fulfillment and easier access to Canadian higher education as factors that significantly influenced their decisions to pursue their undergraduate degrees. The study revealed that the women emphasized the crucial role of education in securing their financial and intellectual independence from the men in the household. They held the belief that being an "educated woman" contributed to having a stronger voice and a more authoritative space within the family.

The results of my study suggest that the voices of these men and women were linked to the issues of "agency", "critical thinking", and "belonging". The participants talked about their lives as "immigrants" and members of a marginalized minority group. While some openly talked about the existence of "covert" or "hidden" racism in Canadian society, they all expressed contentment with their lives in Canada when compared to Iran. They articulated their awareness of the conflicting concepts of gender roles existent in the traditional Iranian culture and the culture of the host country, and viewed western values of women's education and career development as a positive factor in pursuing their academic aspirations.

Highlighting the significance of individual narratives and lived experiences of first-generation immigrant students, this study may contribute to broadening

our understanding of issues faced by immigrant students in institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the insights from the lives of these men and women may have important implications for educators, administrators, and faculty staff in order to create more accepting and culturally sensitive campuses.

خلاصه

هدف من در این پایان نامه تحصیلی، تحقیق در مورد تجربیات زندگی هشت مهاجر نسل اول ایرانی در کانادا است. از این هشت نفر، شش نفر زن و دو مرد بودند که در مقطع لیسانس (کارشناسی) در دانشگاه های انگلیسی زبان در مونترپال مشغول به تحصیل بودند.

تحقیق من بر پایه و اصول فلسفه پدیده شناسی و فرهنگ شناسی انتقادی بنا شده است. در طی یک سری مصاحبات عمیق و متعدد، به بررسی معانی مختلف و چندانة تحصیل و تعلیم و تربیت در زندگی شرکت کنندگان پرداختم. یافته های تحقیقات من نشانگرآنند که تعلیم و تربیت معانی متفاوتی در زندگی آنان داشت. بعضی به تحصیل کردن بعنوان یک سرمایه فرهنگی و اجتماعی نگاه میکردند که موقعیت اجتماعی آنان را تضمین میکند. در عین حال تحصیل کردن معانی دیگری هم داشت ارجمله بهبود وضع اقتصادی، علاقه شخصی، و همینطور استقلال زنان در زندگی خانوادگی. یافته های تحقیقات من نشان میدهند که برای شرکت کنندگان طرز تفکر منتقدانه، آزادی بیان، و احساس تعلق به کشوری که در آن زندگی میکنند اهمیت زیاد داشت.

Résumé

Pour cette dissertation, j'ai examiné les expériences vécues par huit immigrants iraniens (six femmes et deux hommes) de première génération qui étudiaient à plein temps au premier cycle à des institutions universitaires anglophones à Montréal. En utilisant la phénoménologie et l'ethnographie critique, ainsi qu'à travers une série d'entrevues à fond, j'ai voulu explorer et examiner le rôle de l'éducation dans la vie quotidienne de ces hommes et femmes.

Mes résultats démontrent que la perception des participants envers l'éducation de niveau supérieur était fort influencée par leurs valeurs et croyances culturelles. L'éducation était perçue comme un atout social et culturel qui avancera leur statut et leur prestige au sein de leur famille et de leur communauté. D'autres facteurs qui influencèrent leur décision de poursuivre un degré du premier cycle furent l'avancement social et économique, l'essor personnel et l'accès relativement facile aux institutions universitaires au Canada. De plus, les femmes ont souligné le rôle essentiel de l'éducation afin d'assurer leur indépendance financière et intellectuelle vis-à-vis les hommes de leur famille.

Les participants ont aussi discuté à propos de leur vie au tant qu'immigrants et comme membres d'un groupe minoritaire marginalisé. Tandis que quelques-uns ont mentionné l'existence d'un racisme caché dans la société canadienne, d'autres ont éprouvé une satisfaction avec leur vie au Canada comparé avec leur vie en Iran.

Chacun d'entre eux était conscient qu'il y avait des différences d'opinion au sujet des rôles des hommes et des femmes entre la culture traditionnelle iranienne et la culture canadienne. Ils considéraient la libéralité envers l'éducation de la femme et le développement des carrières de celles-ci qui domine dans les pays occidentaux un facteur positif en poursuivant leur aspiration académique.

Acknowledgements

*You sometimes see the earth dry and barren:
but no sooner do We send the water down upon it
then it begins to stir and swell, putting forth every kind
of radiant bloom. (Qur'an; Pilgrimage, 22:5)*

Many years ago, in response to my request to rewrite a term paper, a professor of psychology recommended me to leave university and search for “what would suit me better” outside the grandiose walls of the Ivory Tower. As a young immigrant with no financial and social support and little English proficiency, and struck by the deep impact of his comments and shame and embarrassment that I felt at the time, I decided to forsake his advice and finish an undergraduate degree in Psychology, a second in Applied Linguistics and move on to pursue my graduate studies in Education. Many Years have passed since that incident, and throughout the years of my life, both as a learner and a teacher, the cycle of discouragement, resistance and defiance has continuously recurred, each time leaving me more determined than before.

Looking back at the experiences that I have attained in higher education, many memories stand out; some remind me of heart-warming encouragements, and some speak of antagonistic persuasions. However, one thing that remains certain is the value of support and encouragement that I received from all those who have had a significant role in helping me pursue my dream of “becoming an educated person.”

Writing this dissertation has been a challenging endeavor; a lonely journey that at times seemed nearly impossible to end. Along the way, I have encountered many barriers and obstacles. Nonetheless, I was fortunate enough to have the warmth and generosity of those who believed in me when defeat appeared inevitable.

I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Mary Maguire whose care and support made the completion of this dissertation possible. My long journey has ended because of her thoughtful guidance, exceptionally critical eye and her outstanding sense of responsibility towards her students.

I thank my committee members, Dr. Gillian Bramwell, Dr. Ratna Ghosh and Dr. Uner Turgay, for their support and effort to guide me through this dissertation. I also thank Dr. Shaheen Shariff and Dr. Joan Russell, my doctoral defense committee members who read the last draft of my dissertation, and provided me with invaluable feedback.

I am deeply indebted to the eight men and women who participated in my study and generously shared their lives with me. Listening to their stories has forever changed and enriched my life.

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Special gratitude to all my teachers in Iran for helping me and the young women of my generation through the most difficult years of our lives, and for giving us hope and encouragement to dream about a *tomorrow* at a time when *future* was the distance between the present moment and the next “missile”. Above all, I thank them for making us conscious of our existence as women and individuals.

Last but not least, special thanks to my sisters, Lila, Aram and Roya, the unrivaled role models in my life. Without them, I would not be who I am today.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents: to my mother, Fatima, who taught me to *live* as a woman, and to the memory of my father, Hussein, who taught me to be proud of *being* a woman. Their honor and dignity has given me the courage to fly without wings.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
خلاصه	iii
Resume	iv
Acknowledgments	v
Table of Contents	viii
List of Photos	xiii
List of Maps	xiii
List of Tables	xiv
List of Figures	xv
List of Appendices	xv
 Prologue	 1
The Poem.....	1
The long Journey Home.....	3
The Beginnings.....	3
Destination.....	5
 Chapter One: Introduction	 8
Situating “I”.....	8
Objectives.....	13
Conceptual Framework: A Sociocultural Approach to Research.....	15
Defining Culture.....	19
Research Questions.....	20
Contributions of the Study.....	22
Organization of Dissertation.....	24
 Chapter Two: Anatomy of a Cultural Discourse of Education	 25
History of Higher Education in Iran.....	29
Ancient Iran.....	29
Islamic Era.....	32
Modern Era.....	33
The War on Illiteracy.....	37
The structure of Educational system in Iran.....	39
Education and Politics.....	46
Cultural Revolution.....	47
Philosophy of Education in Iran.....	53

Zoroastrianism.....	53
Islamic Influence.....	55
The “Educated Person”: A Linguistic Analysis.....	63
Women’s Education in Iran.....	64
First Girls’ Schools.....	64
The Road to Progress.....	67
Between Modernity and Tradition.....	70
Post-Revolutionary Era: “Re-Inventing and Old Image”	73
Summary.....	81
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	82
Looking Through Multiple Lenses.....	82
Narrating Lived Experiences.....	85
Epoche.....	87
Reduction.....	89
Critical Ethnography: Moving Beyond Cultural Descriptions.....	91
Crossing Bridges: Voice and Representation in Research.....	95
Politics of Doing Research as the Insider-Within.....	100
Data Collection Strategies.....	104
Participant Observation and Descriptive Field-Notes.....	105
Multiple In-Depth Interviews: Process and Method.....	108
Interactive Interviewing.....	115
The Politics of Gender in Qualitative Interviewing.....	120
Band of Sisters: Gender Identification in Interviews.....	125
Material Culture.....	130
Reflective Field-Notes.....	133
Data Analysis.....	135
Lives in Translation: Language and Authenticity.....	140
Transforming Authenticity into a Social Act.....	143
A Note on Persian-English Transliteration.....	146
Persian or Farsi?.....	148
Summary.....	150

Chapter Four: The Making of an “Immigrant” community	152
Immigrants: A Definition.....	152
Types of Minority Groups.....	156
Cultural Fame of Reference.....	157
Crossing Cultural Boundaries.....	159
The Affective Dilemma.....	160
Dual Frame of Status Mobility.....	161
Participants: A Historical and Biographical Sketch.....	162
Patterns of Iranian Migration: A Socio-Political Analysis.....	166
Iranian Immigration: A continuing Story.....	169
Gaining Access.....	171
Participants: Their Lives and Attributes.....	173
Samira: Desire and Despair.....	175
Nahid: Yearning to Belong.....	177
Roxana: Strength and Confidence.....	179
Mitra: Indecision and Despair.....	181
Yalda: Hardship and Exertion.....	182
Nasrin: Happiness and Belonging.....	183
Nader: Strength and Hardship.....	185
Cyrus: Learning to Cope.....	186
Summary.....	187
 Chapter Five: Situated Meanings and Understanding of Higher Education	188
A Cultural Phenomenology.....	188
Samira: “Being a Somebody”.....	189
Nahid: “A Brighter Future”.....	204
Roxana: “Acquisition of Knowledge”.....	214
Mitra: “It’s All About Money”.....	221
Yalda: “There is No Other Way!”.....	229
Nasrin: “A Different Worldview”.....	237
Nader: “Financial Security”.....	243
Cyrus: “Secret to our Survival!”.....	250
Metaphors and Symbols of Representation.....	256
Education as Social and Cultural Capital.....	257
Education as Social Status and Prestige:	
A Cultural “Obsession”.....	258
Education as a “Signal” of Success and Achievement.....	262
“Savad” as Social Literacy.....	264

Education as Ticket for Upward Socio-Economic Mobility.....	267
Right of Passage to the Job market.....	267
The Path to Immigrants' Integration.....	269
Personal and Intellectual Growth.....	271
Education as a Spiritual Journey.....	272
Education as a Gendering Process.....	275
Women at the Center of the Periphery.....	277
Challenging Traditional Gender Roles.....	281
The Two Faces of Iranian Women.....	283
Education as Women's Empowerment.....	286
Summary.....	288

Chapter Six: Images of Self and Others:

Connecting the Individual to the Family and Community289

Family.....	290
"Frame" of Reference.....	290
"Model" of Appropriate Behaviors.....	291
Source of Support and Understanding.....	291
Multicultural Campus.....	294
Age.....	298
Second Language Literacy.....	302
Speed Bump.....	303
Career Choices.....	304
A Different Way of "Thinking".....	308
Space and Voice in the Classroom.....	311
Connection to the Iranian Community.....	316
Home away from Home: Building New Connections.....	322
Representations of Race and Gender in Education.....	328
Muslims in the West.....	329
Veiled Perceptions: Muslim Women and Cultural Oppression.....	338
Haya: The Measure of a Woman's Modesty.....	342
Experiencing Racism and Discrimination in Education.....	348
The "Invisible" Fist.....	349
Taking it Personally.....	354
Out of Mind, Out of Site!.....	356
Separating "Self" from "Other".....	358
What They don't Know won't Hurt You!.....	365
Summary.....	368

Chapter Seven: Reflective Interpretations	370
A Cultural Phenomenology of Education.....	371
Family.....	380
A gendered Discourse of Education.....	381
“Immigrant”, “Different”, “Other”.....	386
Home and Belonging.....	388
Implications of the Study.....	389
Suggestions for Future Research.....	393
 Epilogue	 396
 References	 399
 Appendices	 429

List of Photos:

Photo 1. Forough Farokhzad	1
Photo 2. The Gates of the University of Tehran	12
Photo 3. School of Theology.....	32
Photo 4. The entrance to Dar-ul-Fonoun School in Tehran.....	34
Photo 5. Woman, as Mother and caretaker in a Textbook	49
Photo 6. Hijab	50
Photo 7. Inside a Classroom in Iran	62
Photo 8. Young Girls inside a classroom	70

List of Maps:

Map 1. Iran's Imperial Territories.....	30
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List of Tables:

Table 1. Enrollment by the Level of Education: 1998-1999	45
Table 2. Rate of Women's Literacy in Iran	69
Table 3. Schedule of the Interview Sessions	113
Table 4. Sources of Material Culture	131
Table 5. Transliteration System.....	147
Table 6. Vowels and Diphthongs	147
Table 7. Participants' Biographical data	174

List of Figures:

Figure 1. Structure of Pre-University Education in Iran.....	40
Figure 2. Iranian Higher Education System	42
Figure 3. Structure of Higher Education system.....	44
Figure 4. The Research Process.....	140

List of Appendices:

Appendix A. The Little Black Fish.....	429
Appendix B. Chart of the Educational System.....	436
Appendix C. Montreal Persian Network.....	437
Appendix D. Consent Form.....	438

Prologue

I begin my dissertation with the poem written by Forough Farokhzad, the renowned Iranian artist, poet and feminist (1935-1967):

Photo 1. Forough Farokhzad, Iranian Poet, writer and director (Source: <http://www.foroughfarokhzad.org>)



***Let us believe in the beginning
of the cold season***

And this is I
a woman alone
at the threshold of a cold season
at the beginning of understanding
the polluted existence of the earth
and the simple and sad pessimism of the
sky
and the incapacity of these concrete
hands.
Time passed,

ایمان بیاوریم به آغاز فصل سرد
و این منم
زنی تنها
در استانه ی فصلی سرد
در ابتدای درک هستی الوده ی زمین
و یأس ساده و غمناک آسمان
و ناتوانی این دستهای سیمانی
زمان گذشت
زمان گذشت و ساعت چهار بار نواخت
چهار بار نواخت

time passed and the clock stuck four,
struck four times.
Today is the winter solstice.
I know the season's secrets...The wind
is blowing through the street,
the beginning of ruination.

I am cold,
I am cold, and it would appear
that I would never be warm again...
I am cold and I know
that nothing will be left
of all the red dreams of one wild poppy
but a few drops of blood.

I shall give up lines
and give up counting syllables too.
And I will seek refuge from the mob
of finite measured forms
In the sensitive planes of expanse.
I am naked, naked, naked,
I am naked as silence between words of
love,
and all my wounds come from love,
from loving...

Will I once again
comb my hair with wind?
Will I ever again plant pansies in the
garden
and set geraniums in the sky
outside the window?
Will I ever again dance on wine glasses
will the doorbell call me again
toward a voice's expectation?

I said to Mother, It's all over now.
I said, Things always happen before one
thinks;
we have to send condolences
to the obituary page...

(Forugh Farrokhzad, 1965)

امروز روز اول دیماه است
من راز فصل ها را می دانم
در کوچه باد می آید
در کوچه باد می آید
و من به جفت گیری گل ها می اندیشم

من سردم است
من سردم است و انگار هیچوقت گرم نخواهم شد
من سردم است و از گوشواره های صدف بیزارم
من سردم است و می دانم
که از تمامی اوهام سرخ یک شقایق وحشی
جز چند قطره خون
چیزی بجا نخواهد ماند

خطوط را رها خواهم کرد
و همچنین شمارش اعداد را رها خواهم کرد
و از میان شکل های هندسی محدود
به پهنه های حسی وسعت پناه خواهم برد
من عریانم ، عریانم ، عریانم
مثل سکوت های میان کلام های محبت عریانم
و زخم های من همه از عشق است
از عشق ، عشق ، عشق .
ایا دوباره گیسوانم را
در باد شانه خواهم زد؟
ایا دوباره باغچه ها را بنفشه خواهم کاشت ؟
و شمعدانی ها را
در آسمان پشت پنجره خواهم گذاشت ؟
ایا دوباره روی لیوان ها خواهم رقصید؟
ایا دوباره زنگ در مرا بسوی انتظار صدا خواهد برد؟
به مادرم گفتم «دیگر تمام شد »
گفتم : همیشه پیش از آنکه فکر کنی اتفاق می افتد
باید برای روزنامه تسلیتی بفرستیم «

(فروغ فرخزاد، ۱۹۶۵)

The Long Journey Home

I was born on the last day of spring at exactly 3:15 in the afternoon, as the story goes. The youngest daughter in a family of seven children, I rushed to begin my life a week early, even before Fatima, my mother, could be taken to the hospital. It was my older brother who called a neighbor who then hastened to find Parvin Khanum (پروین خانم), the elderly semi-retired mid-wife who only showed up at unexpected labors. Minutes, maybe seconds before her arrival, I was already there! The first seven years of my life were spent in the house of my birth. My family then decided to move to a bigger house that my father built in the heart of a modern middle-class neighborhood in Tehran. That house has been home to the most memorable years of my life and still appears in my dreams.

The Beginnings

My father, Hussein, was a patriot from a generation of Iranian political dissidents who had struggled through the social and political upheavals of the 1940's and 1950's Iran. The son and grandson of two respected clergymen himself, Hussein declined to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors. To the dismay of his father and his older brother, he became a lawyer, and in his early twenties joined the increasingly popular leftist group, the "Tudeh Party of Iran" (حزب توده ایران) [the Populist Party of Iran]. It was during the social unrest of those turbulent years, the nationalization of Iran's oil by the Iranian nationalist Prime minister, Dr. Mossadeq (دکتر مصدق), and the Shah's subsequent flight from the country, that my father's leftist and socialist ideology came to existence. Still

a young lawyer, he began printing a short-lived newspaper, which was banned after the 1953 coup d'etat and Shah's return to Iran.

Forbidden from leaving the country for life and banned from publishing or practicing law, he lived in exile for a few years, alone, away from his young wife and children, in one of the most impoverished parts of South-Eastern Iran. When he returned, tired and betrayed by his own comrades, he started a law firm registered under the name of a friend, another lawyer, and eventually became the man behind the scenes. The firm gradually disintegrated, and was finally seized by the revolutionary government in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. Within the borders of the country he had once fought hard for its freedom and prosperity, my father continued to live by his ideology and values till the last breath he took. Along the way, we, his children, learned to love and respect him for the man he was and still is in our memories and value his honor and magnificent sense of humor.

Throughout my father's years in exile and his later battles with a disabling heart disease, my mother, Fatima, became the central figure in our lives. Fulfilling the demanding roles of a forceful and strong matriarch on one hand, and a nurturing parent on the other, she continually encouraged her daughters to defy and fearlessly reject the society's narrow definitions of a woman's space and identity —something that her own generation had been denied.

Born on the eve of my country's social and political developments, I was raised in turbulent times when politicians and activists used manufactured dissent and provocative rhetoric to stage mass unrest and create social change.

It was in those thunderous years that my generation, the children of revolution, grew up amidst political turmoil, Cultural Revolution and mass obliterations of intellectuals. Luckily for us, the strength of our generation never failed to protect the power of our imaginations or our will to embrace life and hope. Our lives juxtaposed intense violence and childhood innocence. But far from unconsciously absorbing outside influences, we, the children of revolution, fervently harbored seeds of dissent and inspiration.

Lost between two worlds, the world of our parents and older siblings and the new order that we were coerced to accept, reality became less and less rigid, blurring the lines between belief and possibility. It was in those thunderous years that we, the children of revolution, learned to use humor, hope and vulnerability to underscore human foolishness, frailty and anguish and question the stability of identity, morality and reality altogether. It was then that, despite radical efforts to break down the soul of a nation and the essence of an entire generation, we learned the value of freedom, thought and education and sang our songs, as caged birds usually do (Maya Angelou, 1993).

Destination

[The little Black Fish said to his mother], "... I want to set out and see what's happening elsewhere. Maybe you think someone taught me these ideas, but believe me, I've had these thoughts for a long time. Of course, I've learned many things here and there. For instance, I know that when most fish get old, they complain about everything. I want to know if life is simply for circling around in a small place until you become old and nothing else, or is there another way to live in the world? (Behrangi, 1968)

My life in Canada began in 1987 on a beautiful mid-summer day. Like the “Little Black Fish” [see Appendix A], the hero of my favorite childhood book by Samad Behrangi (صمد بهرنگی) (1968) —an Iranian teacher, author and educator— I embarked on a journey uncertain, yet exciting. The first few years of my life in Canada were filled with dreams of “reaching my dreams”, the farthest stars in the sky, dreams of a childhood unexpectedly interrupted. I was on the top of my world, unbreakable and undefeatable. The shock of reality, nonetheless, was soon to set in: Goals needed to be readjusted, plans remade, and priorities rearranged. The complexities of life in Canada, as a woman, an immigrant and a Muslim were intensified as a result of a non-existent community network and lack of family support.

In spite of it all, I still persisted and dared to dream. I found solace in writing and reading poetry. This expression of my “voice” comforted the coziest corners of my thoughts and emotions throughout this lonely journey I have *chosen* to launch in a strange land. In this new space, I feel neither belonged nor ostracized; I feel uprooted, but not dispossessed. My life experiences in Canada, a country where I “feel” at home yet, I cannot “call” home, speak of different realities and multiple subject positions (Bhabha, 1994; Khan, 2000). Life in Canada has provided me with many opportunities which would have not been accessible otherwise: Individual freedoms, access to education and even the most basic right to choose what I wish to wear. Nonetheless, I have encountered countless challenges to overcome and barriers to overturn. Disconnection from my country of birth, friends and extended family, which build the core of the

Iranian culture and society, has been, without a doubt, influential in my inclination to still describe Iran as my “homeland”. Meanwhile, in my “home,” Canada, I have found my peace: The prospect of a better life.

The writing of this dissertation has been an exceptionally intimate experience with others and myself. It has provided me with the courage to listen to the stories of the men and women who generously participated in my study. It has taught me to be open, not only to the perspectives *of* others, but also to how my thoughts and feelings are perceived *by* others. Its origins are deeply rooted in the early experiences of my life as a child and a young adolescent growing up in my homeland, long before I started my doctoral studies. In retrospect, I see that it was conceived during the bittersweet days of our lives, the children of revolution and war, yearning and hoping for a better life, which could only be realized through the dreams of university education. However, it is neither a testimony nor a manifesto. At best, it could and should only be regarded as the retelling of the stories of those whose voices are a part of the history of *my generation*. The end of *this* long journey is near. Now, I look forward to the new journeys ahead. I am content!

Chapter One: Introduction

Situating “I”

Samira: I always say that I think Iranians are **obsessed** with education. They love to study, and when they come here [Canada], they want to get educated even more. I don't think it is necessarily because they want to advance their status in Canada, but that **education** is in their blood...*it* is in their blood!

(July 25, 2002)

من همیشه می‌گم که فکر میکنم ایرانی‌ها **obsessed** با تحصیل کردن هستند. عاشق درس خواندنند، و وقتی که اینجا میان حتی بیشتر می‌خوان که درس بخوندند. به خاطر این‌ه که می‌خوان وضعیتشون توی کانادا بهتر بشه ، من فکر نمی‌کنم که این لزوماً ولی اینکه **education** توی خونشونه ...این توی خونشونه !

Respecting a well-learned [educated] person is equivalent to respecting God.

(Imam Ali, religious leader of Shi'a Muslims)

هر کس که به دانشمندی احترام بگذارد، همچون احترامی است که به پروردگار خود گذاشته است (امام علی (ع))

These quotes from Samira and Imam Ali resonate with me for a variety of reasons. I spent most of my formative years within the Iranian educational system. When I look back at my experiences as a young student in Iran, I cannot help but feel a mixture of conflicting emotions, ranging from innermost personal satisfaction to imminent intellectual deprivation. These feelings have been marked by my intimate connections with my childhood memories of my friends and teachers and horrid scars of revolution, war and violence. It is surprising that after having left Iran sixteen years ago, I still feel deeply connected to my earlier schooling experiences in my country of birth. Getting no closer and no further from those childhood memories, my life in Canada and my experiences within the

Canadian academia have been somewhat of a bittersweet journey. This journey is ingrained with desires, hopes, agonizing failures and inspiring successes.

Initially, my decision to come to Canada was influenced by the dominant social and political atmosphere in Iran. My mission was to accomplish a personal and intellectual task that was to a great extent impossible to undertake in my homeland—to get a chance of pursuing my dream of a university education. A dream which was made inaccessible to me and many other young hopeful dreamers of my generation as the result of the Cultural Revolution which followed Iran's 1979 populist uprising. Here, I have consciously chosen to use the term "populist uprising" instead of the more commonly used term, "Islamic revolution". In doing so, I have tried to stay true to the socio-historical roots of the revolution which involved participation of many diverse secular, as well as religious and political groups and parties in Iran (Keddie, 1981; Moghissi, 1994).

However, I did not anticipate that I would spend so many years of my life in Canada and in academia. I did not know what to expect or how to react to what was said to me and happened around me. This was mainly as the result of my unfamiliarity with the culture and language of the country I was living in. I found myself learning to navigate my way through the mysterious Western academe and culture. I struggled to comprehend the most fundamental and basic elements of the system, such as student-teacher relations, administrative procedures, study skills, and most significantly, learning to function in English—the linguistic medium through which I had to survive. These experiences left me with, at times, overwhelming responsibilities and challenges that I was not

prepared to take on. But life went on, and I, walking through the maze of life, sometimes discerning and sometimes incognizant, was able to find my way, at times wounded and hurt but grounded, nonetheless.

For me, life in Canada as a young teenager from a country labeled as part of the developing world, with modest financial resources, non-existent family and social networks and limited linguistic proficiency, the odds of survival in academia were far from likely. These odds were tested numerous times during different phases of my academic career. My schooling experiences in Iran and in Canada spoke of two different realities, parallel but with shared points of juncture. Both have left me with feelings of happiness, competence, self-esteem, but also hopelessness and despair. I have felt equally belonged and alienated. I have felt empowered, and I have felt powerless. My original interest in sciences, with the hopes of pursuing a career in medicine proved fruitless, and drained me both emotionally and intellectually. My next turn to psychology, a field bound with the chains of empirical positivism, although more successful, still remained distant from my true “being” as a firm believer in multiplicity of “truths” inherently existent in different lifeworlds and lived experiences.

It was in the fall of 1995, while working towards completing a second degree in Applied Linguistics (Second Language Acquisition and Teaching) at the University of Ottawa, that my destiny seemed to offer promise of fulfillment. I found my “academic niche” after years of searching and contemplation. My life journey in academia seemed to come closer to having a clearer destination and a more conspicuous direction. With my newly discovered affinity for linguistics and

cultural studies, I decided to embark upon continuing my studies at the graduate level. I completed my Master's degree in Education, and after a two-year work experience, I began my doctoral studies in Education at McGill University. After all these years, however, academia still remains a place of unknown challenges, infinite potentials and forceful barriers. Nevertheless, I have grown to stay defiant in the face of adversity and despair.

At this point in my history, I have attempted to delve into the roots of what I call my "inner desire" for learning and pursuing higher education. This is a personal and intimate experience that I share with many Iranians inside and outside of Iran, wherever they happen to live, in the West or in the East. These desires have been deeply rooted in the old and traditional cultural practices of Iranians, and have transcended into the minds and souls of generations of Iranian youth. My childhood and adolescence years were filled with explicit and implicit messages that highlighted the importance of "education" in my life. Whether interpreted as a national "obsession" as Samira observed, or the pious man or woman's duty to divine power as Imam Ali contended, education and the "educated person" were perceived to hold a special value within the Iranian culture and society. Mrs. Sahabi, my favorite grade nine chemistry teacher used to cunningly criticize the overtures of Iranian culture's exaggerated emphasis on university education. Her humorous comment, "give me death or Medical school" (یا مرگ یا پزشکی), portrayed the somber taste of the lives of many of Iranian youth who could not contemplate life outside the walls of the Ivory Tower. Every year, a new generation of Iranian youth was haunted by the prospect of preparing for the

much-feared “konkour” (کنکور) —Iran’s national post-secondary education admission test. And every year, they would silently envision the likelihood of their shattered dreams in dismay and despair. The passage through the gates of the University of Tehran (Photo 2), the most revered and celebrated institution of higher education in Iran, remained open to a few candidates whose political convictions, far more than their academic credentials, had paved their road into the world of higher learning.

Photo 2. The gates of the University of Tehran (source: <http://www.iranian.com>)



Amidst the violent realities of a political revolution and an external war, my generation grew up to learn the value of education both as a goal and as a means to create and shape a better life for themselves and their future generations. We came to accept and believe that education was the salvation of our souls and the way to the freedom of our nation and prosperity of our country. Education was the road to gain social prestige and material comfort, as it was the window to the world of possibilities and turning far-reaching dreams into inevitable realities. It was within this socio-historical context that my values and perspectives towards education were shaped and defined, and remained unchallenged for years to come until I embarked on a journey and faced the challenges in writing this dissertation.

Objectives

My inquiry is both personal and academic. It is my quest to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canadian higher education. Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to explore the educational experiences of eight first-generation Iranian immigrants within the contexts of two Canadian universities. While sharing a common ethnicity, language and religion with my participants, our schooling experiences diverge in that I do not have first-hand experience with the Iranian higher educational system. However, I believe that we shared an understanding of Iranian cultural practices and culturally influenced educational values and traditional gender roles. These common threads continually surfaced throughout this inquiry.

Despite the large Iranian community in Canada, and recent attempts to investigate the process of their integration (e.g., Hassanpour, 2001; Mirfakhraie, 1999; Moghissi, 1999a, 1999b) into the host Canadian society, the unique personal experiences of Iranian immigrants in Canadian higher education have been left relatively unexplored. In this doctoral study then, my objective is to explore how a selected group of eight Iranian immigrant students negotiate and interpret their educational aspirations and experiences in the social and academic contexts of their host country, Canada. In this process, I recognize how the complex interplay between class, gender and ethnicity adds an intricate layer to the experiences of new immigrants in their adopted country. The experiences of immigrant women, for example, are as unique as their individual backgrounds and worldviews and life experiences. I agree with Edith Sizoo (1997)— the Dutch sociolinguist and anthropologist— that “[g]ender cannot be isolated from other aspects of life like class, caste, race and nationality — reality is not manifested only in terms of gender” (p.175). Men and Womens’ lived experiences vary across the borders of class, race, cultural and educational backgrounds leading to diverse ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986).

Conceptual Framework: A Sociocultural Approach to Research

Culture is in fact the product of human social life and the social activity of human beings, and therefore the very act of putting the question about cultural development of behavior already leads us directly into the social plane of activity. (Vygotsky, 1978, 145-146)

The theoretical underpinning of my study is guided by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural Activity Theory. As illustrated in the previous quote, this theory posits that the origins of an individual's attitudes and behavioral patterns are rooted in social relations and interactions with significant others in particular social contexts. In retrospect, social relations and interactions shape and organize attitudes and behaviors and the use of constructed "social artifacts". Vygotskian sociocultural theory assumes that human behavior and thought are social in two respects. Firstly, they are dependent on "social experience," referring to the individual patterns of stimulating and directing one's behavior, attention and response to others. An individual's social experience implicates how he or she self-regulates the physical movements, and organizes and arranges spatial relationships with other individuals in diverse environments (Wertsch, 1998). Secondly, thought and behavior, by themselves, embody cultural artifacts that are signs and symbols, including linguistic signs and terms, and man-made objects and instruments. Both social experience and cultural artifacts interact in order to produce and shape and define psychological phenomena. James Gee (1992) explains that,

human thought is always and everywhere mediated by cultural “tools” with their own distinctive social histories, whether these can be devices like hammers or computers, or representational systems like writing or logic. How a tool is used is always determined by the discourse in which it is embedded—it has no generalized meaning or function apart from specific social activities which render it ‘useful’ and which it in turn shapes. (p.37)

Therefore, social experiences and cultural tools shape and define the way we look at the world, our perceptions of how the world operates and consequently, our experiences. John Dewey (1938), the American Philosopher, elaborates on this observation in the following excerpt:

[w]e live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which is in large measure what it is because of what it has done and transmitted from previous human activities. When this fact is ignored, experience is treated as if it were something which goes on exclusively inside an individual's body and mind. It ought not to be necessary to say that experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. (p.39)

Dewey asserts that human thought and behaviors are shaped and defined by factors and forces that are external to the individual, as well as recognizing the impact of internal factors. Moreover, Vygotsky's sociocultural Activity Theory, while emphasizing the role and impact of culture in shaping human thought and experience, does not refute the existence of individual's “agency” and the “power of will”. On the one hand, a sociocultural theory highlights the construction of patterns of human thought and behaviors that are socio-historically situated, affected and influenced by social interactions and environment. On the other hand, the theory asserts that individuals are active agents throughout the process of their social construction of knowledge and actions. In a socio-cultural environment, the agent is intentional, because as Schweder (1991) states,

its existence is real, factual, and forceful, but only so long as there exists a community of persons whose beliefs, desires, emotions, purposes, and other mental representations are directed at, and thereby influenced by, it... things exist only in intentional worlds. What makes their existence intentional is that such things would not exist independently of our involvements with and reaction to them; and they exercise their influence in our lives because of our conceptions of them. (p.74)

Therefore, just as humans are agents of their behaviors and ideas, the construction of agency is also culturally influenced and socially organized. New meanings, constructions, conditions, and institutions are fashioned from one's existing social realities (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, individual subjectivities exist as inter-related elements within a system of social activities, experiences, and cultural values and artifacts. The active individual is not passively influenced by the environment; rather, he or she lives within an environment where culture is the medium within which social experience and the individual actively interact.

Extending beyond the "cultural" limits of a socio-cultural account of human experience, sociocultural theory assumes that human behaviors and thought cannot be understood from a universalistic sociocultural perspective (Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Vygotsky's account of human thought and action also takes into consideration the impact of history in defining and shaping and developing phenomena. Donato and McCormick (1998) assert that cultural activities are best understood within the historical contexts within which they are taking place. They define a cultural activity in terms of the,

sociocultural settings in which collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity, and assisted performance occur. It is the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', and 'why', the small recurrent dramas of everyday life, played on the stage of the home, school, community, and workplace. (p.455)

Therefore, cultural activities are historically situated (Maguire, 2003). Having this in mind, individual reactions to the course of human history are unique and are neither a uniform process, nor unidirectional. Understanding socio-cultural-historical constructions of an individual's thoughts and behaviors is important in understanding how one thinks and perceives and reacts to a particular situation. Vygotsky (1982) contends that the centrality of history in making and shaping thought and behavior highlights the role of individuals in the process of co-construction of their identities and historical roles. He asserts,

[w]e do not suffer from illusions of grandeur, thinking that history begins with us...we want a name on which the dust of centuries settles. In this [awareness of history] we see our historical right, an indication of our historical role. (p. 428)

In conclusion, a socio-cultural-historical approach does not mean universality in human thought and behavior; rather, it implies situatedness of experience (Rogoff, 1995) within particular contexts of cultural values and beliefs. Neither does it imply that the social world takes over the individual in any specific manner. It assumes that society is the blueprint of cultural heritage with which the development of thought and behavior takes place. For example, Iranian society's interpretations of the role of education in the lives of its individual members are inadvertently shaped and influenced by its unique cultural values and perspectives towards education. Such cultural values, which in turn shape and define the behavior and perspectives of individual Iranian men

and women, are the product of the socio-political history of that particular society. However, the relationship between culture and social structures is not static and infallible. Social theorist, Margaret Archer (1996) believes that culture does not have a clearly defined role in analysis of social relations and structures because of its descriptive and theoretical vagueness. She contends that, “the status of culture oscillates between that of a supremely independent variable, the superordinate power in society and, with a large sweep of a pendulum, a position of supine dependence on other social institutions” (p.1). A socio-cultural-historical theory acknowledges and validates this paradoxical role of culture as both the subject and object in relation to social structures and the inter-dependent relationship between culture and society (Lehman, 2003).

Defining Culture

The paramount role of “culture” within the framework of sociocultural theory makes it necessary to define this concept. The most straightforward definition of culture is that it is a way of life (Brown, 2000). In retrospect, it may be defined as ideas, beliefs, customs, skills, arts and tools, which are characteristics of a particular group of people (Gordon, 1991; Nieto, 1999; Ogbu, 1995, 2003). Tillman (2002) defines culture as “a group’s individual and collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expressions, social institutions, and behaviors” (p.4). Culture surrounds us, and culture shapes the way we think about the world, and in turn the way the world influences our

thoughts and behaviors (Alasuutari, 1995). The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), asserts that culture is an “historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic form by means of which men [and women] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p.89). Therefore, Geertz asserts that culture is situated within the specific historical contexts of the members of a particular group, community and/or society.

Culture is then, dialectic. It is continually changing and evolving. It transforms and is in turn transformed. Sonia Nieto (1999) contends that culture should be regarded as active “verb,” rather than an aesthetic “noun,” to signify its dynamic nature. Culture inherently entails social and political tensions that are rooted in specific economic and historical contexts (Lankshear, 1997; Morgan, 1998). The historical situatedness of culture provides a “frame of reference” (Ogbu, 1987, 1995) through which the members of a given community perceive the world around them, interpret the events that occur, and behave according to a set of acceptable codes of behavior, and react to their *perceived realities*.

Research Questions

At the beginning of my study, I posed the general question: “What is the experience of being a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canadian higher education?” From this original topic of interest, I began to explore and identify issues that I felt were important to discuss with a selected group of Iranian participants. Prior to the interviews, a self-examination (Marshall & Rossman,

1999; Moustakas, 1994) of my own experiences, perceptions and thoughts, as an Iranian, an immigrant and a woman provided me with valuable insights into the issues surrounding the lives of immigrants in their host country and the process of their integration into academia. Looking at my personal journals, and re-reading what I had written at different phases of my life in Canada enabled me to examine and evaluate my experiences and try to build an empathetic bridge between my life and those of other Iranians in Canada. I was interested in exploring and understanding the perspectives of immigrant Iranian men and women in and out of the “Ivory Tower”. I was particularly curious to examine the influence of “gender” in shaping the individual men and women’s perceptions and lifeworlds. Therefore, the following research questions were in turn shaped within the framework of my original inquiry:

What is the experience of being a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canadian higher education?

- a) Why do immigrant Iranian men and women go to university in Canada?
- b) What does the concept of “education” mean to these individuals?
- c) What are the factors that shape and influence their perspectives towards education?
- d) How does being a man or a woman affect their lives in academia?
- e) How does being an Iranian and Muslim affect their lives in academia?

These questions framed the structure of the conversations which took place between me and the participants. It is noteworthy to mention the “cyclical” relationship between these questions and the interviews. While these questions guided the study and our conversations, they were, in turn, developed from the participant’s own narratives. For example, Samira’s accounts of Iranian culture and society’s “obsession” with education and “being an educated person” framed my subsequent interviews with other participants.

Contributions of the study

It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of secondary school students in Toronto Metropolitan area are ESL learners and first-generation immigrants. The same trend of growth in immigrant population is taking place in major urban centers across Canada (Li, 2003). With the growing number of immigrants into the educational system — many entering institutions of higher education all across Canada — educators, practitioners and policy makers are confronted with an increasing need to identify, understand, and address the issues surrounding the entrance and successful transition of these newcomers. To do so, we must first recognize and understand *where* these students have come from and *what* values and beliefs they are carrying with them. Edith Sizoo (1997) points out: “leaving home means packing one’s past experiences into a suitcase, unpacking them in another spot under the sun and discovering that they light up in a new way” (p.224).

Hence, in this study, I aim to establish a theoretical ground in studying the interconnection between Iranian culture and individual educational aspirations and experiences. From this foundation, future inquiries can emerge. Presently, there are few research studies that attempt to explore the pedagogical practices of Iranian immigrant populations in western education systems (Firouzi, 2001; Shavarini, 2001). There are even fewer studies in the academic literature that investigate the history and philosophy of education from an Iranian cultural framework (Arasteh, 1969; Behrangi, 1978; Hekmat, 1972; Maneshri, 1992). To my knowledge, my doctoral research is the first qualitative inquiry of the pedagogical experiences within this particular immigrant population in Canada.

While my study, may or may not contribute to the construction of a concrete cultural framework through which pedagogical practices of Iranians are understood, it may, however, lead a to better understanding of the link between multifaceted issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity from the unique personal perspectives of the participants. I consider this research project to be an exploration of individual voices through a study of their lived experiences. From this perspective, I believe that my study has aimed to fulfill the goal of research as "satisfying a need to know, and a need to extend the boundaries of existing knowledge through a process of systematic inquiry" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.170).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter One, I discussed my socio-historical *stance* as the researcher within *my* study, and the implications of a sociocultural theory as the conceptual framework of my inquiry. In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the history and structural organization of higher education in Iran, followed by a discussion of the ideology and philosophy of education in Iranian culture and society. In Chapter Three, I explain my research methodology, data collection strategies and methodological issues emerging from the present study. In Chapter Four, I discuss the sociological perspectives of what constitutes an “immigrant”. I also provide a socio-historical background to the immigration of Iranians in Canada, as well as the personal profiles of the six women and two men who participated in this research. In Chapter Five, I discuss the main understandings emerging from the study, and explain the situated meanings of education in the lives of individual men and women. In Chapter Six, I present the issues embedded in these men’s and women’s educational experiences in Canada, such as language, age, gender and discrimination. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, I provide a summary of the research findings, implications and suggestions for future investigation. The epilogue is a retrospective reflection on “my experience” as the researcher throughout the process of my inquiry and writing this dissertation.

Chapter Two

Anatomy of a Cultural Discourse of Education

In this chapter, I draw from different fields of research related to the educational system in Iran and the ideology of education in Iranian culture and society. My arguments in this chapter are grounded on the assumption that education is not a neutral activity (Freire, 1970, 1998; hooks, 1994), which takes place in isolation from social and political histories of a particular population or community. I agree with Paulo Freire (1921-1997)— the late Brazilian educator— that all educational activities are indeed “political actions” (1970, p. 64), which intend to support and promote a particular ideology. This ideology, nonetheless, may refer to either the “banking system of education” (Freire, 1970) —education as an act of depositing objective, quantifiable knowledge — or education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1973)—education as an act of raising social awareness and human agency to act upon the world and challenge the current systems of power and inequality in the society. Shaull (2000) elaborates on the concept of education as a deliberate socio-political and historical act. He writes,

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, *or* it becomes the “practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p.34)

Shaull believes that education as an ideology of social conformity requires the passive acceptance of the current social systems of power, while education as an act of liberation involves an active participation of the individuals throughout

the process of education. Liberating education is, then, viewed as a dialogic process which takes place between the individuals and the social structures, and is, as Paulo Freire (1998) points out, the “human act of intervening in the world” (p. 6).

Viewing education as a political act entails its potential to create and transmit beliefs, values and ideals that are inherently rooted in the culture and history of a particular society (Apple & Weis, 1989; Ballantine, 1989). Education, in this regard, represents a “discourse” widely accepted and practiced by different members of the society and supported and reinforced by the social structures, as well as the political system (Lankshear, 1997). “Discourse”, as defined by James Gee (1991), professor of Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, refers to,

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network.” (p.3)

Gee views discourse as a representation of socially accepted ways of thinking and behaving within a particular social system. He further explains that a discourse possess five specific characteristics. Firstly, discourses represent a particular ideology which includes “a set of values and viewpoints” (p. 4) — prescribing how an individual should talk and act when involved in that particular discourse. Secondly, a discourse does not support and encourage self-scrutiny and critique of accepted value and beliefs. In this respect, a discourse, by itself, defines agreed-upon forms of criticism within the boundaries of its ideology and accepted codes of thought and behavior. Thirdly, a particular discourse is defined

and characterized in relation to other discourses, mainly those that are opposing. In lieu of the absence of such competition and ideological challenges, the standpoint of a particular discourse will be changed and modified. Fourthly, a discourse proposes values, ideas and beliefs that may tend to refute and/or criticize the values and beliefs of other discourses. Lastly, a discourse is hierarchical in nature and is directly linked to the power structure of a particular society. This means that a particular discourse, in relation to other discourses in the society, may become marginalized, challenged or eliminated altogether. Hence, the stance of a discourse in society has strong ties to the social and political power of those who uphold and value it. As Foucault (1972) —the post structuralist French historian and philosopher — asserts, “in every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures” (p. 216). These procedures are governed by the “rules of exclusion” which determine what is “prohibited” and what is “accepted”.

Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1993)—the French sociologist—concept of the “cultural capital” represents the “symbolic power” of culture in transmitting beliefs and values within different layers of a society. The term, “cultural capital” refers to the cultural and social codes of behavior and thought which are necessary for an individual to gain access to non-economic forces within the society such as family, social class and academic success. Cultural capital is viewed as a “mediating factor between social origins and educational outcomes” (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999, p. 159), and as such helps

understand the creation and maintenance of social inequality within a society and the role of education in this process. Schools are not neutral and value-free institutions for learning objective knowledge; rather, they are “social organizations which encourage, promote and reinforce the values, beliefs, attitudes and accepted codes of behavior of the ‘elite’ or the ‘dominant class’” (ibid.). Moreover, in addition to prescribing “accepted” and “valued” forms of thought and behaviors, the concept of cultural capital also refers to the “social exclusion” of those forms which are not accepted and valued within that particular social context (Beasley-Murray, 2000; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Considering the intricate relationship between culture and values, discourse and power, I view education in Iranian culture as the ideology of existing social and political systems. As such, education is a “cultural discourse,” deeply rooted in the culture, history and social networks of the Iranian society.

I have divided this chapter into three sections. In the first section, I present an overview of the Iranian higher educational system. I pay special attention to the religious and secular models of education throughout different stages of Iranian history and social development. In the second section, I discuss the philosophy of educational thought in Iran and examine the influence of social developments in the Iranian educational system throughout the country’s ancient and modern history. In the third section, I examine the situation of women’s education in the Iranian educational system and how it fits within the traditional

perceptions of gender roles and status of women in the contemporary Iranian society.

History of Higher Education in Iran

Higher education has a long history in Iranian society. However, the modern secular, Western-style education has its roots in more recent social developments whose main goal was to modernize the country. Nonetheless, despite efforts to “westernize” the Iranian educational system, religious teachings have traditionally framed the structure of learning and teaching in Iran.

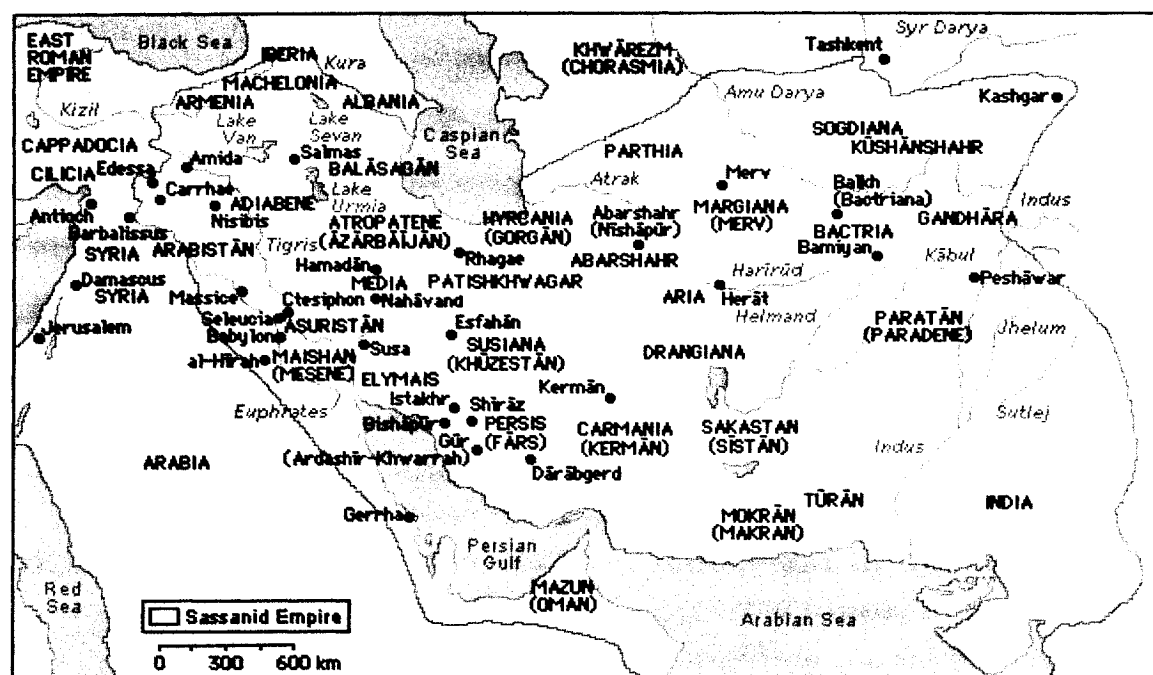
Throughout different phases in history and as the result of social and political developments in Iranian society and culture, educational system in Iran has shifted back and forth between secular and religious frameworks. While the institutions of higher education have significantly increased, particularly since the years following the 1979 revolution, higher education remains inaccessible to the majority of high school graduates of whom only 10 percent are accepted in institutions of higher education across the country annually. In the next section I discuss, in detail, the historical development of formal education in ancient and modern Iran.

Ancient Iran

While modern, secular educational system in Iran—an adaptation from the Western education—has a recent history in the country, the roots of higher education date back to as far as 241 AD, with the establishment of two

institutions of higher education in the cities of “Riv Ardeshir” (ریو اردشیر) and “Jondi Shapour” (جندی شاپور) during the Sassanid Dynasty (ساسانیان) (226 to 642 A.D.). Both these institutions of higher education, and in particular, the University of Jondi Shapour, turned into focal centers of research for academics and scientists in the geographically vast Sassanid Empire. As represented in Map 1, the two cities of Jondi Shapour and Riv Ardeshir, although not on the map, were located in the ancient Iranian province, Susiana or Khuzestan, in the south west of the country. The ancient city of Jondi Shapour is called Ahvaz in modern day Iran.

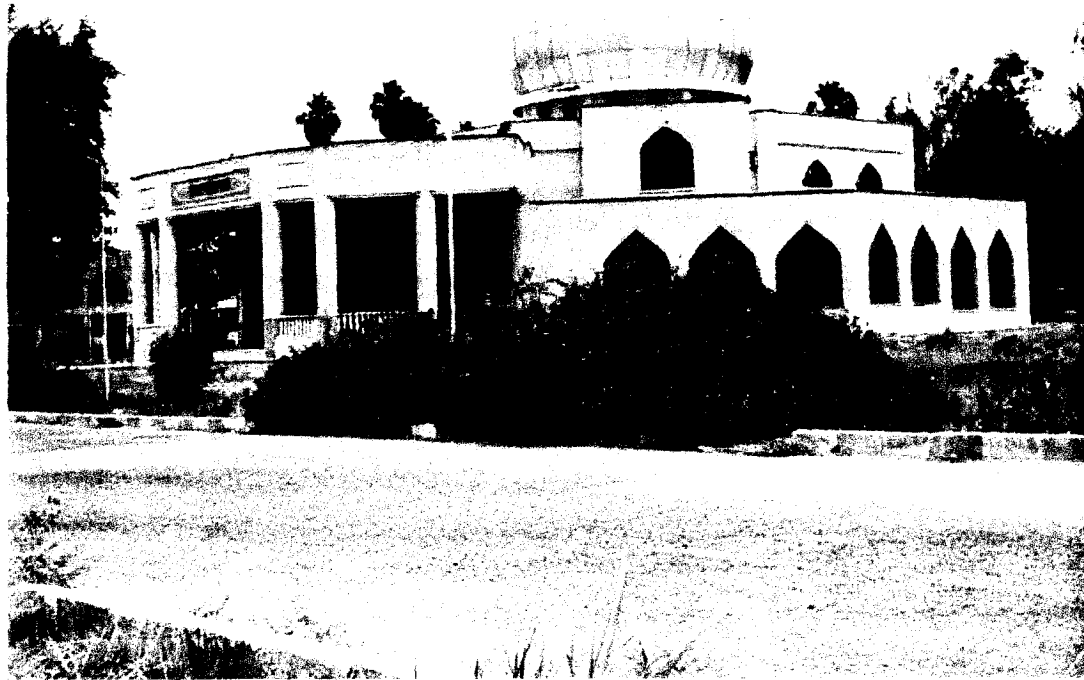
Map 1. Iran's imperial territories during the Sassanid Empire (Source: <http://www.iranchamber.com>)



Teaching and learning areas included philosophy, theology, mathematics, political science, music, agriculture and medicine. The Jondi Shapour's university hospital gained fame as one of the most advanced centers of medical research and practice in the ancient world, and employed researchers and academics from different parts of the empire from India to modern-day Iraq, Greece and Turkey. Known for its emphasis on academic teaching and research, the University of Jondi Shapour became the epicenter of higher learning in the ancient world, long before the establishment of academic institutions in Europe, such as Montpellier in France, Bologna in Italy, Oxford in England, and Harvard in the United States of America (Javam, 2003).

After the decline of the Sassanid Empire, and the country's devastating economic, social and political state, Jondi Shapour lost its financial support, and it was not until 1955, that the university witnessed a rebirth in its lost glory. Since then, the university has continued to experience periods of decline and progress. Throughout the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the University of Jondi Shapour remained closed, and was renamed "Chamran University of Ahvaz" in 1982. In 2003, the university board reached a unanimous decision to change the university's name back to its original Jondi Shapour (Chamran University of Ahvaz, CUA). In recent years, the university's administration and officials have made efforts to revive the lost glory of Jondi Shapour through renovations and reconstruction of university buildings, located in the heart of the war-torn city of Ahvaz. An image of the newly renovated school of theology can be seen in Photo 3.

Photo 3. School of Theology, University of Jondi Shapur also known as Chamran University of Ahvaz (Source: [http:// www.abadan.net](http://www.abadan.net))



Islamic Era

With the advent of Islam in 642 A.D., the education system in Iran underwent significant changes which involved the incorporation of the teachings of the "Qur'an", the Muslim's holy book. In this era, Iran's educational system was associated with more traditional religious institutions, commonly known as Maktab (مکتب). In these institutions, the clergy, both Shia (شیعه) and Sunni (سنی),

were responsible for the education of the youth. Instruction focused on teaching basic literacy skills which was defined as reading and writing in Persian (Farsi) and Arabic with a special focus on reciting Qur'an and other religious text, in addition to teaching of fundamentals of Islamic Sharia (شریعت). These schools or Maktabas, however, were open to middle-class and upper class youth, and therefore the majority of the population who mostly belonged to the working class did not have access to education. The common belief was that "knowledge of reading and writing was not necessary for all the population, and thus education generally was restricted to the sons of the economic and political elite." ("Iran: Education," 1UpInfo, [On line]. Available: <<http://www.1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/iran/iran80.html>). Albeit the restricted access to education in this era, the social and personal worth and value of education have been systematically emphasized in Islamic thought (Lewis, 1995, 1998; Rosenthal, 1970).

Modern Era

The establishment of Nazamieh (نظامیه) in the eleventh century by Nezam-ul-Molk (وزیر نظام الملک)—an Iranian minister (Vizier وزیر) during the Seljug dynasty (سلجوقیان)—marked an important shift in the country's focus on education. The curriculum of these colleges that were named after the Minister himself consisted of theology (as the main subject), astronomy, philosophy, humanities, mathematics and medicine (Ravandi, 1985). The first modern Western-style

school in Iran was Dar-ul-Fonun (دارالفنون) established in 1851 by the prime minister of the time, Amir Kabir (امیرکبیر). Dar-ul-Fonun's architecture is a beautiful amalgamation of ancient pre-Islamic and Islamic Iranian art. Photo 4 is a recent picture of the school.

Photo 4. The entrance to Dar-ul-Fonun school in Tehran (Source: <http://www.iranmehr.com>)



Dar-ul-Fonun has gone through several major renovations since its establishment. The school was closed in 1996 as the result of major structural deterioration of the building and is expected to reopen in 2005. (BBC, [On line].

Available: <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/Persian/arts/story/2004/02/040202.shtml>> ,

Retrieved: February 3, 2004)

Since the establishment of the first institutions of higher education in Iran by the Sassanid kings, education has been given priority. However, the focus on the goal of education has alternated from religious to secular and conversely, secular to religious. The adaptation of secular educational system in Iran came as the result of the Constitutional Revolution (1904-1907), and led to the establishment of Western-style schools throughout the major cities in the country. By the end of the Qajar dynasty (قاجار) in 1925, there were about 3,300 government-sponsored secular schools with a total number of 110,000 students. Consequently, the modern secular Higher education system in Iran is a new phenomenon, a product of the efforts to modernize and secularize Iran's social and political structures (Keddie, 1981), and in turn, the country's educational system.

The Pahlavi era (پهلوی) (1925-1979) saw a rise in the creation and development of modern western-style colleges and institutions of higher education modeled mainly after the French system and were for the most part secular. The first western university, University of Tehran, was coeducational since its early days of establishment in 1934. The construction of these institutions of higher learning was the result of the economic growth of the country due to increased oil revenues in the 1940s and onwards. The new education system in Iran was developed and reflected the new changes in the social and political structure of the country. The educational reform attempted to

address the shortage of skilled manpower, agriculture, and public services as the result of the economic advancements of the country due to the modernization of the industry. In his analysis of socio-political movements in Iran and the Iranian national identity, Vaziri (1993) an Iranian-American professor of political science argues that the development of Western-style education in Iran could not be fully separated from Iran's traditional religious influences. He believes the modern educational establishments,

represented a breakthrough from the traditional religious-oriented type of education and the meticulously western academic courses now offered. Acceptance of the new secular type of education brought the class of intelligentsia closer to the West and to Western concepts. On the other hand, the power of the clergy remained to be dealt with. The educational reforms of the turn of the century continued to give full weight to the study and the exclusivity of Shi'i religious science. (p.180)

The uniform secular structure of the Iranian higher educational institutions came later, and was the consequence of the establishment of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in 1967. However, the goal of a nationwide education system that was attempted by the Pahlavi government through the creation of Education Corps (سپاه دانش) was never realized during that era. In 1940, only 10% of elementary school-aged children were attending schools, and less than 1% of youths between 12-20 years of age were enrolled in secondary education. There was no significant increase in that rate in the decades to come. During the 1960's White revolution and the creation of the education corps, the government attempted a nationwide program to improve and expand public education. In 1978, 75% of all elementary school-aged children were enrolled. However, still less than 50% of all teenagers were attending secondary schools.

The War on Illiteracy (Jahad-e Sazandegi جهاد سازندگی)

The Islamic Republic of Iran defines literacy as “the ability to read and write a simple text” (IRI, [On line]. Available: <<http://www.mche.or.ir/englisg/policy/introduction.html>>, Retrieved: August 20, 2003). While education has been emphasized and focused on throughout the history of the country, the literacy rate remained significantly low compared to that of the industrialized countries. The rate of adult literacy was 48 percent in 1979. Since the revolution, however, there have been major educational movements such as the intensive educational corps devoted to raising literacy rate at the national level. Results of the 2000 census indicate that 76.9 percent of all Iranians ages 15 and over were literate—men had a higher literacy rate (83.7 percent) than women (70 percent). The statistics show a significant achievement considering the population growth in Iran that has increased from 34 million in 1974 to nearly 60 million in 1994, with half of the population under the age of 25.

Education has received considerably increasing importance and emphasis since the 1979 revolution. The 2001 Worlddidac Trade Mission ¹to Tehran reports on the country's focus on education as a “top priority in the development plans” (Farhad Eftekhazadeh, “A glance at the Iranian educational system,” [On line]. Available:http://www/education-market.com/articles/2_iran.htm, Retrieved: August 20, 2003). While in the 1970s, only 3 percent of the country's GDP (gross domestic product was spent on the development of education system and

¹ Worlddidac is an international Trade Association in education which provides vocational and educational training and consulting to developing countries.

policies, in 1980-1986, over 20 percent of the country's budget was devoted to education (Higgins & Shoar-Ghaffari, 1994).

The IRI's campaign "the war against illiteracy" (جهاد سازندگی) which won the United Nations prize fell short of reaching those living in remote rural areas, and the literacy programs were mostly available to those living in urban centers who had access to such literacy programs. However, despite the seemingly successful IRI literacy movement, there have been downfalls in the educational system with regard to the quality of education. The economic problems of the country, the political, economic and social alienation of Iran from the rest of the world, and in particular, the West, have been influential factors in limiting access to higher education to only those who can afford it. Tavassoli, Welch and Houshyar (2000) point out that "the universalizing of education, and the elimination of illiteracy throughout the country, together with a more scientific and technological orientation and commensurate high levels of scientific qualification, has still not been achieved, especially for rural dwellers and women" (p.287).

The population explosion, lack of effective strategic educational policies, coupled with a shortage of experienced teachers and educational experts have led to an inefficient educational system that has categorically failed to provide the students with quality education. According to Tavassoli et al (2000),

Larger class sizes, lower amounts of space per pupil, double shifts at schools, privatization of all sectors of education, and higher pupil-teacher ratios are all indexes of lower quality of education; thus, despite the greater availability of education and the quantitative expansion of the education system, the quality of education can be said to have decreased. (p. 300)

An Iranian government's official report on literacy rates in the country estimates that 89.6 percent of school-aged children were attending primary school in 1996 throughout the country. In the same year, only 74.2 percent were enrolled in secondary school cycles—middle and high school—(IRI, 2003). The same government document attributes the high rate of dropouts in the second and third cycle to a shortage of secondary and high schools in smaller towns and villages, which significantly reduces access to institutions of learning for adolescents and young adults.

The Structure of the Educational System in Iran

The pre-university educational system in Iran is tri-cyclical, and consists of a five-year primary school (دبستان), three-year middle school (راهنمایی), and a four-year high school cycle (دبیرستان). The fourth and last year of high school is the pre-university preparatory year. There is mandatory age-based education for children between the ages of six and eleven, as indicated in article 30 of the Islamic republic of Iran's (IRI) constitution which states that:

The government must provide all citizens with free-education up to secondary school, and must expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency.

Public primary school system in Iran was established in 1906, and the secondary school system was established in 1925. Figure 1 summarizes the structure of the pre-university educational system in Iran.

Figure 1. Structure of Pre-University Education System in Iran (Source: UNESCO, Available: <http://usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/wwcu/background.html>, Retrieved: August 20, 2003)

Cycle	Length of program	Age level	Certificate awarded
Elementary School ابتدایی	5	6-11	None
Middle/Guidance School راهنمایی	3	11-14	Certificate of General Education
Secondary/High School نظری	3	15-17	Secondary School Diploma
Pre-University (Year 4 High School) پیش دانشگاهی	1	17-18	Pre-University Certificate

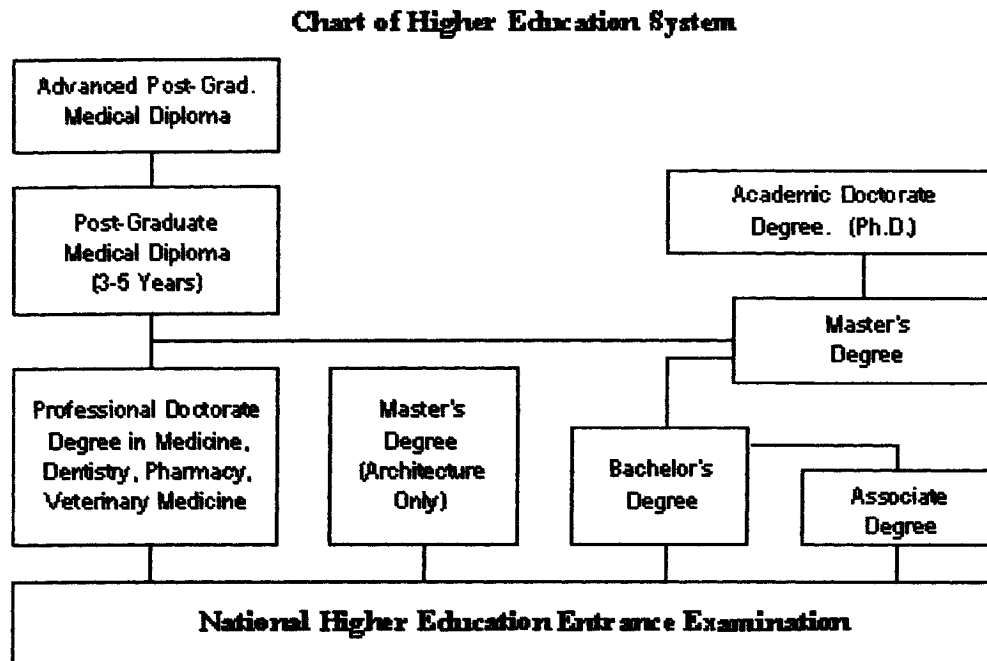
The system of higher education in Iran consists of general comprehensive universities, technology universities, medical universities, professional education institutions, teacher training colleges, and private higher institutions (World Education Services-Canada, WES, [On line]. Available: <http://www.wes.org/ca/webd/iran/irhigher.htm>, Retrieved: August 20, 2003). The following is a summary of Iran's higher education system:

Higher education institutions in Iran are divided into two main groups of 'government' and 'non-government' institutions. Depending on the particular field of study, higher education is organized and supervised by the two independent ministries of 'Culture and Higher Education' and 'Health, Treatment, and Medical Education'. All candidates for the government-run institutions and some of the candidates for the non-governmental institutions enter post-diploma, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral (medical) degree courses by taking a nationwide entrance examination held by the 'Organization for Educational Evaluation' and after passing the required course units graduate from one of the following groups: Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Humanities, Basic sciences, Technical and Engineering, Agriculture, and Arts. The selection of candidates for the specialized doctoral degree (PhD) courses is made directly by the universities. (Islamic Republic of Iran, IRI, [On line],

Available: <http://www.telecom.net.et/iranet/heducation.htm>, Retrieved: August 20, 2003)

In order to be admitted into an institution of higher education in Iran, all eligible university applicants must hold a high school diploma and complete the preparatory pre-university year (پیش دانشگاهی). All potential applicants must also participate in a nation-wide entrance examination, called “Konkour,” and are called for an individual interview upon passing this written examination. The admission interview is mostly aimed to examine the applicant’s knowledge and devotion to Islamic values and principles of Sharia. This determines the probability of his or her acceptance into university. The scores on the written part regulate the participant’s eligibility to apply for admission into different programs of study at different universities that are ranked according to potential salary and social prestige. Admission into medical fields such as Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy and Engineering programs require higher scores than “lower-ranked” programs, such as literature, translation and modern languages. This implies that medical and scientific fields, including engineering programs are considered to be more prestigious than programs in humanities and social sciences. A summary of Iran’s higher educational system is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Iranian Higher Educational System (Source: A. Eskandari, "Islamic Republic of Iran," UNESCO, [On line]. Available: <http://www.unescobkk.org/education/aceid/higher-edu/handbook.html>, retrieved: August 20, 2003)



The social and cultural missions and goals of higher education in Iran, as described by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (MSRT) are:

developing the culture of academic and social criticism and discussion, and preparing a healthy and secure atmosphere in order to enhance culture, thought, knowledge and insight in universities and the society [and] preparing the ground for contribution of academics to the process of policy-making and criticizing and modifying the affairs of the society. (On line, Available: <http://www.msrt.gov.ir/English/Policy/htm>, Retrieved March 12, 2004)

With these goals in mind, there are three types of institutions of higher education in Iran. In the *public sector*, there are 54 universities and institutions of higher education active under the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The

Comprehensive Applied Sciences University was established in 1992. Other higher education institutions are affiliated with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone (Communications), and Ministry of Roads and Transportation.

The second type is the *private sector* which includes the Islamic Azad University established in 1983. Private investors provided the equipment, the buildings, laboratories and the equipment. There are also other private institutions of higher education, in addition to the Islamic Azad University (دانشگاه آزاد) with an enrollment of about 23,000 students throughout the country.

Distance Education is the third type of higher education in Iran. The Payam-e-Nour University (پیام نور) established in 1987 offers distance education courses at the undergraduate level. The goal of the university was to “promote the science and culture of the society, expand higher education in remote areas, admit more candidates to higher education, facilitate further education for employed candidates, take part in training of specialized manpower and make efficient use of educational potentials and facilities” (On line, Available:<http://www.msrt.gov.ir/English/Policy/htm>, Retrieved March 12, 2004). The programs are offered in 18 disciplines and students are admitted after taking part in the nationwide entrance examination. There are 147 centers throughout the country with an enrollment of 146,990 in the academic year 1998-1999, of which over 52% is female. In the academic year 2003-2004, women made up nearly 62% of college and university students in Iran.

Similar to other institutions of higher education in the West and elsewhere in the world, Iran's universities offer degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As indicated in Figure 3, there are three different levels of academic studies. Associate and Bachelor's degrees are awarded at the first stage, the undergraduate level. Master's degrees and Doctoral degrees (including professional Medical programs and Ph.D) are awarded at the second and third stages of university study. Teaching certificates which have the academic value of the undergraduate Bachelor's are awarded to those admitted to the Teacher Education programs across the country.

Figure 3. Structure of Higher Education System in Iran (Source: UNESCO, Available:<http://usc.edu/dept/education/globaled/wwcu/background.html>, Retrieved: August 20, 2003)

Level of Studies	Duration (Years)	Degree awarded
First Stage	2 (Associate)	Associate کاردانی
	4 (Bachelor's)	Bachelor's کارشناسی
Second Stage	2	Master's کارشناسی ارشد
Third Stage	4 ½ (PhD)	Doctorate دکترا
	6 (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Veterinary Medicine)	
Teacher Education	2 (Elementary School)	Associate کاردانی
	4 (Secondary School)	Bachelor's کارشناسی

Table 1 provides a general overview of the rate of enrollment at different levels of studies in higher education throughout the academic year 1998-1999. According the information provided, the majority of the students (approximately %93) who were enrolled in institutions of higher education were pursuing an undergraduate

degree (Associate or Bachelor's). A significantly lower number of students were pursuing their studies at the post-graduate level.

Table 1. Enrollment by the level of education: 1998-1999 (Source: Ministry of Science, research and Technology, Islamic Republic of Iran; Statistics of higher education in Iran, [On line]. Available: <http://www.msrt.gov.ir/english/policy/statistics.htm>, Retrieved: March 12, 2004)

Level of Education	Public		Private		Total	
	No	Percent	No	Percent	No	Percent
Associate	46758	29.11	56668	30.29	103426	29.74
Bachelor	98182	61.13	121467	64.82	219649	63.17
Master	8562	5.33	7195	3.85	15757	4.54
MP	5046	3.14	1499	0.80	6545	1.88
PhD	2067	1.29	278	0.15	2345	0.67
Total	160615	100	187107	100	347722	100

In Iran, the number of universities and institutions of higher education have significantly increased since the 1970s and 1980s, for example, from 22 in 1978 to 98 in 2000. However, the population explosion which transformed Iran from a nation of 37 million inhabitants in 1978 to a nation of over 60 million in 2004, has also put demanding pressures on the universities to increase acceptance and enrollment rates. Nonetheless, the increases in the number of institutions of higher education and enrollment rates have not contributed to improving public access to education. According to official statistics, while the number of admitted students rose from 34,000 in 1979-80, to 62,000 in 1986-87, the percentage of those admitted stayed constant at 10% of all eligible applicants who applied to universities (Higgins & Shoar-Ghaffari, 1994).

Education and Politics

Since the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the government of Iran has employed special policies that facilitate the admission of war veterans and “families of martyrs” (خانواده شهدا). The special categories of those who have a considerable quota in Iranian universities includes “handicapped Iran-Iraq war veterans”, and “volunteer war veterans” and consist of exclusively men. However, the categories of “families of martyrs” and members of the “literacy movement” may also include women. The process of Islamization of Iranian society—in the social, political and educational aspects of the people’s lives—has meant that access to education has not only been limited through an extensive cumbersome entrance examination and limited enrollment, but also through a political process whereby those who are not believed to have appropriate Islamic values are systematically denied access to education. According to Nader Habibi (1994),

In recent years the redistribution of educational and economic opportunities in favor of the government supporters, particularly the war veterans and their families, has emerged as the prime objectives of P.S. (political screening) policies. (p. 582)

Moreover, Education, and educational policies are owned and structured strictly and exclusively by the federal government. The centralized organization of the higher education structure in Iran means that the central Ministry of Education takes main decisions about the structure and educational policies. Consequently, the individual institutions, professors, administrators, and students are not allowed to participate in the process of decision-making and are prevented from criticizing policies decided upon by the central government. Hence, The political

discourse of education in Iran remains to support and reinforce the transmission of Islamic values and beliefs endorsed by the existing structures of power and control in the society.

Cultural Revolution

Since the 1979 revolution in Iran, the structure of the institutions of higher education has gone through more drastic changes than elementary or secondary education. One of the first movements after the 1979 revolution was the attempt to de-secularize all aspects of social and political life which represented itself in a nationwide “cultural revolution” introduced in 1980. The aim of the Cultural Revolution, Enghelab-e-Farhangi (انقلاب فرهنگی) (1980-1983) was to Islamize the institutions of higher education and abolish the secular system that had been in place prior to 1979. The Cultural Revolution was the result of mass demonstrations of the public and in particular, the university students who opposed the clergy coming to power. It gave way to violent clashes between the students who supported the complete desecularization of the educational system and those students and faculty members who did not support such changes and insisted on maintaining a secular educational system and curricula. The universities were reopened in the fall of 1983, at which point they only accommodated a fraction of the students who were enrolled prior to that event. For example, the university of Tehran’s student body was reduced from 17,000 to about 4,500 students.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) describes the Cultural Revolution in this excerpt:

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in 1979 major changes took place in the higher education system and in order to adopt fundamentally to the needs of the revolution, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education was changed into the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. In the same spirit and in order to establish a revolutionary culture, to create a new educational system in higher education, to set new standards in fundamental and applied research, and to institutionalize the values of the revolutionary society existing within the universities, the 'Cultural Revolution Headquarters' which was later changed into the 'Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution' was established by the late leader of the revolution, Imam Khomeini (God bless his soul) and played a most important role in the cultural and educational policy-making of the country. Working under the supervision of the Leader of the country and chairmanship of the President, the Council enjoys the membership of the Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament), Head of the Judiciary, Minister of Culture and Higher Education, Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance, Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Broadcasting Organization, together with a number of leading scientific and cultural experts. (Islamic Republic of Iran, [On line]. Available: http://iranembassy.hu/oniran_education.html, Retrieved: August 20, 2003)

To accomplish these goals, the Cultural Revolution incorporated three measures to introduce and stabilize the new process of Islamization of the country and the nation. The first was to review and revise textbooks which were developed during the Pahlavi era. The process of Islamicization included introducing texts from Islamic scripts, introducing Arabic as the compulsory subject as early as Grade 5 in the elementary school. They removed pictures of women and young girls in textbooks and substituted them with less frequently seen pictures of women in Islamic Hijab, doing traditional feminine work such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. An example is illustrated in Photo 5, which is taken from a Grade One Persian textbook.

Photo 5. Woman, as mother and caretaker in an elementary school textbook (Source: Zanan Magazine, 1999, Volume 56, p.2, Cited in Derayeh, 2002)



Secondly, they undertook a process of “cleansing” (پاکسازی) of the universities, colleges, and to lesser extent secondary schools. University professors and schoolteachers who presumably did not abide by the Islamic rules, and/or were considered to be “agents” of the pre-revolutionary regime were fired and/or forced to resign. Only those teachers/instructors who were not considered to embrace anti-revolutionary ideology and or pose a danger to the new conceived Islamic Republic were allowed to remain in teaching positions. Thirdly, they regulated the behavior and dress code of students, and teachers alike, through introducing Islamic uniform for women and encouraged modest clothing for men. As seen in Photo 6, the Islamic dress code requires women to wear a dark-colored (usually Black, Navy, Brown, Charcoal) shapeless long tunic and pants, and cover their hair with a scarf. Wearing the Chador (چادر), a long black cloth

covering the entire body is not mandatory, but is a commonly practiced tradition among many women. While men are not required to follow a specific dress code, they were prohibited from wearing short-sleeved shirts, jeans, and tight pants that are considered to be culturally inappropriate.

Photo 6. Hijab (حجاب): Iranian women's Islamic dress code (Source: <http://www.payvand.com>)



The Cultural Revolution signified a radical shift in the ideology of education in the country. It aimed to not only change the structure of the educational system in Iran, but also to revive, support and reinforce Islamic values and culture across all layers of the society. The mission statement of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution (SCCR), as the highest authority for policy-making and

planning in Iran, supports this argument. The responsibilities of SCCR are mentioned as follows:

- 1) Dissemination of Islamic culture throughout the society as well as strengthening of Cultural Revolution and enhancement of culture.
- 2) Development of universities, schools, arts and cultural centers on the basis of Islamic culture as well as supporting devout, active and skilful staff, lecturers, educators, and teachers who believe in Islam and independence of the country.
- 3) To expand literacy and benefit from the world's scientific achievements and experiences to attain academic and cultural independence.
- 4) Preservation, revival, and introduction of Islamic works and heritage, including post-Islamic era artifacts, paintings, poetry and literature, as well as traditional Islamic philosophy and religious values: (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, MSRT, [On line].

Available:<http://www.msrt.gov.ir/English/Policy/htm>, Retrieved March 12, 2004)

Despite IRI's efforts to desecularize and Islamize the educational system, universities and other institutions of higher education in Iran have been the sites of struggle against the government's efforts. Iran's recent student movements have heightened since the election of president Mohammad Khatami in the Spring of 1997. Student movements in the Islamic republic, started in the early 1990's with various uprising in major cities in Iran, such as the University of

Tehran. The violent student movements have gone through three periods. The first period was in the pre-revolutionary era, during the Shah's rule; the second period happened in the 1980's and was a response to the repression of rights of the Islamic regime's Cultural Revolution. The third period of student movements have now transformed again to a movement for civil rights and secularization of education system in the 1990's and onwards (Yaghmaian, 2002). Student clashes and anti-government sentiments amongst the university students in Iran are not new phenomena. In years before 1979, and during the turbulence of the revolutionary days of 1978-1979, major universities in Iran have been the scene of violent clashes between the military and the opposition forces.

In an analysis of student movements in Iran, Philip Altbach (1999), a professor of higher education at Boston College, attributes students' dissent to Iran's poor political system and a "weak public sphere". In Iran, and generally speaking, many if not all developing countries, social organizations such as the press, unions, political institutions and non-governmental organizations lack efficient social and political organization and structure to lead populist reform movements. Altbach (1999) observes that in Iran, the students participating and leading the movement,

were the only group in society able to express dissenting views. Students, after all, come from relatively affluent and urbanized families in developing countries. They are relatively easy to organize since they are on campus. The academic atmosphere, even in repressive societies such as Iran and Indonesia, is more free than in the surrounding society. Perhaps most important, higher education encourages inquiry and the questioning of established practices and institutions. It is not at all surprising that critical opinion will be expressed first among students. ("Students: Politics and revolution," [On line]. Available: http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/news17.html, Retrieved: August 20, 2003)

Notwithstanding their frequency, Iranian student movements have not been successful to bring about radical changes to the political and social structure of Iranian society. Nonetheless, they symbolize a rise in social awareness and consciousness among younger Iranians who make up over half of the population.

Philosophy of Education in Iran

In this section, I discuss the traditional and contemporary views and perspectives towards education in Iranian culture throughout the history of the country from ancient to modern times. As illustrated in the previous section, education and specifically higher education have strong historical roots in Iran. While there have been radical changes to the structure of the educational system, the dominant discourse of education aims to acknowledge, value and reinforce religious beliefs and traditions. The Iranian ideology of education has been historically intertwined with religious teachings and practices which have gone from honoring Zoroastrian principles to Islamic thoughts. In the next section, I discuss this issue further.

Zoroastrianism

The early education in Iran was influenced by the teachings of Zarathustra (زرتشت) and regulated by the authoritative state. In this religion, “[b]uilding a strong body, speaking the truth, and perpetuating the Zoroastrian social motto, “[g]ood thoughts, good words, good deeds,” were the important principles. (Sassani, 1962, p.5). The ancient Iranian education embodied the socialization of

well-behaved loyal citizens. The next excerpt from Yasna (یسنا), one of the sections of the Zoroastrian book of Avesta (اوستا), illustrates the traditional Iranian emphasis on raising faithful and socially responsible children:

Oh, Ahuramazda, endow me with an educated child; a child who will participate within his community; a child who will fulfill his duty in society; a child who will strive for the happiness of his family, his city, and his country; an honorable child who may contribute to other's needs. (Yasna, Nos. 62-65)

The early Iranian society's emphasis on the education of good citizens with strong morals, that are defined as the teaching and values of Zarathustra and the Zoroastrian faith created a social order in which the individual was expected to fully participate in the society and perform religious duties. Zoroastrian doctrines played an influential role in influencing and shaping pre-Islamic educational thought. In describing ancient traditional educational thought in Iran, Reza Arasteh (1969) writes:

The culture of ancient Persian was well integrated...The society sought to build a great nation by developing citizens who were religious, of good moral character and patriotic. This cultural pattern existed and flourished because of a tight-knit kinship structure, which stressed good behavior and deeds, the religious teachings of Zarathustra and an authoritarian state. Such a cultural pattern provided a well-coordinated program of socialization, which in turn aided the development of a stable, integrated adult personality. The limitations of a rigid family structure and immobile class system served merely to strengthen the individual's relations to his family, to both his equals and superiors, and to the state itself. (p.2).

As Arasteh stated in the previous quote, the ancient Iranian culture and society valued the role of education in creating loyal and socially responsible individuals who would respect the sanctity of family and authority. Education, while accessible to members of the "noble" classes, the royalty, merchants and the

clergy, emphasized the role of religion and religious thoughts—the teachings of Zoroastra—in the lives of individuals.

Islamic Influence

Seek knowledge even if it be in China, for the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, man or woman

(Prophet Mohammad)

With the advent of Islam in Iran in the later part of the seventh and eighth century, Islamic values gradually replaced ancient Zoroastrian training.

However, a common underlying element in both pre-Islamic and Islamic Iranian society was the affinity and inter-dependence between education and religious principles. Shorish (1988) explains that,

since Islam is the religion of most Iranians as well as *the* revolutionary program of the government, one seldom finds inconsistencies between the official revolutionary values of the government (values the texts and other media are asked to communicate) and the values taught by other agencies, such as the home and places of worship and work. (p.60)

In mid-nineteenth century, “[s]ecular political thinking was being effectively spread to the small number of literate groups in Iran” (Vaziri, 1993, p.179), and continued under the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty the end of the 1970s and prior to the establishment of the Islamic republic. According to Mohsenpour,

[I]mprovising the Iranian student’s religious beliefs was one of the major aims of the educational system during the shah’s reign. The hostility of the former regime against Islam was so extreme that the followers of all other faiths had the permission and freedom to propagate their beliefs in schools other than those that were true followers of Islam. (p.77)

There have been significant efforts to reconcile the religious values and education after the 1979 revolution. The focus has been primarily on the creation of the “Islamic person”; one who is God-fearing (متقى), learned (عالم), and brave (شجاع) (Shorish, 1988). Tavassoli, Welch, and Houshyar, (2000) argue that,

the measure of quality in education is seen to be closely related to the values of Islam, as exemplified in the life of the prophet, and the Imam Khomeini ... The importance of conformity between the ideals of Shi'i Islam and the actions of religious leaders and the government is stressed within school texts, and school practices and organization. These ideals are argued to be universal and potentially to embrace all individuals irrespective of ethnic or religious affiliation—through an emphasis on the universal qualities of humankind, and of the Islamic community, is taught a cardinal value, as is solidarity with oppressed peoples, especially Islamic brethren such as Palestinians. (p.289)

The educational policies developed by governments reflect the views and perspectives in the way they view human development. This does not exclude IRI where the educational policies since the establishment of the relatively new Islamic Republic reflect this view of human development. As Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1994) point out:

Whereas most other contemporary developing societies emphasize the need for trained workers, the Islamic Republic of Iran has given more emphasis to the need for socially responsible adults and for good citizens. This has been taken to mean, in effect, good Muslims. (p.20)

The IRI's view of education is in agreement with Islamic education which is “referred to in [the] Quran (3:110) as the process of shaping character within the Islamic worldview, that is, to learn and to act as guided by the book” (Hafez Barazangi, 1997, p. 49). As described by the High Council of Education, the six goals of post-revolutionary Iranian educational system are: 1) spiritual goals which aim to introduce the students with principles and indoctrines of Islamic

ideology and philosophy, 2) scientific and cultural goals which focus on helping the students familiarize with scientific knowledge, Islamic teachings, languages and development of technology, 3) social goals which include encouraging and fostering family values, and strengthening Muslim brethren and national unity, and respect for law and order based on Islamic justice system, 4) political goals signify accepting the rule of God over the world, and humankind, and unity among Muslims of all nations, and struggle against oppression and ensuring the nation's political independence, and 5) economic goals which include individual participation of all citizens in production, in order to ensure the country's self-sufficiency and economic independence (Mohsenpour, 1988).

Shorish (1988) explains that, "[i]n Islam, training and commitment have always come before everything else that a person does, regardless of the stage of economic development of the society" (p.61). Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1994), illustrate the link between education and state policies in the IRI:

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, as indeed in all contemporary societies, formal schooling is largely a state institution—established, maintained, and controlled in order to implement government policies concerning what may be broadly termed 'the development of human resources'. (p.19)

Furthermore, there is a separation between "taibiyyat" (تربیت) and "ta'lim" (تعلیم), which are literally translated to mean "teaching civility" and "teaching, instruction, training," respectively. The concept of tarbiyyat (تربیت), however, extends beyond the concept of training. It refers to the "acquisition of desirable attitudes and characteristics in addition to what is understood in the Western pedagogy by the word "training"." (p.61). In contrast, ta'lim (تعلیم) is "the process

by which one gets knowledge (*`ilm*) and information (*ma`lumat*) through such media as books and teachers" (Shorish, 1988, p.61). Naquib Al-Attas (1999), an Islamic scholar and al-Ghazali Chair of Islamic Thought, argues that the concept of "education" in Islamic thought and the separation between *ta`lim* and *tarbiyyat*, *"is not simply a matter of language, but a matter of worldviews"* (p.12). He defines Islamic education as,

the recognition and acknowledgement, progressively instilled into man, of the proper places of things in the order of education, such that it leads to the recognition and acknowledgement of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence. (p.26)

Therefore, Education is viewed as the "instillation" of knowledge about God and from God in individual men and women. A question rises, "What is the role of an individual in the learning process?" The view of education as a progressive connection to the "divine" through teaching of religious principles does not seem to attribute an "active" role to the student/individual as an independent learner capable of critical thinking. Not necessarily so, as Ayatollah Morteza Mottahari (1920-1979) (آیت الله مرتضی مطهری), an Iranian scholar on Islamic thought argued. In his book, "*ta`lim [and] taibiyyat [in] Islam*" (1981), Mottahari underlines the necessity of encouraging "critical thinking" in the educational process. He points out:

Teachers should not instill a series of information, facts, [etc.] in the brains of their students and pupils, and assume their memories as a reservoir. The goal of education must be set higher. The teacher should encourage the growth of the pupil's cognitive abilities, and direct [him or her] towards independent [learning]... there are two kinds of knowledge, one that is heard [which means] learned from the outside, and one that is intuitive [which means] its source is the human nature, and it originates from the individual, it is the power of original thinking of the individual... the goal of education should be the cognitive and mental growth of the pupil, the child, the adult and the society. (p.303)

هدف تعلیم باید بالاتر باشد، معلم باید نیروی فکری متعلم را پرورش دهد و او را به سوی استقلال رهنمون شود، باید قوه ابتکار او را زنده کند... علم، دو علم است، یکی علم شنیده شده یعنی فرا گرفته شده از خارج و دیگر علم مطبوع یعنی دانشی که ناشی از طبیعت و سرشت آدمی است، و از خود انسان سر چشمه می گیرد، و منظور همان قوه ابتکار خود شخص است... در آموزش و پرورش، رشد فکری دادن به شاگرد، به کودک، به بزرگ و به جامعه، بایستی هدف قرار گیرد.

In this quote, Mottahari emphasizes the goal of education as instructing and nurturing the “whole person”, and encouraging cognitive growth based on two forms of learning: instructional and intuitive. Thus, education includes both forms of knowledge, “learned” knowledge acquired from outside sources as facts, and “subjective” knowledge, based on an individual's own understandings of the world and his or her experiences.

Culture and religion have significantly influenced Iranian men and women's perceptions of education and their educational practices (Shariatmadari, 1985). In his book, “The Principles of teaching and learning in Islam” (1980), Shahid-al-Thani (شهید الثانی)—a 16th century Shi'a scholar—emphasizes the pivotal role of education and learning for all Muslim men and women, and contends that education, as a process of life-long learning and teaching, is the road to serenity, peace, and affinity to the divine power of God. This book, which has been translated by Dr. Muhammed Bagher Hojati

(محمد باقر حجتی) from its original Arabic, has been used as an introductory textbook in Islamic theology and philosophy at different state universities in Iran since its publication in Persian in 1980. Shahid-al-Thani asserts:

Thy "danesh-jo" [seeker of knowledge], whom I wish success and prosperity with the help of the divine, it is necessary [for you] to make an effort and work hard and use the short-lived and temporary opportunities in life to learn effective and worthwhile knowledge and gain spiritual virtues – because the mastery of these divine wisdom and virtues is the primary reason for prosperity and eternal happiness. (p. 557)

ای دانشجو – ای کسی که چنین امید دارم
بمدد لطف الهی، موفق و کامیاب گردی –
... بر تو لازم است که بکوشی و دامن همت
بکمر زنی و روزگار کوتاه و فرصتهای زودگذر
عمر خویش را – برای دست یافتن
به فضائل روحی و فراهم آوردن نیروهای
سازنده علمی – غنیمت بشماری،
زیرا تحصیل این فضائل و
ملکات علمی، علت اساسی نیکبختی
جاوید و سازنده کمال نعمت و
سرور دائمی می باشد.

He also defines education as the practice of "seeking knowledge", and the religious duty of all Muslim women and men:

Gaining knowledge is mandatory for all Muslims (including all women and men). [You] have to seek knowledge, [and know] its sources and uses...if gaining knowledge accompanies a divine goal, it is encouraged and commanded...and behaviors and deeds that are based upon knowledge are considered as "Jihad" (جهاد) for the divine.

دانش آموختن بر هر فرد مسلمان (اعم از زن و مرد)
ضروری و واجب است. باید علم و دانش را از
سرچشمه ها و موارد استفاده آن، جویا شوید...
اگر دانش آموختن با هدف الهی توأم باشد بعنوان حسنه
تلقی می شود، و پویائی از علم، عبادت است...
و عمل و رفتار هماهنگ با علم، جهاد در راه خدا
است.

(Shahid-al-Thani, 1980, p.60)

Therefore, within the Iranian culture that emphasizes the value of education in an individual's life and its significance in shaping and defining one's identity, the individual responsibility to seek education and gain knowledge is highlighted.

Education, is defined as the search of knowledge and source of prosperity and happiness in life, and becomes a means and an end in and out of itself, a life-long process that leads to the “mastery of divine wisdom and virtues”. Education is also viewed as a means of socio-economic advancement and a vehicle for progress and a better future. The former Shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1945-1979) used the analogy, “the national ship” (کشتی وطن) to emphasize the role of education in moving the country forward to the “shore of progress” (ساحل پیشرفت). Education was seen as an investment of every citizen to ensure the prosperity of their families and the entire country (Sahvarini, 2001). David Maneshri (1992) points out that the concept of education as a means for “economic emancipation” has been stressed by Iranians of all socio-economic levels. He explains:

In my travels in different regions of the country (mainly in Lorestan, Kurdistan, Fars, Mazandaran, Gilan, and Isfahan), I was impressed by the fact that education was held in high regard even in the most remote regions. The most striking example I came across was the small village of Razun in Lorestan. The village had no running water, no electricity, no sanitation, not even a public *hamam* (bath house). Yet when I asked the villagers what they needed most, they had only one answer: “The only thing we really need is a school. Only that can assure our children a better life than ours. (P.170)

Maneshri’s makes the point that in a developing country such as Iran, education is commonly regarded and valued as a means for upward socio-economic mobility and rise to a more privileged social status. Photo 7, an educational poster created by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran underscore Maneshri’s statements.

Photo 7. Inside a classroom in Iran (Source: [http:// www.iranian.com](http://www.iranian.com))

It is never
too late to
learn....

Education
will reduce
Poverty



In Iran, as well as in most developing countries, unstable political establishments, weak social institutions and an underdeveloped economy create a situation where access to education, particularly to institutions of higher education, is nearly impossible for most citizens of the state (Enomoto & Bair, 2002). It is under such unfavorable socio-economic and political environment that mainly those with more privileges in terms of economic resources and political power have an opportunity to reinforce their position as the “privileged” in the society. In turn, those with less power, money and access to education, view

education as a liaison between themselves, their children, and a brighter and more privileged future.

The “Educated Person”: A Linguistic Analysis

In Persian (or Farsi فارسی), the official language of Iran, there is a distinction between two different categories of students in the education system. The first category of students, the “danesh-amouz” (دانش آموز) refers to the students in the pre-university education system (k-12). The term is formed of two separate words, the noun “danesh” (دانش)—meaning “knowledge”—and “amouz”, abbreviated from “amouzandeh” (آموزنده) from the root verb “amouzesht” (آموزش)—translated into English as the verb “to be instructed”. The Persian verb, “amouzesht” (آموزش), implies a *passive* process through which the individual student is instructed and hence led to the *acquisition* of knowledge. The role of the “danesh-amouz” (دانش آموز) can be conceived as one who is the passive recipient of instruction and the receiver of the knowledge transferred onto him/her through the teacher.

The second category of students, “danesh-jou” (دانشجو), refers to students in the higher education system. This term is composed of two separate words: “danesh” (دانش), “knowledge”, and the noun, “jou” abbreviated from “jouyandeh” (جوینده) from the root verb, “jou-yidan” (جوئیدن), meaning “to seek”. Therefore,

students in higher education are “active” seekers of knowledge as opposed to “recipients” of instruction. From a socio-historical stance, university students in Iran have enjoyed a special degree of respect and prestige within the family and the society, not only for being recognized for their quest for “knowledge,” but also as the result of the systematic problems with access to higher education which makes entrance into universities a particularly noble act not accomplished by all.

Women’s Education in Iran

Now, I provide a brief historical overview of the early girl’s schools in Iran. I then explore the patterns of literacy education among Iranian women throughout different periods of the country’s history. Lastly, I attempt to investigate the cultural and religious principles that guide women’s education in Iran, and how these traditional values shape the gendered discourses of education of men and women.

First Girls’ Schools

In 1875 American missionaries established the first girls’ schools in Iran in the city of Urumieh (ارومیه), the center of a large Armenian community in the northwestern part of the country. However, the Iranian government banned Muslims girls and women from enrolling and attending these schools. It was presumed that Muslim women’s education will lead to the moral corruption of the

society and keep women away from performing their natural duties as wives and mothers.

The necessity of women's and girls' education was emphasized and mentioned in the 1906 constitution. However, the delay in the establishment of girls' schools in Iran was predominantly due to cultural and religious beliefs which viewed the education of women with disdain. A resolution was reached at a women's meeting in Tehran on January 20, 1907 in which the establishment of girls' schools was considered a priority. The resolution urged the abolishment of women's dowry and devotion of those dowries to women's education, and subsequently led to the establishment of first women's schools in Iran.

The first girls' school in Iran that was allowed to provide education to Muslim girls was "Ecole France-Persane" established in 1906. This school followed the French curriculum and was, in fact, supported by the French missionaries in Iran. Iranian women themselves developed more schools in the years 1906, 1910, and 1911. The first girls' public school was thus established in 1918. Noteworthy is that these first girls' schools were providing education at the elementary level and were continuously criticized by the clergy and Muslim leaders for trying to "corrupt" the morality of young Muslim girls.

The establishment of girls' schools in Iran led to the creation and construction of a new generation of modern, educated Iranian women who valued education and emphasized literacy and viewed women's literacy as the tools and means for developing modern societies. However, regardless of their personal views towards education, many of these women were working against

the wishes of their husbands and families and cultural values and national and political discourses of the time.

Bibi Vazirof (بی بی وزیروف), a woman from an upper class family in Tehran, founded the first girls' school called, Madresseh Doushizagan (مدرسه دوشیزگان).

The school was closed down shortly after its establishment and was reopened a few months later. There were also other forms of girls' schools held at private houses, such as the school Namous (ناموس) run and managed by Toba

Azmoudeh (طوبی ازموده). In 1910, Mrs Safeieh Yazdi (صفیه یزدی) opened

"Effatieh" (عفتیه), and more schools followed afterwards. Taraghi (ترقی) was

opened in 1911 by the efforts of Mahrukh Gawharshinas (ماهرخ گوهرشناس) despite

her husband's disapproval. Mah Sultan Amir Sehei (ماه سلطان امیر سحایی)

opened Tarbiyat (تربیت) in 1911. By 1913, there were sixty-three girls' schools

with over 2500 students and nine women's associations and societies in Tehran

(Price, 1996). Nonetheless, the establishment of girls' schools in other major

cities in Iran, lagged behind Tehran, the Capital city. In 1908, the first girls'

schools in Isfahan opened under the management of Mrs. Sedigheh Dowlatabadi

(صدیقه دولت آبادی). However, as the result of the pressures from the religious

leaders and their followers, who saw women's education as a contradiction to the

Islamic traditions and values, the schools were closed down after only three

months of service (Sanasarian, 1982).

The Road to Progress

Although educational opportunities for girls improved after the revolution, the dropout rate is still higher for girls...[in 1996] 87 percent of girls of eligible age attended primary school, only 69 percent attended secondary school. (Official IRI Government document, 2000).

In the absence of official statistics on the literacy rate among Iranian women prior to 1925, it has been assumed that the rate was as low as three percent (Sanasarian, 1982). Two reasons are attributed to the low rate of literacy among women. First and foremost, the religious beliefs of traditional Shia (شیعه) religion viewed women's education as a contradiction of divine laws. Secondly, the social segregation of men and women further contributed to the practice of prohibiting women's education. An official document from the late nineteenth century that refers to the official social and public segregation of women is an excellent example of the public political discourse and testimony to the social and public segregation of women. According to this document,

It was illegal for them [women and men] to walk together on the same side after 4:00 pm. If as sometimes happened, a woman wanted to reach her own home, or some other place such as a pharmacy, which lay on the wrong side, she had to get permission from a policeman to go there. She was then allowed to cross, or to hurry out and hurry back. (Bamdada, 1977, cited in Sanasarian, 1982, p.14)

It can be concluded that religious principles and Iranian cultural values discouraged women's education. Moreover, the geographical makeup of nineteenth and early twentieth century Iranian society—with over 90 percent of the population living in the rural areas—further suppressed women's education. The rural lifestyle with its dependence on agriculture equally restricted women

and men's education (Ghahremani, 1988). A rural family's economic sustenance was dependent on women's work at home and on the farm.

The realities of women's lives, and the conventional views towards their education further constrained their abilities to acquire literacy skills and fulfill their educational aspirations. The statistics paint an astounding picture of the dark situation for women in Iran. The literacy rate among women ages seven and older in 1959, was only 8%. This literacy rate was increased to 18% in 1966 and to 26% in 1971. The situation was even more bleak in rural areas, as the educational opportunities were mainly concentrated in more developed urban areas (Sanasarian, 1982).

Since the late 1970's, Iran has made serious attempts to improve women's education. In 2001, girls represented 49 percent of the total student population in Iran. The IRI government's efforts to promote women's access to education have resulted in an increase in girls' enrollment in primary schools (97.5 percent), middle (89.4%) and high schools (66.5%) in 1999 (Eftekharzadeh, 2001). The same development also applies to women's participation in higher education. Table 2, an adaptation from a recent official report from 2004, shows the ratio of women enrolled in Iranian public institutions at 50.2%, which is a significant growth from 31.9% in the year 1995 (Shojaei, 2004).

Table 2. Rate of women's literacy in Iran (Source: Zahra Shojaei, Director of Women's Participation Organization; Webnevesht, [On line]. Available:<<http://webnevesht.com/guest.asp?id=1323334320>>, Retrieved: March 12, 2004)

Education	1995	2004	Rate of Growth
%Literacy	74.24	79.74	7.41
%Pre-University Students (all levels)	47	48	2
% University Students	31.9	50.6	58.62
Women-Only Educational and Vocational Institutions	35	166	374

The information represented above illustrates the greater presence and participation of Iranian women in educational settings, a trend which is likely to continue in the future. Photo 8, an IRI's official educational poster, depicts young girls in a classroom in Iran. The slogan, "On Fridays, children could be here," is particularly interesting since Fridays are official end-of-the-week holidays in Iran (according to the Islamic tradition). The message conveyed by the poster is to emphasize and highlight the significance and importance of education, particularly for young women, so far as attending schools and learning even on the official religious holiday.

Photo 8. Young girls inside a classroom in Iran (Source: <http://www.iranian.com>)



On Fridays, children could be here

Between Modernity and Tradition

While the rate of literacy among women significantly increased during the Pahlavi dynasty, and women's participation in higher education was facilitated, cultural views and religious practices continued to inhibit women's full participation in higher education. As Sanasarian (1982) points out:

despite the rise in literacy rates among women, their traditional attitudes about women's roles did not change. A study of the domestic social environment of women in Isfahan during 1970-71, conducted by John and Margaret Gulick, showed that increased literacy among women did not change their roles in the domestic environment. (p.107-8).

In an earlier study of Iranian women's attitudes towards motherhood, marriage, and career development, Siassi (1976) investigated the attitudes of lower socio-economic women with different levels of education. The results of the study showed that higher levels of education among women did not create a major change in their attitudes towards motherhood and marriage. Traditional views towards culturally accepted gender roles seem to still have a strong influence on Iranian women's attitudes towards education and work. Sanassarian (1982) observes that Iranian women seem "work mostly out of necessity rather than for economic independence or social well-being" (p.108). According to Sanassarian (1982), three reasons contribute to the education of women as a re-enforcement of traditional gender roles, as she explains in the following quote:

One reason has to do with continuing pressures from society. Family, neighborhood, and the general way of life in a town or in a city have been important components of Iranian life. The surroundings in which a woman was raised strongly affected her perceptions of others and of herself. Local socialization was strong and could easily dominate a young girl's attitudes more than any outside force...As in many other countries, a daughter's education was viewed as a means to find her a good suitor. It was quite common for a girl with a university degree to get married, have children, and retire from an active public and professional life altogether. In short, a domesticated mentality was forced upon women not only by their families but also by their social environment around them. The second explanation...may lie in the nature of the Iranian educational system under the Shah. Two aspects of this system prevented a radical change in women's attitudes. First, the Iranian educational system reinforced traditional values and stereotypes...Second, the educational system in Iran was based on memorization...rather than analytical thinking and evaluation....[T]he third explanation...is the lack of any general campaign to raise women's consciousness on women's issues. (p.109-110).

Thus, the inability of the educational system to challenge commonly held traditional views with regard to women's work and education prevents fundamental changes to women's traditional positioning within the family and the society. Similarly, Saedda Khanum (1995) criticizes women's education in Islamic societies as a means to encourage women's peripheral stance and reinforce men's position as holders of power and control over women. She asserts that,

The education of Muslim girls has less to do with schooling than with the exercise of control by Muslim men over the lives of women in the family and wider community. Generally, control is maintained by monitoring the level and amount of interaction with male relatives and local community. (p.282)

The questions remains: Can we conclude that women's education in Iran, and more generally in Islamic societies, is ineffective and in turn inadequate to transform traditional views of women's status in the society? The answer, I believe, is "No". Challenging social norms which are deeply rooted in cultural values and religious beliefs is a slow process which can only be achieved in small, yet consistent steps. Women's presence in education and workplace in Iran and elsewhere may not create sudden social transformations; nonetheless is a step forward to gradually change and reform public and social institutions (Hoodfar, 1999; Moghadam 1993; Sciolino, 2000; Mernissi, 1991). In an interview after his trip to Iran in 2002, Thomas Friedman, journalist and Middle East political commentator for the New York Times, commented:

You now find clerics, I have a friend who is telling me she has a cleric friend who comes up from Kum sometimes to Tehran. He takes off his turban and he takes off his clerical robes when he goes into certain neighborhoods because people will be really hostile. These clerics now stop women sometimes on the streets and yell at them for something they're wearing or not wearing. These women now yell right back. It's quite interesting. One thing that the Islamic revolutionaries did —God bless them —was [that] they extended education to everyone in Iran. Iran is an enormously educated population, much more than in the Arab world. 60 percent of university students now in Iran are women. (Interview with Margaret Warner, June 20, 2002. [On line]. Available: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/foreign_correspondence/jan-june02/friedman_6-20.html>. Retrieved: August 8, 2004)

While Friedman's account of his personal observation in Iran may not be extended to all contexts and situations, he, nonetheless, points to the inherent potential of education in creating public consciousness and awareness with regard to social issues.

Post-Revolutionary Era: "Re-Inventing an Old Image"

Despite the growth in women's literacy and their rate of participation in the work force, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has systematically emphasized the traditional roles of women as mothers and caretakers. I now provide an overview of the IRI's official ideology with respect to women's education in the state. The 1989 statement mission of IRA's in regard to women's education is as follows (Safe, 1996):

- 1) The Iranian education system should recognize the identity of a women and her role in the family and the society on the basis of Islam and plan for the content and method of her schooling accordingly.

- 2) The education guidance of girls should be based on their capabilities and interests and their vocational guidance should take into consideration the kind of occupations needed by women, best fulfilled by women, or most fit with their role and responsibility in the family.
- 3) Education in Iran should strengthen the social and political insight of girls and increase their self-confidence in fulfilling the social and family responsibilities.
- 4) Curriculum development in Iran should emphasize the sanctity and stability of the family and introduce the different roles of men and women in marital life.
- 5) The educational system should take into consideration the unique characteristics of boys and girls at the age of seven; and sending female teachers to girls' schools and male teachers to boys' schools.
- 6) The Ministry of Education should eliminate any form of discrimination against girls, especially in rural areas and among nomads, and give priority to girls in the distribution of resources and opportunities.
- 7) In order to encourage married women to continue their education, special schools should be created, educational radio and television should be provided, correspondence education should be encouraged, and day care centers should be provided for their education.

- 8) Women should participate in the planning, policy making, management and administration of education at all levels, especially at the top level positions.

As evident in these eight statements, women's education is seen as a means to preserve the sanctity and well-being of the family. A woman's education finds its meaning and worth in its potential to contribute to the development of the whole family's economic and emotional growth. According to Safe (1996), these principles illustrate that,

while women are trained to abide by their Muslim identity and fulfill their roles and responsibilities in the family, they are also expected to have social and political insight" according to the dictates of a revolutionary society, and assume "top level positions" in educational planning and decision making based on the criteria of a modern state. (p.4)

Despite claims of encouraging women's educational aspirations and facilitating their access to higher education, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to create barriers for women and curb their educational and career opportunities in order to ensure their compliance with the norms and values of the Islamic society. One example is the post-1979 law that prohibits women from studying abroad without the permission from a male guardian and makes financial scholarships to study abroad open to only men. The parliamentary bill that would have challenged the women's limitations to higher education abroad was amended by a two-to-one margin on January 7, 2001 by the Iran's parliament known as the Majlis (مجلس).

The Guardian Council later overturned the vote of the reformist parliament, a

twelve-member council consists of religious scholars and jurisprudence loyal to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (آیت الله علی خامنه ای), the Supreme Leader. On the eve of this incident, Regan Ralph, the executive Director of the Women's Division of Human Rights Watch, made the following statement:

The current laws contribute to the broad system of discrimination against women in Iran. This bill could have been an important step towards equality for Iranian women. Instead, the Guardian Council remains a serious obstacle to reform. (Human Rights Watch, 2001)

Consequently, Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1994) claim that contrary to the IRI government's claims regarding women's access to education, the official social and political policies and the deteriorating situation of Iran's economy led to the lower enrollment of lower classes and minority women in higher stages of secondary school and college level. Even after the 1979 revolution and the desecularization, many parents of lower socio-economic class and from rural areas, still resisted the idea of women being educated, and considered all forms of girls' education as moral corruption, regardless of the nature of the curriculum (Tavassoli, Welch, & Houshyar, 2000).

The fundamental principles of Islam view that men and women are inherently different. Therefore, they must be prepared for different tasks and perform different social duties in life (Higgins & Shoar-Ghaffari, 1994). Article 30 of the IRI constitution emphasizes the essential (i.e., biological) differences between men and women. However, it also highlights the importance of providing equal quality education to all Iranian men and women. This article states:

The government must provide all citizens with free education up to secondary school, and must expand free higher education to the extent required by the country for attaining self-sufficiency. (IRI Constitution, Article 30)

Hence, the problem in Iran is not the lack of women's interest in higher education or the limitations they face in accessing higher education. These issues carry significant implications and need to be considered. However, what needs to be mentioned here is the Islamic Republic's success in creating a sex-segregated society where women take care of women, and men take care of men. This can be seen in the case of male nurses who are trained to work and take care of the male patients in the hospitals. It should be mentioned that due to a lack of trained professional male nurses, female nurses continue to work in male-only hospital wings. However, the physical contact between a patient and a medical specialist of the opposite sex must be avoided, and/or restricted to situations when contact is necessary. The present Iranian government has been successful in creating a social structure whereby women have limited access to the world of men, and vice versa. However, since the political power is in the hands of men, women's lack of access to the men's public space means further socio-political isolation of women, and their inability to have control over policy making at the government level and, hence, in higher education.

It can be said that a general overview of the education and literacy rates of women in Iran does not necessarily indicate the level of their participation in all aspects of social and political life. As Hafez Barazangi (1997) states, "Muslim women's emancipation needs to be approached from another direction besides

education, namely, perceptual and attitudinal change" (p.46). Womens' roles and responsibilities as child-bearers and primary caretakers of children at home, indicates that there is a need to evaluate the suitability of any activity that women need to do outside of her home duties and her duties as a wife, and a mother.

This also means that these activities should not divert a woman's attention from performing her primary duties as a wife and a mother. Within the Iranian society, as well as other Muslim societies, motherhood and childcare,

are seen as the primary and major responsibility of women; the suitability of other activities can be judged more or less according to the degree to which they interfere with or draw women from their family responsibilities. Men's family responsibilities in contrast, focus on the provision of economic support and the articulation of the family with other public institutions. These family relationships, and society itself, are best protected from the potential disruptiveness of unregulated sexuality through segregation of the sexes in public environments. (Higgins & Shoar-Ghaffari, 1994, p.20)

This emphasis on promoting and reinforcing women's traditional roles in society as caretakers and nurtures is evident in official policies of the IRI. In the introduction of the constitution of the IRA, women's roles as the primary caretakers and wives and mothers is emphasized:

Family is the fundamental unit of the society and the center of growth and human spirit...from this perspective, women's status in society is redefined, and instead of being "objectified" and considered as "economic means" for the purposes of encouraging consumerism and exploitation, [women] will discover their grand role as mothers who raise socially and ideologically responsible human beings, and are equally involved with men in social activities. Consequently, [women] will be ready to take greater [social] responsibilities

خانواده واحد بنیادین جامعه و کانون اصلی رشد و تعالی انسان است ... زن در چنین برداشتی از واحد خانواده از حالت (شینی بودن) و یا (ابزار کار بودن)

در خدمت اشاعه مصرف زدگی و استثمار، خارج شده و ضمن باز یافتن وظیفه خطیر و پر ارج مادری در پرورش انسانهای مکتبی پیشاهنگ و خود هم‌رزم مردان در میدان های فعال حیات می باشد و در نتیجه پذیرای مسئولیتی خطیرتر و در دیدگاه اسلامی برخوردار از ارزش و کرامتی والاتر خواهد بود.

and from an Islamic perspective, will have a higher value and worth. (IRA Constitution, p.3)

Highlighting the maternal role of women and the promotion of an image of women the virtuous wives and dedicated mothers, in effect creates psychological and socio-political constraints on the active presence of women in all aspects of their social lives. Ghahremani (1988) asserts:

The principle goal of the government [of the Islamic Republic] is to isolate women in their homes. Mass media serving the government, the clergy in the mosques, and [Ayatollah] Khomeini are continuously promoting this perspective that the place of women is at home and outside of the job market. [and that] An ideal Muslim woman is a mother who raises children loyal to Allah and Islam—and the Islamic Republic is the advocate of [Allan and Islam] in this world. (p.26)

هدف اصلی سیاست دولت منزوی کردن زن در خانه است . رسانه های گروهی در انحصار دولت ، روحانیون در مساجد و خمینی همواره این نظریه را تبلیغ می کنند که جای زن در خانه و بیرون از بازار کار است و زن مسلمان ایده ال مادری است که به پرورش فرزندان وفادار به الله و اسلام ، که جمهوری اسلامی نماینده شان در این دنیاست ، می پردازد.

Since 1980—the year of the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran— the introduction of the compulsory dress code and forced veiling (حجاب اجباری) has become an important factor inhibiting women's access to education and in turn affects the quality of the education they receive. The cultural perception of women's assumed inferior physical abilities— when compared to men— limits or altogether prohibits women's chances of education in certain fields such as mining engineering, and fields that have been traditionally considered as culturally and religiously unsuitable for women. In an

analysis of the women's education in the IRI, Golnar Mehran (1991), a female university professor at the Al-Zahra University in Tehran, argues that women's dual role in the IRA as both mothers and active participants in the social and political activities creates a contradictory situation in terms of their social roles and educational aspirations and opportunities open to women. She explains that,

A contradictory role seems to be assigned to the Iranian woman. On the one hand, the New Muslim Woman's first and foremost duty in life is to fulfill the "holy" task of motherhood and preserve the sanctity and stability of family life. On the other hand, she is expected to be politically aware and socially active in the affairs of her society. She is expected to serve and struggle... a Muslim woman knows her priorities. Her freedom and participation in social life is conditional upon her having fulfilled her first task—the task of motherhood as well as her loyalty to the Islamic Republic. She is to be politicized but only to serve the government better. She is to be praised but only as a mother of a martyr. Only after recognizing her liabilities and limitations is she allowed to participate in life outside the home. She is to be respected as somebody's wife and mother and a soldier of Islam first and then as an individual—a self-sufficient and independent unit. (p.43-44)

However, women's education in IRI, as flawed and limited it may seem, may and has been used as an oppositional force to those who have attempted to limit women's participation in all aspects of social and political life. Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1994) point out that:

Education has commonly been seen as a major route to advancement for women, and in other countries of the world women's rights movements have grown in settings of sex-segregated and limited-purpose education for women. In the Islamic Republic, too, even the basic and somewhat restricted education being afforded women may give women the tools to become more aware of their possibilities and more articulate about alternative social arrangements, and hence increase their basis for influence and independence. (p.43)

In the IRI, using education as a means for politicization, and socialization of women has indeed led to major developments in their economic and social status. But the situation of women in Iran, while making progress, still lags behind those of their counterparts in the Western countries. In order to improve the situation, the incongruence between women's education, family expectations, and societal values needs to be addressed and women's roles as agents of their own learning should be emphasized and promoted.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the history and ideology of education in Iranian culture, by delving into a discussion of its historical roots in religious teachings, Zoroastrianism in ancient Iran and later on, Islam after the Arab invasion. Religious thought has significantly defined and shaped Iranian cultural views towards education. Education is not merely a medium for transmission of facts and knowledge; rather, it is a vehicle to raise and train socially responsible citizens who highly value the authority of family and the state. The situation of women's education is an important aspect of a "cultural" ideology of education rooted in the values, traditions and beliefs of Iranians. While women's education does not have a long history, it has, however, benefited from the efforts to modernize the country.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Looking Through Multiple Lenses

Cyrus: There is a lot of **Research** on Iranians and the situation and the lives of Iranians outside of the country [Iran]. It seems to me that we all want to portray [this image] that Iranians living abroad are all educated and wealthy, and easily **integrate** into the [host] society. That might be true. But we don't see much said about the problems and hardship that some Iranians have to go through here. True, there are Iranians who are very successful, [especially] young Iranians who came here and got a real good education. But, there are also those who couldn't do the same, because of the problems in their lives. They also have a right to speak up.

(October 4, 2002)

Yalda: Sometimes, I feel [I'm] very tired, that I can't carry on any more, problems in life, taking care of a child, house chores, and other problems. I don't have anyone to, at least, talk to. I feel that no one else has the same problems that I have. Now, that I'm saying these things, I feel lighter inside [getting the burden off my shoulders]. Sometimes, I feel very tired. I only hope I'll be able to carry on. Sometimes I feel so much pressure from life that I can't breath.

(August 28, 2002)

چ. در مورد ایرانی ها و وضعیت زندگی ایرانی های خارج از کشور خیلی **research** میشه. ولی این طور به نظرم میآد که ما میخوایم طوری وانمود کنیم که ایرانی های خارج از کشور همه تحصیلکرده و پولدارن و چقدر با جامعه اینجا **integrate** شدن. این شاید هم درست باشه، ولی کمتر می بینم که در مورد سختی ها و مشکلاتی که بعضی ایرانی ها اینجا دچارش هستن صحبت بشه. آره ایرانی هایی هستن که خیلی هم موفقن، بچه های ایرانی که اومدن اینجا و راحت درس خوندن، ولی کسانی هم هستن که نتونستن مشکلات زندگی بهشون اجازه نداد. اونها هم حق حرف زدن دارن.

بعضی وقت ها حس میکنم که خیلی خسته ام، دیگه نمیتونم بکشم. مسائل زندگی، بچه داری، خونه داری، و همین طور مشکلات دیگه. کسی رو هم ندارم که بتونم باهاش حرف بزنم. فکر می کنم که هیچ کس دیگه این مشکلاتی رو که من دارم، نداره. الان که دارم این چیز ها رو میگم، حس میکنم دارم خالی میشم. بعضی وقت ها خیلی احساس خستگی دارم. فقط امیدوارم که بتونم خودمو بکشم. بعضی وقت ها حس میکنم فشار زندگی اینقدر زیاده که نمیتونم نفس بکشم.

As a teacher, a student and a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canada, I have been intrigued by the experiences of other immigrant students in academia. Similar to my own, the experiences of men like Cyrus and women like

Yalda, conveyed in the opening quotes of this chapter, speak of untold stories of many students whose lives in the host country and academia represent a different reality than many others. My decision to investigate educational experiences of Iranian immigrants did not occur in a vacuum; rather, it was deeply rooted in my own historical stance and day-to-day experiences in my adopted country, Canada. Growing up in Iran, I developed a strong sense of the importance of education in one's life and identity, and realized its potential to transform a man or a woman's social and economic status. I became aware of the role of societal and family influences on shaping a person's perspectives towards education. I also learned about the advantages of being an "educated" person (تحصیل کرده), and the haphazard life of the "uneducated" (بی‌سواد).

In Canada, feeling that I was recognized as an immigrant, a foreigner, and a Third World Muslim woman, I soon came to view the value of education and the importance of being an educated person in a new light. Education, more than being a means for upward social mobility and economic advancement, has become a tool with which I define my "self", who "I" am as a person, as a woman, as an immigrant, and as a Muslim. Being an educated person has allowed me to feel "belonged" in a society where I have, to varying degrees, experienced the brutality of exclusion and discrimination. It was through these experiences that I became aware of the interactions among human experiences, thought and behaviors (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1990, 1998). I became interested in exploring how men and women who belong to marginalized groups make meanings of their lived experiences and how they position their historically

and socially shaped stances in academia. In particular, I aimed to investigate and understand how individual Iranian men and women ascribe meanings to the concept of “education,” and define its role in their lives, and the construction of their identities.

Within qualitative research, there has been increasing attention to the lived experiences of individuals, and investigation of the influences of race, gender and social class on individual perceptions of their unique experiences (Polanyi, 1958; Van Manen, 1997). There is an abundance of academic literature which attempts to address these issues within the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and educational theory (Giroux, 1997; hooks, 1994; Lather, 1991; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995; Shacklock & Smyth, 1998; Shor, 1992). However, within the context of educational research, little has been written about the lived experiences of adult men and women, and even fewer researchers have attempted to focus on the interactions among culture, race, language, gender and social class from a qualitative perspective (Calabrese, 1998; James & Shadd, 2001; Price, 2000; Shavarini, 2001; Watson, 2002).

Drawing from the theoretical underpinnings of sociocultural theory, my PhD study has also been informed by feminist theories (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Fine, 1994; Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 2000; Lather, 1991; Narayan & Harding, 2000) and critical pedagogy. (Giroux, 1983, 1997; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 1989; Shor, 1992). I view my study as a reflective and interpretive qualitative inquiry. My approach to the study design, data collection

and analysis has been influenced by the theoretical assumptions of critical ethnography and phenomenology.

In the next section, I discuss phenomenology and critical ethnography, my approaches to research in this inquiry.

Narrating Lived experiences: A Phenomenological Approach to Research

I view my study, primarily, as an interpretive, phenomenological inquiry that has been guided by the theoretical principles of socio-cultural theory and critical ethnography. My adaptation of an interpretative, phenomenological research methodology assumes a worldview that is socially constructed and encourages reflective explorations of my own lived experiences as related and connected to the participants' stories. Within this paradigm, my epistemic assumptions hold that the creation of any knowledge carries the mark of its creators (Reissman, 1993), and that there is an intermingling of my role, as the knower, and the role of the individual participants, as the known. Phenomenology — the study of human consciousness and lived experiences— attempts to explain the interconnections between experience and consciousness, human thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

A number of qualitative researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Greene, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Haney, 1994; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998; Illich, 1971; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Mohanty, 1997; Moustakas, 1994; Price, 2000; Small, 1999; Van Manen, 1997) acknowledge that phenomenology has firmly established roots as a qualitative research methodology. The origins of

phenomenological research are grounded in Husserl's (1970) philosophical argument that human consciousness constructs and shapes experiences. Linking sociology and Husserl's philosophical notions of phenomenology, Schutz (1964, 1970) asserted that the "taken for granted" outside world is in fact constructed and experienced by individual members. The role of human consciousness and perceptions in shaping one's experiences is a fundamental criticism to the concept of the "natural attitude" (Schutz, 1970), which emphasizes the distinct and separate existence of the world from human consciousness. Socially constructed "stocks of knowledge" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998) are ideas, theories, attitudes, perceptions and values, which give meaning to all aspects of human experience. According to Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991), phenomenology,

signifies the study of "phenomena," that is to say, of *that* which appears to consciousness, *that* which is "given." It seeks to explore this given—"the thing itself" which one perceives, of which one thinks and speaks—without constructing hypotheses concerning either the relationship which binds this phenomena to the being of *which* it is phenomena, or the relationship which unites it with the I *for which* it is phenomena. (p.32-3)

Therefore, a basic assumption of phenomenology is that "there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112). In interpreting the educational experiences of the eight participants, as the phenomenon under investigation, I acknowledged their realities as "interactional and discursive" (Haney, 1994, p.143), and constructed within the context of history and society. I viewed the experiential worlds of the eight Iranian men and women not as fixed realities, but rather, as being

produced, reshaped and experienced by each individual (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Mohanty, 1997). The cultural worlds of the men and women, however, was also influential in establishing shared patterns of meaning making and consciousness of thought and behavior. Later in this chapter, under the section titled, "Data Analysis," I further explore the application and implications of phenomenology in my inquiry. Throughout the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation, I drew on "epoche" and "reduction" as the basis of my phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994; Haney, 1994) which I now describe.

Epoche

The first stage in this phenomenological research was epoche: where the knowing about the Iranian cultural perceptions of education began. Epoche refers to the phase prior to the beginning of the phenomenological interviewing, and formed the start of a process of my self-examination, as the researcher, and also as a member of the same immigrant community I was attempting to study. The goal of epoche was to "gain clarity" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.113) of my own preconceptions and presumptions with respect to the research questions. The French philosopher, Lyotard (1991), asserts that, "[epoche] turns the gaze of consciousness back on itself, changes the direction of this gaze, in suspending the world, lifts the veil that separates the ego from its own truth" (p.51). Moustakas (1994) asserts that in epoche "everything referring to others, their perceptions, preferences, judgments, feelings must be set aside", and the

researcher's own perceptions and acts of consciousness "must remain as pointers to knowledge, meaning, and truth" (p. 88). Epoche, as the hallmark of phenomenological research, necessitates that the researcher sets aside all 'prejudgements', 'intuitions' and 'universal structures' in order to achieve a clear description of the experience under study. This does not, however, exclude the researcher's voice from those of the participants'; rather it implies that the researcher needs to decide 'how', 'where', and 'when', she or he needs to introduce her own experiences into the study (Small, 1999). As an Iranian native who had personally experienced Canadian higher educational system as a first-generation immigrant, I had both observed and experienced the frustrations and concerns conveyed by many immigrant students of Iranian and diverse cultural backgrounds. I was genuinely interested in exploring their experiences in academia and the meanings they make of those experiences. On the other hand, I had to remain aware of my own presumptions and preconceptions which might have interfered with interpretations of the participants' experiences in my study. Hence, I had to be cognizant of my own implicit and explicit assumptions about the participants' lived experiences. To this end, I found writing reflective journals— as I will explain later in this chapter— a powerful and effective tool in helping me account for and sort through my own feelings and thoughts about the issues and concerns in my study.

Reduction

Reduction is the continuation of epoche. At this stage of phenomenological research, the researcher identifies the essence of the phenomenon, and the data is clustered around emerging themes that are also known as “textures of the experience” (Patton, 1990, p.408). Moustakas (1994) points out that reduction is “not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings” (p.92). In this dissertation, reduction involved the process of my on-going reflection and modifying perspectives throughout the research process (Haney, 1994) which involved writing reflective journals, and analyzing the data gathered throughout my interviews with the participants. I viewed reduction as the phase in my inquiry where the reflective process enabled me to reach a new perspective of the phenomenon under investigation. While I am aware of my pre-existing notions of the experiences of Iranian immigrant students in academia and that there is a danger in essentializing those experiences, I agree with Moustakas (1994) that,

although there is always an overlap between looking from one perspective and viewing something as a whole, it is possible to separate the object as a point of focus from my experience of it as a whole, to take one angle of it and look freshly once more, and then another angle, connecting each looking with my conscious experience (p.93).

Nonetheless, exploring a particular topic from a different angle, as I experienced throughout the study, was not easily accomplished. For example, in my interviews with the participants, Mitra, Nasrin, Yalda and Roxana expressed that they had not experienced discrimination either on university campuses or in

the in the broader Canadian society. They articulated a different reality than many other minority and immigrant students I had previously spoken to, including the other four participants in my study – Nader, Cyrus, Nahid and Samira. I realized that in order to understand their perspectives, I had to remain open to their experiences. This was particularly crucial as I realized in my first interview with Roxana (August 8, 2002). In our conversation, she stated that she did not feel there was a misrepresentation of Iranians and Muslims in general in the Western media, and that the terrorist attacks on New York's World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, had not affected her perceptions of her equal status in Canada as a Muslim and an Iranian. While I found her statements to be genuine, I was keenly interested to find out whether there have been instances in her life in Canada when she encountered conflicting experiences. I asked her to reflect upon her experiences and think about when, where and why she felt differently. What I *expected* was to hear Roxana's acknowledgement of existing unequal social and political status of immigrants in relation to the members of the dominant culture. To my astonishment, she categorically repudiated any personal encounters with discrimination and racism since her immigration to Canada, while emphasizing the equality of all peoples, regardless of their race, religion and ethnicity in Canada. For the remainder of our interview session, Roxana seemed cautious when discussing racism, discrimination and social injustice, as she would pause before providing brief replies or seemed eager to change the topic of discussion. Silence and long pauses were particularly uncomfortable because they seemed to bring our

participants'. As will be discussed and elaborated in detail later in this chapter, I used the writing of reflective journals as a strategy to help me confront and evaluate my own perceptions, experiences, and presumptions (Wasserfall, 1997). I was aware of my own unique existence as "Shiva Sadeghi", an Iranian woman who has been created and shaped by her own culture, gender, socio-economic class and educational attainment. I was also aware that my personal experiences as a first-generation immigrant have been equally influential in constructing my view of the world. I acknowledged that denying the existence of my voice within my study would only serve as a veil that would obstruct my vision and my ability to understand and connect to my participants. As Dudley-Marling (1996) eloquently argues,

Hiding the "I" is a pretense, a fraud that forces me to hide my passion, to deny who I am, and to pretend that my words are separate from me. Acknowledging the "I" allows me to reveal myself and my feelings. It also reminds me and my readers that my data, or whatever I present, have been filtered through the temporal lens of that distinctive being called Curt Dudley-Marling. (p.36)

My reflexivity as a researcher involved an awareness of the social interactions between my personal experiences and participants' perspectives and the meanings of education and schooling in their lives. In order to understand the lives of these male and female participants, I needed to not only account for my social relation to the participants, but also critically examine and evaluate my epistemic relations to them. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of my role as an "insider" within the context of ethnographic research study.

conversations to a halt. However, I learned to accept occasional instances of silence and lack of verbal communication as moments of “thoughtful response” and “introspective reflection”. I felt it was necessary for me to learn to be an active listener and validate individual participants’ viewpoints while attempting to explore their experiences even if that necessitates accepting their silence or “perceived” reluctance to reply or elaborate on a particular issue. To this end, phenomenological reduction facilitated my efforts to free myself from “unexamined presuppositions” (Haney, 1994, p.4) and be willing to accept and respect the participants’ diverse ways of articulating their experiences and opinions.

Critical Ethnography: Moving Beyond Cultural Descriptions

In addition to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural-historical Activity Theory and phenomenology, I draw from critical ethnography to move beyond cultural descriptions. Critical ethnography was initially used to refer to qualitative studies in education — such as critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1989; Street, 1992; Weiler, 1988) and feminist theories (Lather, 1986, 1991). It began as a “loose genre of *educational* research” (Carspacken, 2001, p.3). While there is no consensus among researchers as to what constitutes critical ethnography and pedagogy and how it should be applied to research methodology, it is generally defined as a:

type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action. It expands our horizons of choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain. *Critical scholarship requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned.* [italics added] (Thomas, 1993, p.2-3)

My aim to use the tools of critical ethnography to guide this interpretive phenomenological study was mainly based on my dissatisfaction with traditional ethnographic methods, which have been greatly influenced by structuralist approaches to research. Instead of relying on field-based descriptions of human behavior that are mainly void of representing power relations (Fine, 1993), critical ethnography attempts to study and critique “social sites, social processes, and cultural commodities like textbooks, films, [etc.], in order to reveal social inequalities” (Carspecken, 2001, p.4). While using the similar tools of inquiry common in conventional ethnography (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998; Taft, 1999; Trueba & Zou, 1994)— such as interviews and participant observations—theoretical formulation of critical ethnography relies on a “body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy” (Maseman, 1982, p.1).

As an ethnographer, I viewed my study as a form of social and cultural criticism, based upon several fundamental assumptions (Carspacken, 1996, 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; McLaren, 1993; Simon & Dipppo, 1986). Firstly, I firmly believed that all human thoughts and behaviors are mediated by power relations which are socially and historically constituted. The Iranian men and womens’ perceptions of education and the meanings that the concept of

education holds for them are the artifacts of their unique social, historical and political stances in the world. The interplay between gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class, amongst many other factors, significantly shapes and defines their individual epistemic accounts of their experiences. For example, the academic aspirations for a man from a working class background may be more economically oriented because he maybe the potential breadwinner of his family. On the other hand, a woman from a middle or upper class background may pursue education for reasons that are more intrinsic and personal.

Secondly, I believed that facts could not be isolated from the domains of individuals' values or removed from their ideological inscriptions. This implies that I viewed "truth" as a subjective construction of individuals' experiences, thoughts and behaviors that are deeply rooted in their socio-historical situations. Thirdly, I acknowledge the unequal power relations that exist at different structural layers of the society, whether in the academia or in the field. I aimed to create a collaborative research study whereby the participants could be active creators of knowledge and co-constructors of the process of meaning making of their experiences (Berger & Luckman, 1966; hooks, 1990; Usher & Edwards, 1994). This was achieved by conducting multiple in-depth interviews where my participants' voice were encouraged, validated and respected throughout our conversations, and their active participation in the process of analysis and examination of the interview transcripts.

Knowing that certain groups in the society are privileged over others, and oppression is reinforced when the individuals accept their social status as given

or natural, my goal was to go beyond the mere description of the cultural patterns encountered in the field. I intended to provide a context for critical thinking, evaluating and examining commonly held and accepted cultural codes of behavior and thought among the Iranian men and women. In this respect, my aim to pursue and encourage a reflective critique on the community values, and unfolded as a critical or emancipatory research (Alcoff, 1998; Apple, 1997; Coffey, 2001; Fine, 1994; Fine, Powell, Weis & Wong, 1997; Freire, 1970; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Oliver, 1992; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). But the question arises: “who is emancipating whom?” If, as a critical ethnographer, I hold the belief that I have the privilege to empower and emancipate people, however marginalized and disenfranchised, I have, in turn, created my own hierarchy of power and authority on the margins. I agree with Oliver (1992) that,

[t]he issue for the emancipatory research paradigm is not how to empower people but, once people have decided to empower themselves, precisely what research can then do to facilitate their process. This does not mean that the social relations of research production do have to be fundamentally changed; researchers have to learn how to put their knowledge and skills at the disposal of their research subjects, for them to use whatever they choose. (P.111)

I believe by encouraging my participant’s involvement throughout the process of data collection and analysis and translation— which I discuss later in this chapter— I was able to promote and support their active engagement as the co-participants in this study.

Crossing Bridges: Voice and Representation in Research

Grounding my inquiry on the philosophical premises of phenomenology and critical ethnography entailed an on-going dialogic relationship between the participants, and “I”, as the researcher. This necessitated the inclusion of my voice throughout the study as well as those of the participants. I acknowledge that the processes of interviewing, data interpretation and writing this dissertation encompassed a continuous collaborative construction of knowledge between the participants and myself. I agree with Price (2000) that I too,

understand the political dimensions of research endeavors to include the relationships of the researcher to the participants, the social location of the researcher in relation to the production of knowledge, and the social location of the researcher in relation to other researchers and institutions.
(p.36)

To this end, I attempted to include my own understandings and interpretations of my personal educational experiences through a personal narrative in this dissertation, while remaining cognizant of the necessity to separate my voice from voices of the participants. An important epistemological issue within the context of my study was *“how to incorporate my own voice and experiences without masking those of my participants?”* While there are no prescribed and absolute guidelines to achieve this goal, the question entailed a shift in my epistemological assumptions underlying the construction and subsequent representation of knowledge. A shift that involved replacing the epistemological question of “who speaks *for* whom” with “who speaks *with* whom” (Kobayashi, 1994), and “why”. My shared experiences with the eight men and women participants in Canadian academia, as first-generation Iranian immigrants,

positioned me within my own research, as a “situated actor” (Hertz, 1997). In this respect, my lived experiences and personal history entered a process of active engagement with the participants’. I noticed that throughout my interviews, the men and women whom I was interviewing not only regarded me as an interviewer, but also as a co-participant. For example, in the following excerpt, Mitra inquires about my experiences and opinions about “education” in Canada.

Mitra: I feel that it is very difficult to study here.

Shiva: What do you mean?

Mitra: In terms of,..., I mean, I want say that if you don't have money, it is very difficult to study here [in Canada]. I don't know if you agree with my statement, because I don't know the circumstances in your life. *What do you think?* [Her emphasis] Maybe, I'm wrong!

Shiva: Well, I think you're right that everyone's experience is different. Like everyone else, for example, like you, I also had problems. I generally think studying was difficult. [I] had to work very hard.

Mitra: Exactly! I think exactly like that too! It's very interesting that you have the same experience!

(March 11, 2003)

ج. من اینجا حس می کنم که خیلی سخت میشه درس خوند .

س. از چه لحاظی منظورته ؟

ج . از این نظر که ،...، یعنی می خوام بگم اگه پول نداشته باشی خیلی سخت می شه درس خوند .

نمیدونم با حرفم موافقت میکنی یا نه ، چون شرایط زندگی تو رو من نمیدونم . شما چی فکر میکنی ؟

شاید من اشتباه می کنم .

س. خب درست میگی که هر کسی تجربه اش فرق می کنه .

من هم مثل همه ، فرضاً مثل تو یک مشکلاتی داشته ام .

کلاً فکر می کنم درس خوندن سخت بود . خیلی باید زحمت کشید .

ج . آره، من هم دقیقاً همین فکر رو می کنم . خیلی جالبه که تو هم همین تجربه رو داری !

The interaction began as Mitra was discussing problems and difficulties she had encountered in Canadian academia, and the conversation shifted from my original interest in her comments to her subsequent curiosity about my experiences as another immigrant in Canadian higher education. This excerpt is

a good example of how participants actively changed and shaped the direction of the interviews and consciously invited my opinions throughout our conversations.

There were also instances of “resistance” as occasionally one of the participants would refuse to elaborate on his or her statements. I noticed that while Samira, Mitra, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus were openly expressive and elaborative about their experiences, the other three participants, Roxana, Nasrin and Yalda were more reserved in terms of the information they wanted to reveal in our interviews. It was difficult for me to find an accurate explanation for these episodes of resistance, I came to realize that after discussing my own experiences and voicing my own opinions about the issues being discussed, the participants seemed to be more at ease to continue the conversation and actively engage in the dialogues. For example, in the following dialogue, Roxana was talking to me about her feelings of loneliness in Canada:

Roxana: Sometimes, I feel very lonely here
[Silence]

Shiva: Why do you feel this way?

Roxana: I don't have a lot of contacts with
Iranians here [in Canada]

Shiva: Is that why you feel lonely here?

Roxana: [Silence] I don't know!

Shiva: Do you *want* to not communicate with
them?

Roxana: I don't know!

Shiva: I've been lonely here too. My family was
far away, and I was always so busy with school

ج. گاهی اوقات خیلی احساس تنها نی
دارم . (سکوت)

س. چرا این احساس رو داری؟

ج. اینجا من زیاد با ایرانی ها تماس
ندارم . (سکوت)

س. برای همین احساس تنهایی می کنی؟
ج. (سکوت) نمیدونم!

س. آیا خودت می خوای که باهاشون
تماس نداشته باشی؟

ج. نمیدونم!

س. منم اینجا تنها بودم.

برام خیلی سخت بوده .

هم خانواده دور بوده و هم اینکه همش
مشغول کار و درس بودم .

منم با ایرانی ها تماس زیاد نداشتم و ندارم،
بیشتر به خاطر اینکه وقتش نیست .

ج. آره! من هم دقیقاً همینطور.

and work. I, too, didn't and don't have much contact with [other] Iranians. Mostly because I don't have time.

Roxana: Yes! That's exactly true! Here, it's always work or study, or study or work! There is no time left for anyone. Of course, we have a few very very good Iranian friends here, you also know a few of them! [laughs] It's not like I *don't want* [her emphasis] to have contacts with Iranians. It's [my] situation. Of course, even if I had the time, I still wouldn't have contact with every single Iranian!

(August 23, 2002)

همش یا کار یا درس ، یا درس یا کار!
دیگه هیچ وقتی برای کسی نمیمونه!
البته چند تا دوست ایرانی خیلی خیلی خوب
هم اینجا داریم . تو هم چند تاشونو
میشناسی! (می خندد)
این نیست نه نخوام با ایرانی ها تماس
داشته باشم . بیشتر اوضاع آدمه!
البته با همه ایرانی ها حتی اگه
وقتشو هم داشتم رفت و آمد نمی کردم!

As illustrated in this excerpt, it was in such conversations, and through sharing my own experiences and life stories that I was able to encourage my participants to open themselves to me and collaborate in the construction of the dialogues. I now see it is necessary to re-visit the epistemic question posed earlier in this section: *"How should I incorporate my own voice and experiences without masking those of my participants?"* The positioning of my own "voice" within my study entailed a process of continuous self-reflection. I viewed such reflexivity as the ability to "reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p.2). As Fonow and Cook (1991) state, my reflexivity as the researcher, was accomplished by a "thorough-going review of the research setting and its participants, including an exploration of the investigator's reactions to doing the research" (p.3).

Throughout all the phases of my study, I consciously contemplated, reviewed, evaluated and critiqued my own experiences in relation to those of the

participants'. As will be discussed and elaborated in detail later in this chapter, I used the writing of reflective journals as a strategy to help me confront and evaluate my own perceptions, experiences, and presumptions (Wasserfall, 1997). I was aware of my own unique existence as "Shiva Sadeghi", an Iranian woman who has been created and shaped by her own culture, gender, socio-economic class and educational attainment. I was also aware that my personal experiences as a first-generation immigrant have been equally influential in constructing my view of the world. I acknowledged that denying the existence of my voice within my study would only serve as a veil that would obstruct my vision and my ability to understand and connect to my participants. As Dudley-Marling (1996) eloquently argues,

Hiding the "I" is a pretense, a fraud that forces me to hide my passion, to deny who I am, and to pretend that my words are separate from me. Acknowledging the "I" allows me to reveal myself and my feelings. It also reminds me and my readers that my data, or whatever I present, have been filtered through the temporal lens of that distinctive being called Curt Dudley-Marling. (p.36)

My reflexivity as a researcher involved an awareness of the social interactions between my personal experiences and participants' perspectives and the meanings of education and schooling in their lives. In order to understand the lives of these male and female participants, I needed to not only account for my social relation to the participants, but also critically examine and evaluate my epistemic relations to them. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of my role as an "insider" within the context of ethnographic research study.

Politics of Doing Research as the Insider-Within

As a middle-class Iranian woman and a first-generation immigrant in Canada, I shared with my participants a social position that was also uniquely shaped by my own personal experiences. Doing research within the same community of immigrants with whom I shared cultural, linguistic and religious ties, allowed me to occupy the distinctive position of researcher as an “insider-within” (Bolak, 1997). As a member of the same cultural community I was interested in researching, I had the “epistemic privilege” (Narayan, 1989) of understanding two diverse sets of cultural norms and values, Canadian and Iranian. Therefore, I was able to adjust and adapt to both the immigrant and the host cultures. As Narayan (1989) asserts, the common bonds between the participants and myself gave me the possibility to “operate within two sets of rational consensus” (p.266). The shared sense of “sameness” and “cultural ties”, without a doubt, facilitated and enhanced the creation of what I think was a relaxed and non-threatening environment throughout the research. However, I was also cognizant of the disadvantages of doing research within my own cultural community. I was aware that my own experiences and perceptions might lead to presumptions with respect to the participants’ narratives, and consequently drift into a blind retelling of my own story. I agree with Michelle Fine (1994) that I did not want to “make it appear to let the ‘other’ speak...[hiding] under the covers of those marginal, if now ‘liberated’ voices” (p.19).

Therefore, I found it necessary to examine and critically re-evaluate my position as an insider investigator. I came to the understanding that the concept

of insider researcher is highly contextual and deeply influenced by the individual participants, as well as my own personal experiences. I also noticed that the degree of similarity between my background and the individual male and female participants facilitated our conversations. For example, as I have illustrated previously, Roxana's perceptions of our shared understandings and life experiences allowed her to speak more openly and freely about her feelings of loneliness, and reasons behind her social isolation from the Iranian immigrant community. This disclosure only occurred after I willingly volunteered to discuss my own experiences with loneliness and alienation from the community with her.

In addition to shared experiences, I came to the understanding that different individuals interpret the concept of "insider researcher" differently (Kikumura, 1981). Sharing the same cultural, religious, linguistics, and socio-economic ties may be interpreted by one participant as sufficient ground for assuming sameness and insider vision. However, another individual may have a completely different interpretation of what constitutes a common bond. For example, in one of our interviews, Samira, the only female participant who wears a veil, perceived her Muslim veil, the Hijab (حجاب), as a "sign of being different" within the Canadian society and the Iranian immigrant community. She indicated that her Hijab is what sets her part from the majority of the Iranian community and other non-observant Muslims, as she reveals in this excerpt:

Samira: I think that for Iranians [who] live abroad, Hijab [Muslim women's veil] is still an issue.

ج. من فکر می کنم که ایرانی های
خارج از کشور این مسأله حجاب
هنوز براشون حل نشده.
س. یعنی از چه لحاظی منظورت؟

Shiva: In what sense?

Samira: [Silence] I mean, [other Iranians] don't want to have any communication with a veiled Iranian woman like me, for example. I often see that the moment they see my veil they run away! [Laughs] [It seems] like they **fear** [me]! [Laughs]

Shiva: [Laughs] why? Do you have any explanations [for that]?

Samira: Honestly, I don't have any reasons for that, except that I am veiled [silence], and I think, I mean that's what I [her emphasis] think that [because of my veil] I am guilty of starting the revolution! [Laughs] Well, they don't see me as an *insider* [My emphasis] [literal translation: one of themselves]!

Shiva: Even if you are an *educated* [original emphasis] Iranian?

Samira: *Even* [her emphasis] if you are an educated Iranian. Doesn't make any difference. [The moment] they see [your] veil, they **exclude** you.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. (سکوت)، یعنی دارم میگویم که تمایلی ندارم با فرضاً "یک زن ایرانی که مثل من حجاب داره رابطه ای داشته باشن. خیلی اوقات می بینم دیگه، به محض اینکه منو می بینن که حجاب دارم یک دفعه می بینن در میرن! (خنده) اصلاً" انگار **fear** دارن! (خنده)

س. (خنده) واسه چی؟ هیچ دلیلی درش می بینن؟

ج. راستش هیچ دلیلی درش نمی بینم، غیر از این که حجاب دارم (سکوت) و فکر می کنم، یعنی من اینجوری فکر می کنم، که شاید منو به خاطر اینکه مقصر می دونن که مثلاً "من انقلاب کردم! (خنده) خب، منو از خودتون نمیدونن دیگه! س. حتی اگر یک ایرانی تحصیلکرده باشی؟ ج. حتی هم اگر یک ایرانی تحصیلکرده باشی. هیچ فرقی نداره. روسری رو که می بینن بلافاصله **exclude** ات میکنن

In this dialogue, Samira explains that a physical attribute such as the Hijab (Muslim veil) transcends beyond common bonds of shared linguistic and cultural ties and educational attainment. In another example, Mitra expresses a different interpretation of the notion of insider/outsider as illustrated in this excerpt:

Mitra: Well, I think that Iranians here [in Canada], maybe not all of them, but generally, many of them, when they come here, they become closer to some extent.

Shiva: What might be reasons, you think?

Mitra: Of course, I'm not saying that it's always the case; it's not! But I think that because [you] don't have anybody else here; you get closer to your fellow [Iranian] citizens. Doesn't matter how long you stay here and learn the language [English and/or French, one of the official languages of Canada], you still can't communicate with them [Canadians] the way you can with another Iranian, your compatriot. Our cultures are not the same, they are very different, and because of that it is difficult to communicate [with Canadians]. It's like deep down in your heart you don't understand what the other person is saying. [She or her] doesn't understand what you are saying either!

(March 11, 2003)

ج. خب من فکر می کنم که ایرانی های اینجا ، حالا شاید نه همه، ولی بطور کلی، خیلی ها وقتی میازاینجا تا یک حدی به همدیگه نزدیک تر می شن.
س. فکر می کنی دلیلش چیه؟
ج. البته نه اینکه بگم همیشه، مواردی هم هست که اینطوری نیست. ولی فکر می کنم که شاید چون آدم اینجا کس دیگه ای رو نداره، به هموطن های خودش نزدیک تر میشه.
هر چقدر هم که اینجا بمونی، وزیانشون رو یاد بگیری، باز هم نمیتونی مثل یک ایرانی، یک هموطن خودت باهاشون ارتباط برقرار کنی.
فرهنگمون یکی نیست، خیلی فرق دارن با هم، و همین ارتباط برقرار کردن رو سخت می کنه. انگار که ته دلت نمی فهمی طرفت چی داره میگه.
اون هم نمی فهمه تو داری بهش چی میگی!

In this conversation, Mitra was discussing her experiences of life as an immigrant in Canada, and how she perceives her social position in relation to the members of the Iranian immigrant community and the broader Canadian society. Her opinion diverges from Samira inasmuch as she believes that speaking the same language and sharing the same cultural ties amongst the Iranian community may in fact lead to greater understanding among the community members. To Mitra, the common bond of culture and language makes one an "insider" within a particular cultural community.

Data Collection Strategies

In this section, I discuss the data collection methods I employed in my study. Granted that interview data were my primary source of information, I also used multiple sources of data, in order to enhance the richness and quality of the information gathered throughout the interviews, such as reflective and descriptive field-notes, material culture, and participant observation. In qualitative research, and particularly in educational research, using multiple sources of data is a commonly practiced phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2001; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2001). Drawing from a diverse range of qualitative data collection strategies enabled me to bring wider perspectives into my inquiry through focusing on different aspects of participants' lives and experiences. In choosing to be "bricoleur" researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), I was able to situate my own experiences within the research and continuously reflect upon the process of research, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. For example, using material culture or document analysis in addition to the interview transcripts gave me clearer insights into the cultural worlds of the participants. Also, using multiple sources of data such as participant observation, in-depth multiple interviews and document analysis enhanced the depth and breadth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) of my exploration of educational experiences of the eight men and women that I now discuss.

Participant Observation and Descriptive Field-Notes

Throughout the study, I used participant observation as a complementary source of information. I believed that as a secondary, yet important, data collection strategy, participant observation entailed “systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.107). While I regarded participant observation as an important research strategy, I did not, however, follow any of the individual participants and observe them in their natural learning environments— the academic institutions and the classes they were attending. My decision not to do so was mainly due to my own professional and personal obligations which made it impossible for me to follow and observe all eight participants throughout the course of our interviews. I do acknowledge, nonetheless, that having accompanied the participants, and observed their behavior in one or two occasions might have provided me with interesting insights into how they interact and communicate with others, the professors and the students in their educational settings (Bernard, 1988).

Nonetheless, I carefully observed the participants, their non-verbal behaviors and the physical environments within which the interviews were taking place and whether and how it affected the interview process. I recorded the details of my observations in descriptive field-notes. I need to mention that my descriptive field-notes were done entirely in English, and typed at home immediately after the conclusion of each interview session.

For example, in our first scheduled interview session, Roxana's comments and behavior made me feel that she needed to be assured of her privacy and anonymity as a participant in my study. Therefore, I felt it was necessary to clearly communicate with her the nature of my study as outlined in the consent form. In the next excerpt which is a segment of the descriptive field-notes written immediately after that meeting, I explain how I perceived her concern regarding protection of her privacy, and how I went about assuring Roxana of her rights to anonymity, privacy and right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Building Connections

The interview took place at Roxana's apartment. I had talked to her previously on two different occasions, and discussed the details of my project. She expressed an interest in participating in the study. When I called her last night to set a meeting for the first interview, she told me that she would have out-of-town guests, who will arrive in two days and will stay with her for a few weeks. It was time to act fast! We agreed to have the interview the next day. The day of the interview (August 23), I called her about half an hour before my arrival to remind her of the interview. When I got off the elevator, Roxana was waiting for me right there at her apartment door. We greeted each other, and exchanged kisses on the cheeks, Iranian-style! She was wearing a long beige pleated skirt, and a pale pink sleeveless top. Her hair, dark brown, was pulled back into a ponytail.

After the usual greetings, customary in Iranian culture [asking about one's family and relatives], she offered Persian tea which we drank together, commenting on the taste and color of the tea and the Persian sweets (Baghlavas, Sugar candies, honey-coated nuts) that were mailed to her by her parents in Iran.

It took about twenty minutes after my arrival when I finally started talking about the interview. We sat at the dining table. She carefully listened to me as I explained to her about my PhD project. I gave her two copies of the consent form, and asked her to carefully read the content and ask any questions which she may have regarding the study, the interview, or anything else she may need to know.

As Roxana started to read, I looked around her apartment, which had minimal furniture, and was extremely clean and neat. It was my second visit to her apartment, the first time as a guest of Roxana and her husband's Nu-Rouz (Iranian New Year) Party.

As she finished reading the consent form, Roxana slowly raised her head to look at me, and asked in a soft voice: "I can be sure that you won't mention my real name in your study, right? It says it

right here, on this form.” “Of course, I won’t use your real name,” I told her as I leaned over the form, and read aloud the “participant confidentiality section.” After I finished reading, she looked at me and jokingly said if I would call her “...” in my study. Ironically, that was the real name of another participant. But I did not disclose that information to her, and only told her that I had already chosen a few pseudonyms that I was going to use in my study, and these names were chosen because no one I knew, family member or friends were called by any of those names. Of the names I suggested, she chose Roxana as her pseudonym. Throughout this conversation, she seemed uneasy and at times hesitant. A few times, she told me that she just doesn’t want anyone to recognize her. I assured her that I would do everything in my power to protect her anonymity and privacy. I told her once again, even after this interview, she could decide whether she wanted to be part of the project. [I told her]: “You can withdraw at any time”. I also assured her that no one, except myself, would ever have access to the interview transcripts and the recorded tapes. She immediately said, “Oh, no, no, of course I want to participate, just wanted to make sure that my real name is not used” she also said that now she feels “relieved”!

She offered me more tea, and I delightfully accepted! As she was walking out of the kitchen with the tea, she told me, “I’m ready to start [the interview] whenever you are.”

I set up the tape-recorder, and ran a short test to make sure it is working. At 3:22 pm, I started recording our interview session...[Section continues]

(Interview (1) with Roxana, August 23, 2002 ; 2:30 pm to 6 pm)

As shown in this field-note, participant observation in addition to descriptive field-notes provided me with the opportunity to carefully examine and evaluate the physical, verbal and non-verbal environments surrounding the interview sessions, and account for any details which may be later used throughout the process of data analysis and writing the dissertation. For example, Roxana’s observation of Iranian customs and traditions gave me an understanding of her respect and close ties to her cultural backgrounds and family values. This observation was confirmed later on in our conversation when she talked about her family’s continuous support and encouragement of her educational aspirations and goals.

Multiple In-Depth Interviews: Process and Method

The primary source of data came from multiple, in-depth interviews with each of the eight participants. As stated earlier, my goal was to gain a better understanding of the “inner views” (Chirban, 1996) of the individual participants through an exploration of their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Instead of using structured interviews with a set of pre-established interview questions, I chose to conduct interactive, situated interviews whereby the act of interviewing took place as the result of interaction and “collaborative communication” (Ellis, Keisinger & Tillmann-Healy, 1997, p.121) between me and my participants. Similar to Maguire (1995), I viewed interactive interviews as conversational processes that are “dialogic in character and capable of capturing human voices and speaking personalities” (p.x). I started the interviews with “opening moves” (Maguire, 1995), beginning with a general focus and allowed the conversation to further develop and the phenomenon unfold. The next example is an excerpt from my first interview with Nahid, one of the female participants.

Shiva: I wanted to thank you again for agreeing to participate in my **interview[s]**.

س. خیلی ممنونم ازت دوباره که موافقت کردی
توی **interview** من شرکت کنی.

Nahid: You welcome. I thank you! “You’ve been kind to me!” [A common Iranian pleasantry, meaning: “with pleasure”, or “you welcome!”]

ج. قربانت. خیلی ممنونم ازت.
تو به من لطف کردی.

Shiva: As I told you before, anytime [during the interview], you wish to take a **break** or discontinue the **interview**, whatever you prefer, please let me know. Are you ready?

س. همون طور که قبلاً هم بهت گفتم،
هر موقعی که دلت خواست میتونی بهم بگی
یا **break** بگیریم یا **interview** قطع
کنیم. به میل خودت، هر جور
که صلاح دونستی. آماده هستی؟

Nahid: Yes, of course! Where should I start?

ج. آره حتماً، از کجا شروع کنم؟

Shiva: Tell me a little bit about yourself, who you are, how long you've been in Canada, and what do you study?

Nahid: Well, you know my name! [Laughs] My name is [Nahid], and I've been here since 1994. Of course, I came with my husband. Right now, I am studying **Genetic Consulting** at ... university.

Shiva: What year in your studies?

Nahid: Fourth year, and this is my last year.

Shiva: Did you also go to university in Iran?

Nahid: Yes, I got a bachelor's [degree] in **microbiology**.

Shiva: From which university?

Nahid: Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you. The University of Tehran.

Shiva: Why didn't you continue in your field? Could you apply for the Masters degree?

Nahid: Maybe [I could], but honestly I didn't want to, because I felt it was useless.

Shiva: Why is it useless?

Nahid: Well, maybe it is not useless altogether, but the program that I am studying right now is much better.

Shiva: In what sense?

Nahid: I mean, it's easier to find a job; at least this is what seems to me.

Shiva: What you mean [is] that you didn't like your own field, or you change fields because of the **job market**?

Nahid: I don't know. In Iran, it's hard to get into university, and study the field that you are really

س. از خودت یک کم بگو، که کی هستی، چند وقته اینجا زندگی می کنی، و درس چی می خونی؟

ج. خب اسمم رو که میدونی (خنده هر دو) اسمم (ناهید) و از سال ۱۹۹۴ اومدم اینجا. البته با شوهرم اومدم، و الان هم دارم دانشگاه ... توی رشته **Genetic Consulting** درس می خونم.

س. سال چند هستی؟

ج. سال چهارم، که دیگه همون سال آخرم هست دیگه.

س. توی ایران هم که بودی، دانشگاه رفتی؟

ج. آره. ایران لیسانس **Microbiology** گرفتم.

س. از کدوم دانشگاه؟

ج. آره، یادم رفت بهت بگم، از دانشگاه تهران.

س. چرا رشته ات رو اینجا ادامه ندادی؟ میتونستی برای فوق لیسانس تقاضا بدی؟

ج. شاید ولی راستش رو بخوای نخواستم، چون دیدم فایده ای نداره.

س. چرا فایده ای نداره؟

ج. راستش شاید هم فایده های داره ولی فکر کردم این رشته ای که الان دارم میخونم بهتره.

س. از چه لحاظی بهتره؟

ج. یعنی اینکه توش کار بهتر گیر میاد، حداقل اینطور به نظرم میرسه.

س. یعنی به رشته خودت علاقه دیگه نداشتی یا اینکه به خاطر **job market** اومدی

interested in. Of course, like all other Iranian youth, I wanted to get into the Medical school! [Laughs] But it didn't happen. I studied the field that I was accepted in Konkour, which was **Microbiology**. I had no other choice.

Shiva: Why do you think you've been interested in getting a university education?
...[Section continues]

(August 2, 2002)

توی این رشته جدید؟

ج. نمیدونم، توی ایران خیلی سخته دانشگاه رشته ای رو که واقعا دوست داری قبول بشی. من هم خب البته دلم می خواست، مثل همه ی بچه های ایرانی دیگه پزشکی بخونم (می خندد) ولی خب نشد. همون رشته ای که که توی کنکور قبول شدم رفتم، که **Microbiology** بود. دیگه چاره دیگه ای نداشتم.

س. فکر می کنی چرا اصلا" به ادامه تحصیل در دانشگاه علاقه مند بودی؟
(ادامه صحبت...)

In this conversation which marked the very beginning of my first interview session with Nahid, I asked her to begin by speaking about herself. The conversation unfolded as Nahid proceeded to talk about the reasons behind her choice of academic program in Canada and the problems with the higher educational system in Iran. We continued our dialogue, as she talked about her interpretation of the meaning of education, and her experiences in both Iranian and Canadian academia.

Similarly, in my interviews with all of the eight participants, I began our conversations with a brief introduction to the study, and invited them to introduce themselves. I then asked them to talk about the length of their stay in Canada, their family and their educational background. From this initial inquiry, we proceeded to discuss the reasons behind their decisions to pursue higher education, problems they have encountered in academia, and how they view education. As explained earlier, the interviews were both situated within the context of the participants' narratives, and my own prior experiences. This does

not mean, however, that I did not have a focus in my interviews. Rather, it implies that instead of asking the participants a set of questions with the expectations of question-focused responses, I conducted the interviews using a general “topic list” (Anderson, 2004). Below is the list of “topics” of conversation I was initially interested to discuss with the participants.

1. Who is the participant? What is her/his background?
2. Why did the participant decide to pursue higher education? (What has influenced the participant’s decision to continue his/her education?)
3. Has the participant’s decision been influenced by cultural factors? In other words, are there any meanings attached to being an “Iranian” and their desire to continue their education?
4. How would s/he describe her/his experiences in Canadian higher education?
5. Has s/he experienced the Iranian higher education system?
6. How would s/he describe those experiences in the Iranian higher educational system?
7. Does the participant think there are gender differences in men’s and women’s decisions to pursue higher education?

I discussed these topics with my participants in the pre-interview information session. I believe that communicating my research interests with them greatly influenced the ease and fluidity of the interview sessions, as they were able to direct and organize their experiences, and the meanings attached to them within the structure of our interviews. Taken from a different perspective, however, after conducting the first interviews, I realized that there were issues raised by one or more of the participants that were not addressed, directly or indirectly in the “topic list”. Scheurich (1997) states that throughout the process of

multiple, qualitative interviewing, both the interviewer and the interviewee realize that they each have,

multiple intentions and desires, some of which are consciously known and some of which are not...[T]he language out of which the questions [or the responses] are constructed is not bounded or stable; it is persistently slippery, unstable, and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time. (p.62)

For example, in my first interview with Samira, she repeatedly addressed issues of racism and discrimination which seemed to have influenced her experiences in Canadian society and academe significantly. However, the language Samira used to describe her encounters with racism and discrimination shifted as we proceeded from one point in the interview into the next. In the next interview excerpt, Samira reevaluated her earlier position with respect to her experiences with discrimination in Canada.

Samira: Honestly, I said [before] that I've often felt that I was the target of **racism** and **discrimination** here [in Canada], for example, I've had several direct encounters with Canadians. But sometimes, I tell myself that maybe I'm too sensitive, and this person who said something [inappropriate] to me, or did something, is not **racist**. Maybe [s/he] is generally just a **mean** person.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. راستش رو بخوای، گفتم که اینجا خیلی خیلی احساس کردم که **racism** و **discrimination** بوده، مثلاً "یک سری برخوردهای مستقیمی که با اینها داشتم، ولی گاهی هم به خودم میگم که شاید من خیلی حساسم و این شخصی که مثلاً "یک حرفی بهم زد، و یا کاری رو کرد، حالا مثلاً **racist** " نیست، شاید کلاً آدم **mean** یه.

Samira was not unique. All eight participants displayed shifts in their thoughts, feelings and interpretations of their experiences as the interview sessions

proceeded. I return to these issues and discuss them in depth in Chapter Six in which I present my reflective interpretations of the interview data.

The interviews were completed within nine months, from July 2002 to March 2003, as represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Schedule of the Interview Sessions

PARTICIPANTS	INTERVIEW 1	INTERVIEW 2	INTERVIEW 3
Samira	July 25, 2002	January 6, 2003	October 14, 2003
Nahid	August 2, 2002	March 5, 2003	October 20, 2003
Roxana	August 23, 2002	March 6, 2003	October 9, 2003
Mitra	August 21, 2002	March 11, 2003	November 23, 2003
Yalda	August 28, 2002	February 17, 2003	October 9, 2003
Nasrin	September 3, 2002	February 15, 2003	October 17, 2003
Nader	September 19, 2002	February 16, 2003	October 23, 2003
Cyrus	October 4, 2002	January 21, 2003	October 14, 2003

The first set of interviews took place between July-October 2002. I transcribed each of the interview transcripts within one week after the interview was conducted. I gave a copy of the transcripts to each of the eight participants (in the original Persian), and asked for their revisions and or modifications. Except for minor changes made by two of the participants, all copies were returned to me with the participants' approval within two weeks.

The second set of interview sessions took place between January-March 2003. Writing reflective field-notes, as I describe later in this chapter, in addition to continuous data analysis, was the basis upon which the topics and themes for the second interviews were grounded. I conducted the second interviews primarily to address issues and themes which emerged from the first conversations. In the second interviews, I also attempted to discuss topics which were addressed by at least one of the participants. For example, in my first interview with Samira, she discussed her decision to wear the veil, and how, throughout her stay in Canada, she has come to believe that her veil has made her visible as an ethnic minority, a Muslim, and therefore, a target for discrimination and exclusion. This conversation led me to ask other participants about their views on veiling of Muslim women, and how they believed veiled women are treated in Canadian society. Similar to the first interviews, I gave the second interview transcripts to the participants. All copies were returned with no major modifications and/or changes. I also point out that the copies of the interview transcripts given to the participants included translations of the interview excerpts that I intended to use in writing my dissertations. I requested them to look over the translations and revise what they felt was necessary. None of the participants requested any revisions. To ensure that my position as the "primary researcher" has not deterred them from stating their opinions, I assured all of them, at the time of delivering the transcripts, that they should feel free to make any changes necessary. As a second language speaker of English, myself, I needed their feedback in order to examine and verify the accuracy and

authenticity of translations. Making this statement, I believed, facilitated the collaborative nature of the research process and put their experiences and thoughts at the center of the study. In a phone conversation with Yalda, I inquired what she thought about the transcripts and the translations, without asking any direct questions about why she hadn't made any corrections. She commented:

Yalda: I feel you have captured the essence of what I said in the interview beautifully. I would have made corrections if I thought was necessary, but it wasn't necessary. If we were to repeat the interview, I would still say the same things all over again.

من فکر میکنم که واقعا "آنچه رو که من توی مصاحبه مون گفتم خیلی قشنگ نشون دادی. اگه فکر میکردم که مثلا" باید یک چیزهایی رو درست کنم، خوب میکردم، ولی لزومی درش نبود. اگه دوباره همون مصاحبه رو انجام بدیم، باز همون حرف ها رو میزنم.

(Phone conversation, October 9, 2003)

My third conversation with the participants took place shortly after I relocated from Montreal to Ottawa in October 2003. In our last conversations, which were not audiotaped, I informed my participants about my new place of residence and how they could reach me if needed. I also found out about any new developments in the participants' lives and the progress of their studies.

Interactive Interviewing

I agree with Mishler (1990) that the act of qualitative interviewing is a "craft". Therefore, the "craftsmanship" of the interviewer/researcher greatly influences the nature of the interactions that takes place during the interview sessions. Throughout my academic career both as a student and as a

professional, I have attained extensive experience with qualitative interviewing. Therefore, I was familiar with various strategies that would enable me to create a more trusting and intimate relationship between the participants and myself. One such strategy was a pre-interview information session with each of the participants during which I discussed the details of my study and the reasons behind my interest in that particular topic. I told them about my own experiences as a first generation immigrant in Canadian academia. I also explained to them that my background somewhat differed from theirs in terms of my immigration to Canada at a younger age and my lack of familiarity with the Iranian higher educational system. I emphasized that, notwithstanding those points of divergence in our life histories, I was interested to know how *they* experienced life in Canadian academia, and whether there are any gender differences in how individuals view schooling and make meanings of their educational experiences.

Granted that I believe there exists no value-free and neutral research process (Eisner, 1991), I acknowledged that the interactive interview situation is essentially a “joint sense-making endeavor” (Ellis et al, 1997) where I needed to be increasingly aware and cognizant of my own experiences and personal opinions in order to address and identify potential misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the data. Throughout the interviews, I disclosed my own experiences to the participants in order to encourage them to open up. Ellis et al (1997) assert that, “[q]ualitative interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life: as conversations where one person’s disclosures and self-probing invite another’s disclosures and self-probing” (p. 122). I was aware that

as the result of sharing my experiences with the participants, the situation might arise where any or all of the participants may feel apprehensive about sharing any of their own personal experiences which might be different from mine. Being aware of the participants' possible hesitation to contradict my personal accounts, and my belief that all research studies can be hierarchical and encompass an unequal power relationship between the participants and the researcher, I decided to disclose my personal accounts and experiences only at times when I noticed hesitation in answering or elaborating on the part of the participants. In the next example, an excerpt from an interview with Roxana, I was interested to know whether she had experienced "discrimination" in the Canadian academe. My particular interest in this topic was ignited by a preceding interview with another female participant, Samira, who had openly discussed her close encounters with discrimination in different contexts in Canadian contexts.

Shiva: Have you ever had any experiences that you could categorize as **discrimination** against yourself?

Roxana: [Pause] No, never!

Shiva: you mean, you've never had any problems with this issue?

Roxana: No! Never! Ever! [Pause] everything has always been very good. I've never had any problems [with discrimination]

Shiva: It's very interesting! Because sometimes, I have this same feeling. But there are also times that I think I was the target of **discrimination**. Of course, it's very difficult for me to **generalize**. When I talk to my other **participant[s]**, some of them say that they have

س. اینجا هیچ وقت برخوردهایی داشتید که مثلاً،
بگی این یک **discrimination** بر علیه من؟
ج. (سکوت) نه هرگز!

س. یعنی هیچ وقت با این مساله
هیچ مشکلی نداشتی؟

ج. نه هرگز! اصلاً!

(سکوت) همه چیز همیشه خیلی عالی

بوده. من هیچ وقت هیچ مشکلی نداشتم.

س. خیلی جالبه! چون من خودم هم گاهی

همین حس رو دارم. ولی بعضی وقتها هم

بوده که فکر کردم مورد **discrimination**

بودم. البته این خیلی برام سخته که بخوام

generalize کنم

با بعضی از **participant** دیگه که حرف میزنم،

اونا، بعضی هاشون میگوین که خیلی بوده،

بعضی ها هم میگوین که اصلاً نبوده،

experienced a lot of [discrimination], some of them say, they never experienced it, and some of them say, sometimes they did, and sometimes they didn't!

Roxana: [Laughs] Well, I, myself, can't say, that no, never, there has never been such thing! As you said it yourself, it's very complex issue. I think that even when I was the target of **discrimination**, because I was more positive, I didn't let it bother me as much. But, [in any case], there have been situation for me too! ...[Section continues]

(August 23, 2002)

بعضی ها هم میگویند که گاهی بود، گاهی نبود!
ج. (می خندد) خب، منم نمی تونم بگم
که نه اصلاً "هرگز ابداً" همچین چیزی نبوده!
همین طور که خودت هم گفتی،
خیلی پیچیده است، من فکر می کنم که
discrimination وقتی هم که مورد
ممکنه باشم، چون در موردش مثبت فکر
می کنم، نمیذارم زیاد اذیتم کنه!
ولی خب برای من هم مواردی بوده!
(ادامه صحبت...)

Roxana's pauses and short responses to my questions, in addition to my account of her non-verbal behavior (as I later noted in my descriptive field-notes), such as turning her eyes away from mine when responding to these questions, and moving uneasily in her chair, led me to believe that she did not feel comfortable to discuss her personal thoughts and opinions on this sensitive issue. I felt it was necessary to point out to her the validity of her feelings and thoughts by giving examples of my own personal account and/or appealing to other participants' experiences without providing detailed information since this might have led to the identification of other participants in the study. While my goal in qualitative interviewing was to "probe both self and other" (Ellis et al, 1997, p.122), and to exchange meanings attached to different human experiences and phenomena (Anderson, 2004) such as views towards education, perceived gender roles and experiences with racism and discrimination, I did not intend to influence participants' perceptions, thoughts

and feelings. Therefore, I was vigilant in keeping the account of my own experiences at a general, non-detailed, and non-specific level, as I believe that having done otherwise would have influenced Roxana's (or other participants') views and perceptions. For example, in the previous excerpt, I tried to engage Roxana in a dialogue about discrimination through discussing my own thoughts on the issue. In response to Roxana's hesitation to communicate her thoughts and experiences, I stated, "sometimes, I have this same feeling. But there are also times that I think I was the target of discrimination. Of course, it's very difficult for me to generalize". My goal was to probe Roxana's reply without blurring the distinction between "my story" and "Roxana's". Similarly, by stating that "When I talk to my other participant[s], some of them say that they have experienced a lot of [discrimination], some of them say, they never experienced it, and some of them say, sometimes they did, and sometimes they didn't!" I aimed to validate the lived experiences of other participants in my study, and acknowledged the multiplicity of human subjective realities (Kvale, 2003). Consequently, this paved the way to Roxana's account of her personal experiences.

The Politics of Gender in Qualitative Interviewing

Similar to other non-Western and Western cultures, Iranian culture highly emphasizes “gender” as the focal point in the life of a man or a woman. And similar to other western and non-Western cultures, Iranian culture views gender as more than a distinction between the two sexes. There are critical differences between the terms “gender” and “sex”. According to Warren and Hackney (2000), “sex is generally considered a biological status, whereas *gender* refers to the way in which biological sex roles are culturally elaborated: The values, beliefs, technologies, and general fates to which we assign women and men” (p.5). Gender entails an unequal distribution of power amongst different members of a society (Foucault, 1978; hooks, 2000; Mir-Hosseini, 1999; Moghissi, 1999a, 1999b). Warren and Hackney (2000) elaborate on this issue by stating that:

Although it is now generally taken for granted, gender shapes the interactions in our settings; it shapes entrée, trust, research roles, and relationships—the entire epistemological field through which we, as fieldworkers, identify our methodological experiences. (p.3)

As an Iranian woman, I have always been aware of the social and individual denominations attributed to men and women in the Iranian culture. I have always been cognizant of the implications of being a woman, in the family, in the school and in the society, whether in the presence of men or other women. As Nahid asserts in the next excerpt, different social roles and norms are attributed to men and women within the confines of Iranian culture. A man’s presence in the society is more pronounced and prevalent than a woman’s, mainly due to the

family's and society's more tolerance and acceptance of his views and opinions than a woman's. This does not implicate, however, that a woman's opinions are not valued or automatically refuted on the ground of gender differences, as I discuss in Chapters Five and Six. What it means is that different characteristics are attributed to men and women that are essentially influenced by culturally shaped designations of appropriate gender roles. For example, Iranian culture seems to advocate women's modesty and "haya" (حیا) and discourages women from openly and freely expressing their opinions as Nahid explains in this excerpt:

Nahid: In Iran, men are more in the society. I'm not saying that they are *more active* than women, but I intend to say that men are more comfortable [in public], and more accepted by the society. It's different for women. At home, within the family, and in the society, [they] taught us to be polite, well-behaved and **bahaya** [modest], and to pay attention to others more than to ourselves. We've learned that we should never state our own opinions to others, and express what we, as women, think. [In case] someone gets upset [by our opinions], and God forbid, should we think differently than the other person!

(August 2, 2002)

توی ایران مردها بیشتر توی جامعه هستن. نمیگم که اونا فعالترن و مثلاً "زنها نیستن، ولی منظورم اینه که مردها راحت تر هستن، توی جامعه ما بیشتر قبول شدن. برای زنها فرق می کنه، توی خونه و خانواده و جامعه همش به ما یاد دادن که مؤدب و باتریت و باحیا باشیم، و به دیگران حتی بیشتر از خودمون توجه کنیم. یاد گرفتیم که هیچوقت نظر خودمون رو، اون چیزی که خودمون، مثلاً "به عنوان یک زن فکر می کنیم به کسی نکنیم. شاید به کسی بریخوره، و خدای نکرده عقیده مون مثل اون طرف مقابل نباشه!

But are the cultural interpretations of women's haya and the notions of gender discrimination and oppression of women in Muslim societies two sides of the same coin? It is not easy to arrive at a straightforward answer. The issue of haya and modesty, or as Nahid points out, "being polite and well-behaved",

among Iranian women and in general Muslim women, requires further investigation and analysis which I turn to in Chapter Six.

Prior to entering the field, I began to actively reflect upon the implications of interviewing male and female participants who are assumed to share a common cultural background. It has been presumed that Iranian culture encourages women to refrain from free expressions of their thoughts and opinions, and reinforces men to do otherwise (Friedl, 1985; Weiskopf-Bock, 1985). I knew that gender was only one of the issues in my fieldwork. However, it needed to be critically examined and reflected upon as I became closer to begin the interviews. I had previously experienced interviewing Iranian men and women while I worked on a research project that took place at two different institutions of higher education in Iran. While the nature of that particular study required structured interviews, not quite comparable to my doctoral project's themed interviews, I noticed an astounding level of comfort, intimacy and respect displayed by all of the twenty participants (ten men and ten women) in the project. I also realized that the complexities in the fieldwork were mainly rooted in the socio-political and economic structure of the Iranian society, and not necessarily due to the issue of "gender" and my "womanhood" in the field. Fieldwork was less than a smooth journey due to the administrative and institutional strict policies with respect to conducting research projects.

On the other hand, my "gender" as a woman seemed to be less of a barrier as I was approached by the twenty participants, male and female, and asked for my opinion on their academic, personal, and social predicaments. I

was told that my opinion mattered because they perceived me to be, to quote a male participant, “an educated lady” (خانم تحصیلکرده), “intelligent” (فهمیده), and “worldly” (دنیا دیده). They perceived and interpreted my gender “situationally” (Hunt, 1984), which implied that my educational background and role as a researcher shifted my gender identity, from a traditional female role to the authority of an “educated person and researcher”. This shift involved a certain level of power in the field which allowed me to gain entry into the institutions and connect and communicate with the participants. Within the context of our conversations, I became an “honorary male” (Warren & Hackney, 2000) who was able to crisscross the boundaries of traditional gender roles as defined within the confinements of Iranian culture. This does not mean, however, that my gender as a woman did not in any way affect or influence the conversations that took place. Here, I only intend here to draw attention to the complexities of defining gender and addressing gender issues in the field without denying the reality of gendered experiences of men and women. As Reinhartz and Chase (2002) point out, “gender shapes institutions, ideologies, interactions, and identities. At the same time, race, class, and other social dimensions intersect with the gendered contours of our worlds” (p.221).

Reflecting back at those experiences, my initial apprehensions about interviewing Iranian men for my own doctoral project had significantly diminished. I was able to anticipate what I might encounter in the field, as a woman interviewing men and as a woman interviewing other women. I knew that the politics of gender in the field encompassed issues of educational background,

culture, language and shared experiences. Being aware that in-depth qualitative interviews ideally require a great level of intimacy and personal commitment (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Johnson, 2002) which may be difficult or impossible to achieve in real life interview situations, I was pleasantly surprised by the openness of the men and women who participated in my study. Of course, moments of rapport between the participants and myself did not seem to follow a conventional and predictable pattern, but varied across situations, topics, and individuals. For example, I noticed that in discussing issues of discrimination and racism, some participants were more candid than others. While Samira, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus openly shared their thoughts, feelings, and encounters with racism, others seemed to be more apprehensive in disclosing their personal opinions. It was in such instances of reluctance and hesitation that I deemed it necessary to begin an open dialogue with the individual about my own personal experiences without trying to influence theirs. The goal of self-disclosing was to share "ideas, attitudes, and/or experiences concerning matters that might relate to the interview topic in order to encourage the respondents to be more forthcoming" (Reinhartz & Chase 2002, p.227) as illustrated earlier in the chapter.

Band of Sisters: Gender Identification in Interviews

Women do face some odds that put us in the same big boat if not on the same deck, let alone in the same cabin. (Rogers, 1998, p.1)

As Rogers (1998) suggests, women share life experiences that are culminated in their gender and their being as “women” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982). Although I do not intend to deny the importance of social and individual factors such as culture, class, family, ethnicity, and education on lived experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, I acknowledge that gender contours the parameters of the world within which our experiences, as men and women, are shaped and constructed. In my interviews with the eight male and female participants, I observed differences in the ways they each conceived and articulated their thoughts and feelings. I noticed that women were generally more open and inclined to share their personal experiences with me than the males.

I observed that talking about family and family relationships were particularly difficult for all men and women. Knowing that Iranian culture encourages privacy and confidentiality with respect to family matters, I refrained from entering into situations and conversations that required revealing intimate family information. However, several participants were forthright in sharing intimate and personal details about their lives with me. One example was Nahid, a female participant, who candidly confided personal situations she was struggling with at the time. After much contemplation, and consulting with Nahid, herself, we decided to not include that conversation in data analysis and future publications of the study. Another woman, Mitra, talked about her father's

discouraging attitude and behavior with regard to her deeply felt interest in Arts and Music. Roxana agonized over her husband's resistance to her plans to pursue higher education. Yalda alluded to her inner desire to be single and childless.

However, throughout the interviews, there existed moments of disconnection and ambiguity. Women talked implicitly about gender roles within the family, and did not use the pronouns "I" or "we". Rather, they described and explained their thoughts and feelings using impersonal references such as the "Iranian men" (مردهای ایرانی), "Iranian women" (زن های ایرانی), or more formally, the "Iranian ladies" (خانم های ایرانی). The two men, however, when expressing their opinions on the same topic, made general references to "Iranian families" (خانواده های ایرانی), or the "Iranian society" (جامعه ایرانی) instead of Iranian men.

The following two excerpts illustrate my observations:

Yalda: I think that Iranian women are very smart. I'm not saying that to praise myself! [Laughs] Iranian women are hardworking and they are really interested in getting an education and become **educated**. Also, I, myself, don't think that Iranian families stand against [Iranian women], because [the women] are very **ambitious**.

Shiva: When you say Iranian women, do you feel like it is true in your own case too?

Yalda: Well, of course. I say Iranian women, but I have the same feelings. I really care about my education. But, in general, I think all Iranian are this way.

(February 17, 2003)

ج. من فکر میکنم که زن های ایرانی خیلی باهوشن. این رو نمیگم که مثلاً "از خودم تعریف کنم!" (می خندد). زن های ایرانی خیلی زحمتکشن و خیلی هم علاقه دارن که تحصیل کنن و **educated** بشن. توی خانواده های ایرانی هم، من شخصاً فکر نمیکنم که خانواده مثلاً "جلوشون بایسته، چون خیلی **ambitious** هستن." س. یعنی وقتی که میگی "زن های ایرانی" این حس رو داری که اینها در مورد خودت هم صدق میکنه؟ ج. خب آره دیگه، میگم زن های ایرانی، ولی خب خودم هم همین حس رو دارم، به درس وادامه تحصیلم خیلی اهمیت میدم. ولی خب فکر میکنم، که بطور کل زن های ایرانی همین طور هستن.

Similarly, Nader, one of the male participants stated:

Nader: Generally, the Iranian society is very hard [for] women. I think that life in Iran, generally, is very difficult for women. Of course, to some extent, the pressure comes from families.

ج. جامعه ایرانی بطور کل برای زنها خیلی سخته. فکر میکنم که زندگی توی ایران بطور کلی برای زنها خیلی سخته. البته، تا یک حد زیادی فشار از طرف خانواده هاست.

Shiva: You mean generally, in your opinion, or you have seen these situations personally, yourself?

س. یعنی بطور کلی اینطور بوده، به نظرتون، یا اینکه شخصا هم مواردی رو دیدید؟

Nader: No, I mean generally, not me! I don't think that the Iranian society is as difficult for men as it is for women.

ج. نه، منظورم بطور کلیه، خودم که نه. فکر نمیکنم جامعه ایرانی اون طور که مثلاً زن ها روشن فشاره، روی مردها هم باشه.

(September 19, 2002)

The participants' impersonal references to gender roles, and generally the status of women within the Iranian culture, could be interpreted from different perspectives. On the one hand, one might infer that the participants intended to "dissociate" their own personal feelings and thoughts and withhold their lived experiences during the interviews. This act of dissociation might be ascribed to the level of trust between me and the individual participants. Their reluctance to disclose intimate information could be translated as a signifier of a less than ideal trusting and working relationship essential in qualitative interviewing. On the other hand, the desire to separate one's self from expressions of opinions and feelings may be rooted, not in an existing lack of trust in the field, but rather in the culturally defined codes of behavior among Iranian men and women (Ravandi, 1983; Sciolino, 2000; Shirazi, 1985). Traditionally, there exists a separation between public and private spaces in Iranian culture. This separation mainly

entails the distinction between male and female gender roles, making the private female and the public male (Fathi, 1985; DeVecchio Good, 1982; Pakzad, 1994, Veille, 1982).

The obligations of Iranian men, as heads of the family and breadwinners, are to ensure the economic sustenance of the family and protect and defend the “honor” (شرف) of its members. According to Fathi (1985), “in such a social atmosphere, the sense of ‘honor,’ a component of the traditional way of life ‘gives way to ‘individual dignity’” (p.1). As men occupy the public space of economy and politics in the traditional Iranian society, women’s space remains within the confinements of the private sphere and at the center of the family structure as nurturers and caretakers. The man’s duty, as the defender of the family honor, and the woman’s obligations as the loyal mother, wife and daughter, implicate a sense of responsibility to maintain harmony and congruency within the family. Therefore, the central role of the family in one’s life, identity and honor, man or woman, prescribes a set of cultural codes of behaviors which include exclusion of self and family members from the public domain. It is within this social context that *I* becomes *they* or *others* or *society*, and the *general* takes over the *personal*.

Throughout my interviews with the participants, I felt that my relationship with the women was another factor that facilitated the interview process. Having known the women for a longer period of time significantly helped the level of comfort and ease the participants and I felt. I felt that the interviews with Nahid and Samira seemed to have a higher level of intimacy and closeness as the

result of the friendship that developed between us prior to and following the interviews. For example, when discussing the difficulties she has been encountering in Canadian academia, Nahid stated that,

Nahid: Usually, it's very hard for me to talk about these issues. I mean, you know, problems that I've had here [in Canada]. But, on the other hand, I also feel that, not just right at this moment, but whenever we talk to each other, I *unload* [her emphasis] myself. I know that you know [about these problems] too.

(March 5, 2003)

معمولاً "خیلی برام سخته در مورد این جور مسائل صحبت کنم. یعنی میدونی مشکلاتی که اینجا داشته ام. ولی از یک طرفی هم حس می کنم، نه فقط الان، ولی هر وقت با هم صحبت می کنیم، که خودمو خالی می کنم. میدونم که تو هم میدونی."

It is, however, noteworthy to mention that prior contact and familiarity with the participants is not always encouraged. According to Hildenbrand (1995) the downfall is that,

[w]hile is often assumed that access to the field would be facilitated by studying persons well known to the researcher and accordingly finding cases from one's own circle of acquaintances, exactly the opposite is true: the stranger the field, the more easily may researchers appear as strangers, whom the people in the study have something to tell which is new for the researcher. (p.58)

There exist conflicting opinions about the effectiveness of prior rapport between the researcher and participants. However, one thing that can be agreed upon is that the nature of the bond between the interviewer and the interviewee determines the development of a trusting working relationship in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Material Culture

As mentioned previously, the interview transcripts constituted the main source of data. A secondary source of data, however, came from analysis of material culture (Herman, 2002; Hodder, 1993, 1995, 2000), also known as “document analysis”. I utilized a variety of material culture, ranging from books, newsletters, personal e-mails, artwork, poetry, websites, and the recent means of communication and exchange of opinions amongst Iranian diasporic community, and weblogs. All these sources dealt with issues specifically related to Iran and Iranians living inside and outside of Iran. In table 4, I list the material culture consulted and used in my study.

Table 4: Sources of Material Culture

Iranian and International Organizations	Websites/ Newsletters	Weblogs	Poetry/ Artwork
<p>Statistics Iran: http://www.irandoc.ac.ir/</p> <p>Montreal Persian Network: http://www.montrealpersian.net/main-en.htm</p> <p>The Foundation for Iranian studies http://www.fis-iran.org/activiti.htm</p> <p>The society for Iranian studies http://www.iranian-studies.org/</p> <p>Center for Iranian Research and Analysis http://www.dac.neu.edu/cira/</p> <p>United Nations http://www.un.org</p> <p>United Nations Development Program http://www.undp.org.ir/</p> <p>UNICEF http://www.unicef.org</p> <p>Children of Persia www.childreofpersia.org</p>	<p>http://www.gooya.com</p> <p>http://www.payvand.com</p> <p>http://www.iranfilter.com</p> <p>http://www.bbc.com/persian</p> <p>http://www.salamiran.org</p> <p>http://www.iranian.com</p> <p>http://www.iranfilter.com</p> <p>http://www.sobhaneh.com</p> <p>http://www.iranianwomen.com</p> <p>http://www.zan.org</p> <p>http://www.isna.com</p> <p>http://www.ima.com</p> <p>http://www.eyeranian.com</p> <p>http://http://www.iranchamber.com/education/education.php</p>	<p>http://www.webnevesht.com</p> <p>http://www.roshangari.com</p>	<p>Forough Farokhzad (poet)</p> <p>Sadegh Hedayat (writer)</p> <p>Samad Behrangi (writer/ educator)</p> <p>Shahmosh Parsipour (writer/poet)</p> <p>Kaveh Golestan (photographer/ artist)</p>

The importance of material culture lies in its potential to construct narratives. According to Hodder (1993),

individual material culture sequences can be discussed in terms of changing and competing narratives and rhetorics. Material culture actions thus have meaning by being placed sequentially in terms of what went before and what comes after—that is, in terms of plot. (p. 280)

Similarly, within the context of my study, the goal of using material culture was to examine different aspects of cultural patterns, codes of behavior, thoughts and feelings that the Iranian community inside and outside of Iran create, use and experience (Herman, 2002). An example of material culture I used in my study are surveys and reports from Iran posted on different Iranian websites which added to the richness of the interview data. Several of these surveys dealt with an investigation of the perceptions of Iranian public with regard to the effectiveness of the educational system in the country. Of particular interest, was a survey posted on the official Persian website of the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) on August 23, 2003. This public survey which aimed to explore and investigate the reasons for mass immigration of Iranian intellectuals and professionals into the Western countries. Comments posted by individual Iranians, living inside and outside of Iran, pointed to common structural, political and social shortcomings within the Iranian educational system and the job market, as I discuss in Chapter Four. Similarly, websites of different Iranian and international organizations also provided me with useful information, such as statistical data, paintings, photographs, etc, which would have been nearly impossible to gather from published work or the interview transcripts.

Reflective Field-notes

Writing reflective field-notes was an efficient way of gathering and organizing my thoughts prior and following the interviews, and contained my reflective understandings of conversations and observations. Portions of my reflective journals were written in the margins of the descriptive field-notes, which were mainly my efforts to identify and sort out themes emerging from the interviews and participant observations (Holly & McLoughlin, 1989; Ballantyne & Packer, 1993). The following is an example of an entry in my reflective field-notes which was written on the same day of my first interview with Samira.

The “Veiled” as the “Other”

Throughout the entire interview, Samira seemed very at ease with disclosing her experiences and feelings. Her honesty comes through every word she utters.

She easily talks about her feelings as being a veiled Muslim woman in Canada, and the discrimination she experiences as the result of her veil. I imagine how vulnerable she must feel by disclosing such intimate, personal feelings. That, by itself, makes me feel as if I have succeeded in establishing a “working relationship” with her which is built on trust, and respect. At one point in the interview, when Samira was talking about a close brush with racism in Canada (the man in the store, as indicated in the transcripts), I saw her eyes tear up, an indication of how racism feels so close and personal to her. Samira strikes me as a woman who is quite at ease with herself as who she is, and where she is in life, although she mentions in the interview that she feels “underachieved” for not having been able to finish a university degree in her early twenties. But the very fact that she can discuss the issue so openly is, at least in my opinion, a sign of her emotional maturity and integrity.

She has chosen to be veiled in Canada, and although this is “her” choice entirely, and is even discouraged by her husband, she believes in the practice of veiling as part of her faith in her religion. Again, reaffirming my earlier observation about her sense of security and confidence about her identity as a “Muslim” and as an Iranian woman in Canada, where she says is not accepting of Muslims and in particular veiled Muslim women. It is very interesting that Samira, who is the only veiled female participant in my study, talks about the veil as “her choice”. It is also intriguing to know that her husband is not encouraging, and as a matter of fact, he is discouraging her veil. It was my assumption, before the interview that her husband, at least to some extent, was an influential factor in her decision to wear the veil. If veil is part of Samira’s identity, an identity that has been constructed and shaped by her, so what is she thinking about those Iranians who do not wear the veil? How has this (i.e., veiling) affected her connection to the community members?

How does she think other Iranians see her when they look at her? I need to ask her about these issues in one of our future conversations.

She has a very critical eye. She actively compares the social issues which exist in Iran and Canada, and is able to make comparisons. She is very aware of the problems that Iranian women face in Iran; however, she mentions that she, herself, never felt being discriminated against when she was in Iran. However, she remains critical of the unfavorable laws which target women in Iran. She is also aware of the distinction between the male "public space" and the female "private space".

...[Section continues]

(Interview (1) with Samira, July 25, 2002 [2:20 pm to 5 pm])

As shown in this excerpt, the reflective field-notes went above and beyond the physical descriptions and observations made in the field. They were conceptual tools which helped me make sense of my observations and verbalize my thoughts and feelings about the conversations which took place between me and the participants (Holly, 1989). Hillocks (1995) argues that writing reflective field-notes is a "process of discovery [resulting] in a construction, an account of our observations and transformations we impose upon them. When we write, the constructions very likely [are] transformed again with the written product" (p.15). Through writing reflective field-notes, I was able to investigate my own presumptions, and pre-existing beliefs, look at them again within the context of the interviews, and re-examine them from a different perspective. Often, I encountered *disequilibrium* in my beliefs and thoughts, which was caused as the result of my reflections on what I had previously held to be the case. The excerpt from Samira's interview (above) provides an example of this cognitive disequilibrium. In our conversation, she indicated that her choice to adopt Hijab (the Muslim veil) has been entirely her decision and, in fact, to the discontent of

her husband who has actively encouraged her not to wear the veil. Samira's comments challenged my pre-existing assumptions about her choice of the Muslim veil, which I had originally thought to be, at least partly, due to her husband's requests. This revelation made me ask a new question: "what is her stance on the forced veiling of women in Iran?", and "how has her decision to wear the veil affected her relationship with other members of the Iranian community in Montreal?"

Writing the reflective field-notes started at the very early stages of my study, prior to entering the field, and continued throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing up of the dissertation. The reflective journals helped me discern how the participants make meanings of their experiences, and how their understandings interact with my own previously held beliefs and values. They also served as effective guides in determining the topics and themes of the subsequent interviews, as they helped me to unfold and articulate the participants' experiences and narratives.

Data Analysis

The critical task in qualitative research is not to accumulate all the data you can, but to "can" (i.e., get rid of), most of the data you accumulate. (Wolcott, 2001, p.44)

As Wolcott (2001) reminds us in the previous quote, the challenge of qualitative data analysis is to modify a vast collection of raw data into manageable, concise categories of "crunched" data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981) or results, leading to interpretations. Results and interpretations are different

notions each referring to a different stage in the process of data analysis. As

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) explain,

[r]esults are descriptions of what happened in a study and are a critical step leading to the end product—interpretations and implications for more research, intervention, or action—but are not the final step in the research project... Interpretation, or going beyond results, is the goal of the second step of the analytic process. Interpreting, or giving meaning to data involves figuring out what the crunched data mean, or what they say about the people, groups, or programs that the ethnographer has been studying. (p.3-5)

With this distinction in mind, the analysis of results and interpretations of the data in this dissertation, followed the pattern of two on-going and interconnected phases throughout the study as suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (1999). In the first phase, "analysis in the field," I followed the three stages of 1) *speculation* and generating ideas about the themes emerging from the data, 2) *venting* and clarifying ideas through free-writing and talking to other Iranians immigrants in the community, and 3) *reviewing* the data and writing down my ideas and reflections about the interviews in descriptive and reflective field-notes. Analysis in the field aided me in the process of identification and further exploration of topics which seemed significant to the participants as they conveyed them throughout their narratives. It was at this stage of data analysis that I was able to recognize and identify "main themes" emerging from the participants' interview transcripts. For example, these themes pertained to the significance of the role of family and culture on individuals' perceptions of an educated person, men and women's perceptions of culturally defined gender roles within the family and the society, the significance of race, religion and language in the individual men and women's lives and their perceived status as members of an immigrant

community in the host country. As I came to realize, in this stage of data analysis my views and opinions went through a cyclical process of formation of ideas and opinions about the main themes, and evaluation and revision of those initial ideas (Hebert & Beardsley, 2002). The next excerpt is from an entry in my reflective journal written on October 18, 2002:

I have been contemplating about my conversations with the participants. There have been moments of epiphany when [I] felt everything was clear and the data seemed to be shining under a new light. There are other times, however, that I feel the pieces of the puzzle which seemed to be securely into place by this time, came once again falling apart and left me with more questions than answers. As I wrote two nights ago [October 16, 2002], my conversations with some of the participants are leading me into different directions. [Samira] articulated her experiences with discrimination, isolation and racism in Canada. And Roxana, on the other hand, spoke of a completely different experience in Canada; she did not believe in the existence of social inequality since she had not experienced it herself. What do I need to know? What do I need to know about [Roxana and Samira] and their lives in order to make connections to their experiences and opposing (or at least, seemingly opposing) viewpoints? I look back [upon] my own experiences, and witness the same confusion and uncertainty: This country [Canada] has been good to me, and at times, this country [Canada] has been less than generous and accepting... In my informal conversations with other women, Iranian and non-Iranian, I observe the same variations in their individual experiences. They talk about the opportunities open to them in Canada which were not available in their own homelands, the many barriers they have to overcome: No family to rely on (financially and emotionally), isolation, having to function in a second language, and.... (the list goes on). I look back [upon] my own experiences again and I identify with them, as I did with the women in Sizoo's book. It is interesting how human experiences, as diverse as they seem to be, build connecting bridges across nations, colors, cultures, religions and languages... [Section continues]

Consequently, because of the open-ended nature of the interviews, I particularly found reflective field notes and continuous free-writing useful in terms of enabling

me to see the direction of the interviews and the key topics that were discussed by the participants (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

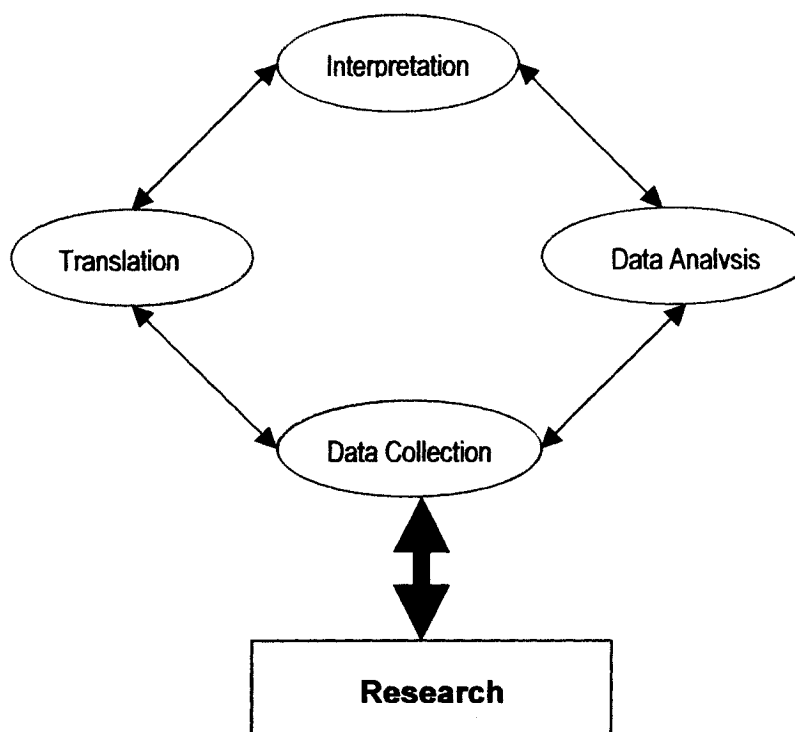
The process of data analysis was *not* a one-dimensional act that occurred after the completion of data collection; rather, it was a dialectical process (Lather, 1991) of data collection and making interpretations. As Lather (1991) suggests, “[d]ata must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a *priori* theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured” (p. 62). In choosing to do data analysis concurrent with data collection, I was able to frame the direction of the proceeding interviews within the framework of each individual participant’s narratives. Marshall and Rossman (1999) observe that the process of simultaneous data collection and analysis in qualitative research helps the researcher, “build a coherent interpretation of data. The researcher is guided by initial concepts and developing understandings but shifts or modifies them as she collects and analyzes the data” (p. 151). In this regard, data analysis is conceptually entangled with the research design, and cannot be separated from it. Additionally, concurrent data collection and analysis served as a practical tool in handling and management of extensive amount of qualitative data (Maxwell, 1996).

In the second phase of data analysis, I categorized and coded the emerging themes which I found to be a complex and challenging task, because I observed overlaps between several themes. In order to reach a trustworthy and credible description of the participants’ narratives, I had to read and reflect upon

what the participants were saying in their interview transcripts and listen to their actual recorded voices whenever the audiotapes were accessible. For example, “family” was one of the themes that surfaced in my interviews with all of the participants. However, the interview transcripts revealed that the role of “family” in individual participants’ lives was a complex phenomenon. While some participants regarded family as a major support system enabling and encouraging them to pursue their educational goals, others mentioned it as a means for transmitting culturally defined gender roles and rules of “haya” (حیا) and modesty for Iranian women. I interpreted that “family” played a multidimensional and paradoxical role in the lives of the participants which made the task of codification of family as a single category half hazardous because it extended beyond the limits of one single category or theme. Therefore, throughout Chapters Five and Six in which I represent and interpret the data, “family” is weaved through the discussions of participants’ situated meanings of education (Price, 2001), and the accounts of their connections to the larger Iranian and Canadian community.

Figure 4 summarizes the process of writing this dissertation from initial stages of data collection to data analysis and interpretation. As illustrated in this figure, the different stages in the research process were interconnected and informed one another. For example, data analysis inherently proceeded from the stage of data collection and in turn shaped the direction of the following interview session.

Figure 4. The Research Process



Lives in Translation: Language and Authenticity

As a researcher, my goal was to examine both the language of my data, and the language in which I interpreted and represented this data to the readers. Through the language of spoken data and reflective interpretations, I attempted to “identify those traditions, norms, institutions, artifacts, and other characteristics of culture that provide access into the netherworld of mundane life to unlock alternative metaphors and meanings” (Thomas, 1993, p.45-6). Interview transcriptions were the primary source of data in my study, and data analysis was based on the original Persian transcriptions. My goal throughout the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation was primarily to keep the

authenticity and integrity of the dialogues and the participants' narratives. In order to stay true to my goal, I postponed translating Persian transcriptions into English until the last stages of writing the interpretations. In doing so, I was able to continuously evaluate and revise the "authenticity" of the English translations throughout the process of data analysis and interpretation and writing this dissertation.

In determining the "authenticity" of translated interview excerpts from Persian into English, I had to define and interpret the implications of an "authentic translation" within the context of my study. I have taken "authenticity" to refer to both "form" and "content" of spoken language. In preserving the "form", I paid close attention to the grammatical structure of the participants' speech, both in terms of word order and "tense" of the spoken language. Translating "content" was a more challenging task, because the content implicated meanings and intentions of individuals in the spoken language. I tried to use the process of direct or word-for-word translation technique whenever possible, as exemplified in the following excerpt from an interview transcript with Nahid, a female participant:

Nahid: I think if I'd stayed in Iran, my situation would have been much better, I mean [my] social status. Sometimes, I feel like [laughs], even physically, **push** myself forward [laughs]. I'm tired of staying in the same spot.

(August 2, 2002)

فکر می کنم که اگر هنوز ایران مونده بودم
وضعیتم خیلی از این چیزی که اینجا هست
بهتر بود، از نظر موقعیت اجتماعی منظورمه.
بعضی وقتها دلم می خواد، (می خندد)،
حتی از لحاظ فیزیکی منظورمه ،
که خودمو **push** کنم جلو (می خندد).
خیلی از یکجا در جا زدن خسته شده ام .

As illustrated in the previous example, Persian words were translated into their corresponding English synonyms. When I lacked confidence in finding English words with the similar meanings (synonyms), I verified with Haim's (2000) Persian-English and Aryanpour's (2001) English-Persian dictionaries. When accessible, I also consulted the "Farsidic" on-line English-Persian-English dictionary which could be accessed at: <http://www.farsidic.com>. As evident in the above example, I reported instances of "code switching"—switching back and forth between two or more languages—as they occurred in the original transcript. For example, Nahid's use of the English word "**push**" was reported in both Persian and English translations in bold font without any modifications. Borrowed words, which are in common use in Persian as in many other languages, were reported so that they would depict the English synonym. In the previous excerpt, Nahid uses the word *فیزیکی*, which is a loan word from French, "Physiquement" (an adverb), commonly used in Persian. The word, also used as an adverb in Nahid's statement, means "physically" in English.

The use of "idioms" and "slang language" by the participants posed another difficulty while translating original interview excerpts. In addition to relying on my own knowledge of the two languages, Persian and English, I employed several other strategies such as verification with dictionaries and posting "request for information" through the website of the "Association of Iranian Linguists" (<http://www.iranian-linguists.ac.ir>). A useful source of information was A'lame Dehkhoda's (1981) (علامه دهخدا) "A Selection of Persian Idioms and Slangs". His book is dedicated entirely to the interpretation of idioms

and slangs used in the Persian language and does not include English translations. However, this book provided me with valuable information about the context and meanings of Persian proverbs, idioms and slangs, and thus helped in the process of translating and interpreting the participants' narratives. For example, in the previous interview excerpt, Nahid's said that "خیلی از یکجا در جا زدن خسته شده ام", is translated to mean, "I'm tired of staying in the same spot". According to Dehkhoda's (1981) interpretation, the proverb implicates the act of "staying in one place (or spot); not being able to move forward" (p.76).

Transforming Authenticity into a Social Act

To reduce the implications of mistranslations and working as a soloist in the act of bilingual translation (Gawn, 1985), I requested all participants to review and evaluate the transcripts in their original language (Persian). As the data analysis progressed, and I began the writing of data interpretations, I asked them to, once again, verify, and if desired, modify the translated interview excerpts chosen to be used as quotations throughout my dissertation. Involving the participants, although a step forward in enhancing the accuracy of the translations, does not, however, necessitate unconditional authenticity of the translations. As Gawn (1985) states,

[A]uthenticity requires understanding and collaboration of a different order. An authentic text...is one that is entirely appropriate to the situation of the originator, of the addressee and of the message. By this definition, literary translation can rarely be authentic. (p.111)

Therefore, throughout the process of gathering, transcribing, translating and interpreting the data, I have been conscious of the paradox of representing a “value-free” accuracy and “absolute” authenticity in my translations. I hold the view that an authentic translation of participants’ narratives may be realized through recognition of the function of “language” as a social representation of subjective realities and experiences of individuals. In this respect, I have interpreted “authenticity” of translations to imply and emphasize language as a “social act” that takes place as an interaction between the narrators (participants) and the translator (researcher), rather than as neutral and value-free. As Bakhtin reminds us,

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes “one’s own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather, it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. (p.293-4)

Viewing language as a social act implies the “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1991) of human languages to name things and its ability to organize different experiences and assign meanings to them. This view assisted me in transcending my role as the researcher/interviewer to that of a translator/interpreter. I, as the translator, as Campbell (1998) argues,

can no longer be thought of as a ghostly perfect bilingual, but as a living being with a role and abilities that can be described and discussed; when the translator emerges, then translation competence begins to emerge as an important issue. (p.4)

Therefore, my voice, as the translator, has a significant influence on the interpretation and representation of the interview data and is affected by the extent of my ability to speak, think and listen in both Persian, the language of my participants' narratives, and English, the medium through which interpretations are made available to the readers of this dissertation. My voice is also influenced by my own personal experiences and history as I relate to the stories of the participants. This also means that "bilingualism is not politically, socially or economically neutral—the world is not constructed in such a fashion that each language has equal status" (Campbell, 1998, p. 22). I believe that "translatability" — defined as the susceptibility of the translation to the role of the translator and the interaction with the reader (Banjamine, 1992)— involves both the reader and the translator, and takes place in a context where language as a social act strives to create symbolic interaction between both the speaker and the listener.

Consequently, translation is an act of "bilingual and cultural interpretation". It marks the historical, sociocultural, and political contexts within which the language is used to assign meanings. Translation stages continued lives of both myself, as the translator and interpreter, and the participants as the narrators and storytellers. Thus, throughout this dissertation, I chose to present the dialogues in their original Persian followed by their English translations. In doing so, I have been able to preserve the integrity of the language in which the participants narrated their experiences and made meanings out of those experiences. The

dialogues also allow for the representation of my voice, as the co-participant in the act of interviewing (Bakhtin, 1981).

A Note on Persian-English Transliteration

The system of transliteration adopted in my dissertation is based on the Persian Transliteration Tables, developed by Princeton University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies and Languages, and Ayanpour's Modern English-Persian Dictionary (2001). The existence of diverse adaptations of Persian-English transliteration makes it difficult to be consistent when transliteration involves Persian words and loaned Arabic words commonly used in Persian. For example in representing the ancient university of "Jondishapour", I encountered two different versions of Persian transliteration, "Jondishapour" (جندی شاپور), and the less commonly used pre-Islamic "Gondishapour" (گندی شاپور). After the advent of Islam in Iran in late seventh and eighth centuries, Persian words containing the letter "g" were converted to "j", since there is no equivalent to "g" in most dialects of Arabic. Taking into consideration the modern Persian dialect, and the widespread acceptance of Arabic adaptations of Persian words in Iran, I settled on using "Jondishapour" (جندی شاپور) throughout my dissertation. I have tried to keep this consistency throughout. Also, in accordance with the conventional rules of written Persian, I avoided typing Persian vowels and diphthongs, but have inserted them in the corresponding English transliteration in order to facilitate pronunciation. In the tables 5 and 6 below, I summarize the system of transliteration used throughout this dissertation.

Table 5. Persian-English Transliteration System

Persian	English	Persian	English
ا	a	ژ	zh
ب	b	ش	sh
ط ت	t	ع	a; ai
ص س ث	s	ق غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
چ	ch	ک	k
ه ح	h	گ	g
خ	kh	ل	L
د	d	ن	n
ظ ض ز ذ	z	و	v
ر	r	ی	y

Table 6. Persian-English Transliteration System: Vowels and Diphthongs

Persian	English	Persian	English
اَ	a	یَ	i
اُ	u	ایَ	ay
او	ou	ایَ	ai

Moreover, I faced another difficulty in representing the Iranian Solar system (سال شمسی) that starts every year on March 21. Throughout the study, I have represented the dates in the international calendar by adding 621 to the Iranian solar year. For example, Iranian year 1357 refers to the international year 1978, using the following formula:

$$\text{Iranian Solar year} + 621 = \text{International Calendar year}$$

Persian or Farsi (فارسی)?

Throughout this dissertation, I have used “Persian” and/or “Farsi” (فارسی) to refer to the native language of the participants and the official language spoken in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Notwithstanding my choice to use Persian and Farsi interchangeably within the context of my inquiry, the debate over the appropriate name of the language in English continues to intensify among the members of the Iranian community in Canada and the United States (Akbarzadeh, 2003; Parandeh, 1996; Talattof, 1997, 2003). This debate extends beyond the discussion of the functional use of the words, and implicates the socio-political nature of the words used in any language which are embedded in the culture and history of those who speak it. Kamran Talattof (2003), an Iranian linguist at Arizona State University, warns the Iranian community against the “detrimental damages” brought upon as the result of replacing “Persian” with “Farsi” in the English language, which he believes,

is not only incongruous with the history of the language but also creates confusion and misunderstanding. While the use of the word “Farsi” is a political statement for some Iranian authorities, for others it may indicate a lack of knowledge about the history of this language. It indicates that those who carelessly promote the use of the [Arabized] word *Farsi* [italics added] are indeed engaging in an equivocal representation of this language and may not, by any means, be promoting Iranian culture. (p.1)

Hence, Talatoff advocates the consistent use of “Persian” in the English language to refer to the official language spoken in Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and spoken as a minority language in countries all over the world, from Iraq to Canada and the United States. In an open forum on the subject of

"Persian or Farsi" posted on the popular Iranian website,

<<http://www.iranain.com>>, Parandeh (1996), an Iranian-American, expresses a similar opinion and states that,

Farsi is the name of our language in Iran. Farsi in English has a translation and that is Persian, which if you look up the dictionary you will usually see the description "Of or pertaining to Persia, its inhabitants, or language...". So, for those who would like to insist that Persian=Farsi in English, maybe they should also consider calling themselves Farse (instead of Iranian or Persian) which incidentally in English means: "An amplification inserted into a liturgical formula..."

(Persian *not* Farsi, [On line], Available: <http://www.iranain.com/july96/articles/Farsi.html>, Retrieved: June 7, 2003)

Sussan Tahmasebi (1996), also an Iranian-American herself, responds to Parandeh's comments not from a historical-linguistic viewpoint, but from a national identity perspective. She replies:

For me, the question of identity does not begin and end with telling the world that I am Iranian, Muslim, woman, other... There is a lot of pain in knowing your true status in society, especially when you are an other, minority, lesser, not equal... When I choose to tell people that I am Iranian and speak Farsi, it is for a reason. It is an attempt at defining myself in my own terms. And, regardless of whether Iranians chose Farsi over Persian in a conscious effort toward self-definition, I think the infusion of the word into the English language is proof enough for our collective power. (I speak Farsi, [On line], Available: <http://www.iranain.com/sep96/articles/farsireaction2.html>, Retrieved: June 7, 2003)

Statements made by Talattof, Parandeh and Tahmasebi point to the power of language to assign "value", "worth" and "status" to words in the language, and how individual speakers interpret and give meanings to *words* as the they see and experience their *worlds*.

The debate over “Persian or Farsi” is far from over. As an Iranian-Canadian who is fluent in both English and Persian or Farsi (!) I have realized that I continuously switch between using “Persian” and “Farsi” when referring to my native language in English conversations. However, I have also become conscious of the exclusive use of “Farsi” in my Persian conversations. Interestingly, all eight participants in my study referred to their native language as “Farsi” (فارسی) and not Persian. I believe this was mainly because the interviews were entirely conducted in Persian with only few and occasional instances of code-mixing (or code-switching) between the two languages, Persian and English.

Summary

Guided by Vygotsky’s sociocultural-historical Activity Theory, and within the framework of critical ethnography, this inquiry aimed to explore and investigate the phenomenon of educational experiences of eight first-generation Iranians in Canada’s institutions of higher education. This inquiry followed the structure of a qualitative research study in which I employed multiple, in-depth interviews, material culture, and researcher’s descriptive and reflective field-notes to address the guiding research question: “What is the experience of being a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canadian higher education?” The process of data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously and informed the structure and direction of subsequent interviews. Prior and throughout the interviews, I became increasingly aware of the paradoxical role of “gender” on the research process

and the implications of doing research as an “insider”. “Language” of my conversations with the participants also became a significant issue which needed to be addressed. All eight men and women chose to conduct the interviews in Persian, their native language. Therefore, representation of participants’ voices and authenticity of their narratives became paramount in this bilingual interpretative study. Throughout the dissertation, I have chosen to cite original interview excerpts (in Persian) adjacent to their English translations.

In the next chapter, I introduce the participants and provide a brief biographical sketch for each of the eight men and women.

Chapter Four: The Making of an “Immigrant” Community

My goal in this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I aspire to define and explain the notions of “immigrants” and “minority groups”. My argument here is that these notions are inherently socio-politically situated and imply “status” and “power” within a particular social system. Secondly, I aim to introduce the participants and provide a brief biographical overview of their lifeworlds.

“Immigrants”: A Definition

The term “immigrant” has been defined differently in the literature. Merriam Webster’s dictionary (2004) defines an immigrant as “a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence” (Merriam Webster dictionary, [On line]. Available:<http://www.m-w.com>, Retrieved: August 3, 2004). Canadian government’s legal definition of the term seems to coincide with this general description. Halli and Driedger (1999) state that the term “immigrant” refers to any group of foreign-born Canadian residents who hold permanent landed immigrant status. Hence, “immigrant” is a legal designation ascribed to permanent residents in Canada who do not have the same legal privileges as Canadian citizens, such as the right to vote in federal and provincial elections.

An alternative definition of the term has been offered by sociologists (Ghosh, 1996; Isoki, 2000; James & Shadd, 2000; Khayatt, 2000; Ng, 1987, 1995, 2000) who state that the term has been categorically used by the mainstream dominant population to refer to those belonging to “visible minority groups,” regardless of their place of birth. Hence, the socio-political connotation

of the term “immigrant” implies a lower, subordinate position within the larger mainstream culture. Furthermore, in defining the term immigrant, we need to take into consideration factors such as gender, socio-economic class, language proficiency, religion and most importantly, lived experiences of “individual” immigrants. As Khayatt (2001) points out, the “general” descriptions of what constitutes an immigrant,

conceal real life differences in the experiences and do not account for or distinguish between various levels of oppression. They assume homogeneity of background amongst all people who fall into those various groupings. (p.79)

In their book, *Talking about Identity: Encounters in Race, Ethnicity, and Language* (2001), Carl James and Adrienne Shadd —two Toronto-based educators and researchers— provide a fascinating account of different interpretations of the terms “immigrant” and “minority” which, they believe, have been commonly used interchangeably. The book is a collection of essays from approximately thirty men and women who identify themselves as members of diverse minority groups in Canada. Their narratives present the readers with a window to the worlds of those identified as ethnic and minority. The authors underline socio-political meanings inherent in terms such as “immigrant” and “minority groups”. Their accounts and opinions are as diverse as their cultural backgrounds. Each sees and defines the terms as she or he sees it through the window of his or her own lived experiences. For example, one of the contributors, Susan Judith Ship, a French-Canadian Jew, writes about her perceptions of being identified as the “other,” because she does not fit the

general description of a “real Canadian” —one with Blond hair and blue eyes.

She writes:

The relative homogeneity and dominance of Anglo/French culture in most of Canada and Quebec still make me ill at ease even though I was born here. Too many people, particularly in Quebec, still ask me where I was born, what my nationality is (I thought I was Canadian!), where my parents were born, and what languages I speak. Although some people, perhaps most, are genuinely curious, I am, however, reminded of my status as “other” and somehow obviously “different.” But then I understand. I speak French with a funny accent. I don’t have blond hair or blue eyes. I don’t look Nordic or Norman. I don’t belong to either of the “two founding nations.” Therefore, I must be in that “other” category — the eternal immigrant. (p.25)

Ship’s statements and her analogy of the “eternal immigrant” highlight the experience of being the “other,” “being different,” and being “reminded” of that difference. This experience is all too often shared by those Canadians, native- and foreign-born, who, for one reason or another, do not fit the category of what a “real” Canadian looks like. Nonetheless, “difference” and “otherness” are paradoxical concepts which cannot be easily defined, as Katalin Szepesi (2001), a Canadian with a Hungarian last name and another contributor to the book, asserts. She says:

I want to call myself Canadian, but I’m not allowed. My name is Hungarian by origin, so therefore, I am Hungarian. It doesn’t matter that on my mother’s side I’m seventh-generation Canadian and before that our family came from Great Britain. It doesn’t matter that I can’t speak Hungarian and have only a marginal understanding of the culture. It doesn’t matter that I was born and raised in Canada. It doesn’t even matter that I’m white. Katalin Szepesi is not a Canadian name, so Katalin Szepesi will never be a Canadian... I would also have the hope of becoming a full-fledged Canadian if I married a white person with an Anglo-Saxon name. My husband could have been born and raised in another country, but if I had an Anglo name then I would get my *status* [italics added]. (p.33)

Szepesi reminds us of the “value” and “status” of words and labels used in the language of a particular culture. Being an “immigrant” holds more than having a legal designation; rather, it implies the “status” of the individuals identified as “different” and “other.”

Furthermore, she emphasizes the situatedness and fluid character of the concept of “whiteness” (Levin-Rasky, 2002). Being white transcends beyond the physical appearances of individuals and covers a whole range of factors such as a person’s name, ethnic origin (Desai, 2001) and class (Orlowski, 2001). Ruth Frankenberg (1993) attributes three characteristics to the concept of “whiteness.” Firstly, whiteness inherently implies institutionalized or structural privileges which allow those identified as white to have access to various resources in the social, economic and political arenas. Secondly, whiteness refers to a “standpoint,” a “paradigm,” or a “worldview,” through which “white people” understand the world and their experiences. Thirdly, whiteness includes cultural patterns and codes of behavior which are marked as “accepted” (Aguiar, 2001). In her analysis of the concept of “whiteness,” Cynthia Levin-Rasky (2002) stresses that,

...whiteness should not be conceptualized as a static identity marker. Whiteness is, rather, a social construction emergent from particular sets of contexts taken up by inequitably empowered groups negotiating their way through the world in social relation to each other. (p.4)

Hence, “being white,” “being an immigrant,” and “being a minority,” are socially constructed concepts which implicate one’s status in the community and relation to others, and access to social and economic privileges (Sefa Dei, 1996).

Types of Minority Groups

The catchphrase “Canada is an immigrant country” refers to the existence of diverse cultural, religious and linguistic groups in Canada which make up the “multicultural mosaic” of Canadian society. Immigrants are commonly categorized as belonging to one or more particular “minority groups.” While all societies, including Canada, are made up of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, not all of these minority groups belong to the same category in terms of their socio-political status in society. Their status is in fact related and connected to their particular histories and cultural frames of reference — or culturally influenced ways of seeing and relating to the world. The late John Ogbu (1987, 2003) — professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkley — identified three different types of minority groups. According to his Cultural Ecological Theory, minorities may be categorized according to their socio-political stances in the host country and their status in the society in relation to the dominant group.

Ogbu’s categorization of minority groups include, 1) *Autonomous minorities* which includes those minority groups who possess a distinct linguistic, cultural or religious identity, such as Jews and Mormons in North America, 2) *Immigrant minorities* who have voluntarily moved to the host country, such as Iranians, Pakistanis, and Chinese who immigrated to Canada in the pursuit of education or greater political and social freedoms, and 3) *Castlike or involuntary minorities* who were forced to move from their countries of origin and “brought” into the host society through slavery, colonization and conquests, such as African-Americans

and the First Nations of Canada. Through forced displacement, these minorities often include the lower socio-economic classes in the society and have been historically denied access to social and political institutions. While Ogbu's categorization of minority groups seem to label different minorities according to general categories, he acknowledges the existence of individual variations within and across diverse cultural groups. He explains: "when I refer to or describe the distinctive features of a minority group I do not thereby deny that there are individual differences within that minority group" (1987, p.321). Ogbu (1987) asserts that these categories of minorities are not meant to stereotype different social groups. Rather, he explains, they should be used as "heuristic classifications" which allow scholars, researchers, and practitioners to explore and consider the role of cultural differences when investigating patterns of integration and/or academic achievements of members of diverse minority groups .

Cultural Frame of Reference

Ogbu (1995) defines "cultural frame of reference," as a "coherent or ideal way to behave within the culture (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, preferences and symbols considered appropriate for members of the culture)" (Ogbu, 1995, p. 195). The underlying assumption is that the frames of reference that exist within a culture are widely accepted and govern the group members' behaviors. The notion of a cultural frame of reference gains greater importance when two cultures come into contact with each other, such as the members of an immigrant group in the host

country. However, differences in the ways of thinking and behaving does not necessarily lead to clashes and conflicts between the two groups. Ogbu (1978, 1991, 1995, 2003) proposes that there are three possible frames of references in the context of cultural contact: 1) similar, 2) different, and 3) oppositional. *Similar* frames of reference share common beliefs, values and codes of behavior. For example, mainstream white Canadians from Vancouver may have a similar frame of reference with mainstream white Canadians from Toronto. On the other hand, social groups with *different* frames of reference, might speak different languages, and uphold somewhat diverse attitudes and norms of behavior. Chinese and Russian immigrants in Canada are examples of two cultures with different frames of reference from the mainstream Canadians. The Russian and Chinese communities in Canada are different as the result of speaking different languages, and upholding different customs and cultural traditions not valued by the majority of the Canadian population. The third category, the *oppositional* frames of reference involve cultural contact between social groups that are not only different, but also perceive the values and beliefs of the other group as contradictory to their own. Examples of social groups with oppositional frames of reference are African-Americans and the mainstream white population in the United States of America. Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1986) observe that cultural frames of reference are crucial factors in determining a particular cultural group's willingness and readiness to accept the values and beliefs of another group. In general, contact between oppositional frames of reference can lead to more conflict and divergence between the social groups. Oppositional frames of

reference are rooted in unequal power structures within a society. This means that often, if not always, the minority group is in a subordinate position to the dominant/majority group. The system of beliefs of the minority group very often include the attitudes, values, and behaviors that are rejected and not accepted by the members of the dominant group. According to Ogbu's Theory of Cultural Contact (1987, 1995), three factors determine the process of integration of different minority groups within their respective host cultures, 1) the willingness of members of a particular minority group to cross cultural boundaries, 2) whether members of a particular minority group perceive the dominant culture as oppositional to their own, also referred to as the "affective dilemma", and 3) how minority groups compare their social, political and economic status when compared to their countries of origin. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of these three factors.

Crossing Cultural Boundaries

Different minority types tend to differ in their ability or willingness to "cross cultural boundaries", (i.e., cultural differences that distinguish different social groups from one another), and integrate into the dominant culture. Perceived social distance, social and political memories of individuals are crucial factors in how members of a particular social group react and respond to their status and relationships with the members of the dominant group.

The Affective Dilemma

Involuntary minority groups tend to find it more difficult to cross these cultural boundaries. One possible explanation may be that involuntary minorities may possess an oppositional frame of reference, and find the dominant culture's values and codes of behavior contradictory to their own. Any initiatives to integrate and/or assimilate are interpreted as acts of betraying one's own culture and denouncing minority group membership. In this context, "they interpret the cultural differences they encounter as *markers of group or their collective identity* to be maintained and as boundary-making mechanisms between themselves and the dominant group" (Ogbu, 1995, p.201). Affective dilemma (De Vos, 1980, 1997) refers to the tensions experienced by individuals who feel torn between choosing their own culture and the culture of the dominant group, the "enemy" (McMurray, 2003). The affective dilemma, however, does not seem to have negative influences on the educational aspirations and academic performance of voluntary minorities (autonomous minorities and immigrants). Voluntary minorities view the acquisition of the language and culture of the host society not as a threat to their cultural identity, but as an instrument for self-advancement (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) and mobility within and across diverse communities.

Dual Frame of Status Mobility

Voluntary minorities may interpret difficulties and problems they encounter as barriers to overcome, and not necessarily as a symbol of oppression and subordination by the dominant culture. Ogbu (1995) observes,

[a]lthough the immigrants may not get jobs and wages equal to their white peers for the success in learning the standard English and subsequent school success, they consider what they get 'better' than what they would have achieved 'back home'. That is, they have a positive 'dual frame' of status mobility. (p.200)

On the other hand, the involuntary minorities have a "negative" dual frame of status mobility. This means that they do not compare their status in society with their counterparts "back home," either as the result of a historical disconnection from their ethnic and cultural roots, or, for example in the case of the First Nations of Canada, they occupy a subordinate position in their original place of residence. Therefore, they can only compare their status to that of the mainstream dominant group, and interpret their position as "inferior" and "subordinate". Thus, the attitudes and perspectives of members of a particular minority group hold towards the dominant culture may or may not ultimately affect their experiences in social institutions such as schools and institutions of higher education.

Participants: A Historical and Biographical Sketch

Where we stand at any moment in our lives, our place in the world in relation to others and ourselves is, without a doubt, connected to our past, where we have been, what we have experienced and where we see ourselves in the future. As Paulo Freire (1992) states,

No one goes anywhere alone, least of all into exile – not even those who arrive physically alone, unaccompanied by family, spouse, children, or siblings. No one leaves his or her world without having been transfixed by its roots, or with a vacuum for a soul. We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history, our culture; a memory, sometimes scattered, sometimes sharp and clear, of the streets of our childhood, or our adolescence; the reminiscence of something distant that suddenly stands before us. (Paulo Freire, 1992, p.31)

It is with this belief in the power of history, culture and memory that in this section I provide the readers with a brief historical and biographical description of the individual participants. In depicting a picture of the eight immigrant Iranian men and women, I have attempted to provide the readers with an historical background of the Iranian immigrant population in Canada. While this information may not and should not be generalized to all or even most immigrant Iranians residing in Canada, it will give the readers relevant historical knowledge necessary to understand the complexities of the lives of this particular immigrant minority group.

Eight first-generation Iranian immigrants, six women and two men who were born and raised in Iran and moved to Canada in their adulthood, participated in my study. They were all residents in the Metropolitan area of Montreal, home to a large Iranian community, many of whom immigrated to

Canada in the early years following the 1979 Iranian revolution. My search to find specific information with respect to the number and composition of Iranians residing in Montreal was for the most part unsuccessful. My search was limited to two main sources: the first was the official Canadian Census and the second was information gathered from individual members of the Iranian community who were connected to the larger Montreal Iranian population. These individual Iranians included volunteers and coordinators at the local “Montreal Persian Association” (انجمن ایرانی های مونتریال) [see Appendix C], the “Nima Library” (کتابخانه نیما), and the Iranian student associations of McGill and Concordia Universities.

Official Canadian statistics, the first main source of information on Iranian immigrant population in Canada and Montreal, failed to provide me with a clear picture of Iranian immigrants in particular. This lack of substantive information may be attributed to several factors, such as the Iranian immigrants' more recent history in Canadian multicultural society when compared to other immigrant groups such as the Irish, German, Italian, and Asian and South-Asian communities. Another factor may be ascribed to the negative portrayals of Iran and Iranians by the western media and social and political dismay expressed towards Iranians because of the anti-Western, and in particular, the anti-American policies of the Iranian government. Since 9/11, Iran's political, economic, social and cultural alienation of Iran from the West may have contributed to an increasing lack of interest in studying and gathering detailed and specific information about the Iranian immigrant population. Lastly, the

Canadian federal government's policy prior to the 1980's required Canadians to report only one ancestry or ethnic origin, and therefore, the multi-ethnic picture of Canada was assumed to be "characterized as being dominated by the two charter groups and a few others of relatively minor significance" (Halli & Driedger, 1995). In 1981, however, that policy was changed and the new census allowed Canadians to report more than one ancestry and ethnic origin. Hence, it revealed a clearer picture of Canada as a more heterogeneous and "multicultural mosaic" than was originally believed.

While the Iranian migration to Canada, and North America in general, was a post WWII phenomenon (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1986), throughout the decades following the post war era, the 1950s and 1960s, the number of Iranian immigrants ranged from ten to one hundred each year (Marsh, 2000). The mass immigration of Iranian citizens to Canada began in the early years after the 1979 revolution and the subsequent establishment of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in the spring of 1980. Since then, Canada has become home to an ever-increasing number of Iranian men and women. According to the Canadian official Census, the number of Iranian immigrants in Canada increased from 100 in 1961 to 660 in 1970, and witnessed an exponential boost to 64, 405 in 1996 (Inter-Cultural Collection, Government of Canada, 2003). The majority of Iranian immigrants live in major urban areas such as Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver. In 1996, 56% of Iranian immigrants resided in Ontario, 15% in Quebec, and 23% in British Columbia (Rahnema, 2000, p.1189). In the same year, Persian (or Farsi فارسی) —the official language of Iran —ranked 17 among

the 110 non-official languages spoken in Canada (Hassanpour, 2001).

According to Li (2003), the reasons behind Iranian immigrants' choice of larger metropolitan areas are rather apparent. This is mainly because "[i]mmigrants are attracted to large cities because of the opportunities and services available, and because of the presence of large ethnic communities that provide newcomers with emotional and other support" (p.147).

While there is general information about the Iranian immigrant community in Canada, there is no specific information about the Iranian immigrants living in Montreal. According to Shahram, the coordinator of the Montreal Persian Network,

Statistics Canada (or any association) doesn't follow the movement of immigrants specifically for each nationality... they only have a general view of them... Many Iranians enrolling in universities as Canadian citizens... and nobody ask them where they are originally from... We are still not sure about the number of Iranians living in Quebec... People are talking about 4000, 5000, 10000... The thing I'm sure is that there is no universal student association/federation for all Iranian University students. (personal communications, Nov. 25, 2002)

The history of Iranian immigration to Canada suggests not only a major change in the rate of migration of Iranian citizens to Canada, but it also involves significant shifts in the social and political compositions of this immigrant population. In the next section, I provide a socio-political analysis of the patterns of Iranian migration to Canada.

Patterns of Iranian Migration: A Socio-Political Analysis

Migration of Iranian citizens to Canada may be categorized into two different historical periods; the decades prior to the 1979 revolution, and the years following the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran. During the first period, the years prior to 1979, immigration of Iranians was mainly known as the “brain drain”, translated as the “escape of the brains,” (فرار مغزها) caused by systematic problems within the Iranian higher educational system and society’s lack of appropriate means to accommodate for the educational and career aspirations of a growing educated middle class in Iran. During this period, the majority of immigrants were men, and their reasons for immigration were mostly personal and based on the close relationship between the former government of Iran and other Western countries. The tendency of these groups of Iranian immigrants to assimilate into Canadian culture did not create a need for the formation of a unified community (Moallem, 1989, 1992). The Iranian immigrants of this period displayed a strong tendency to assimilate within the host society—as opposed to integrate—mainly because, “they were all educated in the west, [and] thus, familiar with the western culture” (Nassehi, 1995, p.27).

The second period of Iranian immigration marks the country’s socio-political upheaval that took place in Iran after the 1979 revolution. This period was characterized by an ever-increasing number of Iranian immigrants into the Western countries. Many of them came from the educated middle-class levels of Iranian society. Political problems between the newly-established Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and the different Iranian political dissidents, international

economic sanctions imposed by the United States of America as the consequence of the “hostage Crisis” were among factors that helped to deteriorate the country’s economic and political situation. In 1980, the invasion of Iran’s Southern province, Khozestan (خوزستان), by the neighboring Iraq, and the start of a lengthy, violent eight year long war (1980-1988), further vexed Iran’s devastated economy. The devastating socio-political and economic climate of Iran in the years after the 1979, led to a new era of the “exodus of those who were opposed to both the Shah’s and the Islamic republic’s regime, and all belonged to vast political, social, and cultural patterns” (Nassehi, 1995, p.28).

The major shift in the demographics of Iranian immigrants can be found in the patterns of migration of Iranian women (Azadeh, 1989; Moallem, 1989, 1992; Nassehi, 1995; Omidvar, 1988). Immigrant Iranian women were the new “socio-cultural” immigrants (Nassehi, 1995) and belonged to diverse cultural and linguistic groups. They came from different socio-economic levels of Iranian society, and whether single, married, divorced or widowed, they did not fit the new definition of “exemplary Muslim women”. Consequently, these women felt the pressures of the new public regulations of the Islamic governance which ranged from “forced veiling”, expulsion of many female employees from their work place based on their past “unIslamic behavior”, and the exclusion of women from many arenas of education and employment. Consequently, patterns of post-revolutionary Iranian migration can be regarded as a truly unique phenomenon which is “political as well as sociocultural...simply because many elite with precious intellectual and financial resources were among the

immigrants of this period" (Nassehi, 1995, p. 29). Official government reports show that the Iranian immigrants from the pre-and post-revolutionary period have completed at least a high school diploma. This makes Iranians the second most educated cultural group in Canada, ranking second after Germans (Pluri Vox 2002 Media Report, The Iranian community in Canada, [On line]. Available: <http://http://www.plurivox.ca/iranianfku.html>), Retrieved: September 14, 2003).

Furthermore, the significant increase in Iranian migration to Canada has been the result of Canada's rapid economic and social developments in the years following WWII that led to changes in the Immigration Act in 1967. While Canada is commonly called an "immigrant country", the categorization of immigrants into "preferred" European immigrants and "undesirable" non-European immigrants according to the Immigration Act of 1910 (amended in 1919), practically prevented the immigration of people of color into Canada. Elabor-Idemudia (2000) states that the undesirable immigrant category referred to,

those belonging to nationalities unlikely to assimilate of their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life, methods of holding property and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated or assume the duties and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship within reasonable time after their entry. This was seen as something that would consequently prevent the building of a united nation of people of familiar customs and ideals. (p.96)

With changes made to the immigration guidelines, the old restrictions on "undesirable" immigrants were replaced with a new "points system" granting points to potential immigrants based on their job training, skills, education, and knowledge of one or both of the Canada's official languages, English and French.

The immigration of Iranian immigrants is representative of the favorable immigration laws which have facilitated their entry to Canada (Mirfakhraei, 1999).

Iranian Immigration: A Continuing Story

The immigration of Iranian citizens, in particular those who have attained higher education, into Canada and other Western countries is a continuing phenomenon. In a recent report, the World Bank (2003) ranked Iran first among 91 developing countries, in terms of migration of its educated citizens to outside the country. This report estimated that about 150 to 180 thousand university-educated immigrants leave the country annually. A BBC report (BBC Report (2003). What should be done with the brain-drain [in Iran]. BBC Report, Jame-Jahan-Nama. [On line]. Available:<http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/forum/030822h-forum-braindrain.shtml>, Retrieved: August 23, 2003) claimed that 90 out of 150 Iranian students who had ranked one of three top spots in International science Olympiads during the period 2000-2003 were studying in American universities. The Same BBC report also included a survey of reasons attributed to Iranian immigration to Western countries. Different individuals, both living in and outside of the country, mentioned Iran's downward economic situation, lack of individual rights and freedoms, and a skeptical view towards any development and change in Iran's current political situation as primary reasons to leave the country. I have chosen several statements from that survey in order to depict the respondents' perspectives:

After investigating the factors which I, myself, have encountered in the past years, I can mention a few reasons [for the exodus of Iranians from the country]:

1. Lack of hope and faith in one's future career, taking into consideration the bureaucratic corruption in selection of candidates in education and employment,
2. Obliteration of a sense of national pride, and Iranian youth's embarrassment of their nationality in the world,
3. The possibility of creating a better future for [their] children through changing their nationality,
4. Lack of hope in any changes in Iran's situation
5. Inability to work and cooperate with the [religious] fanatics who are in charge,
6. [The country's] lack of interest in their potential which naturally motivates them to live.

(Anonymous, Iran)

- با بررسی موارد مشاهده شده در اطراف خودم در این چند سال چند علت را می توان نام برد.
۱. عدم امید به آینده شغلی با توجه به گزینش و حاکم بودن روابط در مورد اعطای هر گونه تسهیلات شغلی یا تحصیلی.
 ۲. مردود کردن حس ملی گرایی و خجل بودن جوانان از ملیت نزد جهانیان
 ۳. امکان بوجود آوردن آینده بهتر برای فرزندان با تغییر ملیت
 ۴. عدم امید به دگرگونی در اوضاع ایران
 ۵. عدم امکان همکاری با افراد فئاتیک و بیسواد که در رأس امور هستند
 ۶. عدم نیاز به مغز در داخل که باعث خروج طبیعی آنها می شود
(امضاً محفوظ - ایران)

Hamid, a male resident of Tehran, attributes reasons behind the desire to emigrate among Iranians to the adverse economic and political situation of the country that prevents educated young Iranians from attaining their goals within the borders of their homeland. He states:

One of the major reasons for brain drain [in Iran] is the lack of hope and prospect for the development in the economic, industrial, and social situation in Iran. This is due to the lack of faith caused by mismanagement and corruption, and its impact on the educated young citizens of this country. The consequence is that most of the young educated Iranians seek to pursue and realize their dreams on the other side of the borders [of Iran].

(Hamid, Tehran)

یکی از دلایل عمده فرار مغزها ناامیدی از بهبود اوضاع اقتصادی، صنعتی و اجتماعی ایران است. این سرخوردگی ناشی از سوء مدیریت و نبود شایسته سالاری و تاثیر گذار نبودن جوانان تحصیل کرده بر آینده این مملکت است که باعث شده که اغلب جوانان تحصیل کرده ایرانی تحقق رویاهای خود را در آن سوی مرزها بجویند.

(حمید، تهران)

While these two statements cannot be generalized to represent the opinions of the majority of Iran's population, they do, however, speak of the economic, social and political problems facing the young and educated in Iran. With a new wave of political, and socio-cultural upheavals inside Iran as the result of the frictions between the reformist and extremist wings of the IRI government, Iranian citizens appear to aspire more than ever to leave their homeland.

Gaining Access

I started contacting Iranian men and women introduced to me by my "gatekeepers" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) who were mostly friends and family members. This "snowball" strategy (Flick, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) allowed me to choose potential candidates for my study amongst those individuals I already knew. I found this strategy to be advantageous in terms of allowing me to build a working relationship based upon trust and familiarity between me and the participants. However, a downfall of this strategy, according to Hildenbrand (1995) is that,

While it is often assumed that access to the field would be facilitated by studying persons well known to the researcher and accordingly finding cases from one's own circle of acquaintances, exactly the opposite is true: the stranger the field, the more easily may researchers appear as strangers, whom the people in the study have something to tell which is new for the researcher. (p.58)

This quote highlights the advantages of a researcher's anonymity in the field, which will allow him or her to find and connect more easily to potential participants and hear stories which would have not been heard otherwise. I do

not agree or disagree with Hildenbrand. I argue that the advantages of a researcher's anonymity, or conversely, his or her familiarity with the participants are inherently situated within the specific context of the study, the location of the fieldwork and the nature of the research questions. I believe that in the context of my study, previous familiarity with the participants allowed for more openness and trust throughout the interview sessions, data collection and interpretations of the data.

My search to find potential candidates to participate in my doctoral project started in early September 2000, soon after I moved from Ottawa to Montreal to pursue my doctoral studies in Education at McGill University. I continued my search for contacts within the Iranian community in Montreal. While I was uncertain of the exact nature and details of my research questions at that early stage of my studies, I was undoubtedly interested in making connections with members of the Iranian immigrant community in Montreal. My primary reason, at that point, was to create ties with different individuals in the cultural community for moral and emotional support and build friendships because I knew few people in Montreal.

The final eight participants were chosen from a pool of nearly twenty potential candidates all of whom I had previously contacted and described the details of my project as it evolved. These eight candidates were selected for two major reasons: 1) their overt expressions of interest in my study and their willingness to participate in lengthy, multiple qualitative interviews, which can be time-consuming and inconvenient for many individuals, and 2) common

denominators amongst all eight, such as shared linguistic background (all speak Persian or Farsi as their first language), place of residence in Iran (Tehran), and their common experience as mature undergraduate students in an English university in Montreal.

Additionally, another important factor that connects the participants is their experience in the Iranian higher educational system. All, except one woman (yalda), had already completed or were enrolled full-time in an undergraduate program in either a public or privately funded university in Iran. Yalda, the only participant with no previous university education in Iran, pursued a professional career as a tennis instructor after the obtaining her high school diploma. While she lacked first-hand experience as a university student in Iran, I decided to keep her as a participant because of her professional experience and her display of enthusiasm to participate in my project. Yalda's unique perspectives and personal struggles in the Canadian higher educational system, as a first-time university student, added a rich and interesting dimension to the study.

Participants: Their Lives and Attributes

In this section, I provide a brief biography of each participant. This information is based on the data gathered throughout the interviews. Table 7 provides a summary of participants' profiles.

Table 7. Biographical Data of Participants

Name (male/female)	Age	Program of study in Iran /years completed	Year arrived in Canada	Program of study in Canada/ years completed	Marital status/ No. of children	Parents' education
Samira (F)	31	Persian Literature (Year 2)	1995	Psychology (Year 3)	Married (One 4-year old daughter)	Father: B.SC Mother: B.SC
Nahid (F)	37	Microbiology (B.SC)	1994	Genetic Consulting (Year 4)	Married (One 5-year old son)	Father: High School Mother: Grade One
Roxana (F)	36	Comparative Literature (BA)	1996	Biochemistry (Year 4)	Married (No children)	Father: B.A. Mother: High School
Mitra (F)	29	Nursing (B.SC)	1997	Biology (Year 2)	Single	Father: BA Mother: High School
Yalda (F)	37	High School diploma/ Tennis Coach	1996	Computer Science (Year 3)	Married (One six- year old son)	Father & Mother: not finished High School
Nasrin (F)	28	Biology (B.SC)	1997	Biomedical Engineering (Year 2)	Single	Father & Mother: High School
Nader (M)	31	Political Science (Year 1)	1996	Computer Science (Year 3)	Single	Father & Mother: not finished High School
Cyrus (M)	29	Political Science (BA)	1997	Computer Science (Year 3)	Single	Father: BA Mother: BA

In order to protect their anonymity, pseudonyms have been used. Names of universities, and certain identifying personal information have been withheld and/or modified. At the end of our first interviews, I asked the participants to answer this question, "How would you define who you are as [name of the participant] in a few sentences?" The quotes opening each men's and women's profile is his or her response to this question.

Samira (سمیرا): Desire and Despair

Samira: I always feel like I didn't work hard, that I didn't work hard enough. I constantly have this feeling that,..., how can I say, I have a feeling of **underachievement**, ..., that's it, I have a feeling of **underachievement**. I feel guilty!

(July 25, 2002)

همیشه این احساس رو دارم که خیلی سخت کار نکردم ، که به اندازه کافی زحمت نکشیدم .
همش این احساس رو دارم که ،...،
چه جوری بگم ، یک حالت **underachievement**
دارم ،...، فقط همین ،
حالت **underachievement** دارم .
احساس گناه دارم !

Samira is thirty-one years old, born and raised in a middle-class family in Tehran. Samira is petite and olive skinned, with facial features that make her stand out as a visible minority in Quebec. She is the only veiled female participant, although she has adopted a Western-style of clothing. Instead of wearing a shapeless, dark-colored tunic which is common among a vast majority of veiled Muslim women in Montreal and elsewhere in Canada, Samira has opted to wear two-piece skirt and pant suits, and loose shirts over long skirts and pants. Our first interview was conducted at her home, where she was dressed more casually, but in our second interview which took place in my office on the McGill University Campus, she was wearing a loose turtleneck, and jeans underneath

her winter coat. Samira's hijab (Islamic veil) consists of colorful, stylish silk scarves, loosely knotted under her chin. She pays careful attention to the full coverage of her hair.

Samira's parents are both university educated. Her mother is a retired high school science teacher in Iran, and her father, a retired government employee, holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture. Her siblings, two older brothers, are university-educated engineers; the oldest is working towards a PhD in Mechanical engineering in Iran.

Samira is married, and has a pre-school daughter who was four years old at the time of our interviews (August 2002 – January 2003). She and her husband moved to Canada in 1995, after being granted Landed Immigrant Visa. Samira's husband, who had a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering from a highly ranked Iranian public university, immediately made plans to pursue his doctoral degree in Engineering in Canada.

Prior to her marriage at the age of twenty-two, Samira was a second year university student, majoring in Persian Literature at the University of Tehran. After their immigration to Canada, limited financial resources, taking care of an infant daughter, and her husband's absence from home due to his full-time engagement with his own work and studies, were the main reasons that prevented her from continuing her education in the early years of their life in Canada. After the completion of her husband's doctoral degree three years ago, she enrolled full-time in an undergraduate degree in Psychology in an English University in Montreal, and is currently in the third year of her studies.

I have known Samira for almost two and half years, and kept contact with her, through regular e-mails and phone calls after being introduced to her by a mutual friend in December 2000. I met officially with Samira once prior to our interviews for a briefing on my PhD study, and twice more for the scheduled interviews; the first two meetings took place at her home, and the last one in my office on McGill campus.

The most striking characteristic of Samira is her honesty, and her ease in articulating intense feelings and thoughts about different issues she faces within her family and in the larger society. Samira is very eloquent in Persian, and while our interviews are conducted entirely in Persian, she occasionally conveys certain concepts and ideas in English.

At an Iranian social gathering, I observed Samira as she was talking to another guest's Canadian wife, and noticed that while her non-native accent stands out, she has a native-like mastery of the English Language, in terms of both fluency and accuracy.

Nahid (ناهید): Yearning to Belong

Nahid: I think if I'd stayed in Iran, my situation would have been much better, I mean [my] social status. Sometimes, I feel like [laughs], even physically, **push** myself forward [laughs]. I'm tired of staying in the same spot.

(August 2, 2002)

فکر می کنم که اگر هنوز ایران مونده بودم
وضعیتم خیلی از این چیزی که اینجا هست
بهتر بود، از نظرموقعیت اجتماعی
منظورمه. بعضی وقتها دلم می خواد،
(می خندد)، حتی از لحاظ فیزیکی
منظورمه، که خودمو **push** کنم جلو
(می خندد).
خیلی از یکجا در جا زدن خسته شده ام .

A thirty-seven year old native of Tehran, Nahid and her husband have been living in Canada since 1994, originally as landed immigrants, and more recently as naturalized Canadian citizens. She is the mother of a five-year old son, who was born in Canada. She is petite, with a fair complexion and light brown eyes, well dressed, and is not easily identified as a visible minority in the mainstream society.

Like Samira, Nahid's husband, a graduate of Electrical Engineering from the University of Tehran, pursued his doctoral studies at an English University in Montreal, shortly after their migration to Canada. Nahid already held an undergraduate degree in Microbiology from the University of Tehran, and was working full-time as a lab-assistant in a medical laboratory.

Nahid decided to return to university after the completion of her husband's doctoral degree, a decision that was also influenced by her inability to find employment equivalent to her previous professional training. She is currently in her fourth year of Genetic consulting program, aiming to finish her program of study by the end of August 2003.

Nahid, the fourth child in her family, has two brothers and two sisters, all born and raised in Tehran, and university-educated. She is the only member of her family who lives outside of Iran. Her parents, natives of a small town in a Northwestern province in Iran, are both literate. Her father, a retired army officer, has completed high school, and her mother, a home-maker, had to discontinue her education after completing grade one because of her family's disapproval of women's education.

I met Nahid at a social gathering in early October 2000, and after a brief conversation about my future plans for a PhD project related to the Iranian immigrants in Montreal, she eagerly expressed an interest in participating in my project, and offered to help me get in touch with other members of the community. This brief conversation led to a close friendship. To date, I have conducted two formal audio-taped interviews with Nahid. However, we have discussed issues related to education, and immigration on many different occasions within a more informal and personal context.

Roxana (روکسانا): Strength and Confidence

Roxana: I am like a *lioness*! I have a lot of strength. Nothing in life can bring me down to my knees! I've seen things in my life that I would have never even imagined. But I always [came out] stronger and with a higher self-confidence. I've learned to stand up for my rights; this is what I've learned in my life.

(August 23, 2002)

من مثل شیرم ! خیلی استقامت دارم .
هیچ چیز توی زندگی نمی تونه منو
به زانو بیاره !
یک چیزهایی توی زندگیم دیدم که
که هیچوقت حتی فکرشو هم نمی کردم .
اما همیشه حتی مقاومتر هم شدم ،
و اعتماد به نفسم هم بیشتر شده .
یاد گرفته ام که برای حق خودم بایستم ،
این چیزیه که توی زندگیم یاد گرفتم .

Roxana and her husband moved to Canada in 1996 after receiving their landed immigrant Visa, similar to Samira and Nahid, They have become naturalized Canadian citizens. At thirty-six, Roxana has been married for over ten years, and has no children. I met this couple at a friend's home shortly after their arrival in Canada. Since then, I have met them occasionally at different social gatherings. Our conversations mainly revolved around issues such as university admission and programs of studies at different Canadian universities.

Roxana, who has only one older sister, was born and raised in an upper-middle class family in Tehran. Her father, a successful businessman, holds an undergraduate degree in Business, and her mother who has completed high school is a retired government employee. Her sister, however, did not pursue higher education after her marriage at eighteen.

Roxana and her husband are both full-time students at an English university in Montreal. Her husband is pursuing a doctoral degree in Business Administration. Roxana, while holding a bachelor's degree in comparative literature from the privately-funded Islamic Azad University (دانشگاه آزاد اسلامی) in Tehran, is currently in the last year of an undergraduate program in Biochemistry.

Roxana is olive-skinned and her facial features identify her as a visible minority in Canada, in addition to her distinct "Iranian" accent. However, her open and liberal approach to clothing does not make her stand out as a Muslim woman. My two interviews with Roxana took place at her apartment in Montreal. She is warm and hospitable; although in the first interview she left me with the impression that she was not particularly interested in in-depth discussions of issues, and seemed to be very protective of her privacy and family life. The second interview, however, was more open and Roxana seemed to be more willing to discuss her experiences and thoughts about life and study in Canada.

Mitra (میترا): Indecision and Despair

Mitra: I'm **confused!** [Her emphasis] That's how I would describe myself. When I was in Iran, I studied really hard, and made a real effort to get admitted into university. I really made an effort to get good grades. In university, I also studied hard. But now,..., I think that [all that hard work] was a waste. I've completely lost my self-confidence. I'm very **confused!** [Her emphasis] I have no idea what I'm doing in my life!

(August 21, 2002)

من **Confused** ام ! این طوری می تونم خودمو توصیف کنم . ایران که بودم ، خیلی درس خوندم و زحمت کشیدم که دانشگاه قبول بشم . خیلی زحمت کشیدم که نمره های خوبی بیارم . توی دانشگاه هم خیلی درس خوندم ولی حالا ،...، حالا فکر میکنم که همش هدر شد . کلاً "اعتماد به نفسم رو از دست داده ام . خیلی **Confused** ام ! اصلاً" نمی دونم دارم توی زندگیم چکار میکنم !

Mitra, 29, was born and raised in a middle-class family in Tehran, Mitra is a graduate of Nursing from the National University of Iran (located in Tehran), and has lived with her family in Canada since 1997. Her father, a retired government employee holds an undergraduate degree in engineering, and her mother, a homemaker, has completed her high school diploma.

She is not married but is dating a French-Canadian, and marriage plans have been discussed in a near future after her graduation. Mitra's Nursing degree was not recognized in Canada, and she was recommended to take another five full-year university courses for accreditation. Considering the time and money involved, she decided to enroll in a pre-med program, and attempt for admission into the medical school. She is currently a second-year Biology student at an English university in Montreal. Her two younger sisters are full-time undergraduate students in a Montreal-based university.

Mitra is olive-skinned, with prominent Middle-Eastern physical characteristics, which make her stand out as a visible minority. She also has a

distinctive “Iranian” accent when speaking English. I met Mitra through a mutual friend in July 2002, and after a brief phone conversation, she expressed interest in participating in my study. I interviewed Mitra once at her home and the second time at my residence. She is eloquent, warm, and strikes me as an honest individual who was able to easily share many aspects of her personal life with me, from her academic ambitions, to personal family issues. In our last interview, Mitra discussed her dissatisfaction with her studies, and discussed her plans to pursue a different field of study at the end of the academic year 2002-2003. In my last phone conversation with her in November 2003, she stated that she was taking one year off from her studies, working full-time, and planning to return to full-time studies in September 2004. She expressed that she was “content” with her decision.

Yalda (یلدا): Hardship and Exertion

Yalda: [When] I was in Iran, I used to work very hard. Of course, I loved my job, as well. How can I say [it], I have a **desire** [for my job]. I *really loved* [her emphasis] sports. But here... I feel that I work very hard, I am a very **hardworking** [her emphasis] person, I work hard, especially because I have a child. [Having] a child makes everything much harder. I've been through very tough times these past few years [in Canada].

(August 28, 2002)

توی ایران که بودم خیلی سخت کار می کردم .
البته به کارم هم خیلی علاقه داشتم .
یعنی چه طوری بگم ، یک نوع **desire** بود .
ورزش رو خیلی دوست داشتم .
ولی اینجا،...، حس می کنم که خیلی سخت
کار میکنم، خیلی آدم **hardworking** هستم
خیلی زحمت میکشم ، بخصوص که بچه هم دارم .
بچه همه چیز رو سخت تر می کنه .
این چند ساله اینجا خیلی سختی کشیده ام .

Yalda, 37, married and mother of a six-year-old son, has lived in Canada since 1996. Yalda is the only participant in the study who has not attended

university in Iran. After finishing high school, and competing unsuccessfully for Konkour (the National University Entrance Examinations) for several years, she was able to land a full-time job as a Tennis coach. Her husband, a technician, has been able to find a job in his field in Canada, while Yalda is attending an English University in Montreal. She is in the third-year of the computer science program, and plans on pursuing her Master's degree part-time while working full-time. The youngest of seven, Yalda was born and raised in a middle-class family in Tehran. Her mother, a homemaker, and her father, a government employee, are both literate, although neither of her parents has completed high school.

Yalda is tall, fair-skinned, with dark hair and green eyes, and regardless of her distinct "Iranian" accent, is not identified as a visible minority based on her apparent physical characteristics,.

I met Yalda through a mutual friend, at a New Year's social gathering in March 2001, and she expressed her willingness to participate in my research project. The two interviews I conducted with Yalda were conducted at her apartment in Montreal.

Nasrin (نسرين): Happiness and Belonging

Nasrin: I really love it here [in Canada]. I really love the style of living here. I feel strangely comfortable. Because of that, I am very satisfied in my life. I am my own person here. Whatever I do,..., I feel satisfied. I should have been born here [in Canada] [laughs]

(September 3, 2002)

من اینجا رو خیلی دوست دارم .
از سیستم زندگی کردن در اینجا خیلی خوشم میاد.
احساس راحتی عجیبی دارم.
برای همین هم توی زندگیم خیلی راضی ام .
اینجا آدم خودم هستم ، هر کاری بکنم،...،
احساس رضایت دارم .
اصلاً "انگار باید اینجا به دنیا میومدم!
(می خندد)

The youngest participant in the study, Nasrin, 28, is a native of Tehran who immigrated to Canada in 1997. She is single, and lives with her parents in Montreal where she is in the second year of Biomedical engineering at an English university. In Iran, Nasrin finished an undergraduate degree in Biology at the Azad University of Tehran. Nasrin is the youngest of four children, and her three older brothers are university-educated professionals who live elsewhere in North America. Nasrin comes from a middle-class background. Both her parents have finished high school, although neither has attended university. Her mother, a homemaker, and her father, a retired government employee, are now residing in Montreal.

Nasrin is fair-skinned, dark-haired and dark-eyed, but her unique physical characteristics do not easily identify her as a visible minority. I was introduced to Nasrin through her cousin, also a friend of mine. After hearing Nasrin speak English, I was surprised with Nasrin's native-like mastery of the language, although her non-native like but soft accent would immediately identify her as a second language speaker. She began learning English in Iran, at the age of six, and had been taking private lessons from a native speaker for six years prior to her family's immigration to Canada.

Nasrin plans to complete her undergraduate degree, but has no plans to pursue graduate studies in the field she is currently studying. She is considering a career in Medicine instead.

Nader (نادر): Strength and Hardship

Nader: I am a **fair** person. In fact, if you want the truth, I have different characteristics under different circumstances. For example, because I had difficulties here [in Canada], and I was able to study and work, if I weren't strong, I couldn't make it. A lot of people didn't make it.

(September 19, 2002)

من آدم **fair** هستم در واقع ،
 راستش رو بخواهی ، در مواقع
 مختلف خصوصیت های متفاوتی دارم .
 مثلاً " چون مشکل کشیدم اینجا ،
 و تا الان تونستم درسی بخونم و کاری بکنم ،
 اگه قوی نبودم نمیتونستم بکشم .
 خیلی ها نتونستن بکشن .

Nader, is a thirty-one year Iranian man, born and raised in a middle-class family in Tehran. He came to Canada in 1996, by himself, after finishing the freshman year at Tehran's Azad University as a political science major. Nader is currently a third-year computer science student at an English university in Montreal.

His parents are both literate, although neither has finished high school. His mother is a homemaker, and his father is a retired government employee and is now running his own business in a small Northern city in Iran. He is the oldest of five children, and his brothers and sisters are attending university in Iran.

Nader is tall, fair-skinned, light brown hair and green eyes, can easily blend into the mainstream Canadian society without standing out as a visible minority. According to Nader, his distinct Iranian accent is usually mistaken for an Eastern European accent.

Nader is not interested in pursuing graduate work after the completion of his undergraduate degree; however, he acknowledges the possibility that he might in fact change his mind in the future.

Cyrus (سیروس): Learning to Cope

Cyrus: When I first came [to Canada], I was like *paralyzed* [his emphasis] people. I think a lot of people are like that, at least to some extent. When I say *paralyzed* [his emphasis], I mean, the strength to get up and work. The same things we used to do in Iran. The simplest tasks become difficult, like an infant trying to learn how to walk. We had to learn how to do everything all over again.

(October 4, 2002)

من مثل آدم های فلج بودم اوایل که اینجا اومده بودم . فکر می کنم همه همینطورن ، حداقل تا یک حدی ! میگم فلج ، از این نظر که ، توانایی از جا بلند شدن و کار کردن . همون کارهایی که عادت داشتیم توی ایران انجام بدیم . ساده ترین کارها سخت میشن ، عین یک بچه ای که داره راه رفتن رو یاد میگیره . ما هم باید همه چیز رو از اول یاد می گرفتیم .

Cyrus, 29, was born and raised in a middle-class family in Tehran. He has one older sister, a university-educated professional who lives in Iran with her husband and children. Cyrus's mother, a retired secondary school teacher, and his father, a retired government employee are both university-educated and now own a small family business in Tehran. Cyrus moved to Canada in 1997, alone, after being granted landed immigrant visa.

Cyrus holds an undergraduate degree in political science from Tehran's Azad University, and is currently a third-year computer science student at an English university in Montreal.

Cyrus is tall, fair-skinned and dark-haired with brown eyes. He can physically blend into the mainstream society and does not stand out as a "visible" minority. He is soft-spoken and eloquent, and speaks English more fluently than Nader.

Pursuing graduate studies for Cyrus is a possible but not definite goal in the future; he is mainly aiming to find full-time employment in the High Tech

industry after his graduation. I was introduced to Cyrus through Nader in September 2002, and met him two times and exchanged several e-mails and phone calls prior to our official interviews. I conducted two interviews with Cyrus, both taking place in my office on McGill campus.

Summary

Understanding the socio-historical roots of individuals is important in understanding their personal and individual experiences. As Carl Rogers (1952) reminds us, "the most intimate human experiences are also the most general". In this chapter, I discussed definitions of an "immigrant," as an inherently socio-political notion which is embedded in the individual participant's cultural frame of reference and their perceived status within the host society. By providing an historical and biographical sketch of the participants, I opened a window into their lives as members of a larger cultural group and as individual men and women.

In the next chapter, I present the narratives of the lived experiences of these eight men and women and the situated meanings (Price, 2001) of education in their lives based on the analysis of the data.

Chapter Five: Situated Meanings and Understandings of Higher Education

In this chapter, I explore the situated interpretations and understatings of higher education for a selected group of eight first-generation Iranian men and women, and their perspectives towards education and literacy. I interpret and reflect upon how individual participants describe and make meanings of their educational experiences. I argue that education, while emphasized as a fundamental desire in the lives of these men and women, held different meanings for each individual. These meanings have been defined and shaped by the person's history, gender, life experiences and family expectations.

A Cultural Phenomenology

I asked the participants how they viewed "education" and what meanings this concept held for them. I asked them to reflect upon their lives and educational experiences and explore which factors have influenced and encouraged them to pursue higher education. The individual values and meanings of education seemed to be highly intertwined with Iranian cultural values towards education and literacy. Furthermore, upward social mobility, family expectations, social prestige, women's economic independence and personal fulfillment were among the reasons that the participants regarded as having a significant impact on their decisions to pursue higher education. Each participant, while negotiating the meaning of education in life, seemed to have reached and crafted his or her own unique way of identifying with cultural values. Each had constructed his or her own personal space and meanings of education

within the confinements of the Iranian cultural norms. In this chapter, I first explore and examine each participant's perspectives towards higher education, and the meanings that this concept holds for him or her. I then critically examine my reflective interpretations of the similarities and differences among the individual participant's narratives and perspectives.

Samira: "Being a Somebody"

کسی بودن

The desire to pursue higher education seemed to be the focal point of Samira's life. In exploring and describing her values and beliefs towards education, Samira stated a multiplicity of factors in her life that have affected and shaped her views. In the following conversation which is an excerpt from our first interview, she talked about the role of culture and family expectations on her views towards education. Personal fulfillment, culturally defined educational values, and family expectations, in particular her mother's views towards education, seemed to be the main incentives for Samira to continue her education, and fulfill her desire, as she described it, "to become a somebody" in her life as she explains in this excerpt:

Shiva: Do you think there has been a particular reason or reasons which influenced you to continue your education?

س. آیا فکر می کنی دلیل یا دلایل خاصی وجود داشته که تأثیر گذاشته روت که تحصیلات رو ادامه بدی؟

Samira: For me, well, I want to feel better about myself, [pause], maybe, it's mostly for [that reason].

ج. برای من، خوب من می خواهم که در مورد خودم احساس بهتری داشته باشم. (سکوت) بیشتر شاید به خاطر همین. (سکوت)

Shiva: Has there been any other [reason]?

س. چیز دیگه ای هم بوده؟

Samira: [Pause] well, yes! Of course there have been other reasons. For example, my mother was a teacher herself, and maybe because she worked outside the home, she really wanted all of us [her children] to study. My own feeling has been the same, but I [also] have to say that everything was influential.

Shiva: For example, what?

Samira: Since [my] childhood, there was this feeling that the society, family, friends, relatives, everyone, everyone, had this influence on me that [I] have to *definitely definitely* study. Well, the Iranian society puts a lot of pressure on the youth that they have to study; [that] they have to have university education. Like other people, I also wanted to *be a somebody* [Italics added] for myself.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. (سکوت) چرا خب، البته که دلایل دیگه ای هم وجود داشتن. مثلاً" مامان من خودشون معلم بودن، و شاید به خاطر همین که خودشون بیرون از خونه کار میکردن، خیلی دلشون می خواست که همه ما هم درس بخونیم. احساس خودم هم همین بود، همیشه دلم می خواست درس بخونم، ولی اینطوری بگم که همه چیز تأثیر داشت

س. مثلاً" چه چیزهائی؟

ج. از بچه گی، خب این احساس بود که جامعه، خانواده، دوستان، فامیل، همه و همه این تأثیر رو من داشتن " که حتماً" حتماً باید درس خوند. جامعه ایران خب از این لحاظ خیلی روی بچه ها فشار میآورد که حتماً" باید درس خوند، باید حتماً" تحصیل دانشگاهی داشت. من هم می خواستم مثل بقیه برای خودم کسی بشم.

As expressed in the previous quote, culture and family, and in particular, her mother's expectations seemed to have a major influence on Samira and her values towards higher education. Throughout our conversations, Samira talked about her mother's frequent discussions about the value of education, and her open criticism of Samira's decision to marry before the completion of her university studies. In the next excerpt, Samira comments on the tensions between marriage and career:

Samira: My mom, herself, was educated and worked outside. She believed that women should get an education and a job before they get married. She always said [to me] "don't get married now, study, use the free time you have now properly, [because] after you get married, it

ج. مامان من خودش درس خونده بود و کار می کرد. معتقد بود که خانم ها باید حتماً" قبل از اینکه ازدواج کنن درس بخونن و کاری داشته باشن. همیشه می گفت الآن ازدواج نکن، درست بخون، و از وقت

will be very difficult to study.

Shiva: Why did your mother emphasize education?

Samira: well, she [always] said, "you have to study". Of course, not just me, but also my brothers, [my mom] emphasized their education too. I'm not [trying] to say that she was only sensitive towards my education. [Pause] She [always] said, "you [all] have to study and *become a somebody* [italics added]. So that you can hold your head high in the society.

(July 25, 2002)

آزادی که الآن داری خوب استفاده کن،
بعدا" که ازدواج کنی، خیلی سخت تر
میشه درس خوند.

س. چرا مادرتون روی درس خوندن تأکید
می کرد؟

ج. خب می گفت باید درس بخونی،
البته نه فقط من، در مورد برادرهام هم
همین طور، روی درس خوندن اونها
هم همین طور تأکید داشت، نه که
بگم فقط روی من حساسیت داشت.
(سکوت) می گفت که باید درس
بخونید و یک کسی بشید.
که بتونید توی جامعه سرتون رو
بالا بگیرید.

Similar to her mother, Samira, a married woman with a pre-school child, acknowledged the complexities of combining marriage and higher education. Despite her personal interest and effort to pursue education, Samira also expressed that the obligations of a married life and the responsibility of taking care of the household, a husband, and a child can act as deterrents to a woman's educational aspirations. Throughout our first interview (July 25, 2002), Samira talked about her sincere and genuine desire to complete her undergraduate degree and continue her studies at the Master's and Doctoral level. But her hopes and plans for the future did not seem to erase the effects of her past decision to abandon her studies and follow her husband to Canada, where she was not financially able to continue her education for a few years. Comparing herself to her friends who had already completed their undergraduate

studies in Iran left Samira with a deep feeling of sadness and "embarrassment"

as she recalls in this excerpt:

Samira: I knew that [when] I get married continuing my education will be more difficult. Well, [I'll have] the responsibility of the family, home, life, and then taking care of a child. All these things make the situation complicated. On the other hand, when I came here, my mom would tell me constantly on the phone, that "you made a mistake to interrupt your studies, all your friends, finished their bachelor [degree], their Master's [degree], and they are doing their Ph.D. Whatever the case, they are ahead of you." I myself was really upset, I was embarrassed in front of my mother, I was ashamed of myself, I was embarrassed in front of my friends.

Shiva: Why *did* [italics added] you have this feeling?

Samira: Actually, I *still have* [italics added] this feeling. [Pause] The Iranian society, as I've said before, is **obsessed** with **education**. And [you] always have this feeling that [you] shouldn't fall behind, [that] if you aren't educated, you are nothing. Well, on the other hand, my mother was always telling me that I have to study. When we came here [to Canada], she was constantly telling me to continue my education when there is an opportunity.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. می دوستم که ازدواج بکنم شرایط برای درس خوندن سخت تر میشه. خب به هر حال مسئولیت خانواده و خونه و زندگی، و خب بعد هم بچه داری، همه این چیز ها مسائل رو پیچیده می کنه. و از اون طرف هم وقتی اینجا اومدم مامان همش از پشت تلفن می گفت که اشتباه کردی درست رو ول کردی، دوستای همکلاسیت الان لیسانس گرفتن، دکترا دارن میگیرن. هر چی باشه الان از تو خیلی جلو زدن. من خودم هم خیلی ناراحت بودم. از مادرم خجالت می کشیدم. از خودم خجالت می کشیدم، از دوستام خجالت می کشیدم.

س. چرا این احساس رو داشتی؟

ج. البته هنوز هم دارم. (سکوت) جامعه ایرانی، قبلاً هم گفتم اصلاً **obsessed** با **education** . و آدم همش این احساس رو داره که نباید عقب بیفته. اگه درس نخونی هیچ چی نیستی. خب، از یک طرف دیگه مادرم هم همش می گفت باید درس بخونی. اینجا که اومدیم، دائماً می گفت باید حتماً یک فرصتی رو که پیدا کردی درست رو ادامه بدی.

When I asked her to reflect back at the time when she made the decision to get married, and contemplate on whether she would make a different decision today, she strongly insisted that she would still make the same decision now, as she did back then.

Shiva: Do you think, if you could go back, would you make any changes in your decision [to get] married?

س. فکر می کنی اگه میتونستی به عقب برگردی، آیا تغییری در تصمیمت در مورد ازدواج میدادی؟

Samira: No, Absolutely not! Never! Well, sometimes, when I talk to my mother and I'm reminded that I am behind [my] friends and classmates [in Iran]. But, when I really think about it myself, I realize that I always wanted to have [children], and what I've done now, some [people] do later [in life], and I did it earlier in [my] life. I had a child earlier, and, well, my child will grow up sooner. In this sense, I don't have any regrets.

ج. نه، اصلاً! هرگز! گاهی اوقات، چرا خب، موقعی که با مادرم حرف میزنم و یاد آوری میشه که از همه دوستا و همکلاسی ها عقبم، ولی وقتی خودم واقعا "بهش فکر می کنم، متوجه میشم که خب من همیشه دلم می خواست بچه دار بشم، و حالا این کاری که من کردم، بعضی ها دیرتر می کنن، و من زودتر کردم توی زندگی. من زودتر بچه دار شدم و خب، بچه ام هم زودتر بزرگ میشه. از این لحاظ، هیچ وقت احساس پشیمونی ندارم.

(July 25, 2002)

But Samira seemed to express conflicting views at different moments in our interviews. In our second interview session, when she was talking about her problems as a mature undergraduate student, married with a child, she pointed out that if she could relive the past, she would postpone marriage until after the end of her studies and focus on her education instead.

Samira: If I had to do it [all] over again, I would wait until I was finished with university, and then start a family. My mother always used to say to me that it would never be too late to get married. But at that time, I saw a good opportunity to get married, and I did. If I had to make a different decision today, yes, definitely, I would definitely wait, continue with my studies, and then get married. It is very hard to take care of a family, and [get an] education at the same time. But well, my daughter is very quiet and good; she doesn't fuss at all. In this sense, I'm very lucky.

ج. اگه میتونستم دوباره بکنم، صبر میکردم تا دانشگاه رو تمام میکردم، بعد تشکیل خانواده میدادم. مادرم همیشه بهم می گفت حالا صبر کن، برای ازدواج هیچ وقت دیر نیست. ولی اون موقع، یک موقعیت خوبی دیدم که ازدواج کنم و کردم. اگه می تونستم یک تصمیم دیگه امروز بگیرم، آره حتماً "اول به درس ادامه میدادم، و بعد ازدواج می کردم. خیلی سخته خونه داری و تحصیل در یک زمان. ولی خب دخترم خیلی آروم و خویه، اصلاً اذیت نداره. از این لحاظ خیلی شانس آوردم.

(January 6, 2003)

Samira interpreted not having a university degree as a “sign of failure” and something that she had to be “ashamed of”. As our conversation unfolded, Samira talked about her feelings of “embarrassment,” “shame,” “guilt” and “underachievement”.

Samira: I always feel like I didn't work hard, that I didn't work hard enough. I constantly have this feeling that,..., how can I say, I have a feeling of **underachievement**, ..., that's it, I have a feeling of **underachievement**. I feel guilty!
(July 25, 2002)

همیشه این احساس رو دارم که خیلی سخت کار نکردم ، که به اندازه کافی زحمت نکشیدم .
همش این احساس رو دارم که ،....،
underachievement چه جوری بگم ، یک حالت دارم
....، فقط همین ،
حالت **underachievement** دارم .
احساس گناه دارم !

Samira talked about the value of studying “medicine” and “becoming a doctor” (دکتر شدن) as the pinnacle of educational aspirations of all university-bound students. However, she believed that such expectations are usually unrealistic as an individual encounters the realities of life, either in Iran or as an immigrant in Canada.

Samira: In Iran, unfortunately, everything is about getting into medical school and becoming a doctor. When I was in Iran, I too wanted to study medicine, but, well, it didn't happen. It was very difficult to get admitted into medicine in Iran. When I [first] came here [to Canada] , I was thinking about studying medicine, but when I did some search, I realized that it wasn't an easy task at all. First, you have to study **Science**, then you have to write that exam, **MCAT**, and you have to have really good grades to be accepted. Even then, you still

ج. توی ایران، متأسفانه همه چیز توی وارد پزشکی شدن و دکتر شدن خلاصه میشه.
منم ایران که بودم می خواستم پزشکی بخونم، ولی خب نشد، توی ایران خیلی سخت بود پزشکی خوندن. اینجام که اومدم همون فکر توی سرم بود، ولی وقتی در موردش تحقیق کردم دیدم که اصلاً کار آسونی نیست، باید اول **Science** بخونی، بعد اون امتحان **MCAT** رو بدی، و تازه باید نمره های خیلی بالائی داشته باشی که بتونی قبول بشی، اون هم تازه یک مصاحبه باید بدی.

have to pass an interview. In overall, I think it's even harder [to study medicine] here [in Canada], especially for us **immigrants** who don't have financial resources and family **support**. But well, when I think about it, I think that it's even better that I didn't go after [studying] medicine, because I like the [academic] program I am studying now. I didn't get accepted [in this program] in Iran, but here, I was accepted. [Canada] is not like Iran that a person's worth is based on their money and profession. In Iran, you are treated like a criminal if you can't get into medicine.

(July 25, 2002)

خلاصه اینکه اینجا به نظرم حتی سخت تره. بخصوص برای **immigrant** مثل ما که کمک مالی و **support** خانواده نداریم. ولی خب الان می بینم که همون بهتر رفتم پزشکی، چون از همین رشته ای که می خونم خیلی خوشم میآید، توی ایران قبول نشدم، ولی اینجا تونستم واردش بشم. اینجا هم که مثل ایران نیست، ارزش کسی زیاد از روی شغل و پولش حساب نمیشه. توی ایران که اصلاً "اگه پزشکی نتونی قبول بشی انگار جنایت کردی." (خنده)

Samira was faced with a complex set of emotions. On the one hand, she felt pressured and "underachieved" as a result of interrupting her university education in Iran, and not living up to her mother's and Iranian society's standards of "prestige" and "status" as an educated person. On the other hand, she felt relieved and content to continue her studies in Canada, where she was able to pursue her field of interest in an educational environment that encourages development of problem solving skills and values her opinions and perspectives as an individual. In the end, influenced by the boundaries of cultural values and family expectations, Samira, who stated she sees herself "through the others' eyes", vowed to never return to Iran, where she did not feel the freedom to make *her own* decisions and choose *her own* direction in life. Samira seemed content with being able to pursue the academic program she is interested in, an opportunity which was not open to her in Iran.

Having previously experienced the Iranian higher education system, Samira believed that one of the main advantages of Canadian universities over institutions of higher education in Iran is public access. While in Iran, only a small percentage of high school graduates are admitted into university, a more widespread public access to Canadian universities creates an ideal condition for people of all ages and all walks of life to pursue their aspirations in higher educational institutions and programs of study of their choice. The freedom on choosing one's direction in life, as Samira asserts, is what she considers her major attraction to live and study in Canada. Disrupting her studies after finishing year two in Persian Literature, she moved to Canada with her husband. When her husband completed his doctoral degree and started working, and the family could afford to financially support her education, she decided to change her program of study to psychology. The main reason for this decision, as Samira stated, was not the unavailability of Persian Literature as an undergraduate program in Canadian universities, but rather her original interest in psychology which she was not admitted to in Iran. In addition to easier access to higher education, Samira believed that emphasis on critical thinking and development of problem solving skills in Canadian universities translated into a higher quality of education when compared to what she had experienced in Iran. She held the view that rote learning and memorization, perceived to be the focus and goal of teaching and learning in Iranian education system, do not prepare students with adequate problem solving skills, and, in fact, discourage critical thinking and capacity to analyze and evaluate situations. She said:

Samira: In Iran, they ask you for **definition[s]**. Here too, sometimes on the **test**, they ask for **definitions**, but it is not the whole test, just a few **definitions** that are fundamental to your understanding. But in Iran, the whole learning process revolved around **definitions** and rote learning. Another thing, even here when they ask for **definitions**, they ask you to give a definition of something and then **analyze** it in some **context**, I mean, most of the time, they ask you to **compare**, **evaluate**, and so on. Therefore, you have to know the definition, but on the other hand, you have to be able to **analyze** and see the **context in real life** to **compare** and **evaluate**. In Canada, the focus is on **critical thinking**. They tell you to **compare** and **evaluate** things, and that there is no right or wrong answers as long as you can justify it. But in Iran, god forbid, you go against what is in the book [laughs]. Your opinions don't matter; it is what's in the book that you have to know. What you, yourself, think is irrelevant to what is being taught.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. توی ایران، ازت همش **definition** میخوان. اینجا هم بعضی وقت ها توی **test** ها **definition** میخوان، ولی همه **test** نیست. فقط چند تا **definition** که اساسیه برای فهمیدن مطلب. اما توی ایران تمام یادگیری آدم روی **definition** و حفظ کردنه. یک چیز دیگه هم که اینجا هست اینه که اگر هم ازت **definition** میخوان، میگن تعریفش کن و بعد توی **context in real life** کن. منظورم اینه که بیشتر اوقات ازت میخوان که **compare** و **evaluate** غیره. بنا بر این میدونی که تعریفش چیه، ولی باید بتونی که **analyze** کنی، و ببینی که **compare** و **evaluate** کنی. توی کانادا تأکیدشون روی **critical thinking** . بهت میگن که **compare** و **evaluate** بکن و جواب درست و غلط هم وجود نداره تا زمانی که بتونی توضیح بدی. ولی توی ایران، خدا نکنه بر خلاف نوشته های کتاب بری. (خنده) عقیده خودت مهم نیست، اون چیزی که توی کتاب نوشته شده باید بدونی. اون چیزی که خودت فکر میکنی کاملاً بیربطه به اون چیزی که یاد یاد می گیری.

While Samira's statements emphasized a "personal desire" as the main reason to pursue higher education, our conversations revealed that societal values and her mother's expectations had a greater influence on her decision to attend university than her personal pursuit of self-fulfillment. Samira's views towards education seemed to be strongly influenced by external factors such as family's expectations, comparison of her status with her friends and culturally induced social pressures on Iranian youth to be educated. She believed that the Iranian culture overemphasized education to the extent that, as she described it,

became a national "obsession." From this cultural perspective, education becomes the defining point in determining one's value and status in society regardless of "who" the person "really" is. Education, as Samira asserts, does not make one a better person, but helps establish one's status and prestige in the society as a member of the "educated minority". She believed that systemic problems with the Iranian higher education system, and the difficulty of getting admitted into an institution of higher education in Iran, are among the reasons which encourage many Iranians seek higher education whether in Iran or abroad.

Samira: I think, educated people, not only in Iran, but also in the rest of the world, don't make [that] much money. Generally, that is what I think, that Iranians are after the **title** and **prestige** that comes with **education**.

ج. افراد تحصیلکرده، نه فقط توی ایران، فکر کنم همه جای دنیا، پول زیادی در میان. فقط به خاطر پول نیست. کلاً، یعنی این طور که من فکر می کنم، بیشتر ایرانی ها دنبال همون **title** و **prestige** که معمولاً با **education** میاد.

Shiva: Do you think it's only Iranians or everyone, in general?

س. فکر میکنید که فقط ایرانی ها اینطور فکر می کنن یا کلاً همه؟

Samira: [Pause] No, I think, mostly Iranians are like that.

ج. (سکوت) نه، بیشتر ایرانی ها اینجور هستن.

Shiva: Why?

س. چرا؟

Samira: Well, to [a] great degree, it is in our culture that you have to be educated, and to some extent, it's because getting into university is very difficult in Iran. That's why if someone gets admitted into university, everyone thinks it's a very important thing.

ج. خب، تا یک حد زیاد که توی فرهنگ ماست که حتماً باید تحصیلکرده باشی، و تا حدی هم به خاطر اینه که تحصیل کردن و وارد دانشگاه شدن توی ایران خیلی سخته. اینه که اگه کسی وارد دانشگاه بشه، همه فکر می کنن که کار خیلی مهمیه.

(January 6, 2003)

In addition to the role of education in determining one's status in society, as stated in the previous quote, Samira also stressed the importance of women's

education and its prospects for their financial independence. She talked about her earlier life experiences and her family's encouragement to study hard and focus on academic achievement. She believed that being a woman did not affect her family's views towards education, and that her parents emphasized education for all their children, regardless of their gender. But despite her earlier statements, Samira talked about the central role of men within the traditional Iranian family and society, which ultimately leads to the encouragement of men's education as the future breadwinners of their families.

Shiva: Do you think your family put the same emphasis on your and your brothers' education?

س. فکر می کنی خانواده ات به تحصیل خودت و برادر هات به یک اندازه اهمیت میدادن؟

Samira: Yes, my family did not encourage only me to study, but they also encouraged my brothers to the same degree to go to university. I even think that there was more pressure on my brothers.

ج. آره، خانواده من فقط منو به درس خوندن تشویق نکردن، بلکه برادرهام رو هم همون اندازه تشویق می کردن که برن دانشگاه درس بخونن. من حتی فکر می کنم که فشار روی برادرهای من حتی بیشتر هم بود.

Shiva: In what sense? [What do you mean?]

س. از چه لحاظی؟

Samira: Well, because after all in Iran, men are considered to be guardians of the family. That is why men are supposed to study a [good university program] so that later on they can find a good job, and when they start their own families, take care of their families. My mother used to tell me, "it will be great if you can get into medical school or another high-ranking university program, but if it doesn't happen, teaching is a very good profession for women. But I think that there was a lot of pressure on my brothers to get accepted into a high-ranking [university] program.

ج. چون که خب مرد، هر چی که باشه توی ایران سرپرست خانواده حساب میشه. اینطوری که پسرها حتماً باید یک درس درست و حسابی بخونن که بتونن باهانش یک کار درست و حسابی پیدا کنن، و بتونن وقتی خانواده از خودشون درست می کنن سرپرستیشون رو به عهده بگیرن. مادر من مثلاً همیشه می گفتن که "آگه تو بتونی پزشکی یا یک رشته بالا قبول بشی خیلی عالیه، ولی آگه نشد معلمی هم برای خانم ها یک شغل خیلی خوبیه" ولی خب مثلاً من فکر می کنم که روی برادرهام به خاطر همین مسأله خیلی فشار بود که حتماً یک رشته بالا قبول بشن.

(July 25, 2002)

From Samira's comments, I could make two observations. One is the centrality of men as guardians and primary caretakers of their families, and the other is the distinction between high and low-ranking university programs and, consequently, high-status and low-status professions in Iranian culture. Medicine, along with such programs as Dentistry and engineering (mostly emphasized for men) are considered to have an especially high status among Iranian youth and their families. These two observations were further explored later in the interviews.

When I asked Samira to reflect and elaborate upon her opinion on the differences between men's and women's education among Iranians, she said:

Shiva: Could you explain a bit more about what the Iranian culture thinks about **education** for men and women?

Samira: [Pause] In Iranian culture, there is equal emphasis on **education** for men and women. The difference is, I think, men have more **responsibilities** and they work more.

Shiva: You mean that there is not as much **responsibility** on Iranian women?

Samira: [Laughs] No! Not at all! There is even more [responsibility]. The difference is that Iranian women work more inside and outside the home, but their works is not *considered*. An Iranian woman who works outside the home, and helps her husband with the family finances, her money is not worth as much as the man's. Maybe because if her work and money is considered to have the same worth, it jeopardizes the man's situation as the guardian of the family! [Laughs]

(July 25, 2002)

س. ممکنه یک کم بیشتر توضیح بدی فرهنگ ایرانی در مورد **education** زن و مرد چطوری فکر میکنه؟

ج. (سکوت) **education** زن و مرد خیلی اهمیت داره، توی فرهنگ و جامعه ایرانی روی هر دو تاکید میشه. فکر کنم تفاوتش در اینه که مردها روشن بیشتر **responsibility** هست و خب بیشتر کار می کنن.

س. یعنی زن های ایرانی به اون اندازه روشن مسئولیت و **responsibility** نیست؟

ج. (خنده) نه بابا خیلی هم بیشتره، تفاوت در اینه که زنهای ایرانی خیلی هم بیشتر هم توی خونه و هم بیرون خونه کار می کنن، ولی به جایی حساب نمیشه. یک زن ایرانی که بیرون از خونه کار میکنه، و کمک خرجی شوهرش هست، روی پولش به اندازه یک مرد حساب نمیشه. شاید به خاطر اینکه اگه پول و کار زن هم به همون اندازه روش حساب بشه موقعیت اون مردی که سرپرست خونه و خانواده اس به مخاطره میفته (خنده)

Although Samira did not make direct parallels to this observation using her personal life experiences, she talked about the decision to postpone her education while her husband was working on his doctoral degree. She mentioned that taking care of a family on her own, because her husband was absent most of the time, and going to school would have been very difficult tasks to accomplish. However, the main reason underlying her decision to postpone her studies was due to the fact that they could not afford to pay university fees for the two of them.

Despite her recognition of the role of education in promoting women's equal rights within the family and the society, Samira believed that Iranian society and culture over-emphasizes women's education, without challenging commonly held traditional women's roles within the family as wives, mothers and caretakers. She pointed out that the society's excessive stress on women's education in isolation from cultural transformation of traditional views towards gender roles creates a difficult situation for women, where they feel pressured to continue their education even if they do not wish to do so. She elaborated on this topic eloquently in the following conversation:

Samira: In my opinion, when we speak about women's **education**, we have a lot of cultural differences with Canadians. I think we are, at least, a few decades behind them, in terms of our social thought and behavior. Here in the West, when they have a problem, they think about different ways of solving it, and when one solution doesn't work out, they let it go, and move on to the next [solution]. For example, take this issue of women's work and education.

ج. به نظر من، وقتی صحبت از **education** خانم ها همیشه، ما خیلی تفاوت فرهنگی با کانادائی ها داریم. فکر می کنم که روی هم رفته ما حداقل یک چند دهه جامعه مون و رفتار و تفکر اجتماعی مون از اینها عقب تره. اینجا توی غرب، یک مسأله رو که دارن، در مورد راه حل های متفاوتش فکر می کنن، و وقتی دیدن اون راه حل درست کار نمی کنه، ولش می کنن و

at one point in time they [Westerners] encouraged women to study and work. Then they noticed that it was increasing problems within the family and society. Sending children to **daycare** is not necessarily a good thing; there will be more problems within the family. Then they said, "well, we shouldn't force women to get educated and work." Now, they have entered a period when they respect motherhood and womanhood, and believe that being a mother, and taking care of your children at home, is a very important job, and they have a lot of value for it. But, unfortunately, we, Iranians, are at least five steps behind [people in the West]. We've *just started* forcing our women to get educated, become doctors, and work and we tell them that being a homemaker is not a real job, taking care of children is not real life! [Laughs] If a woman wants to stay at home, and she likes to take care of [her] children, we ridicule her and say that she is lazy and doesn't want to work. Her husband and others will humiliate her and [tell] her that she is lazy and she has to go and work outside [the home]. [Laughs]. Do you really know what our problem is? Our problem is that we are trying to imitate the West and the Westerners, without knowing what they are really doing. We try to implement social models without investigating whether they fit out cultural beliefs and values or not! That's our problem!

(July 25, 2002)

میرن سراغ راه حل بعدی. برای مثال همین مسأله تحصیل و کار توی یک مقطع زمانی اینها زنها رو تشویق کردن که برن درس بخونن و کار کنن، بعد دیدن نه مسائل اجتماعی و خانواده گی شون تشدید شد، بچه ها رو از صبح تا شب فرستادن **daycare** کار همچین خوبی هم نیست، اختلافات توی خانواده ها بیشتر شد، گفتن خب شاید این درست نباشه ما به همه زنها فشار بیاریم که نه حتما" باید درس بخونی و کار کنی . حالا وارد مرحله ای شدن که زن بودن و مادر بودن رو احترام میذارن و عقیده دارن که مادر بودن و در خونه از بچه ها نگهداری کردن، خودش یک کار خیلی مهمیه، و خیلی براش ارزش قائلن. ولی متأسفانه ما ایرانیها حداقل پنج قدم از اینها عقب تریم. ما الآن تازه داریم به زنهامون فشار شدید میآریم که حتما" باید درس بخونن، دکتر بشن، کار بکنن، و میگی کار خونه کردن که کار نیست، بچه داری که زندگی نشد (خنده) اگه یک خانمی بخواد توی خونه باشه و دوست داشته باشه بچه داری کنه، مسخره اش می کنیم که تنبله و نمی خواد کار بکنه. شوهرش و اطرافیان توی سرش میزنن که برو بیرون کار کن، تنبل! (خنده) میدونی اصلا" مشکل ما چیه؟ مشکل ما اینه که سعی می کنیم که از غرب و غربی ها تقلید کنیم بدون اینکه بفهمیم اینها واقعا" چکار میکنن. سعی می کنیم یک الگوهائی رو توی جامعه مون درست کنیم بدون اینکه اصلا" ببینیم به فرهنگ ما جور در میآد یا نه. مشکلمون اینه!

As illustrated in the previous excerpt, Samira believed that the complexities of Iranian women's lives and education, and the added pressures of the family and society to become an educated woman might not correspond to the individual values and desires of these Iranian women whose goals may in fact be contradictory to the general expectations of women's education held by their

families and the society. Samira held the view that Iranian cultural definitions of gender roles and the culturally defined traditional gender roles are not necessarily influenced and subjected to change and transformation as the result of women's education and men's education. Cultural boundaries and restrictions on women remain unchanged regardless of women's access to education and employment. In the following excerpt, Samira talks about patriarchal attitudes, educational background and the perceptions of Iranian men of women's education and employment:

Samira: I don't think that **education** will have that much effect on Iranian men's way of thinking. They will think the same way they've always thought, and with the same attitudes they were raised with. They will stay the same. If an Iranian man is a patriarch, doesn't matter how educated he is, he will retain his patriarch attitudes. If [a man] believes that a woman's place in the kitchen, regardless of how educated the woman is, in his eyes, her place is in the kitchen. Now, the woman maybe more educated than the man, and make more money.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. من فکر نمی کنم که **education** روی طرز فکر مردهای ایرانی چندان فرقی بذاره. اونها همونطور که همیشه فکر می کردن و با همون طرز فکری که باهاش بزرگ شدن، همونطور باقی میمونن. اگه یک مرد ایرانی مردسالاره، حالا هر چقدر هم تحصیلکرده باشه هیچ فرقی به حالش نمی کنه، و همون عقاید مردسالاری و پدر سالاری رو نگه میداره. اگه عقیده داره جای زن توی است، زن هر چقدر هم که خودش تحصیلکرده باشه، از نظر اون مرد زن جاش توی آشپزخونه است، حالا زن ممکنه تحصیل و درآمدش از مرد هم بالاتر باشه.

Hence, Samira views patriarchy as an ideology that influences the lives of those who uphold male-dominated attitudes and perspectives. Formal education, in its own right, does not lead to more liberal and open views with respect to women's rights to education and work outside the home.

Since our last interview in February 2003, Samira has finished her undergraduate degree in Psychology, and relocated to Canada's West Coast

where her husband was able to find employment. Samira is currently taking courses at a local university as a special student, hoping that after taking GRE (Graduate Record Exam) examination, she can continue her graduate studies in Psychology.

Nahid: "A Brighter Future"

زندگی روشن تر

Unlike Samira, neither of Nahid's parents had attended a post-secondary institution. In fact, Nahid's mother is semiliterate with only one year of formal schooling. Nahid talked about her parents' expectations for their children to continue their education in order to create a "brighter future for themselves". Similar to Samira, Nahid also talked about the importance of education in establishing a person's status and position within the society. However, the function of education and higher education as a means for economic advancement was more pronounced in Nahid's narratives:

Nahid: A lot of Iranian families emphasize that their children pursue higher education, because of their own experiences in life.

ج. خیلی از خانواده های ایرانی تاکید می کنند که بچه هاشون درسشون رو در سطح بالاتر ادامه بدن، به خاطر تجربه هائی که خودشون توی زندگی شون داشتن.

Shiva: For example what experiences?

س. مثلاً "چه تجربه هائی؟"

Nahid: Well, those [parents] who were not educated themselves, and had to work very hard to make a living, and had to take orders from someone with less life and work experience and awful personality, who is their superior because of a higher level of education, naturally want their children to study, go to university, and get a good job later on, so that the same thing doesn't happen to them [the parents], so that they [the children] don't have to

ج. خب اون هائی که خودشون تحصیل نکرده بودن باید خیلی سخت کار می کردن که زندگیشون بگذره، واز کسانی دستور می گرفتن که تجربه کار و زندگی کمتری داشتن، و شخصیت های وحشتناکی داشتن و فقط بالاتر بودن چون که تحصیلات بیشتری داشتن. خب این جور پدر و مادر ها طبیعتاً

be humiliated the same way, so that they don't have to work hard, and at the end get **minimum wage**. They naturally want their children to move up in the society to have a better life, and [a] brighter future.

(August 2, 2002)

دلشون می خواد که بچه هاشو درس بخونن،
برن دانشگاه و یک کار خوبی بعداً پیدا
کنن، که همون چیزی که برای اون ها پیش
اومد برای این ها دیگه نیفته. که دیگه
اینام این طوری تحقیر نشن، که مجبور نباشن
minimum wage " سخت کار کنن و آخرش
بگیرن. اونها طبیعتاً میخوان که بچه هاشون
توی جامعه برن بالا و زندگی بهتر و آینده
روشن تری داشته باشن.

Therefore, education is a means for upward social mobility. Interestingly, Nahid's previous statements were later linked to her own family history. The earlier life experiences of Nahid's mother, her lack of access to education as a young girl growing up in a working class family in a small town in Iran had a great impact on her perspectives towards education. According to Nahid, her mother's lack of opportunity to continue her own schooling was the result of traditional views of women's place in the family and the community. This, in turn, had a significant influence on her mother's views of the value of education, and her genuine efforts to help encourage and motivate her children to achieve what she, herself, could not. Her mother's lack of educational opportunities was as much the result of the traditional Iranian society's views towards women's education, as the family's limited financial resources.

Nahid: My mother would sacrifice anything so that we could get an education. She always said, you just study, and don't worry about what will happen. My mother, when she finished first grade, her father's friends, living in a small town, told him that he shouldn't let his daughter go to school. Because of that, unfortunately, my mother didn't go to school. That always upset her. She always believed that her children had to go to school and get an education, even though in terms of financial situation, we weren't doing [very] well. She said that she would sacrifice everything so that we could continue our education.

(August 2, 2002)

ج. مادر از هیچ چیز کاری دریغ نداشت که ما بتونیم درسمون بخونیم. همیشه می گفت شما ها فقط درس بخونید و نگران نباشید که چه اتفاقی میافته. مادرم وقتی خودش کلاس اول رو تموم کرد، دوستای پدرش توی یک شهر کوچک زندگی می کردن، بهش گفتن که نباید اجازه بده دخترش مدرسه بره. به خاطر همون متأسفانه مادرم نرفت مدرسه. همین همیشه اذیتش می کرد. عقیده داشت که بچه هاش باید برن مدرسه و تحصیل کنن. حتی از نظر مالی هم، وضع آنچنان خوبی نداشتیم، ولی خب از هیچ چیز دریغ نکرد که ما بتونیم درس بخونیم.

As seen in this statement, Nahid's views towards education seemed to have been significantly influenced by her family's values and, in particular, her mother's life experiences. Like Samira, Nahid also acknowledged the value and status of an educated person within the Iranian society which she believed may be due to the lack of public access to higher education, and the limited opportunities available to potential university candidates. As a result, education is regarded as a signifier of a privileged social status open exclusively to a selected few who will benefit from the socio-economic advantages brought to them through university education. Nahid, however, regarded education not merely a means for financial freedom and socio-economic upward mobility, but also as a personal desire to connect to others in the community.

Nahid: In Iran, education has always been important. Even in the past, when a lot of people didn't go to university, if someone finished high school, it was a big achievement. For example, when my [paternal aunt] finished high school thirty-five years ago, she got a high paying job as a high school principal in Tehran. You can't do that with a high school diploma nowadays. In Iran, education is emphasized, not only for financial gains, but also, as my mother used to say to us, when you are educated, you have a higher level of social awareness, you know a lot of things, you know what is going on in the society; you've read a few books, you've talked to a few people, you know the world a little more. Maybe that's because in Iran, they really emphasize education and respect educated people. Even I, myself, I feel more comfortable with those who are educated than those who are not. I feel I have more to talk to them, I feel they can understand me, and I can understand them.

(August 2, 2002)

ج. توی ایران درس خوندن همیشه مهم بوده. حتی قدیم هام که خیلی از مردم دانشگاه نمیرفتن، اگه یکی دبیرستان رو تمام میکرد، یک کار خیلی مهمی بود. مثلاً" عمه خودم ۳۵ سال پیش وقتی دبیرستان رو تمام کرد، به عنوان مدیر دبیرستان توی تهران یک کار با حقوق خیلی بالا گرفت. الان دیگه نمیتونی با یک دیپلم دبیرستان این کار رو بکنی. توی ایران تحصیل خیلی مهمه ولی نه فقط برای مسائل مادی، ولی همون طور که مادرم همیشه بهمون می گفت، وقتی که تحصیلكرده باشی، آگاهی اجتماعی ات هم بیشتره. خیلی چیزها رو میدونی، میدونی چی توی جامعه میگذره، چند تا کتاب خوندی، با چند تا آدم حرف زدی، دنیا رو یک خورده بهتر میشناسی. شاید هم به خاطر همینکه که توی ایران به آدم های تحصیلكرده بیشتر احترام میدارن. من خودم هم با آدم های تحصیلكرده راحت ترم، فکر می کنم که من اون ها رو میفهمم و اون ها من رو میفهمن.

However, Nahid's views towards education and its role in defining one's social status, respect and social awareness were further complicated when I asked her whether education had made her a different person, a better person, and whether she believes that education has a role in creating a more socially responsible individual. Similar to Samira, Nahid also believed that education does not automatically make one a more socially responsible citizen. However, the educated person, for the sole reason of having had access to institutions of higher education is acknowledged by the society, and occupies a more distinguished and prestigious position as compared to others without higher education.

Nahid: In Iran, if you are educated, you are very different from the person who isn't. You are treated differently, the entire society looks at you differently, and you have a higher status in society. I don't agree with it 100%, because I've seen people who are educated, and their character is awful. But because they are educated and have a degree, Iranians respect them, and put them superior to those who are not. A lot of [Iranians] abuse their education, and humiliate others. Education does not mean you are a better person because of it. But unfortunately in Iran, this is the idea. You can be a miserable, pathetic creature and people respect you because you have a degree!

(August 2, 2002)

ج. توی ایران اگه تحصیلکرده باشی، خیلی با اونی که تحصیل نکرده فرق داری. باهات یک طور دیگه رفتار میشه، کل جامعه یک جور دیگه بهت نگاه میکنه، یک موقعیت بالاتری توی جامعه داری. من با این ۱۰۰٪ موافق نیستم، چون خیلی ها هستن که تحصیل کردن ولی از نظر شخصیتی افتضاحن، ولی چون تحصیلکرده ان و مدرک دارن و ایرانی هام بهشون احترام میذارن، و میذارنشون بالاتر از کسانی که تحصیل نکردن. خیلی از ایرانی ها از تحصیلشون سوءاستفاده میکنن و دیگران رو تحقیر میکنن. تحصیلکرده بودن معنی اش این نیست که آدم بهتری باشی، ولی متأسفانه توی ایران این طرز تفکره. یک آدم بدبخت فلکزده باش ولی یک مدرک داشته باش، و همه بهت احترام میذارن!

In the previous excerpt and throughout our conversations, Nahid articulated her awareness of the Iranian society's culturally defined values and perspectives towards education. She was critical of the Iranian culture's over-emphasis on education and expressed the view that a university degree does not necessarily lead to greater humanity, although it does put a person in a higher social status within a society and culture that regards education as a criterion for superiority over others. In describing her own motivations to pursue university education, Nahid expressed a deep desire to achieve personal fulfillment and satisfaction through education which could also bring about financial gains.

Nahid: I always wanted to go to university, not only necessarily for the money; you don't make much money from your education in Iran anyways. But because I always wanted to be in the **academic** environment. Of course, if you have higher education, you can make more

ج. من همیشه می خواستم که دانشگاه برم، نه فقط برای پولش، در هر صورت توی ایران از راه تحصیل پولی در نمیآری. ولی من همیشه می خواستم که توی محیط **academic** باشم. البته اگه تحصیلات

money, but it wasn't just money. I wanted to do it for myself, to satisfy myself, making more money is just a **bonus**!

Shiva: What do you mean by *satisfying* yourself?

Nahid: I mean, [pause], what I'm trying to say is that I am fulfilled when I have an education and can be in charge of my own life, be able to stand on my own feet, and not be considered inferior or a nobody because I don't have an education.

(August 2, 2002)

عالی داشته باشی، پول بیشتری هم در میآری، ولی برای من فقط مسأله پول نبود. من می خواستم این کارو برای خودم بکنم، که خودم رو ارضاً کنم. پول بیشتر درآوردن هم خب خودش یک **bonus** هه!

س. منظورت از ارضاً کردن خودت چیه؟

ج. یعنی که (سکوت) می خوام بگم که راضی هستم از خودم وقتی که تحصیل کرده باشم و مسؤل زندگی خودم باشم و روی پاهای خودم بایستم. و کسی منو حقیر و هیچ کاره حساب نکنه چون تحصیلات ندارم.

Nahid painted a complex picture of what higher education meant to her personally. She acknowledged self fulfillment and satisfaction as her main reasons to study at university. However, when asked to define what fulfillment and satisfaction meant to her, she explained them in terms of financial independence and having a higher status and respect in the community.

Similar to Samira, Nahid also believed that in Iranian culture and society, men's education takes priority over women's, which she attributed to the culturally perceived central role of men in the family as the breadwinners and heads of the household.

Shiva: Do you think there is a difference between men's and women's **education** in Iranian culture?

Nahid: Usually, [it's] the men's **education** [that] is emphasized, because the man is considered to be the breadwinner, and the head of the family. If you are a man, and you want to start a

س. آیا فرقی بین **education** زن و مرد توی فرهنگ ایرانی وجود داره؟

ج. خب معمولاً **education** مرده که روش خیلی **stress** هست. شاید دلیلش اینه که مردها نان آور خونه و خانواده شون حساب میشن. اگر مرد باشی، و بخوای تشکیل خانواده بدی، تو مسؤل اون

family, you are responsible for that family. A lot of so-called educated Iranians [laughs] still believe that the family revolves around the man. We have a friend here who is a physician, and came here because of her husband's education. now, she stays at home, and doesn't do anything. Her [medical] degree is not accepted here either. Poor [girl] is very **depressed**. I tell her, "why did you come here? You were much better off in Iran." She says, "I didn't have any other choice, my husband is financially responsible for the family." What's funny is that she is more educated than her husband and [in Iran] she was making even more money. My point is that, an Iranian woman, doesn't matter how educated she is, and how much money she makes, it is the *husband's money that counts*. If the woman spends all her money in the household, *it doesn't count at all*. Have you noticed that even if the house belongs to the woman, [Iranians] always say, Mr. So and so's house! [Laughs] That's it! A woman's **wealth** and money and the role she plays in [her] home, don't count for anything! That **mentality** never changes, at least not for a long time!

(March 5, 2003)

خانواده هستی. خیلی ایرانی های به اصطلاح تحصیلکرده (خنده) هستن که هنوزم فکر می کنن این مرده که همه کار خانواده اس. ما یک دوستی داریم که دکتره و بخاطر درس شوهرش اومد اینجا، حالا توی خونه نشسته و هیچ کاری هم نمی کنه، مدرکش رو که هم قبول ندارن، خیلی طفلکی **depressed** بهش میگم چرا اومدی اینجا، تو که توی ایران وضعت بهتر بود، میگه چاره ای نداشتم، شوهرم مسئولیت مالی و سرپرستی خانواده رو به عهده داره. خنده دار اینکه که این از شوهرش هم تحصیلکرده تر بود. و هم پول بیشتری در میآورد! (خنده) حالا مقصودمینه که زن ایرانی هر چقدر هم تحصیل کرده باشه، و کار کنه و پول در بیاره، اون پول شوهره که اصلی حساب میشه، و اون زن تمام پول رو هم خرج زندگیش بکنه، به هیچ جا حساب نیست. مثلاً متوجه شدی که حتی اگه خونه مال زن باشه، همیشه میگن خونه آقای فلانی؟ (خنده) همین دیگه، مال و پول و نقشی که زن توی خونه داره هیچ چیز حساب نمیشه. این **mentality** هیچ وقت عوض نمیشه، حداقل نه برای یک مدت طولانی!

Nahid believed that education helps women gain financial independence. She observed that many Iranian women, regardless of their peripheral position in the economy and financial decision making of the household, still tend to be interested in the pursuit of higher education, because of their belief that education leads to financial independence and its potential to provide them with some degree of freedom in making their own decisions, and as Nahid states, become important figures in their own lives.

Nahid: Women in Iran are encouraged to study, because **education** brings financial independence. Of course, a woman's financial contribution to the household is never equaled to that of the man's. But in any case, even her money doesn't have much value; it's better than nothing. At least the woman has her education, her own money, and can be independent to some extent, and doesn't have to beg her [husband] to give her money [to buy] a pair of socks, a pair of shoe, and a skirt, and lower her [dignity]. She can do all these things for herself. *Financial independence* is the most important thing Iranian women need right now, whether in Iran or here [in the West]. Maybe, an Iranian woman can never be the *central figure* in her family, but at least she can be an *important figure*.

(August 2, 2002)

ج. زنها توی ایران خیلی تشویق میشن که درس بخونن، چونکه **education** استقلال مالی میآره. البته اگه یک زن کمک مالی به اقتصاد خانواده بکنه، هیچ وقت به اندازه اون کاری که مرد می کنه حساب نمیشه. ولی در هر صورت، هر چقدر هم که قدر پول زن دونسته نشه، باز هم از هیچ بهتره، باز هم اون زن تحصیلی کرده، از خودش پولی داره، و میتونه تا حدی مستقل باشه، و دیگه برای پول یک جفت جوراب و یک جفت کفش و یک دامن به اون مرد التماس نکنه و خودشو پائین بیآره. میتونه خودش همه اینکارها رو برای خودش بکنه. استقلال مالی مهم ترین چیزیه که زنهای ایرانی الآن چه توی ایران باشن و چه اینجا. شاید هیچوقت یک زن ایرانی نتونه مرکز اصلی خانواده بشه، ولی حداقل می تونه یک مرکز مهم باشه.

Reflecting back at her experiences of growing up in Iran, she perceived having received equal encouragements and motivations from her family to continue her education when compared to the males in the family. She talked about the social and cultural restrictions faced by women in Iran as a result of strict rules which promote gender segregation, which limit a woman's contact with other males in the society. However, she concluded that such restrictions have actually facilitated women's participation in the society. Nahid believed the implications of new Islamic laws and codes of behavior provided more freedom for more traditional families who did not agree with women's education and work outside the home before the revolution. This meant more freedom of choice and liberty for women who could not otherwise work or study because of their families' religious and traditional views towards women's education.

Nahid: After the revolution, many traditional families wouldn't allow their daughters to go to school and study, because before the revolution many used to say that the school environments, especially the universities were *unIslamic*, and they thought if they let their daughters to go to school unveiled, they will go the wrong way. Even after the revolution, some of our relatives were telling my parents not to let me study, because I will be [morally] corrupted! [Laughs] But my mother used to say, "don't worry what others say, go and study". But after the revolution, the situation changed, and many of those who used to think that way before, they changed their minds. Now, everything is segregated for men and women. In universities, men and women sit separately. I've even heard that in some [situations] there is a curtain in classes. Although I haven't seen that myself, but I know it's true. Many families feel comfortable this way, and allow their daughters to go to school, and get an education, that is their **mentality**.

(August 2, 2002)

Although Nahid emphasized the importance of education in a woman's life, she also emphasized that this education does not necessarily change her position as secondary to her husband as the male in charge of the household in the family. She explained her opinion in the following conversation:

Shiva: Do you think women's education had any effect on the way Iranian men think [about women's status]?

Nahid: No! It has no effects at all. Of course, I have to say that it has one effect, and that is, generally Iranian men, I mean, if a man was a patriarch from the beginning, and considered

ج. بعد از انقلاب، خیلی از خانواده های سنتی که نمی گذاشتن دخترهاشون مدرسه برن، و درس بخونن، چون قبل از انقلاب خیلی ها می گفتن که محیط تحصیل بخصوص توی دانشگاه ها غیر اسلامی بود، فکر می کردن اگه دخترهاشون بدون حجاب دانشگاه برن، به راه بد کشیده میشن. حتی بعد از انقلاب، چند تا از این آشناهای ما به پدر و مادرم می گفتن که نذارن من دانشگاه برم چون خراب میشم! (خنده) ولی مادرم می گفت "اهمیت نده دیگران چی میگن، برو درست رو بخون". بعد از انقلاب، خب اوضاع خیلی فرق کرد، و خیلی ها که قبلا "اون طور فکر می کردن، نظرشون عوض شد. الان همه چیز دیگه برای مرد و زنها جدا شده، توی دانشگاه ها دختر و پسرها جدا میشینن، و حتی شنیدم که بعضی کلاسها رو پرده بینشون میکشن، هر چند که خودم ندیدم، ولی میدونم که هست. خیلی خانواده ها هم اینطوری احساس راحتی می کنن، و میذارن دخترهاشون درس بخونن، این **mentality** شونه.

س. فکر می کنی که تحصیل زن روی طرز تفکر مرد هم فرقی میذاره؟

ج. اصلاً هیچ تأثیری نداره. البته باید بگم که یک تأثیر داره و اون هم اینه که مردهای ایرانی کلاً، یعنی اون مرد اگه از اول مردسالار بوده و خودشو آقای خونه میدونسته،

himself the master of the house, he will stay the same, and maybe will get even worse. But the problem is that Iranian women will get to know their rights [as they get educated], especially when they come to Canada, and they can easily get into university, and they don't have the same problems getting admitted into university, the same way they did in Iran. Now, in my opinion, it is the woman whose perspectives have changed as the result of [her] education. Why do you think there is an increase in the rate of divorce in Iran, and even here, there is a lot of cases of divorce among Iranians? Because the woman wants to study and work.

Shiva: Do you think the Iranian women have the same reasons to [pursue] higher education in Iran and in the West?

Nahid: Yes, to a great extent. Wherever in the world the [Iranian woman] lives, she wants to get educated, work and stand on her feet. This is very important. I also wanted the same thing for myself.

(March 5, 2003)

الآن هم همون میمونه که بدتر هم میشه. ولی مسأله اینه که زنهای ایرانی به حق و حقوق خودشون آشنا میشن، بخصوص وقتی میان کانادا و می بینن که راحت می تونن درس بخونن، اون مشکلات وارد دانشگاه شدن توی ایران دیگه نیست. حالا این زنه که به نظر من تحصیل کردن روی طرز فکرش تأثیر میذاره، واسه چیه که میگن توی ایران آمار طلاق بالا رفته و یا اینکه حتی اینجا هم طلاق بینشون زیاده؟ چون زن میخواد درس بخونه و کار کنه.

س. فکر میکنی دلیل درس خوندن زنهای ایرانی توی ایران و غرب یکیه؟

ج. آره، تا حد زیادی. هر کجای دنیا که باشه میخواد درسی بخونه، کاری بکنه، که روی پای خودش بایسته. این خیلی مهمه. من خودم هم همیشه همین رو میخواستم.

Nonetheless, the Iranian man's central role remains unchallenged regardless of the woman's level of education, economic resources and her financial contributions to the family. Similar to Samira, Nahid also believed that a man's mentality and view of a women's role in the family decision-making affairs does not change as the result of the woman's employment and education. On the contrary, living in Canada and being exposed to Canadian society's more open and accepting views towards women's rights to education and enter the labor market influence changes in women's perceptions and make them more aware of their rights as equal members of their families and the community.

My last phone conversation with Nahid was on October 20, 2003. She has finished her degree, and is currently employed as a research assistant in a private scientific research company. She is planning to work for several years before going back to university and pursue her Master's degree and possibly continue at the doctoral level. But for now, her family depends on her "extra" income to pay for the household expenses, as well as saving money to fund her future graduate studies.

Roxana: "Acquisition of Knowledge"

کسب علم

Roxana's educational narrative contrasts with Samira's and Nahid's. She expressed a strong inner motivation to complete her university education, and in her case, family expectations and Iranian cultural values seemed to have less of an impact on her educational aspirations.

Shiva: Why did you decide to go to university?

س. چرا تصمیم گرفتی وارد دانشگاه بشی؟

Roxana: [Pause] honestly, it's partly personal. I like to be somebody for myself. I think that if I gain knowledge, I can satisfy myself. For example, [pause] I can find a better job and do what I like to do, in the field that I'm studying now. That's it!

ج. (سکوت) راستش یک مقدارش شخصی است، دوست دارم برای خودم کسی باشم. فکر می‌کنم که با کسب علم می‌تونم خودمو ارضا کنم. مثلاً، (سکوت) می‌تونم کار بهتری پیدا کنم در اون چیزی که دوست دارم، همین رشته‌ای که دارم می‌خونم. همین!

Shiva: Did your father and mother influence your decision?

س. آیا پدر و مادرت هم فکر می‌کنی تأثیر داشتن روی تصمیمت؟

Roxana: No, no! Never! They always want my comfort [and happiness]. If they think I like to study, [then] they also like it. If they think I don't like to study, then they also don't like it! Whatever that I want, they want the same thing [for me].

ج. نه نه! هرگز! اونها همیشه راحتی منو میخوان. اگه فکر می‌کنن من دوست دارم درس بخونم، اونها هم دوست دارن من درس

(August 23, 2002)

بخونم. اگه فکر کنن من دوست ندارم
درس بخونم، اونها هم دوست ندارن!
هر چی که من بخوام اونها هم میخوان.

However, despite Roxana's account of a personal desire for self-fulfillment as her motive to seek higher education, she admitted, as did Nahid, that her sense of self-fulfillment was related to her position as an educated person in the society, and her ability to achieve financial independence. Roxana acknowledged the Iranian cultural notion of education as an instrument for economic advancement and upward social mobility.

Roxana: In Iran, money is everything. I mean, nothing else is important except money. Even if you don't study, having money is more important than anything else.

ج. توی ایران همه چیز با پول،
منظورم اینه که هیچ چیز دیگه اهمیت نداره
غیر از پول، حتی اگر هم درس نخونی،
پولدار بودن از هر چیز دیگه مهمتره.

Shiva: Well, what do you think is the purpose of education, if money is the only thing that matters?

س. خب فکر میکنی که هدف از تحصیل
کردن چیه، اگر این پول که فقط مهمه؟

Roxana: I think that the goal of education is to gain knowledge. You go to university to have more knowledge, and know more about something, so that later on you can use your knowledge to have a profession, and have a job, and be able to stand on your own feet.

ج. فکر می کنم که هدف از تحصیل کردن
دانش و علم آموختن. دانشگاه میری که
دانشت بیشتر بشه، بیشتر در مورد چیزی
بدونی، که بعد بتونی به عنوان یک
حرفه از اون دانش استفاده بکنی و
کاری برای خودت داشته باشی که بتونی
روی پای خودت بایستی.

(August 23, 2002)

My conversations with Roxana revealed a sense of duality in her statements. She pointed out that her primary goal to seek university education was to gain "knowledge" (دانش) in order to achieve a feeling of self-fulfillment and satisfaction in her own personal life. However, at different points in the

interviews, she described the nature of knowledge gained through higher education as an instrument of achieving economic independence. Knowledge, in her view, is validated through its ability to give a person the tools to select a profession and find employment. The instrumental function of education is further implicated in her later statements in our conversations when she talked about the impact of education on one's identity.

Roxana: The goal of university, as I said before, is to give you knowledge, [and] not to make you a better person. I see a lot of people who are highly educated, and don't have any character, they are horrible [laughs]. I, myself, think that I have become a better person throughout the years, I've become stronger, but I don't think it has anything to do with my education. I think, it's partly because of my age, and partly because of my life experiences [which] are also related to age. But that education has made me a better person? No, absolutely not. These **course[s]** that I've taken all these years haven't been of much use! [Laughs]

(March 6, 2003)

ج. هدف دانشگاه اینه که گفتیم بهت دانش بده، نه اینکه ازت آدم بهتری بسازه. خیلی کسانی رو می بینم که تحصیلات خیلی بالائی هم دارن، ولی هیچ شخصیت ندارن و آدم های خیلی گندی ان (خنده) من خودم فکر می کنم که در عرض این سالها آدم خیلی بهتری شدم، خیلی قویتر شدم، ولی فکر نمی کنم هیچ ارتباطی با درس خوندنم داشته. فکر می کنم که تا حدی به خاطر سنمه و تا حدی هم به خاطر تجربه های زندگیه که خب اون هم به سن ربط داره. ولی این که درس خوندن منو آدم بهتری کنه، نه اصلاً، این **course** های رو که این چند ساله رفتم به هیچ دردی نخوردن (خنده)

Roxana's comments regarding the lack of "usefulness" or relevance of the courses she has taken in university further clarify and illustrate her earlier statements. Education by itself, she is convinced, does not make one a better person. Rather, "age" and "life experiences", which are inherently interconnected, have a greater influence on shaping and defining one's character and identity.

While she articulated her personal views with respect to the disconnection between “formal education” the making of a “better person”, Roxana acknowledged the importance of education and becoming an educated person within the Iranian culture. She emphasized the cultural notions of education as a means for escaping social and economic constraints brought upon by one’s socio-economic class. She stated that while Iranian culture, in general, valued education for the youth, and equated education with a higher socio-economic status and social worth and prestige, seeking higher education was perceived as imperative for the members of the working and lower middle-class level Iranians.

Roxana: There are a lot of rich families in Iran, and they don't care if their children go to university. There are also a lot of poor people, [who] work hard to give their children the opportunity to go to school. [Socio-economic] class doesn't influence a person's decision to become educated. Of course, it does in a way. For example, the poor [person] who wants [his or her] child to study, wants to escape poverty. And the person who has money doesn't care very much, because education doesn't make that much difference [for him or her child]. Of course, there are rich kids who are very studious, but that is really their personal choice, and not necessity.

(August 23, 2002)

ج. خیلی خانواده های پولدار توی ایران هستن که اصلاً اهمیت نمیدن که بچه هاشون دانشگاه برن. خیلی هم آدم های فقیر هستن که سخت کار می کنن که بچه اشون این امکان رو داشته باشن که مدرسه سطح طبقاتی یک نفر تأثیری روی تصمیم درس خوندنش نداره. البته داره از یک لحاظی. مثلاً اون که فقیره میخواد بچه اش درس بخونه که از فقر نجات پیدا کنه، و اون که پول داره اهمیتی زیاد نداره، چونکه پولداره، و درس خوندن روش هیچ تأثیری نداره، البته هستن بچه های پولداری که خیلی هم درسخونن، ولی اون دیگه واقعاً یک تصمیم شخصی نه احتیاج

Therefore, the desire to become an educated person, according to Roxana, is the pursuit of socio-economic advancement and a means to escape the harsh realities of poverty. Education for the *poor* is a social necessity, and for the *wealthy*, a personal choice.

Although Roxana acknowledged the culturally defined restraints against women's' rights to education and employment in Iran, she stated that that cultural approaches to women's education should be mostly regarded as individual and independent cases. According to her, a family's money, level of education or religious beliefs does not have much to do with women's aspirations, and do not diminish the value of women's education.

Roxana: I can't generalize the experiences of all Iranian women. My own family never pressured me to do anything, especially when it came to education. That's why I can't say everyone was the same. Each family was different from another one. And it didn't have anything to do with their educational level and wealth. There were families who didn't have much money, but they would encourage their daughters to get educated. There were also families who were really wealthy, and either didn't care about that at all, or education didn't hold any values for them.

Shiva: What about traditional and religious families? What do think they [thought about women's education]?

Roxana: Also the same thing. People were all different. You see a very religious family wouldn't even let their daughters to go to school, but another example that we knew ourselves in Iran, [a religious family] who were also veiled, they sent their daughter to England to get her PhD in engineering.

Shiva: Before the revolution?

Roxana: Yes. Actually, she came back to Iran a couple of years after the revolution, and is now teaching in a university. They were very religious.

(August 23, 2002)

ج. نمی توانم تجربه همه زنهای ایرانی رو جمعبندی کنم. من خودم، خانواده ام اصلاً در مورد هیچ چیز، بخصوص درس خوندن فشار نمیآورد. برای همین نمیتونم بگم همه این جور بودن. هر خانواده ای با یک خانواده دیگه فرق میکرد. هیچ ارتباطی هم به سطح تحصیلی و ثروتشون نداشت. خانواده هائی بودن که پول چندانی نداشتن ولی از اون طرف خیلی دخترهاشونو تشویق میکردن که درس بخونن. خانواده هائی هم بودن که خیلی پولدار بودن و اصلاً حالا یا اهمیت نمیدادن و یا اینکه خیلی درس خوندن بطور کلی براشون ارزش نداشت.

س. فکر میکنی خانواده هائی که سنتی و مذهبی بودن چی؟ اونها به نظرت چی فکر میکردن؟

ج. اونها هم همین طور. همه با هم فرق داشتن. میدیدی یک خانواده مذهبی اصلاً نمیگذاشت دخترش درس بخونه، ولی یکی دیگه، نمونه اش رو خود ما توی ایران می شناختیم، دخترش رو فرستاد انگلیس، با حجاب هم بودن، دکترای مهندسی گرفت.

س. قبل از انقلاب؟

ج. آره. اتفاقاً همون یکی دو سال بعد از انقلاب برگشت ایران و توی دانشگاه الآن داره درس میده. خیلی هم مذهبی بودن.

As stated above, Roxana believes that each Iranian family has a unique view towards the girls' education. The complexity in structure and history and uniqueness of individual families make it difficult to stereotype and generalize such views under specific categories such as religion, educational background and socio-economic status.

Similar to the other female participants, Roxana also stated her family did not undermine her educational aspirations and personal interests because she was a woman. She talked about how her parents had encouraged their children to strive to achieve their goals to the best of their abilities. As a result of her parents' open-mindedness, Roxana believed that she never felt underprivileged or discriminated against on the grounds of her gender, be it within the family, or the wider society. However, in the following excerpt, she expresses her perceptions of gender discrimination as a university student in Iran.

Roxana: Sometimes, in Iran, I felt that men had it easier; I'm talking about the university, for example. I mean if you were a man, professors paid more attention to you, and were more attentive. But in Canada, it really doesn't matter to a professor whether you are a man or a woman, we are all treated the same way. I've never seen anything that would make me say they are discriminating between men and women.

Shiva: For example, what types of discriminatory behaviors did you notice when you were studying in university in Iran?

Roxana: [Pause] Well, for example, I felt that the professors were mostly talking to the guys in our classes. It's kind of hard to judge these things in Iran, because male professors can't

ج. توی ایران، بعضی وقتها فکر می کردم مردها راحت تر بودن، مثلاً "دارم در مورد دانشگاه حرف میزنم. یعنی اگر پسر بودی، استادها بیشتر بهت توجه می کردن و مراقب تر بودن. ولی توی کانادا، استاد براش مهم نیست دختری یا پسر، همه مون یکجور باهامون رفتار میشه. من هیچوقت چیزی ندیدم که بتونم بگم دارن بین زن و مرد تبعیض قائل میشن.

س. برای مثال، چه جور رفتار تبعیض آمیزی دیدی وقتی ایران درس می خوندی؟

ج. (سکوت) خب، مثلاً "فکر می کردم که استادها با پسرها بیشتر توی کلاس حرف می زنن. سخته این جور چیزها رو توی ایران قضاوت کنی، چون استادهای مرد واقعا"

really look at women or they'll get into trouble, and the same for female professors who can't look directly at male students. But generally, they were also ruder towards female students. The way they talked, it was as if they were trying to humiliate you. They would ignore female students in class more often than male students. It's interesting that even female professors were doing the same!

Shiva: You mean they [female professors] were ignoring female students?

Roxana: Yes, exactly. It's interesting, isn't it?! I sometimes felt like I wasn't supposed to be there, and that it was a men's university. We, the women, were not supposed to be there. We were occupying the men's space!

(March 6, 2003)

نمی تونن به زن ها نگاه کنن، وگر نه دچار مشکل میشن. همین طور هم استادهای زن نمی تونن به دانشجوهایی مرد مستقیماً نگاه کنن. ولی به طور کل نسبت دانشجوهایی دختر پر روتر بودن. اون طوری که صحبت می کردن، انگار می خواستن تحقیرت کنن. توی کلاس، به دانشجوهایی دختر بیشتر از پسرها کم محلی می کردن. جالبه که حتی استادهای زن هم همین کارو می کردن!

س. منظورت اینکه که استادهای زن به دانشجوهایی زن کم محلی می کردن؟

ج. آره، دقیقاً. جالبه، نه؟ بعضی وقت ها حس می کردم که من نباید اینجا باشم، واینجا دانشگاه مرداس. ما زن ها قرار نیست که اینجا باشیم. داریم فضای مردها رو اشغال می کنیم.

As stated above, despite her personal experiences within her family and the society (which she had articulated earlier), Roxana acknowledged that discrimination against women existed in Iranian society. She specifically referred to institutions of higher education where she felt that discrimination was significantly evident.

Roxana graduated in the Fall of 2003, and is currently working as a volunteer research assistant in a Bio-Medical Laboratory. After failed efforts to find paid full-time or part-time employment, she is hopeful that her present volunteer work will provide her with necessary knowledge, experience and skills and lead to better opportunities in the future. She is also planning to take a number of additional courses in the university in order to raise her GPA, and

meet the requirements to apply into graduate school. She has decided to postpone having children until after finding paid full-time work.

Mitra: "It's all about Money!"

همه چیز پولیه!

Mitra's discourse of education represented a starkly different view when compared to other participants. Mitra described parental expectations, also acknowledged by other participants, not as agents of encouragement and motivation but as detrimental to her personal aspirations and interests. She stated that her parents and, in particular, her father were very strict in their views towards their children's education. When she was growing up, her parents regarded simple childhood pleasures such as watching television, playing games and having hobbies as fruitless distractions which would only divert Mitra's (and her siblings') attention from studying and achieving excellent (and not just good) grades.

Mitra: When I was a child, I was very interested in music, particularly playing the piano,[and] also painting. I even went to a painting class for two summers when I was in grades 7 and 8. But then my father started complaining that I was wasting my time in these classes. It was only two hours a week [laughs], but my father believed that I could have spent those two hours studying physics, and maths—*real school subjects* [emphasis hers] [laughs]. It's funny that during the summers we really didn't do anything, I would never study during the summers, wouldn't even open a book [laughs], but somehow my father believed that the painting class was a bad influence on me. It wasn't the money, I know [that] for a fact, we

ج. وقتی که بچه بودم، خیلی به موسیقی علاقه داشتم، بخصوص به پیانو، نقاشی هم همینطور. دو تا تابستون هم رفتم کلاس نقاشی، کلاس ۷ و ۸. ولی پدرم، شروع کرد ایراد گرفتن که من دارم توی این کلاسها وقتم رو تلف می کنم، فقط دو ساعت در هفته بود (خنده). ولی پدر من معتقد بود که من این دو ساعت رو باید فیزیک و ریاضی و درس واقعی بخونم (خنده) خنده دار اینه که توی تابستون ها ما هیچ کاری هم نمی کردیم، اصلاً درس نمی خوندیم تابستون ها، لای کتاب رو هم باز نمی کردیم (خنده) ولی پدر من، به دلیلی عقیده داشت

could easily afford a painting class, it was my father's **attitude**. Unfortunately, *it is a very bad attitude* and is very common in our culture. I feel that if my father let me go to that painting class, it would have even allowed me to focus more on my studies, *the real school subjects* [emphasis mine] [laughs]. It would have made me happier inside, because I had a hobby that I liked, and who knows, maybe I would have pursued it and turn into a great painter [laughs]. You never know! [Laughs]

(August 21, 2002)

که کلاس نقاشی تأثیر بد روی من میذاره (خنده) مسأله پولش هم نبود میدونم که پولشو بدیم، فقط **attitude** پدرم بود. متأسفانه خیلی **attitude** بدیه، و توی فرهنگ مام خیلی رایجه. من فکر می کنم که اگر پدرم میگذاشت کلاس نقاشی برم، همین میگذاشت که من بیشتر روی درس تمرکز کنم، همون درس های واقعی! (خنده) خیلی آدم خوشحالتری بودم در درون خودم، شاید هم حتی نقاشی رو ادامه می دادم و یک نقاش خیلی بزرگ می شدم (خنده) آدم نمیدونه که! (خنده)

My conversations with Mitra revealed a great sense of loss and regret over her unaccomplished goals in life. Not being able to make use of the undergraduate degree she had completed in Iran, she expressed grave sadness and sorrow over her unexplored interests in Arts and Music. Mitra seemed torn between two cultures, and two different views towards education and its value in one's life. She also expressed a genuine love for both her parents, regardless of her father's rejection and discontent for her interest in Arts. She admitted that her parents' persistence on their children's education and excellent grades was mainly due to the Iranian culture's emphasis on education and the value attributed to an educated person in the society and within the family. However, she regrets in not having been able to pursue arts and music, and believed that this has been the main source of unhappiness in her life today.

Mitra: I'm **confused**! [Her emphasis] That's how I would describe myself. When I was in Iran, I studied really hard, and made a real effort to get admitted into university. I really made an effort to get good grades. In university, I also studied hard. But now,..., I think that [all that hard work] was a waste. I've completely lost my self-confidence. I'm very **confused**! [Her emphasis] I have no idea what I'm doing in my life!

(August 21, 2002)

من **Confused** ام ! این طوری می تونم خودمو توصیف کنم . ایران که بودم ، خیلی درس خوندم و زحمت کشیدم که دانشگاه قبول بشم . خیلی زحمت کشیدم که نمره های خوبی بیارم . توی دانشگاه هم خیلی درس خوندم ولی حالا ،...، حالا فکر میکنم که همش هدر شد . کلاً" اعتماد به نفسم رو از دست داده ام . خیلی **Confused** ام ! اصلاً" نمی دونم دارم توی زندگیم چکار میکنم !

Mitra said that she was "confused" and had no awareness of where she was going in her life. She was also the only participant who regretted not being able to practice her profession because her nursing certificate is not acknowledged in Canada. Throughout our interviews, despair, confusion, and lack of self-confidence were evident in her comments. Mitra was also struggling with her financial situation and openly talked about the financial problems she was facing in her life. Having lived comfortably in a middle class family in Tehran, she was facing a serious dilemma in Canada. Although Mitra clearly missed the life she had in Iran, she was also content to be in Canada where she can live the life she wants, and can choose her own direction in life, as she stated in this excerpt:

Mitra: The people in the West have good qualities that we Iranians lack. For example, here they really focus on happiness, and choosing to do what makes them happy. You never hear a Canadian child say that they are pressured to go to university, much less being pressured to become a physician [laughs]. Their parents don't force them to do what they don't want to do. Therefore, they don't have that feeling of failure, and stress that sometimes, Iranian children feel. Because

ج. مردم غرب خصوصیت های خیلی خوبی دارن که ما ایرانی ها نداریم. مثلاً" اینها خیلی روی خوشحال بودن تأکید می کنن، و اینکه چیزی توی زندگی انتخاب نکنی که خوشحالت کنه. هیچوقت نمیشنوی یک بچه کانادایی بگه بهش فشار آوردن بیاد دانشگاه، چه برسه به اینکه دکتر بشه! (خنده) خانواده هاشون بهشون فشار نمیارن کاری رو که دوست ندارن بکنن.

[Canadians] are allowed to choose their own path in life, not what has been dictated to them by others, parents, society, relatives [laughs].

(August 21, 2002)

برای همین هم هیچوقت احساس شکست
خوردگی ندارن، و اون استرس که بچه های
ایرانی بعضی وقت ها حس می کنن.
برای اینکه اجازه دارن راه خودشون
رو توی زندگی انتخاب کنن، نه اون چیزی
رو که از طرف دیگران، پدر و مادر،
جامعه و فک و فامیل! (خنده)

Hence, for Mitra, the ability to exercise one's own choices in life generally and also with regard to educational goals were strengths of Western cultural values and beliefs towards education.

Moreover, Mitra's views of education seemed to be significantly influenced by financial situation and her inability to make use of the undergraduate degree she completed in Iran. She regards education as a way out of her "financially unbearable situation" (موقعیت مالی غیرقابل تحمل), and her only chance of making something out of her life. For her, education is an inescapable necessity, and not a path chosen on her free will or interest.

Mitra: If I had money, I wouldn't go to school. I'm not crazy! [Laughs] Why would I want to school if I had money? Honestly, even studying here is really expensive. In Iran, public universities are free, and that's probably their best quality. I didn't have to worry about money. Here, you have tuition fees, and other things. It's a very heavy price for education. I get student loans, but you have nothing to really live on. If I could marry tomorrow, I would and let go of everything, I would just marry some rich guy, stay at home and have kids, and not worry about money, university, work [pause]. If I had money I wouldn't worry about anything! It's all about money!

(August 21, 2002)

ج. اگه پول داشتم، مدرسه نمیرفتم،
مگه دیوونه ام؟ (خنده) چرا بخوام
مدرسه برم اگه پول داشتم؟ راستش
درس خوندن اینجا خیلی گرونه، توی ایران
دانشگاه های سراسری مجانی ان و این بهترین
خصوصیتشونه. من مجبور نبودم نگران پول
باشم. اینجا شهریه دانشگاه هست و
چیزهای دیگه، خیلی تحصیل کردن گرونه.
من وام دانشجویی می گیرم، ولی چیزی
نیست که باهاش زندگی کرد. اگه می تونستم
فردا ازدواج می کردم و همه چیز رو ول
می کردم. با یک مرد پولدار ازدواج
می کردم، می موندم توی خونه، بچه دار
می شدم، و نگران پول و دانشگاه و
کار هم نبودم (سکوت) اگه پول داشتم،
نگران هیچی نبودم! همه چیز پوله!

As illustrated above, Mitra believed that education was her only means for socioeconomic advancement. But pursuing higher education required a significant financial investment which was a major source of stress and worry for her. Mitra held the view that for the working and lower middle class Iranian families education is the way out of an otherwise financially devastating situation. Iranian tuition-free public universities provide access to higher education to those who cannot afford private institutions, such as the Islamic Azad Universities as she commented in the following conversation:

Mitra: Those who don't have money try hard to go to university, and get an education. And those who have money do nothing or go to Azad University! [Laughs]

(August 21, 2002)

ج. اون هائی که پول ندارن، زحمت میکشن
و میرن دانشگاه و درس میخوانن
و اونهایی که پول دارن
یا هیچ کار نمی کنن یا میرن
دانشگاه آزاد! (خنده)

She stressed the positive influence of open relationships between men and women in Canadian academia, and their role in creating healthy and open learning environment where all students learn side by side and are treated equally, regardless of their gender. She stated that the equality in treatment of male and female students is one of the major differences between the Iranian and Canadian educational systems. Consequently, this is what makes the educational system different, while the content and subjects of study remain equivalent both in Iran and in Canada.

Mitra: In terms of textbooks, and subject content, Iran and Canada are the same. We had the same textbooks that they teach here. We used to have both English originals, and Persian translations in the bookstore. But regardless of the content, the quality of education here [Canada] is higher and much better, because of the equipments, the library, administration, the classrooms, everything. I know it sounds trivial, but these things are all important in determining how a student learns. The open relationship between men and women makes the university a whole lot easier here. I mean, to the professor, it doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman, you are not treated differently. I think that's really important. In Iran, sometimes I feel most of my energy and time was wasted arguing with the moral police on campus over two threads of hair showing from under my scarf.

(March 11, 2003)

For Mitra, financial difficulties of living life as a first-generation immigrant seemed to be the pinnacle of her problems in Canadian academia. Throughout the interviews, she talked about her financial problems, and expressed her regrets in not having married a wealthy man in order to avoid her financial difficulties. Despite these statements, she also expressed an awareness of the consequences of marrying for money. She said:

Mitra: Sometimes I feel that I made a big mistake that I didn't marry when I had the chance. Maybe if I were married to a wealthy person, at least, I didn't have to worry about getting an education, and a job. I would stay home and have children and be a housewife and mother. But then I look back, and see that I couldn't live that way either. My husband would want me to stay home and be a good,

ج. از نظر کتاب های درسی، و درسی که می خونی، ایران و کانادا مثل هم. ما همون کتاب های درسی رو داشتیم که اینجا هم درس میدن. توی کتاب فروشی هم کتاب اصلی انگلیسی رو داشتیم و هم ترجمه فارسی اش رو. ولی از مطلب درسی که بگذریم، کیفیت درسی اینجا خیلی خیلی بهتر و بالاتره، هم از لحاظ وسیله، کتاب خونه، مدیریت، کلاس ها. این چیزها خیلی ساده و پیش پا افتاده به نظر می رسن، ولی خیلی روی یادگیری دانشجو تأثیر دارن. اینجا اون رابطه آزادی که بین زن و مرد هست، خیلی دانشگاه رفتن رو آسون می کنه. یعنی، برای استاد اهمیت نداره که مرد یا زنی، یک جور باهات رفتار می شه. من فکر می کنم این خیلی مهمه. حس می کنم که بیشتر انرژی و وقت من تلف شد که با این منکراتی ها سر روسری عقب و جلو و جلو و دو تا تار مو توی دانشگاه جر و بحث کنم!

ج. بعضی وقت ها حس می کنم که اشتباه بزرگی بزرگی کردم که وقتی موقعیتش بود ازدواج کنم. شاید اگه با یک مرد پولدار ازدواج کرده بودم الآن دیگه نگران درس خوندن و کار پیدا کردن نبودم. میشستم توی خونه و بچه داری می کردم، و همسر و مادر می شدم. ملی وقتی که بهش فکر می کنم، می بینم که اون جوری هم نمی تونستم زندگی کنم. شوهری که می خواست من توی خونه بشینم

quiet wife, and put up with everything. I can't live like that. That's why even when I had the chance to marry a rich Iranian man, I looked deep into their behaviors and attitudes, and saw that I couldn't live the way they expected me. Money is not a big problem for me; I'd rather live with little money than to be a housewife for someone who doesn't respect me.

(August 21, 2002)

و یک زن خوب آروم و سازگار باشم. نمی تونم اون جوری زندگی کنم. برای همینه که وقتی موقعیتش پیش آمد که با یک مرد ایرانی پولدار ازدواج کنم، نگاه کردم به عقاید و طرز رفتار و دیدم که نمی تونم اون جوری که اون می خواد زندگی کنم. پول مسئله بزرگی برای من نیست، ترجیح میدم با پول کمی زندگی کنم تا این که زن خونه نشین کسی باشم که برام احترام قائل نیست.

As Mitra stated previously, finding a partner who would respect her as a woman and treat her as his equal was more important than his financial assets. Marrying a man for money may free a woman, temporarily, from an otherwise adverse financial situation; however, it does not necessarily translate into a respectful and happy partnership in life.

Mitra acknowledged the restrictions put on her and her siblings by her parents. However, she believed that her family's, and particularly her father's insistence on their children's academic performance could not be attributed to desire to "control" the children's behavior or their mistreatment.

Mitra: In Iran, I had friends that were free to do as they wished, but in my family, particularly my father, put a lot of restrictions on us. We couldn't go certain places, we couldn't do certain things, I mean, for example, I could go to the movies with my friends, but I couldn't go to a birthday party. I know it was because we were girls, and my father was very **protective**, but more than that, I think, he believed that we have to really focus on our studies, and going to parties or spending too much time with friends, he thought, was a waste of time. We

ج. توی ایران دوستانی داشتم که هر کاری دلشون می خواست می کردن. ولی توی خانواده من، بخصوص پدرم، خیلی روی ما سختگیری می کرد. یک سری جا ها نمی تونستیم بریم، یک سری کارها نمی تونستیم بکنیم، یعنی مثلاً "با دوستان نمیتونستم سینما برم، نمیتونستم جشن تولدشون برم. میدونستم به خاطر اینکه که دختر هستیم، و پدرم خیلی **protective** هست. ولی بیشتر از اون فکر می کنم که عقیده داشت ما باید روی درسمون تمرکز کنیم، و رفتن به مهمونی و وقت صرف کردن

used to resist and constantly complain that we were tired of studying so hard, and that kind of stuff. But I never thought [that] my father was doing that because we were girls and he wanted to **control** us, *never!*

(August 21, 2002)

با دوستانمون، اون طوری که اون فکر می کرد،
وقت تلف کردند. مام همش مقاومت می کردیم
می زدیم که خسته شدیم از درس خوندن و از
این جور چیزها، ولی هیچ وقت فکر نکردم که پدرم
این جوری می کرد چون ما دختر بودیم و می خواست
مارو **control** کنه، هرگز!

Interestingly, Mitra's above statement may be interpreted to indicate otherwise.

Cultural notions of women's need to be "protected" and safeguarded against social ills, may indeed represent general social attitudes towards women's freedom to choose what they wish to do. Noteworthy is that, Mitra, herself, expressed that her sisters' and her own struggles against their father's restrictions. Her statement: "We used to *resist* [italics added] and constantly complain that we were tired of studying so hard", represents their desire for more freedom to spend time with friends and choose the path of their education.

Mitra dropped out of university at the end of the Fall 2003, one week after writing her mid-term exams. She believed that there was no use in "wasting her energy" doing what she did not enjoy. In our last phone conversation which took place on November 23, 2003, she informed me of her plans to marry her French-Canadian new fiancé in the summer of 2004. She hopes she can get a job with her B.SC (Nursing) degree which she obtained in Iran. She is trying to find out whether her degree can be accredited in Canada, and is willing to move to another province if necessary.

Yalda: "There is no Other Way!"

راه دیگه ای وجود نداره!

Yalda was the only participant with no previous experiences in the higher education system prior to her immigration to Canada. Yalda was an intriguing participant. Although she had not entered higher education in Iran, she was employed as a professional athlete and tennis coach at a private sports club, and a part-time physical education teacher in several high schools in western Tehran. After several unsuccessful attempts to get accepted into a university, Yalda found solace in pursuing her interest in sports at a professional level—a decision which, as she expressed, made her content and fulfilled.

Shiva: Did you go to university in Iran?

س. توی ایران دانشگاه رفتی؟

Yalda: I didn't go to university, not because I didn't want to, but because I didn't have the opportunity. You know, in Iran, it's very difficult to be accepted into a university. I tried a few times, wrote the konkour a few years in a row, but when I wasn't accepted, I wasn't really disappointed. I already had a job as a professional athlete even though women's sport was going downhill after the revolution. But I actually worked more than one job, and made a living. Not getting into university wasn't such a big problem, because I loved sports. I have always loved sports and after high school, continued to do what I loved to do.

(August 28, 2002)

ج. نه. من دانشگاه نفرتم، نه به خاطر اینکه دوست نداشتم، چون موقعیتش نبود. میدونی که، توی ایران خیلی سخته وارد دانشگاه شدن. یک چند بار سعی کردم، کنکور رو چند سال پشت سر هم نوشتم، ولی قبول نشدم. ولی با این حال ناامید نشدم. من به عنوان ورزشکار حرفه ای کار می کردم، با وجود اینکه ورزش خانم ها توی ایران وضعش بد شد بعد از انقلاب. ولی خب من چند جا کار می کردم و زندگی می چرخوندم. قبول نشدن توی دانشگاه مسأله خیلی مهمی نبود چون من عاشق ورزش بودم، همیشه عاشق ورزش بودم. بعد از دبیرستان هم همین چیزی رو که دوست داشتم ادامه دادم.

Like the other participants, Yalda also had dreams of pursuing her education at the university level as stated in the previous excerpt. Yalda perceived that, while

her family valued education and stressed its importance in her life, they seemed to have a realistic picture of opportunities open to her and her siblings in Iran. She commented:

Yalda: There was always this pressure on us, especially from the society and others around us. My family was less like that because they encouraged us to learn some kind of sports. But, well, I could see that my classmates really suffered if they failed the Konkour. In my family, it was really up to you, yourself. If you were admitted, then you were admitted, and if you weren't admitted, you would let it go and get a job, [that was it]. In my family, we all learned some kind of sports, and that made it easy to find jobs.

(August 28, 2002)

ج. همیشه این فشار روی ما بود، بخصوص از طرف جامعه و اطرافیان. حالا خانواده من کمتر چون ما رو توی ورزش خیلی تشویق می کردن، ولی خب میدیدم همکلاسی هام خیلی زجر می کشیدن وقتی کنکور رد می شدن. توی خانواده ما به خودت بستگی داشت، اگه قبول می شدی که قبول می شدی و درست رو میخوندی، و اگه هم قبول نمی شدی خب ول می کردی و می رفتی توی کار و اینجور برنامه ها. همه ما توی خانواده مون یک ورزشی رو برای همین آسون بود کار گیر آوردن.

Pressures from family and society, *Yalda* believed, subsided as soon as she entered the job market, and started doing what she enjoyed. In fact, as a result of her family's open views towards women's employment and their encouragement of her interests in sports, not getting admitted into university opened a new window of opportunity for her to pursue her interest in sports at the professional level.

Yalda regarded education as a necessary means for economic sustenance of her family. After coming to Canada and losing hope in ever being able to find employment in professional sports in the new country, and faced with the financial responsibility of taking care of her family in the absence of a strong social and family network, she decided to enroll full-time in a university program

which would help her find employment after graduation. It was for this reason that she decided to study computer science with the hopes of landing a job with her newly acquired computer skills in a near future. Education, she commented, is an essential requirement to enter today's job market. Without education and training, one does not stand a chance to compete for employment:

Yalda: To do anything nowadays, you have to be educated, you have to get training for it. For example, if you want to become a hairdresser, you have to go to hair styling training classes and get [your] certificate. Likewise, if you want to become a **travel agent**, [you have] to do the same, go to college, and get trained. Everything you want to do, you have to do the same. When I look around myself, I see everyone is studying something, they are doing something. [If] you want to find any jobs; you have to study for it. I think the main goal of education is that [you] can sustain [yourself] economically. But in Iranian culture, social prestige and status are more important even more than economic reasons. Iranians think you have a [higher] social status if you get an education.

(August 28, 2002)

ج. این روزها هر کاری بخوای بکنی باید درسی خونده باشی، رفته باشی دوره شو دیده باشی. مثلاً" اگه بخوای آرایشگر بشی باید بری کلاس آرایشگری، مدرکشو بگیری، بخوای **travel agent** بشی همین طور باید بری کالج دوره شو ببینی. هر کاری بخوای بکنی همین طور. دور و ورم رو که نگاه می کنم می بینم همه دارن درسی می خونن، همه دارن یک کاری می کنن. هر کاری که بخوای پیدا کنی باید براش درس بخونی. من فکر می کنم دلیل اصلی درس خوندن هم همین، که آدم بتونه از لحاظ مالی خودشو تأمین کنه. ولی توی فرهنگ ایرانی، حتی بیشتر از از مسأله مالی همون وجهه و رتبه اجتماعی آدمه که، ایرانی ها فکر می کنن با درس خوندن بالا میره.

Similar to other participants, Yalda acknowledged the Iranian cultural views towards education as a prescription for reaching higher social status and prestige. She observed that education, in and of itself, does not make one a better person, regardless of the social and economic position of the individual. Rather, the main goal of education is to train individuals for future jobs, and provide them with marketable skills which they can use to function as

economically independent members of the society. However, she also pointed out that while there are no guarantees, the ideal education has the potential to create more socially responsible and conscious individuals.

Yalda: Education, doesn't matter at what level, high school, college, university, is supposed to make you a better person. Doesn't matter how far you carried on your studies, education is supposed to shape your views, and help you to have a healthy, productive existence within the society. Of course, this is not a guarantee, because many times you see someone with very good education, and you can't even call them a *human being*.

ج. تحصیلات، در هر سطحی که باشد، دبیرستان، کالج، دانشگاه، باید آدمه یک انسان بهتر بکنه. اهمیتی نداره که چقدر تحصیل کردی، همون هم باید کمک کنه که آدم یک موجود سالم و سازنده توی جامعه و خانواده اش باشه. البته تضمینی نیست که این اتفاق بیفته چون خیلی وقتها می بینی یک نفر با تحصیلات خیلی خوب، اصلاً اسم انسان هم نمیشه روش گذاشت.

Shiva: Why do you think that is so?

س. چرا فکر می کنی این طوریه؟

Yalda: I think it is a personal issue. If you are inherently a good person, then education will help you become even a better person, and if [you are a horrible person] [laughs], then all the degrees you have will not make any difference! [Laughs]

ج. فکر می کنم یک مسأله شخصیه، اگه اساساً آدم خوبی باشی، تحصیل کردن بهت کمک می کنه حتی بهتر هم بشی، ولی اگه از اول وضعت خراب بوده، (خنده) هر چقدر هم مدرک داشته باشی، هیچ فرقی می کنه به حالت! (خنده)

(August 28, 2002)

Similar to the other participants, Yalda also acknowledged the role of individual men and women's histories and lived experiences in shaping their characters and identities.

Yalda regarded women's education as the gateway to financial independence and having a more integral part as a decision maker within the family. Women's education is empowering and gives them a more authoritative status in the household.

Yalda: Well, of course, economic independence is very important. Now a days, only one income is not sufficient for the family, so that's very important. How can a woman gain her independence? Well, it's through economic independence. She gets educated, works, and has a salary of her own. But more than that, you become more literate. When a woman is educated, she has more authority and say in the household, she can express her opinion, how the money is spent, [and] how the children are raised. You share intellectual responsibility with your husband. Even just the act of getting an education means learning, [it is] learning experiences. You learn how to tackle life's problems.

(August 28, 2002)

ج. خب البته استقلال مالی خیلی مهمه. این روزها، فقط یک درآمد کافی نیست که زندگی بچرخه، بنابراین، این خیلی مهمه. چه طور یک زن می تونه استقلال بدست بیاره؟ خب از طریق استقلال مالی. می تونه درس بخونه، کار بکنه و حقوق خودش داشته باشه. ولی بیشتر از اون باسواد میشی. وقتی که یک زن تحصیلکرده است، اقتدار و اختیار بیشتری توی خونه داره، و میتونه عقیده خودشو ابراز کنه، چه جوری پول خرج میشه، بچه ها چه جوری تربیت میشن. با شوهرت مسئولیت فکری داری. حتی اگر تحصیل کردن یعنی یاد گرفتن، اون یاد گرفتن تجربه است. یاد می گیری چه جوری با مشکلات زندگی دست و پنجه نرم کنی.

As illustrated in this excerpt, *Yalda* believed that a woman's path to independence is through education and therefore holding a greater share of "authority" and "intellectual responsibility" in the household.

Similar to *Samira* and *Nahid*, *Yalda* commented that an Iranian man's educational background and lived experiences in life in Western societies does not inevitably lead to more liberal and open views towards women's equal rights. Rather, an Iranian man's perceptions of a woman's place in society and her rights to education and employment are more related to his upbringing and his own experiences in life than his level of education or living in the west. On the contrary, life in a Western society has more impact on shaping and redefining Iranian women's views as they become more aware of their rights, and the

opportunities available to them in Canada. She explained her views in the following conversation:

Yalda: Some Iranian men will become better, and some will become worse. In my opinion, those who already held liberal views in Iran will become even more liberated in their attitudes towards women's rights. They have no problems with their wives working or getting an education. But others, no! They just don't like it; you see they don't let the woman do anything. I think, those who were more patriarchal, will become even worse. You see some families don't allow women to get an education, many don't let them even work. Well, this is discrimination. So, you see many Iranian women leave that country. The women who didn't have that kind of freedom there [in Iran], when they come here and see all the **opportunities** available to them, they change. Their worldviews change completely. I think the husbands may **support** their wives as long as they can afford it. But, generally, I don't think so, unless he is very well off. But I still don't think that would be enough, even when you look at it in terms of psychological support, it is not there. When a woman decides to go back to school, there will be problems between the husband and the wife. Simply because when you study, you have to set time aside to study, and the Iranian men, well, after all, in Iranian life style, the family has different expectations of women [laughs], cooking, cleaning, and stuff. Yes, I think these expectations are expected to be realized. But many Iranian men don't understand this; they just can't comprehend the situation. There are very few who may understand, but I am still very doubtful [laughs]. You have to manage somehow.

(February 17, 2003)

ج. بعضی مردهای ایرانی بهتر میشن، بعضی ها هم بدتر میشن. به نظر من، اون هائی که توی ایران مترقی بودن، اینجا حتی بهتر هم میشن از نظر عقائدشون نسبت به حقوق زن ها. اون ها هیچ مشکلی ندارن که زنشون درس بخونه و کار کنه. ولی بقیه، نه! اصلاً خوششون نمیآد، اجازه نمیدن زن هیچ کاری کنه. من فکر می کنم، اون هائی که مردسالار بودن، بدتر هم میشن. می بینی بعضی خانواده ها اجازه نمیدن زن درس بخونه، حتی اجازه نمیدن کار کنه. خب این یک تبعیضه. واسه همین می بینی خیلی زن های ایرانی از کشور میآن بیرون. زن هائی که این آزادی هارو نداشتن، وقتی که میآن اینجا و همه این **opportunities** رو می بینن، عوض میشن. ایده هاشون به طور کلی تغییر می کنه. من فکر می کنم شوهرها زن هاشون رو **support** می کنن، تا زمانی که از لحاظ مالی بتونن. ولی بطور کل، من فکر نمی کنم، مگر اینکه مرفه باشه. ولی من هنوز فکر نمی کنم که این کافی باشه، چون وقتی از لحاظ کمک معنوی نگاه می کنی، وجود نداره. وقتی که زن تصمیم می گیره بره مدرسه، اختلاف بین زن و شوهر پیش میآد. فقط به خاطر اینکه وقتی میری مدرسه، باید وقت روش بذاری که درس بخونی. و مردهای ایرانی، خب هر چی که باشه توی زندگی ایرانی، خانواده یک سری انتظاراتی از زن داره (خنده) پختن، شستن، این جور چیزها. آره من فکر می کنم که این انتظارات باید برآورده بشن. ولی خیلی مردهای ایرانی نمی فهمن، اصلاً نمی تونن موقعیت رو درک کنن. یک تعداد کمی شون ممکنه درک کنن، ولی من در اون هم شک دارم (خنده) باید یک جوری گذروند.

According to Yalda, women's education and employment is perceived by some Iranian men to interfere with women's household responsibilities. Such perceptions are deeply rooted in family and individual histories and lives of these men, and are not easily challenged by their educational background. Moreover, Yalda acknowledged the problems faced by women in Iran, but she believed that Iranian culture by itself does not discourage women's education, regardless of discriminatory laws against Iranian women.

Yalda: I think Iranian women are very smart, not that I'm saying this to boost my ego [laughs], but I really think they are very ambitious and work hard to become **educated**. I don't think that the Iranian society stands against the women's wishes to get educated and work. There are problems in the society for them, but I think it is mostly because of the laws that are discriminatory towards women. For example, I've had friends who wanted to get divorced, and the hassle they had to go through. Here, [Canada] laws are more favorable for women. But I still don't think that women in Iran are humiliated because they are women.

Shiva: Do you think these discriminatory laws [again Iranian women] may, to some extent, inhibit women's education?

Yalda: Uhm, not really. I don't think so. These laws are not favorable towards women, but they also don't inhibit women's education. Iranian society, the culture I mean, doesn't discriminate against women; it only limits what they can do.

Shiva: and you don't think that's discrimination?

ج. من فکر می‌کنم زن‌های ایرانی خیلی باهوشن، این رو به این خاطر نمی‌گم که خودم رو بالا ببرم (خنده) ولی واقعا "فکر می‌کنم که خیلی بلندپروازن و خیلی سخت کار می‌کنن که **educated** بشن. من فکر نمی‌کنم که جامعه ایرانی بر علیه خواسته‌های زن‌هاست که درس بخونن و کار کنن. ولی بیشتر فکر می‌کنم که این به خاطر قانون‌هایی است که بر علیه زن‌هاست، مثلاً "من دوستانی داشتم که می‌خواستن طلاق بگیرن، و چه بدبختی‌هایی کشیدن. اینجا قانون بیشتر طرف زن‌هاست. ولی من هنوز هم فکر نمی‌کنم که زن‌ها توی ایران تحقیر میشن چون زن هستن.

س. فکر می‌کنی این قانون‌هایی که توی ایران هست، بر علیه زن‌ها، جلوی تحصیلشون رو می‌گیره؟

ج. آه، نه همچنین. من فکر نمی‌کنم. این قانون‌ها طرف زن‌ها رو نمی‌گیرن، ولی جلوی درس خوندنشون رو هم نمی‌گیرن. جامعه ایرانی، منظورم فرهنگمونه، بر علیه زن‌ها تبعیض قائل نمیشه، ولی محدود می‌کنه اون کارهایی رو که می‌تونن بکنن.

س. فکر نمی‌کنی که این تبعیضه؟

ج. (خنده) خیلی سؤال خویه! خیلی سخته گفتنش. من توی ایران هیچ وقت تحقیر نشدم، و مورد تبعیض نبودم، ولی می‌تونم بگم که محدودیت‌هایی داشتم. کارهایی رو نمی‌تونن بکنن. به طور مثال،

Yalda: [Laughs] That's a really good question! It's really hard to say. I was never humiliated or discriminated in Iran, but I can also say that I noticed the limitations I had. There are certain things you can't do. You have to be a nice girl, for example. You have to be virtuous. That's not the same as being discriminated against.

Shiva: What is it like then?

Yalda: I think it's more protection of women in our culture. Women need to be protected and the more limited they are, the more protected they feel. Of course, an **educated** woman has less limitations.

Shiva: Why?

Yalda: Maybe because she knows more. She's seen more. She has experienced more. She is wiser! [Laughs]

(February 17, 2003)

باید دختر خوبی باشی. باید محبوب باشی،
و این مثل تبعیض نیست.

س. پس مثل چیه؟

ج. فکر کنم بیشتر حمایت از زن ها توی فرهنگ ماست.
زن ها باید حمایت بشن، و هر چقدر محدودتر باشن،
بیشتر محافظت میشن. البته زن های **educated**
کمتر محدودیت دارن.

س. چرا؟

ج. شاید به این خاطر که بیشتر میدونه. چیزهای
بیشتری دیده. تجربه بیشتر داره. عاقل تره! (خنده)

It is interesting to note the similarities between Yalda's statements and those made by Samira, Nahid, Roxana and Mitra who all acknowledged the restrictions against women within the Iranian society. Protecting women and encouraging their modesty, they all claimed, did not necessarily translate into gender discrimination and/or a lesser status of women in the society and their families. What is more intriguing is the greater level of freedom granted to educated women who, according to Yalda, possess more life experiences and wisdom.

My last conversation with Yalda took place over the phone on October 9, 2003. Yalda was supposed to graduate in the Spring 2004. However, after giving birth to her second child, another son, she decided to take a one-year

leave of absence. She is hoping she will return to her full-time studies in September 2004. She believes that taking care of a school-age child, and an infant while going to university will be particularly demanding, both mentally and physically. This is why she hopes her mother will be able to come to Canada next Fall and help her take care of the children and the household while she is going to school. In the "probable" event that her mother cannot obtain a Visitor Visa, Yalda may have to take an additional year away from her studies or opt to continue as a part-time student.

Nasrin: "A Different Worldview"

یک نگاه متفاوت

Nasrin described her interest in higher education as the result of a personal desire to solve problems, her curiosity to learn new things and developing new perspectives towards the world. According to her, higher education should foster academic knowledge as well as a critical worldview.

Nasrin: I think I was interested in **education** because I always wanted to put **small pieces** together and reach a conclusion. I never wanted to just get a degree and don't work. I always wanted to use [that degree], and find a job. But ultimately I think the more you know, the more your views towards the world change. You look at things in ways that others may not be able to see.

(September 3, 2002)

ج. من فکر می‌کنم که همیشه به **education** علاقه داشتم، چون همیشه می‌خواستم **small pieces** رو پهلوی هم بذارم و به یک نتیجه ای برسم. هیچ وقت دلم نمی‌خواست یک مدرکی بگیرم و کار نکنم. همیشه می‌خواستم که ازش استفاده ببرم و یک کاری پیدا کنم. ولی نهایتاً فکر می‌کنم که هر چی بیشتر بدونی، نگاهت به دنیا عوض میشه. به همه چیز طوری نگاه می‌کنی که دیگران شاید نتونن ببینن.

Nasrin seemed to place importance on the role of education in changing one's perspectives towards the world without influencing a person's character. Education, as she observed, does not make one a better person, but helps her or him develop essential skills in order to function in the society. She commented:

Nasrin: I don't think **education** affects who you are as a person. It may change the way you think and look at the world, but it will not change your character.

Shiva: What do mean [when you say education] "changes the way you think"?

Nasrin: For example, [education] may change the way you raise your children and solve your financial situation, but it will not affect your character, whether you are good or bad is irrelevant to how **educated** you are.

(February 15, 2003)

ج. فکر نمی کنم که **education** تأثیری داشته باشد که چه جور آدمی هستی. ممکنه طرز فکر تو تغییر کنه و اینکه چه جوری به دنیا نگاه میکنی، ولی شخصیت آدم رو تغییر نمیده.

س. منظورت از اینکه نظر آدم رو نسبت به دنیا تغییر میده چیه؟

ج. برای مثال ممکنه تأثیر بذاره چه جوری بچه ها تو تربیت می کنی، چه جور مسائل مالی تو حل می کنی ولی روی شخصیت تأثیر نداره، آدم خوب یا بد بودن هیچ ربطی به اینکه چقدر **educated** هستی نداره.

As illustrated in the previous example, Nasrin stressed the disconnection between formal education and development of an individual's character, as was also indicated by the other participants. In this respect, Nasrin's description of developing a "worldview " is in fact acquiring a set of social skills such as raising children and managing finances, rather than a critical change in an individual's personality and character.

Similar to other participants, Nasrin also talked about Iranian cultural values towards education. As she explained in the following conversation,

Iranian culture emphasizes the role of education in establishing one's place and status in society.

Nasrin: In Iran, **education** really matters. When people find out you are educated, all of a sudden, their opinion of you changes.

ج. توی ایران **education** خیلی اهمیت داره. وقتی که مردم می فهمن تحصیل کرده هستی، نظرشون یک دفعه در مورت فرق می کنه.

Shiva: In what sense?

س. از چه لحاظی؟

Nasrin: I mean, they don't look at you and who you are as a person, the more educated you are, they respect you more, and [you have more] prestige. **Education** seems to conceal a person's weak characteristics! [Laughs]

ج. یعنی بهت نگاه نمی کنن چه جور آدمی هستی، هر چقدر بیشتر تحصیل داشته باشی برات بیشتر احترام قائلن و بیشتر ارج و قرب داری. ظاهراً "**education** همه بدیهای آدم رو می پوشون! (خنده)

(September 3, 2002)

Additionally, Nasrin talked about her family's unspoken educational expectations from their children which, she expressed had a profound affect on her academic aspirations and performance in school. She stated that while her family encouraged these implicit values towards education, they did not explicitly communicate those expectations with her.

Nasrin: I never felt [my family] pressured me to study, but I always knew that they *expected* [emphasis mine] me to study. It was never **verbally** communicated, but it was like a **feeling** that they are encouraging me to study and get good grades. I think it was mostly **unconsciously**, but definitely not **verbally**.

ج. من هیچ وقت حس نکردم بهم فشار آوردن درس بخونم، ولی همیشه می دونستم که از من توقع دارن درس بخونم. هیچ وقت **verbally** صحبت نشد، ولی مثل یک **feeling** بود که اون ها دارن منو تشویق می کنن درس بخونم و نمره های خوب بگیرم. فکر می کنم بیشتر **unconsciously** بود، ولی مطمئناً **verbally** نبود.

(September 3, 2002)

Although Nasrin was born and raised in a middle-class Iranian family who encouraged and valued education significantly, she believed that that the socio-

economic class of an Iranian family does not influence their views towards education. According to her, those who belong to different socio-economic levels have their own distinct reasons for emphasizing education for their children. From the point of view of a family from a lower socio-economic background, education is the “safe” road to a more privileged life and future for their children, while those from middle and upper socio-economic levels of the society emphasize the role of education in establishing and sustaining one’s status and prestige within the society and the family.

Nasrin: I don't think, class has anything to do with family's encouraging their children to get an education. Sometimes, you see families from lower classes emphasize **education** more than families from upper classes. You also see the reverse too! That makes it very difficult to say who thinks what. Maybe those who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, think that with **education** their children will be **safe** and won't have to go through so much hardship as they did themselves. Maybe that's why they encourage their children to get an **education**.

(September 3, 2002)

ج. فکر نمی کنم سطح طبقاتی یک خانواده هیچ تأثیری داشته باشد که بچه هاشون رو ترغیب به تحصیل بکنن. بعضی وقت ها می بینی که خانواده هائی از سطح طبقاتی پائین بیشتر به **education** اهمیت میدن تا خانواده های مرفه. بر عکسش رو هم می بینی! خیلی سخته آدم بگه کی چی فکر می کنه. شاید اون هائی که از طبقات پائین تر میان فکر می کنن که بچه هاشون با **safe , education** تر هستن، و مثل خودشون سختی نمی کشن. شاید به خاطر همینکه که بچه هاشون رو تشویق می کنن **education** داشته باشن.

Having completed her first undergraduate degree in Iran, Nasrin compared and contrasted her experiences within the two educational systems in Iran and Canada. She stated that there are fundamental problems with the Iranian education system which are affected by the social and economic situation of the country as well as traditional approaches to education. She compared the Iranian education system which emphasizes memorization and rote learning with

the Canadian system which emphasizes critical and analytical thinking. Nasrin was critical of the Iranian approach to education because of its inability to encourage analytical learning and development of critical thinking.

Nasrin: Canadian education system is much better than Iran. First of all, the universities take care of the **student[s]**, and respect them. [But] in Iran, that is not the case, at least in my experience, they were very **rude**.

Shiva: Why? Was there a reason?

Nasrin: No, not at all! I mean, in our culture, respect for **student[s]** is not accepted yet. Maybe, it was also because of the social problems of Iranian society. When people have so many financial and social problems, well, they become more irritable and don't have as much respect for others as the result of their problems.

Shiva: do you see any other differences between the two educational systems?

Nasrin: In Iran, it was all rote learning and memorization. Now if you really understood or not, it didn't matter, you have to just memorize. But here [in Canada] the emphasis is on **critical thinking**, and being able to use what you learn in **context**. In Iran, you wouldn't learn anything, you would memorize and immediately forget [it] [laughs] but here you really learn.

(September 3, 2002)

ج. سیستم تحصیلی کانادا خیلی بهتر از ایران. اولاً "که محیط های دانشگاه های اینجا خیلی به **student** اهمیت میدن، و براشون احترام قائلن. در صورتی که توی ایران اصلاً این جور نیست، حداقل حداقل تجربه من این بود که خیلی **rude** بودن.

س. چرا؟ دلیلی داشت؟

ج. نه، اصلاً این جور بودن، یعنی توی فرهنگ ما احترام برای **student** هنوز جا نیفتاده. شاید هم دلیلش مشکلات جامعه ایران، که وقتی مردم این همه مشکلات مالی و اجتماعی دارن، خب در هر صورت کم طاقت تر میشن، و احترامشون برای برای دیگران کمتر میشه بخاطر مشکلاتی که دارن.

س. تفاوت دیگه ای هم بین این دو تا سیستم آموزشی می بینی؟

ج. ایران درس ها همش حفظ کردن بود، حالا میفهمیدی یا نه هیچ اهمیت نداشت، فقط باید حفظ میکردی. ولی اینجا تأکید روی **critical thinking** هستش بیشتر، و و اینکه اون چیزی رو که یاد میگیری بتونی توی **context** بکار ببری. توی ایران هیچ چی یاد نمی گرفتی، حفظ می کردی بعد هم بلافاصله یادت میرفت (خنده) ولی اینجا واقعاً یاد میگیری.

Nasrin acknowledged the existence of gender discrimination and exclusion of women within some Iranian families and difficulties faced by women when entering education and employment realms. She also mentioned that her family emphasized gender equality and women's rights to education and employment, and she had not been faced with such discrimination in her own personal life. She also emphasized her parents' equal treatment of her and her brothers, while acknowledging the unequal treatment of women in the broader Iranian society.

Nasrin: I have seen in some families that they really discriminate between their daughters and their sons. In my family, however, my parents were really open; they treated us all equally. I even think that I had a louder [stronger] voice within the family than my brothers. [laughs] my mother a decision-maker, as well as my father. I had a lot of freedom in Iran in terms of my family's liberal views towards women. But, in terms of the society, well, there are a lot of restrictions in Iran, and even if the family is **open**, you can't do a lot of things because you just can't; the society doesn't accept it. Although, I have also seen families who really discriminate against [their] sons and daughters, the boys do as they wish, and the girls can't do anything, they just don't have any rights.

Shiva: Why do you think that is?

Nasrin: [Pause] I can't really say why, it could be lack of proper education, or the family's lack of economic resources that they don't stress women's equal rights. It's really hard to say. I really think it's mostly **ignorance**, people who really don't understand that it's not a hundred years ago, and that women can accomplish the same things that men can.

(September 3, 2002)

ج. دیدم توی بعضی خانواده ها که واقعا" بین دخترها و پسرهاشون تبعیض قائل میشن. ولی توی خانواده من پدر و مادرم خیلی باز بودن و همه ما رو باهامون یکسان رفتار می کردن. من حتی فکر می کنم که صدام توی خانواده از برادرهام بلندتر بود (خنده). مادرم یک زن مصمم بود، پدرم هم همین طور. من توی ایران خیلی آزادی داشتم، از این نظر که نظر خانواده ام نسبت به حقوق زن ها خیلی روشن بود. ولی توی جامعه، خب، خیلی محدودیت ها توی ایران هست، حتی اگه خانواده ات هم **open** باشه، خیلی کارها رو نمی تونی بکنی، چون نمی تونی، جامعه قبول نمی کنه. ولی در عین حال خانواده هائی رو هم دیدم که بین دختر و پسرشون فرق می ذارن. پسرها هر کاری دلشون می خواد می کنن، ولی دخترها هیچ کاری نمی تونن بکنن، اصلا" هیچ حق و حقوقی ندارن.

س. فکر می کنی چرا این طوریه؟

ج. (سکوت) واقعا" نمی تونم بگم چرا، شاید دلیلش کم سوادیه، شاید دلیلش اینه که خانواده از لحاظ مالی وضعش طوری نیست که بتونه روی حقوق مساوی زن ها تأکید کنه. واقعا" سخته گفتنش. من فکر می کنم که این بیشتر **ignorance** هستش که مردم بفهمن که بابا این دیگه صد سال پیش نیست، و زن ها می تونن همون چیزهائی و به دست بیارن که مردها می تونن.

Nasrin will graduate in the Fall of 2004. She “owes” her smooth transition in academia to taking summer courses which enabled her to have a “lighter than average” coursework during her full-time academic years. In our last phone conversation, she stated that she is “considering” taking the “MCAT” (Medical College Admission Test) after her graduation. She told me that while she is aware that her admission is not guaranteed and cannot even decide whether she “wants” to make a long-term personal commitment to the medical field, she is “curious” to know if she “can make it” into the medical school. In case she does not, graduate school is her “alternative choice”.

Nader: “Financial Security”

تضمین اقتصادی

Nader crafted a clear vision of his view of education as an instrument of gaining employment credentials. He expressed that the main goal of education is to equip an individual with necessary skills to enter and compete in the job market. Education, he believed, is financial security for those who do not have the advantage of family wealth and financial support.

Nader: I think everyone goes to university, and gets a degree, wants to ultimately find a job with [that degree]. Why else would you go to university for four years, study, spend [your] energy, time and money on it? To frame it and hang it on the wall?

ج. من فکر می کنم هر کسی میره دانشگاه و یک مدرک می گیره، می خواد نهایتاً باهاش کاری پیدا کنه. وگرنه واسه چه چهار سال بری دانشگاه، درس بخونی و انرژی، وقت و پولتو روش بذاری؟ که قاب بکنی و آویزون کنی روی دیوار؟

Shiva: So you think **education** is for economic reasons?

س. پس فکر می کنی **education** برای دلایل اقتصادی؟

Nader: Of course, everyone is trying to get an **education** for economic reasons, even those

who are rich. Well, they have an easier time [because] they don't have to worry like us. But they also want to get a good job, and preserve their status in society, and make even more money. I personally, prefer to be **educated** than wealthy and illiterate [uneducated]. But, well, money is a very good thing! [Laughs] And the only way people like me who don't have very rich family can move up and sustain themselves economically is through **education**. In fact, [education] is financial security.

(September 19, 2002)

ج. البته، هر کسی می خواد **education** بگیره برای دلایل اقتصادی، حتی اون هائی هم که پولدار هستن. خب اونها شرایطشون راحتتره، نباید مثل ماها نگران باشن، ولی اونها هم می خوان یک کار خوبی داشته باشن که بتونن مهقعیتشون رو توی جامعه حفظ کنن، و حتی پول بیشتری هم در بیارن. من خودم فکر می کنم که ترجیح میدم **educated** باشم تا پولدار و بیسواد. ولی خب پول هم چیز خیلی خوبیه! (خنده) و تنها راهی که کسانی مثل من که خانواده چندان پولداری ندارن بتونن خودشون رو بالا ببرن و از لحاظ مالی خودشونو تأمین کنن همین **education** اِه. در واقع تضمین اقتصادی

Nader, however, believed that in addition to the instrumental value of education in the economy, it also plays an important role in establishing and sustaining one's status in society. Similar to Nasrin, he talked about the implicit nature of his family's and Iranian society's views towards education. Reflecting back at his childhood experiences, he stated that while these educational expectations were never explicitly articulated, they were symbolized in the differential treatment directed at "educated" (تحصیل کرده) and "uneducated" (تأمین نکرده) individuals in his community. Being a "daneshjo" (دانشجو)—a university student—inherently implied a higher status and respect when compared to those with no university education.

Nader: My parents emphasized education for all their children, [all] boys and girls. I knew they expected me to study, but those expectations were never **communicated**. As Canadians say, **it was an unwritten rule**. It wasn't like they would tell their children, "my son or my daughter, you have to study hard and get into university". I think most Iranian families were like that. It was not directly **communicated**.

Shiva: It's very interesting. How do you think you picked up that these are the expectations?

Nader: [Pause] Maybe it is because, even as a child, you see the difference in the way people treat an educated person, and an uneducated one. I remember, when I was growing up, our neighbors' children were going to university, and everyone used to treat them with such respect. Being a **daneshjo** [university student] was a very important thing [laughs]. You held a special place in your community and family if you were a **daneshjo** [university student] going to university.

(September 19, 2002)

ج. پدر و مادر من درس خواندن رو برای همه تأکید کردن، پسر و دختر. فکر می‌کنم اونها توقع داشتن من درس بخونم، ولی اون توقعات رو هیچ‌وقت **communicated** نکردن. همینطور که کانادایی‌ها می‌گن، **it was an unwritten rule** این نبودش که به بچه‌هاشون بگن: "پسرم یا دخترم باید سخت درس بخونی که بتونی وارد دانشگاه بشی" من فکر می‌کنم اکثر خانواده‌های ایرانی این جور بودن، مستقیماً **communicated** نمی‌کردن.

س. خیلی جالبه، فکر می‌کنی جطوری این توقعات رو متوجه شدی؟

ج. (سکوت) شاید این بوده که حتی وقتی بچه بودم، میدیدم که طرز رفتار مردم با یک آدم تحصیل‌کرده و تحصیل‌نکرده چطوری فرق می‌کنه. یادم می‌آد وقتی وقتی بزرگ میشدم، بچه‌های همسایه‌ها که دانشگاه میرفتن، همه با یک احترامی باهاشون رفتار می‌کردن. دانشجو بودن خیلی چیز مهمی بود! (خنده) یک جای خاصی توی محل و خانواده داشتی اگه دانشجو بودی و دانشگاه می‌رفتی.

Nader criticized the Iranian educational system in its inability to keep competitive with institutions of higher education in more technologically advanced western countries. Nader observed that the lack of equipment, dated library resources, and unavailability of western academic journals and books have ultimately led to a less efficient quality of instruction, teaching and learning in Iran's institutions of higher education. But he mentioned, as did other participants, that the major obstacle faced by many Iranian youth is the lack of access to institutions of higher education in Iran. He asserted that while Iran's

public universities are tuition-free, they are limited in the number of students they admit, and therefore, are more difficult to get into. On the other hand, semi-private or private institutions such as the Azad University are less restricted, in terms of their academic requirements, but are also too costly for those with lesser financial resources.

Shiva: How do you compare Iranian and Canadian educational systems?

س. سیستم آموزشی ایران و کانادا رو چه جوری با هم مقایسه میکنی؟

Nader: [We] could talk about it for hours! [Laughs] The biggest problem in Iran's educational system is the lack of **access**, that education is not available to everyone. I always liked **technical** fields, and in Iran, I would have liked to study engineering or something in that field, but I wasn't accepted. Konkour is a big obstacle for high school students in Iran. I think that especially now, getting accepted into a university is mostly **political**, [and] not based on merits. I wasn't such a bad student myself, but just didn't do well on konkour. I was accepted to political science program [in Iran], and I had to go, I couldn't do anything else. A program you don't really like is better than nothing at all. But here, except for really high profile programs like medicine, you can basically do anything you want. **Education** is accessible and available to anyone who wants it.

(September 19, 2002)

ج. ساعت ها باید در موردش حرف زد! (خنده) بزرگ ترین مشکل سیستم آموزشی توی ایران همین نداشتن **access** بهشه. من همیشه رشته های **technical** دوست داشتم، و می خواستم یا مهندسی یا یک همچین رشته ای رو بخونم، ولی خب قبول نشدم. کنکور یک سد خیلی بزرگی بود برای دبیرستانی ها توی ایران. فکر می کنم بخصوص الآن، وارد شدن به به دانشگاه خیلی **political** و نه بر اساس لیاقت کسی. من خودم دانش آموز بدی، نبودم، ولی خیلی کنکور رو خوب ندادم. رشته علوم سیاسی قبول شدم و مجبور بودم که برم، کار دیگه ای نمی تونستم بکنم. بالاخره چیزی که دوست نداری بهتر از هیچ چیه. ولی اینجا غیر از رشته های سطح بالا مثلاً پزشکی، هر کاری بخوای میتونی بکنی. **Education** برای همه قابل دسترسیه، و هر کسی بخواد میتونه بره.

In addition to differences in access to institutions of higher education between Iran and Canada, Nader stated that the values towards education in the two countries also diverge. While in the Iranian culture, higher education implies

moving up the ladder of social prestige, in the Canadian culture, higher education is a means to gain intellectual and financial independence as well as the development of problem-solving abilities.

Nader: The value of **education** in Canada is different from Iran. Because here in Canada, it is easier to get into a university, it doesn't have the same value in terms of one's social status and **prestige** in Iran. Here, in Canada, the focus is on raising children who are independent, and are able to make critical decisions by the time they are 17 or 18. Going to university here is something that they do for different reasons, sometimes because they don't know what they want to do yet, and are experimenting different paths, sometimes because they want to leave home, and be away from the family. In general, going to university is like a life experience that helps them find out what they want to do with their lives. I don't mean that Canadian families don't care about their children's education, not at all. What I'm saying is that they don't have such excessive emphasis on university education as the Iranian families. They allow their children experiment and experience life, and find out what *they* [his emphasis] want to do.

(February 16, 2003)

Nader also talked about women's easier access to institutions of higher education in Canada which in addition to the West's more liberal views towards women's education and employment pave the road for Iranian women's entry into the academe.

ج. ارزش **education** توی ایران و کانادا خیلی فرق می‌کنه. چون توی کانادا راحت تره وارد دانشگاه بشی، اون ارزشی رو که توی ایران از نظر موقعیت اجتماعی و **prestige** داره اینجا نداره. اینجا، توی کانادا، اهمیت روی اینکه بچه هائی رو تربیت کنن که مستقل هستن، و می‌تونن تا سن ۱۷، ۱۸ سالگی تصمیم‌های مهم زندگی شون رو خودشون بگیرن. اینجا دانشگاه برای دلایل مختلف میرن. گاهی اوقات به خاطر اینکه هنوز نمی‌دونن میخوان توی زندگی شون چی کار کنن، و دارن راه‌های مختلف رو امتحان می‌کنن. گاهی اوقات می‌خوان از خونه برن و از خانواده دور باشن. به طور کل دانشگاه رفتن براشون یک تجربه‌ایه که بهشون کمک می‌کنه بفهمن چی کار می‌خوان توی زندگی بکنن. نمیگم که خانواده‌های کانادائی اهمیت نمیدن به تحصیل بچه هاشون، اصلاً. می‌خوام بگم که اون تأکید بیش از حد خانواده‌های ایرانی رو روی دانشگاه رفتن نمیگذارن. اجازه میدن که بچه هاشون زندگی رو تجربه کنن و بفهمن خودشون چی کار میخوان بکنن.

Nader: Iranian society is very difficult for women. Life is very difficult for Iranian women. Of course, there was a lot of pressure on women. Then, they came here, and well, the society is more liberal and open for them. They can work, they can go to school. Now, I am not talking about family problems now, but in overall the society is more open for them.

ج. جامعه ایران برای زن ها خیلی سخته. زندگی برای زن های ایرانی خیلی سخته. البته فشار زیادی روی زن ها بود. بعد آمدن اینجا، و خب، جامعه اینجا بازتر و آزادتره برای زن ها. می تونن کار کنن، می تونن مدرسه برن. در مورد مسائل خانوادگی حرف نمی زنم، ولی به طور کلی جامعه اینجا بازتره.

س. و جامعه ایرانی این طور نیست؟

Shiva: And the Iranian society isn't?

Nader: Well, not to this extent. [Pause] I mean, in Iran, it's not like women aren't encouraged to get an **education**, but it's difficult for everyone, men and women, to get and **education**. Plus, in Iran, there are still a lot of families that don't let their daughters go to university. I, myself, know a lot of families that their daughters got into a university program, but in a another town, and didn't let their daughters go.

ج. خب، نه به این اندازه. (مکث) یعنی توی ایران این طور نیست که زن ها تشویق نشن دنبال **education** برن. به علاوه توی ایران خیلی خانواده ها هنوز هستن که دخترهاشون دنبال **education** برن. من خودم خیلی خانواده ها رو می شناسم که دخترهاشون دانشگاه یک شهر دیگه قبول شدن ولی اجازه ندادن برن دانشگاه یک شهر دیگه.

س. برای چی بود؟

Shiva: Why was that?

Nader: Well, they didn't want their daughter to go away and live without their families. You see, there are always these problems. Many Iranians may encourage women's education, but there are also a lot of restrictions. It's not as, Canadians say, as **black and white** as we think [it is].

ج. خب، نمی خواستن دخترهاشون دور بشن و بدون خانواده زندگی کنن. ببین همیشه این مسائل وجود داشته. خیلی ایرانی ها ممکنه تحصیل زن ها رو تشویق کنن ولی محدودیت هائی هم وجود داره. ولی، همون طور که کانادائی ها میگن، این طور **black and white** نیست که فکر می کنیم.

(September 19, 2002)

For Nader, lack of family support seemed to be a major obstacle to overcome while studying in Canadian academia. Having to rely only on himself, and lack of a strong family network he had in Iran seemed to be a major barriers to academic achievement. He expressed that his financial difficulties which were

mainly the result of a lack of family support have further complicated his position as a student in Canadian higher education.

Nader: You can't even begin to compare the differences between the universities here and in Iran. In terms of equipment [and] **technology**, take for example, access to **computer labs**, it is a world of difference. Of course, it may have changed for the better in Iran since I left, but as they make progress in Iran, the same thing happens here too. I think in terms of quality of education, we will always walk behind western societies. But there are problems here too, which can affect how and what you study. I mean, for students like us who come as immigrants and don't have family to **support** us, it is very difficult. You can't rely on anyone but yourself. In Iran, first of all, public universities are free. And even if you go to the Azad university [private university], family is there to help you. Here, we have no family, [I mean] a family that will **support** you financially. That was one of the **advantages** of Iran's educational system.

Shiva: What are you referring to when you say "**advantages**"? Family **support**?

Nader: Yes, of course. Family **support**. Your family, even if they have very limited [financial] resources they will do anything for you to go through university with as fewer problems as you can. You don't have that here. At least, I [his emphasis] didn't have it. I am in the third year of the **computer science** program and can't even afford a **computer**. I have to go to the **lab** to do my **assignments**. I don't have the same **advantages** as others who have family support.

(February 16, 2003)

ج. اصلاً نمی‌تونیم شروع کنیم بگیم تفاوت دانشگاه‌های اینجا و ایران چی هستن. از نظر وسیله و **technology**، مثلاً دسترسی به **computer lab** یک دنیا اختلافه. البته ایران خیلی بهتر شده از زمانی که من آمدم بیرون، ولی هر چقدر توی ایران پیشرفت میشه، اینجا هم همون طوره. از نظر کیفیت تحصیلی، ما همیشه عقب‌تر از غرب هستیم. ولی اینجا هم مشکلاتی وجود داره که اثر میذاره چی و چه طوری درس می‌خونی. یعنی برای دانشجویانی مثل ما که مهاجر هستیم و خانواده‌ای نداریم که **support** بکنه، خیلی سخته. روی هیچ کس غیر از خودت نمی‌تونی تکیه کنی. اولاً توی ایران، دانشگاه‌های سراسری مجانی هستن، حتی اگر دانشگاه آزاد هم بری خانواده ات بهت کمک می‌کنه. اینجا خانواده نداریم، خانواده‌ای که بتونه از لحاظ مالی **support** کنه، این یکی از **advantages** های سیستم آموزشی ایران بود.

س. منظورت چیه وقتی می‌گی **advantages** ؟ **support** خانواده؟

ج. آره، همین طوره. **support** خانواده. خانواده ات حتی اگه محدودیت‌هایی هم که داشته باشن، برات همه کاری می‌کنن که با مشکلات کمتری دانشگاه بری. اینجا اون رو نداری. حداقل من نداشتم. من سال سوم **computer science** هستم و حتی یک **computer** هم نمی‌تونم تهیه کنم. باید برم به **lab** تا **assignments** ام رو انجام بدم. من مثل اون‌هایی که خانواده دارن، اون **advantage** رو ندارم.

Nader's statements refer to the important role of family in providing financial, as well as emotional and moral support for their children. Family support and their economic contribution significantly influence how children experience the educational process. Family assumes an imperative financial and emotional base for its members. It is for this reason that, as Nader stated, the "privilege" of having family by your side makes studying within the Iranian higher education more adventurous.

Nader graduated in 2004. I last talked to him on October 23, 2003.

Despite his many efforts, he has not been able to find a job in the computer industry. Currently, he is working part-time in retail and is facing financial difficulties. He is willing to relocate to anywhere in Canada and the United States if he can find employment. In our last phone conversation, he told me that he has been thinking about moving back to Iran, where he might be able to have better opportunities. However, after talking to family members and friends who are still residing in Iran, and being reminded of the adverse economic, political, and social situation of the country, he remains "optimistic" about his future in Canada. He believes that at some point, hopefully in the near future, the high tech industry will flourish again.

Cyrus: "Secret to our Survival!"

راز بقاً!

Similar to Nader, Cyrus also viewed education as a tool for economic advancement and the right of passage into a competitive job market. He

emphasized the pivotal role of education in helping him fulfill his duties and responsibilities as the “breadwinner” of his future family.

Cyrus: I view **education** as something that would teach you how to [survive] in the society. I think the goal of **education** is, well, first of all you have to feed yourself, and take care of yourself. This is the basic goal of **education**. Can you do anything without an education these days? Even to work **minimum paid jobs** you need to be a university student! [Laughs]. I only hope that by the time I finish [university] the **job market** is better than what it is right now. At the moment, I am not married but think that I have to start a family at some point, and my responsibility is to provide for them, and I have to carry that [responsibility] on my shoulders.

(October 4, 2002)

ج. من نظرم در مورد **education** به عنوان چیزیه که بهت یاد بده چطوری توی جامعه گلیم خودت رو از آب بکشی بیرون. من فکر میکنم که هدف **education** اینه که، اولاً باید شکم خودت رو سیر کنی، و از خودت نگه داری کنی. این ابتدائی ترین هدف **education** هست. این روزها میشه بدون **education** هیچ کاری کرد؟ حتی اگه بخوای **minimum paid jobs** بکنی، باید دانشجوی دانشگاه باشی! (خنده) من فقط امیدوارم که وقتی تمام کنم بتونم یک کاری پیدا کنم و وضعیت **job market** از اینی که الآن هست بهتر باشه. الآن ازدواج نکردم، ولی فکر کنم که یک زمانی باید تشکیل خانواده بدم، و مسئولیت نگهداریشون با منه، من باید این مسئولیت رو روی شونه های خودم قبول کنم.

Cyrus mentioned that he too, similar to other youth he knew during his school years in Iran, felt pressured by his family, the society, friends and relatives to pursue medicine and become a physician. He believed that in Iranian society “becoming a physician” (دکتر شدن) holds such a high status and value that not getting admitted into medical school leaves many Iranian youth with a “feeling of failure and emptiness” (احساس شکست و هیچ بودن). He stated that the desires and ideals of education, specifically “becoming a doctor/physician”, do not necessarily reflect the realities of the lives of many young people who find it difficult to fulfill their parents’ expectations.

Cyrus: My family, like all other Iranian families wanted us to become doctors! [Laughs] Is there anyone in Iran who didn't wish the same thing for [his or her] children? In Iran, every body's dream was to become a doctor, so was mine. But, well, the problem is that dreams and reality are two different things. In Iran, it's difficult to get into any university programs, much less medicine! [Laughs] Here [in Canada] it's difficult too. If you are an **immigrant** and don't have the financial **support** of your family, it's very hard to be accepted into medicine. But unfortunately, many Iranian parents don't understand these things, because they didn't have the same pressures [to get into medicine]. These unfounded expectations create a feeling of failure and emptiness in many Iranian youth. Dream and reality are two completely different things. As they say here: **Reality bites!** [Laughs].

(October 4, 2002)

ج. خانواده منم مثل همه خانواده های ایرانی دیگه می خواستن ما هم دکتر بشیم! (خنده) کسی هم بود توی ایران که این آرزو رو برای بچه هاش نداشته باشه؟ توی ایران آرزوی همه اینه که دکتر بشن. من خودم هم همین طور. ولی خب مسأله سر اینه که آرزو و واقعیت دو تا چیز خیلی متفاوت هستن. توی ایران که وارد دانشگاه شدن حتی یک رشته عادی کار حضرت فیله، دیگه چه برسه پزشکی! (خنده) اینجا هم یک جور دیگه سخته، اگه **immigrant** باشی و **support** خانواده، از نظر مالی میگم، نداشته باشی، خیلی سخته بتونی وارد پزشکی بشی. و خب متأسفانه پر و مادر ایرانی این چیزها رو اصلاً متوجه نمیشن، چون خودشون این فشار رو شون نبوده. این توقعات بیجا یک احساس شکست و هیچ بودن در خیلی بچه های ایرانی بوجود میاره. آرزو و واقعیت دو تا چیز کاملاً متفاوتن. به قول اینجائی ها **Reality bites!** (خنده)

Cyrus talked about the difficulties faced by immigrants in the new country. Similar to other participants, he acknowledged lack of family support, and limited financial resources as obstacles to the new immigrants' educational and academic aspirations and performance. But these difficulties, he stressed, do not necessarily deter many newcomers from pursuing higher education and trying to do the best they can in Canadian academia. Cyrus believed that the newcomers' desires and hopes for a more financially secure future play a significant role in affecting their struggles in higher education and their efforts to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. Cyrus resembled the experiences of an immigrant in the host country as being born again and having to "start from

zero" (از صفر شروع کردن). With no financial and social resources and support, education is the only option one has to gain financial independence and integrate into the host society.

Cyrus also acknowledged the value and place of education within the Iranian culture, and stated that these cultural values may be rooted in an individual's desire to create better opportunities and consequently a better life for their children. He asserted that while education may seem inaccessible for many Iranians for economic reasons; however, it does not deter many parents from struggling to provide educational opportunities for their children. Rich or poor, everyone wants to have a more comfortable life, and for many people education is the tool to reach this ideal regardless of where in the world they live.

Cyrus: **Education** has a special value in the Iranian culture. If you really want to get into the roots of it, I can't really say the roots are modern, or they have been there for a very long time. It is true that in the not so distant past, the majority of the population was illiterate. But I think even at that time, everyone wanted to go to school; at least they wanted it for their children. **Education** has become part of our culture, for better or for worse. Right now, in Iran, everywhere you turn, you see a university especially Azad University to which most [applicants] are accepted. Its only problem is the tuition fees that a lot of people can't afford. But [still] you see parents who work 18 hour a day, so that their children get an education. That shows that education is very important. Everyone wants their child to have a better future, and a better life, and **education** is the *secret to our survival*, wherever in the world we [happen] to be! [Laughs]

(October 4, 2002)

ج. **Education** یک جای خاصی توی فرهنگ ایرانی داره. اگه واقعا "بخوای وارد ریشه هاش بشی، نمیتونم بگم که ریشه هاش مدرن، یا اینکه خیلی قدمت دارن. این درسته که همین گذشته نه چندان دور اکثر مردم ایران بیسواد بودن، ولی حتی همون موقع هم مردم می خواستن مدرسه برن یا حداقل بچه هاشون. **Education** یک جزئی از فرهنگ ما شده حالا این یا خویه یا بده. الان نگاه کنی توی ایران همه جا یک دانشگاهی هست، بخصوص دانشگاه آزاد که اکثرا "قبول میشن، مشککش فقط پولشه که خیلی ها از عهده شون بر نمیآد. ولی می بینی پدر و مادر هائی که ۱۸ ساعت در روز کار می کنن که بچه هاشون بتونن برن درس بخونن. همین نشون میده درس خوندن خیلی مهمه. همه میخوان بچه هاشون زندگی بهتر داشته باشن، **Education** راز بقا آدم هاست هر کجای دنیا که باشی! (خنده)

Cyrus talked about his perceptions of his family's equal treatment of men and women, and how they viewed and valued women's education and employment to be as significant and valuable as men's career and education. In explaining whether the concept of higher education holds different meanings for men and women, Cyrus stated that women's education is as equally important as men's education and should be emphasized as having equivalent importance and significance, as was stressed by his own family. However, he commented that within the socially and culturally defined structure of family in Iranian society, "a man's education is more integral to establishing the economic integrity of the whole family, as it is the man's money that should be spent on the household and not the woman's". An "educated woman" (زن تحصیل کرده) holds a valued place within her family and society," but her income should, at best, supplement a man's income as the family's primary economic resource.

Cyrus acknowledged his parents' different treatment of him and his sister, which he attributed to the Iranian cultural views that emphasize the importance of women's protection. However, he believed that the different treatment of men and women within the Iranian family and society does not imply women's inevitable inferiority, rather it points to the traditional values of respect for women as sisters, daughters, and mothers.

Cyrus: I never felt that our parents were stricter with my sister; on the contrary, sometimes it was the opposite. She was the older child; the older sister, so her words carried more weight than mine; she used to tell me what to do, and what not to do, sometimes even more than my

ج. من هیچ وقت حس نکردم که پدر و مادرم با خواهرم سختگیرتر بودن. از طرفی فکر می کنم که بر عکس بود. اولاد اول بود، خواهر بزرگتر بود، بنابراین حرفش بیشتر از من میرفت. عادت داشت که به من بگه چی کار بکن چی کار نکن، حتی بیشتر از

mother, and I think because we were closer in age, I felt that she understood me more than my parents, for example, my mother. But I am thinking about it right now as I have thought about it before, and I think, there was some sort of differential treatment there. It wasn't really unequal relationship; it was more, in terms of women being more protected. For example, my sister couldn't go certain places, or she couldn't stay out late at night, even at her friends, but *I could* [his emphasis], but that didn't mean that my parents felt she was inferior to me.

(October 4, 2002)

مادرم. و فکر می‌کنم چون از لحاظ سنی به هم نزدیک تر بودیم، بیشتر از پدر و مادرم، مثلاً "مادرم، منو می‌فهمید. اما الآن که بهش فکر می‌کنم، همون طور که قبلاً" هم کردم، متوجه میشم که یک تفاوت هائی توی طرز رفتار با ما بود. نمی‌گم که رابطه غیر عادلانه بود، بیشتر از اون، این جوری بود که زن‌ها حمایت بشن. مثلاً "خواهر من نمی‌تونست بعضی جاها بره، یا نمی‌تونست تا آخر شب بیرون باشه، حتی با دوستاش. ولی من می‌تونستم. ولی معنی اش این نیست که پدر و مادرم اونو کمتر از من میدیدن.

It is noteworthy that these comments concur with statements made by the other participants. Cultural perceptions of women's need to be "protected", do not automatically contribute to their unequal status in relation to other members of the family and the broader society. As Cyrus stressed, cultural and social restrictions convey a desire for women's protection and not their "inferior" status.

My last conversation with Cyrus was on October 14, 2003. Cyrus also graduated in 2004, and like Nader, he has not been able to find a job in the computer industry. He is now working as a temporary contractor with the federal government of Canada. Cyrus is hopeful about the future of high tech in North America, and believes that the situation will improve by the year 2005. Although he hopes to find full-time employment in his technical field, he is planning to start his own business, and believes that his present job is providing him with the necessary experience and professional skills he might need in the future.

Metaphors and Symbols of Representation

The interview data revealed common elements in perceptions and experiences of individual participants. The data also indicated a wide range of diversity among the individual men's and women's interpretations of those experiences and perceptions. Higher education was perceived as playing an important role in all their lives; however, the meanings they constructed and attributed to the value of higher education were influenced by their unique historical and social stances as men, women, and first-generation immigrants. These meanings and values emerged as each individual's unique social world was constructed from the complex intertwined interactions among their cultural values and perceptions, family backgrounds, socio-economic levels, gender, age and marital status. Although the participants did not set the same educational goals and academic aspirations, they all embraced "education" as a crucial factor in the making of their social and personal worlds and establishing a place and space for themselves in society.

The participants connected the value of higher education to different social and individual dimensions such as upward socio-economic mobility, social prestige and respect, employment accreditation, and social awareness. From their narratives, it appeared that these meanings and values towards education were continuously in the process of being made and remade, and never constant and unchanging. Their accounts revealed how they perceived the role of education in their lives and the making of who they are as individual men and women, and in relation to others in the family and the community. Based on their

description of the significance of higher education, four themes emerged.

Education was viewed as 1) a social and cultural capital, 2) a means for upward socio-economic mobility, 3) a journey towards personal fulfillment and intellectual growth, and 4) a gendering process. In the next section, I critically examine these themes.

Education as Social and Cultural Capital

Education seemed to play a critical role in the lives of all eight participants, regardless of their gender, age, socio-economic level, marital status and family educational background. They all emphasized the importance placed on education within the Iranian culture and society as well as within their families. The participants' narratives revealed the existence of an intricate relationship and connection between cultural values and how an individual perceives the role of education in shaping and defining his or her personal and social lives. They stated that through acquiring higher education, they could walk on a path that for them and other Iranians – members of their families and the community – symbolizes social status, achievement and success, and a greater social awareness. They viewed education as a cultural and social capital which enabled them to construct and play out their roles as “educated individuals” within their schools and their communities.

Education as social status and prestige: A cultural “obsession”

All participants had a clear idea of the significance of being an educated person within the Iranian culture. A person's educational level is associated with the social status and respect they receive by the members of their family and community. The participants all stated that they felt a strong need to pursue education; a need which was transmitted to them through their family, friends, relatives and the wider Iranian society. Samira interpreted the Iranian values towards education as a “cultural obsession” which pushed her to seek higher education, and to “become a somebody” in her life. In her essay to an Iranian news website, Syma Sayyah talked about her similar interpretation of Iranian culture's obsession with culture, regardless of the potential for economic and financial success. She wrote:

We are a nation obsessed with degree, and please include me in that too. Is it supposed to be the route to a better life or just prestige of an academic degree? Do we really end up being better individuals, parents, friends or employees because of the educations that we have taken? I must admit one must truly wonder why as a nation, we suffer from this *obsession* [italics added], the paper degree syndrome I call it. (“A friends' visit/Iran's brain drain issue,” Payvand News, [on line]. Available: <http://www.payvand.com/news/03/nov/1153.html>, 2003)

Similarly, Mitra, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus, while emphasizing the instrumental value of education in creating a financially secure future, pointed to the role of education as a “social signal” (Shavarini, 2001) which indicates the status of the individual compared to the other members of the community. The awareness of culturally defined and prescribed meanings of education was also evident in Nasrin and Roxana's narratives who mentioned personal fulfillment and a need

for intellectual growth as the driving force behind their desire to become educated. Drawing from their personal experiences growing up in Iran, the participants acknowledged that the “educated person” occupies a higher status within the society, a status which is not accorded to the “uneducated,” regardless of their actual financial wealth. Cyrus elaborated in this conversation:

Cyrus: There is this thing about **education** and being educated [in Iran]. It is true that money is also important, but with education, you have a certain kind of respect and acceptance that you can't have otherwise. Of course, in Iranian society, if you are rich, , either in Iran, or anywhere else in the world, other Iranians respect you. But it's not the same kind of respect, especially if you aren't educated. There is always this thing that you are an *illiterate rich* [person] which is actually kind of an insult! [Laughs] So, what is the morale of the story? Wealth is always good, gives you power, and material things, but **education**, [really], **education** is what gives you respect.

(January 21, 2003)

Other participants shared Cyrus' opinions. Roxana talked about the Iranian public's perceptions of an educated person as deserving of respect and “special treatment” in the society.

Roxana: I don't know if you remember this, but had you ever noticed that in Iran, when you went to buy something, at the grocery store or the butcher shop, and you were well dressed, and looked presentable, they always called you “Mr. Doctor”, “Mrs. Doctor” or “Mr. Engineer”? They wouldn't even know who you are! [Laughs]

ج. یک چیزیه در مورد تحصیل و تحصیلکرده بودن. درستیه که پول مهمه، ولی با **education** یک احترام و پذیرفته شدگی داری که بدون اون نداری. توی جامعه ایرانی، چه توی ایران و یا هر جای دیگه دنیا، اگه پولدار باشی، البته ایرانی های دیگه بهت احترام میدارن. که این اون احترامی نیست که وقتی تحصیلکرده هستی. همیشه این هست که یک بیسواد پولداری، که در واقع یک توهینه! (خنده) پس نتیجه اخلاقی داستان چیه؟ ثروت همیشه خوبه، بهت قدرت و مادیات میده، ولی **education**، حالا، **education** برات احترام میآره.

ج. نمی دونم اگه یادت بیاد، ولی من توی ایران متوجه شده بودم که وقتی میرفتی خرید، و خوب لباس پوشیده بودی و ظاهر مرتب بود، صدات می زدن “آقای دکتر”، “خانم دکتر”، “آقای مهندس”؟ اصلا نمیدونستن کی هستی! (خنده) س. (خنده) خیلی جالبه، من زیاد خرید نکردم

Shiva: [Laugh] That's very interesting! I didn't do much shopping when I was in Iran, but what you said is very interesting. Why do you think that was?

Roxana: Because you *looked educated*. Being educated means you have a better job, you look more presentable, and you deserve more respect. Even the nastiest shopkeepers would treat you with more respect. How can I explain it? You get *special treatment*. That shows that education puts you in a higher place than everyone else. Even *looking educated* [italics added] is good enough! [Laughs]

(August 23, 2002)

وقتی ایران بودم، ولی حرفی که زدی خیلی جالب بود. چرا فکر می کنی این طوری بود؟

ج. شاید این بود که قیافه ات **educated** بود. تحصیلکرده بودن یعنی اینکه شغل بهتری داری، قیافه ات بهتره، و لایق احترام بیشتری هستی. حتی پرروترین کاسب ها هم بیشتر برات احترام قائل بودن. چه جوری بگم؟ **special treatment** می گرفتی. این نشون میده که درس خوندن تو رو در یک جای بالاتری از همه دیگه قرار میده. حتی درس خونده به نظر رسیدن هم خودش کافیه! (خنده)

Similarly, Nader talked about the importance of being a “danesh-jo” (دانشجو - university student) in his community, and the respect granted to the individuals who were pursuing higher education. For many of the participants, the culturally defined social status and prestige was symbolized in studying medicine. “Becoming a doctor” (دکتر شدن) marked the highest level of education and social prestige one can achieve in the society and within the family. Samira, Roxana, Nahid, Cyrus and Mitra openly talked about their parents’ expectations for them to study Medicine. Samira described her mother’s disappointment at the prospect of “not having a doctor in the family.”

Samira: My mother always wanted us to study medicine. When my brothers, who are older than I am, got into engineering programs, I was still in high school. She used to say to me, “well, those two didn’t get into medicine, but you should try. One of my children *has* [her

ج. مادرم همیشه می خواست که ما پزشکی بخونیم. وقتی برادرام که از من بزرگترن مهندسی قبول شدن من هنوز دبیرستانی بودم. همش می گفت “خب اونها وارد پزشکی نشدن، ولی تو باید سعی ات رو بکنی. یکی از بچه های من باید دکتر بشه!” (خنده) خب، آخرشم نشدم. فکر می کنم خیلی

emphasis] to become a doctor!" [Laughs] well, at the end, I didn't. I think she was really disappointed. She used to say, "so and so's daughter or son are doctors, what I did I do wrong?" [Laughs]

(July 25, 2002)

ناامید شده بود. همش می گفت "دختر و پسر
فلانی دکترن، مگه من اشتباهی کردم؟" (خنده)

Nahid talked about having felt intense regret and depression after making a mistake which cost her the medical school.

Nahid: I was always a good student. From the beginning, I wanted to study medicine. No one ever told me that I had to go to university. I just knew that after I finish high school, the next step was going to university. Medicine was my dream, because I was a good student, and I always thought I deserved to study a high-ranking field. When I wrote the **konkour**, my score was also very high, enough to get me into a good medical school, but I made a big mistake when I was choosing my field of study, and chose microbiology instead. It was the dumbest mistake. I just chose the wrong subject **code**, and my life was changed forever. After I found out about my mistake, I wanted to turn down my admission, and try for the **konkour** the next year. But I was afraid that I might not do as well and get a lower score. So, I was stuck with microbiology. But there was always a feeling in me that no, this is not what I deserved. I even liked what I was studying, but I just couldn't help thinking that. I *could have become a physician* [Italics added], and instead I was becoming a *microbiologist* [Italics added]! It was horrible! I *really deserved more*.

(March 5, 2003)

ج. من همیشه شاگرد خوبی بودم. از همون اول هم می خواستم پزشکی بخونم. هیچ کس هم بهم نگفت باید بری دانشگاه، فقط می دونستم که وقتی دبیرستان رو تموم کنم، قدم بعدی دانشگاه رفتنه. پزشکی هم آرزوم بود، چون شاگرد خوبی بودم و همیشه فکر می کردم که لیاقت دارم وارد یک رشته بالا بشم. وقتی که کنکور رو دادم رتبه ام اون قدر بالا بود که وارد یک دانشگاه پزشکی خوب بشم، ولی موقع تعیین رشته یک اشتباه بزرگ کردم و رشته زیست شناسی سلولی جاش زدم. احمقانه ترین اشتباه بود. کد درسی رو اشتباه زدم و زندگی ام تا ابد تغییر کرد بعد از اینکه متوجه اشتباهم شدم، می خواستم که پذیرشم رو رد کنم و برای کنکور سال بعد تقاضا بدم. ولی ترسیدم که به اون خوبی ندم، و رتبه ام پائین تر بشه. با همون گیر افتادم. ولی یک احساسی درم بود که نه، این لایقم نبود. حتی از اون رشته هم خوشم میومد، ولی نمی تونستم جلوی خودم رو بگیرم. من می تونستم پزشک بشم، ولی به جاش زیست شناس شدم! وحشتناک بود! لیاقتم بیشتر بود.

According to the participants, “studying medicine” and “becoming a doctor” marks the pinnacle of an individual’s academic achievement, and therefore the highest level of status and prestige granted to a member of the family or community. The emphasis on medical fields, as elaborated by Nahid, Samira and Cyrus, creates a hierarchical system wherein there exists “low ranking” programs and “high ranking” programs, as I explained in Chapter Two, in the competitive Iranian educational system. Consequently, acceptance into the field of Medicine represents social status, prestige, and respect incomparable to any other degree programs.

Education as a signal of “success” and “achievement”

Each of the participants, explicitly or implicitly, asserted the importance of education and particularly a university degree in symbolizing the “success” of the individuals in the Iranian society. A successful person is one who has attended higher education, holds a university degree and works as a professional. For them, higher education, for them, symbolized “achievement”, much the same way that lack of a university degree represented “failure,” and as Samira pointed out, feelings of “underachievement”, “shame” and “guilt”.

The need to succeed and achieve was represented in the participants’ struggles in both the Iranian and Canadian higher education system. However, in Iran, as they all insisted, a university degree signaled a greater level of success in the family and the wider society. This was attributed to the systematic problems with the multi-phase admission procedure to the institutions of higher

education in Iran which include the Konkour—the national entrance admission test—and the subsequent interviews whose main goal is to identify and exclude minorities, political dissidents and secular Muslims. This intense nature of the process of admission into institutions of higher education, signals a high level of competence and success of those who are admitted. As Nader pointed out:

Nader: In Iran, we had to overcome one barrier after the other. It wasn't all academic either, especially in the eighties and early nineties, the process of getting into university was very political, didn't have much to do with your grades or things like that. But regardless, it has always been difficult to get into a university in Iran. And when you do get in, it is a big deal; it's really *breaking the moon into half!* [Laughs] [The proverb in italics refers to miracle of breaking the Moon in Mecca by prophet Mohammad (sa), as a response to a challenge put forward by the non-believers. Literally, means, "a miracle", or "doing the impossible"]

(September 19, 2002)

ج. توی ایران باید همین طور سختی پشت سر می گذاشتی. فقط هم مشکل درسی نبود، بخصوص توی ۸۰ سال های ۹۰ وارد دانشگاه شدن خیلی مسأله سیاسی بود، خیلی هم به نمره و این جور چیزها ارتباط نداشت. ولی غیر از اون هم، دانشگاه رفتن همیشه توی ایران سخت بوده. و وقتی هم که وارد بشی، یک چیز خیلی بزرگیه، انگار که شق القمر کردی! (خنده)

What was interesting was that the participants, while emphasizing the significance of a university degree in determining the "success" and "achievement" of individuals insisted upon the irrelevance of education, and attending a university degree to a person's identity and characteristics. As Nasrin argued:

Nasrin: I don't think **education** affects who you are as a person. It may change the way you think, and look at the world, but it will not change your character.

Shiva: What do mean [when you say education] "changes the way you think"?

Nasrin: For example, [education] may change the way you raise your children and solve your financial situation, but it will not affect your character, whether you are good or bad, is irrelevant to how **educated** you are.

(February 15, 2003)

ج. فکر نمی کنم که **education** تأثیری داشته باشد که چه جور آدمی هستی. ممکنه طرز فکر تو تغییر کنه و اینکه چه جوری به دنیا نگاه میکنی، ولی شخصیت آدم رو تغییر نمیده.

س. منظورت از اینکه نظر آدم رو نسبت به دنیا تغییر میده چیه؟

ج. برای مثال ممکنه تأثیر بذاره چه جوری بچه هات رو تربیت می کنی، چه جور مسائل مالی تو حل می کنی ولی روی شخصیت تأثیر نداره، آدم خوب یا بد بودن هیچ ربطی به اینکه چقدر **educated** هستی نداره.

It is noteworthy that while the disconnection between education and "character building" was underlined by Nasrin and other participants, they all believed that education should, in fact, attribute to the creation of better citizens who are socially responsible. The participants commented that whilst such an ideal is desirable, it is not intrinsically realistic.

"Savad" (سواد) as social literacy

Education played an important role in the social lives of the participants.

In addition to being a symbol of social status and achievement, being an educated person was a key factor in the development of individuals' social literacy. Although each person's definition of social literacy varied, they all emphasized the function of education as a "tool kit" in building social relations and connections to others. Nahid interpreted social literacy as the ability to connect to others and create social relations and interactions. "Savad" (سواد)

which in Persian (or Farsi) is translated to mean "literacy", is viewed in a new light as the development of social skills and abilities. The educated person or the "ba-savad" (باسواد) is the individual who possess social awareness and ability to build and create strong inter-personal relationships with others in the family and the community (Street, 1994). As Nahid clarified:

Nahid: Of course, education should also help you to be a more socially aware person. I mean, take for example, the person who is *ba-savad* [italics added] and compare to the person who is not, the *bi-savad* [italics added]. There are huge differences between the ways these two people look at the world.

Shiva: In which ways?

Nahid: [Pause] for example, see, what I mean is that the *ba-savad* [the educated] is more aware [about] how to connect to other people and function in the society, and relate to other people. When I was working in Iran, I always felt that I was more at ease with the educated people, because I could identify with them, and they [could identify] with me. I don't mean that the uneducated are less or for example, inferior, or that I was snubbing them, no, not at all. But what I mean is that I knew the same things as the educated person, things that the uneducated didn't know, because they didn't have any exposure to it. And it is also difficult for the uneducated to relate and connect to the educated too, because they also don't understand their [the educated persons'] way of thinking.

(March 5, 2003)

ج. البته، درس خوندن بهت کمک می کنه که از نظر اجتماعی آگاه تر باشی. یعنی مثلاً" اگه یکی باسواده، در مقایسه با اونیه که بی سواده. یک تفاوت بزرگیه بین این که اون دو نفر چه جوری به دنیا نگاه می کنن.

س. چه جوری؟

ج. (مکث) مثلاً" ببین، وقتی یکی باسواده، آگاهی بیشتر داره، و بهتر می تونه با مردم ارتباط برقرار کنه، و توی جامعه باشه. وقتی من توی ایران کار می کردم، همیشه فکر می کردم با مردم تحصیلکرده راحت ترم، برای اینکه بهشون نزدیک تر احساس می کنم، و اونها با من. نمیگم که تحصیل نکرده ها کمترن و یا مثلاً پست ترن، یا مثلاً من خودمو می گیرم، نه، اصلاً. منظورم اینه که من یک آدم تحصیلکرده مثل هم میدونیم، چیز هائی میدونیم که یک تحصیل نکرده نمیدونه به این خاطر که ندیده. و همون طور برای یک تحصیل نکرده سخته که با یک تحصیلکرده ارتباط برقرار کنه، چون نمی فهمه که چه جوری فکر می کنن.

Similarly, Yalda interpreted social literacy or “savād” as the individual’s meaningful experiences which are examined and explored in light of problem-solving skills and critical and analytical abilities developed within the context of education.

Yalda: When your level of *savad* [italics added] is higher, well, of course, you have more **knowledge**, you know how to look at things **critically**, **analyze** them, and see them in a different way. You learn how to function in society more easily. What do they say in Iran? You can find your path more easily. [Pause] You have to be able to use your **knowledge**, and choose the path you want and walk in that direction. In my opinion, [pause], education, and it doesn’t matter at what level, it could be high school, university, doctoral level, whatever, it really doesn’t matter, it has to be able to help you make connections with the society, that we will learn to live in the society productively.

(February 17, 2003)

ج. وقتی که سطح سوادت بالاتر باشه، خوب، **knowledge** هم بیشتره، میدونی که چه طور به مسائل **critically** نگاه کنی، **analyze** شون کنی، و یک جور متفاوت ببینیشون. یاد می گیری که چه طوری توی جامعه راحت تر جا بیفتی. چی میگن توی ایران، راهتو راحت تر پیدا می کنی. (مکث) چی میگن توی ایران، راهتو راحت تر پیدا می کنی. باید بتونی اون **knowledge** رو استفاده کنی و توی اون راهی که انتخاب می کنی قدم برداری. به نظر من، تحصیل، مهم نیست در چه مقطعی باشه، دبیرستان، دانشگاه، مرحله دکترا، هر چی، واقعا مهم نیست، باید بهت کمک کنه با جامعه مرتبط باشی، که یاد بگیری چه طوری توی جامعه مفید زندگی کنی.

Yalda’s statement points to the role of literacy in encouraging individuals’ sense of self and function within the society. In other words, the significant function of *savad* is its potential to raise social and individual consciousness and agency in relation to other members of the community. Interestingly, all participants acknowledged the value of *savad* (سواد) or social literacy. In essence, *savad* symbolized individual’s ability to relate and connect to others in the community, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

Education as Ticket for Upward Socio-Economic Mobility

The importance of education in facilitating upward socio-economic mobility was acknowledged by all. They pointed out that higher education does not inevitably lead to accumulation of wealth and material possessions; rather, its significance lies in the potential to provide opportunities which would have been unattainable otherwise. Higher education represented a level and form of economic success which was valued not only by the individual participants, but also by the members of their family and community. The importance of a university degree was both in helping these individuals to enter a competitive job market, and also as an *immigrant's* only possible way of improving his or her status in the host society. According to the participants, desire to pursue higher education also symbolized the struggles of the underprivileged and the working class to move up the socio-economic ladder in the society, be it in Iran or Canada.

Right of passage to the job market

The degree of importance granted to the instrumental function of a university degree varied amongst the individual participants. While all men and women seemed to be cognizant of the significance of university credentials, Nader, Cyrus and Mitra regarded acquiring a university degree as a strategy for economic advancement and gaining access to an ever-competitive job market. In one of our conversations Nader commented:

Nader: When I came to Canada, I wanted to study and get a university degree. Without a university degree you cannot get a job here. Of course, it wasn't all for the sake of a degree and job, but it was a pretty good reason! I could do it only through education. As they say [in Canada] it is the **right of passage** to get a job.

(September 19, 2002)

ج. من وقتی اومدم کانادا، می خواستم درس بخونم و یک مدرک دانشگاهی بگیرم. بدون مدرک دانشگاه، اینجا نمی تونی کار پیدا کنی. البته همش هم به خاطر مدرک و کار نبود، ولی همون هم دلیل خیلی خوبی بود! فقط با درس خوندن می تونستم این کار رو بکنم. توی کانادا میگن، این یک **right of passage** هست که کار پیدا کنی.

While economic advancement through an accreditation-acquiring process was considered to be *one* of the reasons to pursue higher education, it was emphasized as a key factor in completing a university degree. Cyrus further illuminated this point:

Cyrus: Money and material things are not necessarily the main goal of going to university; at least it wasn't for me. And I think a lot of other people think the same way. Plus, you don't make that much money from education anyways, unless you have a great **idea** and have your own **business**. But money had been definitely the motivating force behind getting into university. If it's not the most important thing, it is still very important. Without money, you can't pay rent, you can't feed yourself; basically you can't do much. For many, education is the way to make money and improve their situation economically.

(October 4, 2002)

ج. پول و چیزهای مادی لزوماً دلیل اصلی دانشگاه رفتن نیستن، حداقل نه برای من. من فکر می کنم خیلی مردم دیگه هم همین طور فکر می کنن. به علاوه با تحصیل پول چندان هم در نیامیزی مگر مگر اینکه یک **idea** خوبی داشته باشی و بندازیش توی **business** خودت. ولی قطعاً پول یک مشوقی بوده برای دانشگاه رفتن. اگه مهم ترین چیز نباشه، باز هم دلیل مهمیه. بدون پول نمی تونی اجاره خونه بدی، نمی تونی شکم تو سیر کنی، کلاً کار خاصی نمی تونی بکنی. برای خیلی ها تحصیل یک راهیه که پول در بیارن و وضع اقتصادی شون رو بهتر کنن.

University credentials, however, represented different meanings and values to different people, as stressed by the participants. For the masses of the underclass, it symbolized class struggles and efforts to move up the socio-

economic ladder. For the middle class, it represented a wish to maintain their status and affirming their middle class life style. For the members of the upper class, it signified efforts to secure their already-established position as affluent and wealthy.

The path to immigrants' integration

Connected to the economic value of a university degree, the participants also stressed the “necessity” of education in the lives of immigrants and newcomers. They commented on their financial situation in Canada, and talked about lack of economic resources were mainly due to their lower socio-economic status in the Canada. The following excerpt from my conversation with Nader further illuminated this observation.

Nader: Without education, you can't do anything here. We are immigrants, and this is the reality of our lives. There is not much else we can do. Even with an education, it is difficult to get a job, and make a living; imagine you don't even have that. Immigrants really do not have any other choices. They have to study and go to university [and] get an education.

ج. بدون درس خوندن، هیچ کاری نمی تونی اینجا بکنی. ما مهاجریم و این واقعیت زندگی ماست. چندان کار دیگه ای نمی تونیم بکنیم. حتی با تحصیلات هم سخته کار گیر آوردن و تلاش معاش کردن. حالا فکرشو بکن که اونم نداری. مهاجرا خیلی انتخاب دیگه ای ندارن. باید درس بخونن، دانشگاه برن و تحصیل بکنن.

(September 19, 2002)

The limited financial resources available to immigrants served as an additional incentive to pursue higher education in order to integrate into the Canadian society. I also have to note that in this particular context, participants

referred to the concept of “integration” as the potential for “economic independence and sustenance” in the communities they were living in. Mitra, who openly commented about the financial problems she had been facing since her immigration to Canada, eloquently talked about her “need” as an immigrant for financial independence through obtaining a university degree.

Mitra: In Iran, we weren't very rich, but we were living a privileged life. When we came here, we were faced with a lot of problems, I mean financial problems. Of course, I want to have a better life. I am an *immigrant*. This is the reality of my life. I need education to give me a better life. I will always be an *immigrant* here, but at least, one with a job and money and education. I want a better life. If I wanted to work at **McDonald's**, I would stay in my own country. I didn't come to Canada to **flip burgers**.

Shiva: You think education is important for immigrants?

Mitra: of course, it is! There is no other choice. What else can you do without an education? How else can you get a job? You won't have any other opportunities open to you.

(March 11, 2003)

ج. توی ایران، ما خیلی پولدار نبودیم، ولی زندگی مرفهی داشتیم. وقتی که اومدیم اینجا، خیلی مشکلات زیاد بود، مشکلات مالی منظورمه. البته البته که من می خوام یک زندگی بهتری داشته باشم. من یک *immigrant* هستم. این واقعیت زندگی منه. من باید درس بخونم که زندگی بهتری داشته باشم. من همیشه یک *immigrant* خواهم بود اینجا، ولی حداقل یک کاری، یک پولی، و یک تحصیلی دارم. من یک زندگی بهتر می خوام. اگه می خواستم **McDonald's** کار کنم، توی کشور خودم می موندم. من کانادا نیامدم که **flip burgers** کنم.

س. فکر می کنی تحصیل برای مهاجرها مهمه؟

ج. آره که مهمه! انتخاب دیگه ای ندارن. چیکار می تونی بکنی بدون تحصیل؟ چه طوری می تونی کار پیدا کنی؟ هیچ راه دیگه ای برات باز نیست.

Other participants also acknowledged the invaluable role of education in helping newcomers to economically integrate into their host communities. Yalda viewed education as a “reward” in exchange for the otherwise unpleasant experiences of immigration and leaving one's own country, as she states in the following excerpt:

Yalda: When immigrants come here, they leave a lot of things behind, your family, your friends, your home, not to mention your jobs and the relative financial security you had in your own country. But with going to school and getting an education and, God willing [laughs] a good job afterwards, you can at least get a *reward* for all those things that you had to leave behind. That's the least we deserve after all that we lost.

ج. وقتی مهاجران میآیند اینجا، خیلی چیزها رو جا میذارن، خانواده ات، دوستات، خونه ات، دیگه بگیر کارت و اون رفاه مالی نسبی که توی کشور خودت داشتی. ولی با مدرسه رفتن و تحصیل کردن و بعد از اون انشاالله (خنده) یک کار خوب گیر آوردن، می تونی یک پاداشی بگیری برای همه اون چیزهایی که پشت سرت گذاشتی. این حداقل جبران اون چیزهایی است که از دست دادیم.

(February 17, 2003)

Regardless of their family's socio-economic status in Iran, all participants acknowledged having had encountered financial difficulties after their immigration to Canada. The realities of living life as an "Immigrant" which implied limited financial resources and lack of family's economic support further influenced and developed their perspectives towards higher education as a means for economic integration in the host country. As *Yalda* emphasized in the previous quote, education and employment are "rewards" which give the individual the ability to move upwards in the socio-economic ladder. This may indeed compensate for the lost network of family and friends, and the linguistic and financial barriers they have had to face in a new environment.

Education as an Experience of Personal and Intellectual Growth

Although the participants viewed higher education as social status, and a means for economic advancement, they also underlined the importance of education in enriching the personal and intellectual aspects of their lives. Pursuing higher education was regarded as walking down a path of spiritual fulfillment and intellectual development. Notwithstanding the diverse nature of

the participants' experiences, they appeared to value education as a process of transformation and self-discovery.

Education as a spiritual journey

Throughout our conversations, the participants, explicitly or implicitly, highlighted the role of education in shaping and defining who they are, how they view themselves and how they relate to others in their lives at a personal level. They regarded education as playing an invaluable role in creating a sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction with their stances in their personal and social lives. Samira's desire to "become a somebody" extended to a deeper and more spiritual view of education as a path to inner happiness and satisfaction with her "self". She stated:

Samira: For me, [education] is solely for the purpose of feeling better about myself in my discipline. It is to your economic advantage to have a [university degree], but for me, personally, it is very important to have a higher goal, and that is the more important reason. But I mean, I may have to get my Masters and then wait to get my PhD. I will have to work until I really know what I want to do in my life, and if I want to continue in this discipline, but it is *very important* to me to get at least a university degree. It makes me satisfied, it makes me feel that I have accomplished something in my life, not for the sake of others, but for myself, for my own self.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. برای من تنها راهیه که می تونم احساس بهتری داشته باشم نسبت به توی اون رشته ای که می خونم. این به نفع مالیته که یک مدرک داشته باشی. ولی برای من شخصا این مهم تره که یک هدف بالاتر داشته باشم، و این مهم ترین دلیله. ولی منظورم اینه که ممکنه فوق لیسانسم رو بگیرم و صبر کنم تا دکترام رو بگیرم. باید کار کنم تا بدونم واقعا چکار می خوام توی زندگی ام بکنم، و آیا اصلا می خوام توی این رشته بمونم. ولی این برام خیلی مهمه که حداقل یک مدرک دانشگاهی داشته باشم. این منو راضی می کنه، احساس می کنم که یک چیزی توی زندگی ام بدست آوردم، نه به خاطر دیگران، ولی به خاطر خودم، فقط برای خودم.

Similarly, Roxana talked about the personal value and worth of education in making her a happier individual, and concluded that a self-satisfied person is also one who is capable of creating healthier social and personal relations with others.

Roxana: [higher education] is mostly personal for me. I like to be a somebody for myself. I think with studying and learning I can satisfy myself. That's the most important thing: to be a happy and self-fulfilled person. Then I can find a better job and work in a field that I truly like. When I'm at peace with myself, then I can be at peace with others as well. That's it!

(March 6, 2003)

ج. برای من بیشتر شخصیه. من می خوام یک کسی برای خودم باشم. فکر می کنم با درس خوندن و یاد گرفتن می تونم خودمو راضی کنم. این برام خیلی مهمه که خوشحال باشم و از خودم رضایت داشته باشم. اون وقت می تونم توی رشته ای که دوست دارم کار خوبی پیدا کنم. وقتی که با وجود خودم آرامش دارم، با دیگران هم آرامش دارم. همین!

Nader, Cyrus and Mitra who mentioned upward socio-economic mobility as their main objective in the pursuit of higher education also highlighted the influence of education in the making of their inner selves. Cyrus underlined his sense of "happiness" and "confidence" with his education. Knowing that he had completed his undergraduate education in Iran, made him feel that he had used his life productively, and made him content with his current situation in life.

Cyrus: Without education, I feel that I wouldn't know who I am. I am happy that I completed my bachelor's degree in Iran. Even though I can't use it here, well, actually, I couldn't do much with it in Iran either! [Laughs] But at least I know that I did something with my life in the past before coming here. So, when I get depressed here [thinking] that I am doing an undergraduate degree, I look back and

ج. بدون تحصیل، این کسی که الان هستم نبودم. خوشحالم که لیسانسم رو توی ایران تموم کردم. با وجود اینکه اینجا استفاده اش نمی کنم، خب در واقع توی ایران هم نمی تونستم! (خنده) ولی حداقل میدونم که یک کاری توی زندگیم انجام دادم، قبل از اینکه اینجا بیام. برای همین وقتی که ناراحتم از اینکه دارم یک مدرک لیسانس می گیرم، برمیگردم به گذشته و احساس بهتری دارم از دوستن

feel much better knowing that I used my life productively, that I didn't waste it, that I learned something. That makes me a happier person [knowing that] I am educated and know, not everything, but know more than if I didn't have any education. I feel more confident about my situation.

(January 21, 2003)

اینکه از زندگیم درست استفاده کردم. و وقتی رو هدر ندادم، و یک چیزی یاد گرفتم. این منو خوشحال می کنه که که تحصیلکرده ام و، همه چی رو نمی دونم، ولی بیشتر از اونمی می دونم که اگه هیچ تحصیلی نداشتم. اعتماد به نفس بیشتری دارم نسبت به موقعیتم.

Despite the diverse views and perspectives of the participants, there was a noticeable emphasis on the impact of education on their inner happiness and their sense of “self-hood”. From this perspective, education means more than a mere means for economic advancement and securing one’s social and socio-economic status in life. Rather it implies a sense of connectedness to the inner self as well as a deeper connection to others. Education was viewed as a means to transcend the “self” to the world, and connect to the community. The participants saw education as the creator of *their* worlds and what they saw in them. Parker Palmer (1993), a Christian educator, talks about the necessity of education to try to reconnect the self to the world. Education that fails to enable the individual to reach self-fulfillment and inner growth does not portray an “authentic and spontaneous” (p.13) representation of the self. As Palmer (1993) writes:

[E]ducation gave me an identity as a knower. It answered the question “Who am I?” by saying “You are one who knows.” The knowledge I gained through education was more than a tool for my vocation; it became a source of my self-understanding as one whose nature it is to know. At the same time, education gave me an identity to the world in which I live. (p.21)

The participants perceived education as a process of “creating” knowledge to better know the self and connect to the world as they come to understand it. Education, more than being an “instrument” of financial gains, was a “means” to create a space where the individual feels belonged and fulfilled.

Education as a Gendering Process

For the participants, the pursuit of higher education involved re-evaluation of traditionally held values with respect to socio-culturally appropriate gender roles. This process involved a critical exploration of their perspectives towards women’s education and employment and significance of women’s roles within their families. In this context, migration and life in Diaspora played an important role in the redefinition of gender roles and family structure. Moghissi (1999b) points out that:

Family relations and gender roles are central to all cultures, be they European or non-European, Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern. But the importance of sustaining the status quo within the family increases greatly for diasporic communities. To an uprooted and displaced people, the old, familiar relations within the family, that is, clearly-defined sex-roles, gender power and authority, represent the lost and desired past which was dramatically different from the present. The family, in a sense, stands in for the culture under siege as a result of displacement. It represents the native culture which has been overshadowed and is constantly out down by the structural racism of the host country. (p.208)

While all men and women regarded women’s rights to have equal access to education and employment as essential and necessary, women’s roles in family decision-making and economic sustenance were not regarded as equal to that of men’s. The experiences of the married women conveyed the existing unequal

positions of women within their families as providers and decision-makers. Iranian culture is traditionally andocentric and male-dominated. The social structures of the Iranian society encourage the men's status as the primary caretakers and "heads" (سرپرست) of their families. In a study of changes in gender roles of Iranian immigrants in the United States, Mahdi (1999a) found out that immigration challenged the traditional roles of Iranian men as "breadwinners" (نان آور), as the result of women's higher rate of participation in labor force and higher education. However, this did not necessarily entail that women acquired a "primary significance in the provision of family income" (p.61). In other words, the mere presence of women in the job market and their access to higher education does not grant them an equal status to that of the men within the family. Men are still considered to be the breadwinners and in charge of the household, and the primary source of income, regardless of women's contribution to the household finances.

Similar trends have been observed in other immigrant communities. In a study of gender roles within a Vietnamese immigrant community in Philadelphia, Kibria (1996) concluded that, "the effects of migration on gender relations must be understood as highly uneven and shifting in quality, often resulting in gains for women in certain spheres and losses in others" (p.220). However, education is still considered to play a crucial role in women's financial emancipation from men. For the women in this study, having the option of relying on their own economic resources and not the men in their lives was regarded as

“empowerment” and freedom to have more control over making decisions in their own lives.

Women at the center of the periphery

Although all participants put great emphasis on women’s education, the social realities of women’s’ lives revealed a rather different picture. The married women, Yalda, Samira, Roxana and Nahid believed they occupied a secondary space within their families when compared to their husbands’. Despite their genuine personal interest and desire to pursue higher education, all four women stressed the centrality of their husband’s education and career at the heart of the family planning and decision-making. One woman, Roxana, even referred to her “husband’s wishes” as critical in deciding where they should go and what they should do.

While these women acknowledged the secondary position occupied by women within the family’s economic structure, they also rejected the passive role of women as the recipients of men’s economic support, and emphasized women’s roles as key contributors to the family’s economy. Samira mentioned that after coming to Canada with her husband, she felt it was necessary to delay her university education. Due to the limited financial resources available to her and her husband, it was not financially possible for the couple to pursue their education at the same time. Samira abandoned her own university studies in Iran to join her husband in Canada, she felt that although she and her family held

high regards for higher education, her own academic aspirations had now become peripheral to her husband's, as she explained in this conversation:

Samira: When we came here, my husband was a **graduate student**, and we couldn't afford to pay [tuition] fees for the both of us. So, I stayed at home. I went to different language classes until my husband's studies were finished and he started working. I was very depressed at the time, [I mean] psychologically; I just couldn't stay at home. So, I decided to enroll in university. In Iran, I was in the second year of classical Persian Literature, but because I wasn't generally very happy with that field of study, I decided to change. But I never did. I got married, despite my mother's persistence that I wait until after I finish my degree. Well, what I can say? [Laughs], it just happened. I got married without finishing my degree, and then we had to come to Canada. I accept the decisions that I made, but it was hard to hear my mother say over phone: "all your friends finished their studies, even got their PhDs." I had a feeling of **underachievement**. I feel that if I hadn't chosen to get married, I would be in their situation too; I wouldn't be in an undergraduate program, I would at least have a Master's.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. وقتی که اومدیم اینجا، شوهرم **graduate student** بود، و نمی تونستیم برای هردوتامون شهریه بدیم. واسه همین، من توی خونه موندم. کلاس زبان مختلف رفتم تا اینکه شوهرم درسش تموم شد و شروع کرد به کار کردن. بعضی اوقات خیلی افسرده بودم، از نظر روانی منظورمه، نمی تونستم توی خونه بمونم. بنابراین تصمیم گرفتم که پیام دانشگاه اسم نویسی کنم. توی ایران، سال دوم ادبیات فارسی بودم، ولی چون از رشته ای که می خوندم راضی نبودم، تصمیم گرفتم که تغییرش بدم. ولی نکردم. ازدواج کردم بر خلاف اصرار مادرم که صبر کنم بعد از اتمام درس. ولی خب چی بگم؟ (خنده) اتفاق افتاد. قبل از تموم شدن درس ازدواج کردم، و بعد هم که باید میامدیم کانادا. تصمیم هائی رو که گرفتم قبول می کنم، ولی سخت بود از پشت تلفن بشنوم مادرم میگه، «تمام دوستات درسشون رو هم تموم کردن، دکتراشون رو هم گرفتن» یک احساس **underachievement** داشتم. حس می کنم اگر من هم ازدواج نکرده بودم، الان من هم مثل اونها بودم، که الان دیگه لیسانس نمی گرفتم، حداقل یک فوق لیسانس داشتم.

Similarly, Roxana also talked about the prominence of her husband's work and study over hers. Roxana, who also left Iran to join her husband, a graduate student in Canada, believed that her husband's goals preceded her own. Her interests, be it academic aspirations or social affairs, had to be first ratified by her husband, as evident in her following statement:

Roxana: Because I am married, I always have to see if my husband likes to do [something], I have to first see if *he* likes it, and that *he* has the time to do it. I mean, I have **check** with him. If he doesn't agree, there is no use in pursuing it.

ج. من چون ازدواج کردم، همیشه باید ببینم اگه شوهرم می خواد یک کاری رو بکنه. اول باید ببینم اگه اون دوست داره و وقتشو داره که کاری رو بکنه. یعنی باید با اون **check** بکنم. اگه موافقت نکنه، اصلا دنبالشم نمیشه گرفت.

Shiva: In which contexts?

س. توی چه شرایطی مثلاً؟

Roxana: [Pause] doesn't matter, everything! Even when I tell him I want to apply to graduate school, he says, "I have to see." [Laughs] [He] never says, "we have to see!" [Laughs]

ج. (سکوت) فرقی نداره، همه چی! حتی وقتی بهش گفتم که می خوام فوق لیسانس تقاضا بدم، گفت، "ببینم!" هیچ وقت نمیگه، "ببینیم!" (خنده)

(August 23, 2002)

The dynamics of Roxana's self-reported relationship with her husband leads to the observation that a woman's perceived awareness of her right to pursue higher education and seek employment does not necessarily entail an equal role in family decision-making situations. Consequently, when perceived as inconvenient, a woman's academic and career aspirations can and are interrupted at any time to accommodate the husband's. Throughout my interviews with Roxana, she expressed a keen desire to continue her studies, and possibly complete her doctoral degree. However, she perceives that family responsibilities and obligations toward her husband may prevent her from doing so. In the following excerpt, she talks about her "lack of control" in family decision-making, and her "uncertainty" about her own future academic career:

Roxana: My life is not in my **control**, as others may think. But I, myself, I don't know, may be I have *too much self-confidence*. I want to continue my education, but I can't predict what will happen. [Laughs] If I'm alive and have the strength, I would like to continue, but if I can't, [silence], well, I have a lot of **stress** in my life, **stress** to get high grades, I don't know, two years to do a master's, another four or five years for a PhD. No, I don't know if I can. I don't know if I can. My husband will be finished in the next year or so, and he wants me to have a child. It will be too much. I mean, [silence], I don't know if I can, I don't know if I can.

(March 6, 2003)

ج. زندگیم اون طوری که دیگران فکر می کنند توی **control** من نیست. ولی خودم، نمیدونم، شاید زیادی **self-confidence** دارم. من میخوام که درسمو ادامه بدم ولی نمی تونم بگه چی پیش میآد. (خنده) اگه زنده بمونم و توانائی اش رو داشته باشم. دلم میخواد ادامه بدم، ولی اگه نتونم، (مکث) خب، توی زندگیم **stress** زیاده، **stress** اینکه نمره های خوب بگیرم، نمیدونم، دو سال برای فوق لیسانس، چهار، پنج سال دیگه برای دکترا. نه، نمیدونم اگه بتونم. نمیدونم اگه بتونم. شوهرم درسش یک سال دیگه این طورها تموم میشه، و میخواد که بچه دار بشم. خیلی زیادیه دیگه. یعنی (مکث) نمیدونم اگه بتونم. نمیدونم اگه بتونم.

Noteworthy is that the single female participants, Nasrin and Mitra viewed marriage and having a partner in their lives as barriers to their educational goals and negatively influencing their freedom in planning and making their own decisions in their lives. Nasrin stated that her decision to postpone marriage to after graduation and finding employment was partly due to the constraints to women's education and career planning within marriage. However, choosing to stay single has been a difficult decision to make, because Nasrin believed that Iranian society and culture does not favor postponing marriage, particularly for women.

Nasrin: One of the reasons that I decided not to get married was that I knew if I wanted to get married, I couldn't do what I really wanted to do. I had to wait and see what my husband says.

ج. یکی از دلایلی که تصمیم گرفتم ازدواج نکنم این بود که میدونستم ازدواج کنم نمتونم اون کاری رو که می خوام انجام بدم. همش باید صبر کنم بینم شوهرم چی میگه.

Shiva: Why do you think so?

س. چرا این طور فکر می کنی؟

Nasrin: Because we, Iranians, put men's words and decisions and choices before the women's. If I want to study, and my husband doesn't want me to, for whatever the reason, then I can't study. If he wants to go to school, and so do I, then he is the one who goes to school. Especially if financially we can't afford it for the both of us. That's what I've been trying to say.

ج. چون ما ایرانی ها حرف و تصمیم و انتخاب مرد رو اول در نظر می گیریم. اگه من بخوام درس بخونم و به هر دلیلی که هست شوهرم نخواهد، من نمی تونم درس بخونم. اگه اون بخواد مدرسه بره، و من هم همون جور، این اونه که میره مدرسه، بخصوص اگه از نظر مالی مشکل باشه برای هر دو. اینو می خواستم بگم.

(February 15, 2003)

Mitra, who was single but in a committed relationship, underlined the importance of completing her education before “settling down” with a partner whom she feels respects her. In her opinion, it was important for her to find out “who she is” and what she wants to do, before making the decision to get married and start a family.

Challenging traditional gender roles: The silent battle

Closely connected to the centrality of men's goals and choices in the family, was the concept of reinforced traditional gender roles in the lives of the participants. While all of them stressed the instrumental role of education and particularly a university degree in achieving economic advancement and upward socio-economic mobility for men and women alike, they also emphasized the central role of men as “breadwinners” (نان آور) and “heads of the family”

(سرپرست خانواده). As Nahid, Samira and Yalda eloquently elaborated, a woman's economic contributions to the family household is considered as secondary and

less important than the man's, even if the woman's contribution is greater in value.

The experience of immigration is different for men and women. As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1996) states, "[w]omen and men do not enter the migration process equally, but given the diverse historical and social contexts in which migration occurs, women in the same culture and in similar circumstances may encounter different types of patriarchal obstacles and, hence, improvise different responses to migration" (p.185). For example, in a study of Mexican immigrants in the United States, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1996) concluded that the process of migration changed the traditional gender roles within the families and "with the diminution of patriarchal gender relations, women gain more power and authority, and men lose some of their authority and privilege" (p.202). However, as women's role within the family receives more importance and significance in terms of contributing to family finances and decision making, women's role still lacks centrality, and is of secondary importance to that of men. She further comments that, "[a]lthough gender relations in Mexican immigrant families become less patriarchal; they do so in a heterogeneous fashion...the partial dismantling of patriarchy arises from new patterns of behavior induced by the arrangements of family stage migration. In light of this analysis, migration becomes a gendering process" (p.188).

Although culture plays an important role in defining and shaping men's and women's' perceptions of appropriate gender roles, I believe that we cannot fail to consider the impact of individuals' unique lifeworlds. Gender relations,

while culturally defined and determined represent the individual values as being either “modern” or “traditional” (Al-Sanabary, 1985). The participants, in general, expressed that immigration and living in the west would not significantly affect a man’s view of women’s rights to education and employment. They implied that living in the west does not inherently entail a radical transformation in culturally defined gender roles and expectations of women as wives and mothers.

However, they observed that immigrant Iranian women who become increasingly aware of their rights to pursue education and employment undergo significant transformations and changes in the way they view their roles within the family. For the participants, the experience of living in a foreign country as a new immigrant involved a shift of focus from traditional gender roles prescribed by their culture.

The two faces of Iranian women: Between the home and the school

The women also seemed torn between family obligations and responsibilities and their desire to pursue higher education (Edwards, 1993; Gaskell, 1991). The binary tensions between the roles of women as caretakers, wives and mothers, and their plans for career development seemed to create great distress for some of the women. Yalda talked about feeling tired and fatigued after a full day of hard work at school and home. Nahid and Samira also expressed the same concerns, although Samira was content with her pre-school daughter’s behavior at home, which she believed lifted a heavy weight off her shoulders. In a study of economic and cultural integration and adaptation of

Iranian immigrant families in Metropolitan Montreal area, Minoo Moallem (1992) referred to women's dual responsibilities inside and outside of the home as the "double work day dilemma". She points out that,

Although lower family incomes and unemployed men have been the byproducts of immigration for many Iranian families, these same conditions have in turn caused the entry of women into the work force while the household responsibilities still remain completely within the domain of female expertise. Women's employment outside the home has not automatically ruled out the pressures of a "double work day" for these women. (p.193) [My translation from original Persian]

Similarly, for the women in my study, married or single, the economic demands of life in Diaspora involved a greater demand on the women to pursue education as a means of entry into the job market. However, their pursuit of higher education did not result in less household obligations. As Yalda, Nahid, and Samira all attested, the pressures of raising children and taking care of a household only "added to the hassles of life in school" (Nahid, August 2, 2002). Samira eloquently talked about her perceived cultural expectations of the Iranian woman to go to university, work and contribute to household economy while fulfilling her responsibilities as a daughter, a wife and a mother. Ziba Mir-Hosseini (1998), an Iranian feminist scholar, uses the metaphor of "crafting an educated housewife" in discussing the dual identity of Iranian women as housewives and laborers. She writes:

Thus was crafted the new woman: the scientific mother and the compassionate wife, the learned woman versed in sciences of cooking, sewing and breast-feeding. Of such woman, ministers, state scribes, doctors, and professors would be born...she would not only produce better children; she would also prevent her man from behaving badly, as American women have stopped their men from drinking and obstinacy. (p.112)

Interestingly in a review of women's education in the United States, Kirsch (1993) concurs with Mir-Hosseini and states that:

Reasons for encouraging women to pursue an education varied from ideals of motherhood (the mother as conveyer and preserver of culture) to economic needs and a dearth of teachers. Educational opportunities made available to women in the United States in the last century were intended to reinforce existing cultural and social values... (p. 7)

The married women, Samira, Nahid, Yalda and Roxana seemed aware and critical of their intensified roles and duties as women living in diaspora. Nahid who was a working woman prior to coming to Canada said:

Nahid: It's very hard here to do everything on your own. Those who have their families here [in Canada] probably don't suffer as much, but for others, people like me, actually most of Iranians or other **immigrants**, it's hard to juggle all these responsibilities on your own. It's very hard. It is my dream to get an education and start working, making some money [so that] I can send my child to a good private school and [so that he] doesn't worry when goes off to university. But also, sometimes I wish that I didn't have to go to university, or at least we had enough money that I didn't have to worry so much. But this is the *reality of my life!* [Laughs]

(March 5, 2003)

ج. خیلی سخته همه کارها رو روی پای خودت انجام بدی. اون هائی که اینجا خانواده دارن، اینقدر زجر نمیکشن. ولی برای مردم دیگه مثل من، در واقع بیشتر ایرانی ها یا **immigrant** های دیگه، خیلی سخته با مسئولیت هاشون، روی دوش خودشون، دست و پنجه نرم کنن. خیلی سخته. آرزوی من اینه تحصیل کردن و کار کردنه، و پول در آوردن که بتونم بچه ام رو یک مدرسه خصوصی خوب بفرستم و نگران نباشم وقتی دانشگاه میره. ولی بعضی وقتها هم آرزو می کنم که مجبور نبودم دانشگاه برم، یا حداقل اون قدر پول داشتم که زیاد نگران نبودم. این هم واقعیت زندگی منه! (خنده)

The married women talked about experiencing intensive feelings of "stress" and "worrying" about the future in their struggles to complete their university degrees on one hand, and be a "good" wife and mother, on the other.

Education as women's empowerment

The women in this study believed that education greatly enhanced their chances for economic independence. Otieno (2001) observes that, "[e]ducation is a particularly powerful achievement for women as it opens up the potential for wider participation in the economy." (p. 3) Nahid, Samira, Yalda, Roxana and Mitra openly talked about their views towards education as a means to gain financial independence from their husbands and be able to stand on their own feet. Research studies by Darvishpour (2001), Mahdi (1999), and (Moghissi, 1999a,b) demonstrate the importance of education on Iranian immigrant women's lives, and their perceptions of being empowered as the result of their financial independence. While in my study, the women acknowledged that their involvement in the family economy tends to improve the socio-economic status of the family, gaining power and control over the direction of their lives was considered to be of greater importance. For Yalda, education meant having a "say" in her family life; being an educated woman implied gaining a "stronger voice" that would make others, and in particular, her husband listen to her.

Yalda: I want to find a job after I graduate. Our family depends on it. My husband's income is not enough to take care of all the expenses we have here. But besides that, education is what gives me a *voice* [italics added] in my life, and within my family. If you are an educated woman, you get more respect from your husband, your family, everyone. You have more **control** over what is going on in your life. Others will not have as much **control** otherwise.

(August 28, 2002)

ج. میخوام بعد از فارغ التحصیلی یک کاری پیدا کنم. خانواده ام به اون تکیه می کنه. درآمد شوهرم اون قدر نیست که به همه مخارجی که اینجا داریم برسه. ولی گذشته از اون، تحصیل کردن به من یک صدائی توی زندگی ام میده، و توی خانواده ام. اگه یک زن تحصیلکرده باشی، شوهرت و خانواده ات و همه اون های دیگه احترام بیشتری برات قائلن. **control** داری توی زندگی ات چی میگذره. غیر از این، دیگران خیلی **control** ندارن.

Agency, having a “say” within her family, and control over making decisions in her life are what mattered to Yalda. Education, and in particular a university degree will essentially lead to a higher socio-economic status, and will facilitate an individual’s transition into the job market. However, as important as “making money” is to the household finances, the true value of education exists in its potential for “empowerment” of individual women (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986, 1997; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy & Belenky, 1996; Katjavivi, 2000; Kirsch, 1993; Norton Pierce, 1995; Skelton, 1993), and giving them a strong presence and space (Losey, 1995), although not necessary an equal status in the family and society.

In these women’s lives, the “power of knowing” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986, 1997) was intertwined with a sense of “self” and understanding of “who they are”. They believed that knowledge is gained through education and it is through education that one begins to examine and evaluate one’s existence within the family and the wider society. The concept of “education” and knowledge as “power” was as much evident in the statements of Samira and Mitra—the two women who felt underachieved and confused—as it was in Nasrin, Nahid and Roxana’s—the women who had a stronger sense of satisfaction with where they were at in their lives.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed themes emerging from my interviews and conversations with the eight participants. All the men and women identified culture as an important element in defining and shaping their views and perspectives towards education. Higher education is regarded as a social and cultural capital, the ticket to upward socio-economic mobility and an inner desire for personal and intellectual growth. Gender also plays an important role in the construction of a culturally defined discourse of education. Education is regarded to have an equal value and significance in the lives of all participants. However, it held different meanings for them in different contexts. Although individual participants were profoundly aware of the interrelationship between culture and their views towards education, they articulated their own unique ways of defining their educational goals and aspirations using different metaphors and symbols of representation.

Chapter Six: Images of Self and Others

Connecting the Individual to the Family and Community

In the previous chapter I dealt with the situated meanings of education to the individual participants. I interpreted and discussed the metaphors and symbols of education articulated in their narratives. However, these men and women's experiences did not begin and end inside the four walls of their classrooms and university campuses. The experiences of education, as they told me, was closely related and influenced by other factors such as their ties with their cultural community and the perceptions of the general Canadian public of who they were as Iranians and Muslims. The understandings that emerged in this chapter represent the participants' perceptions and experiences with discrimination and racism in Canadian higher education and the wider society. I have organized this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the participants' relationships with their families, and their connections to the broader Iranian immigrant community. In the second section, I discuss the participants' experiences with discrimination within and outside of the university campuses, and reflect on how these experiences have affected their lives as first-generation immigrants and members of a cultural and religious minority group in Canada.

Family

The participants acknowledged the crucial role of “family” and family relationships on the making and defining of their values and perspectives towards education. As the fundamental unit of the Iranian culture and society (Fathi, 1985; Friedl, 1985; Moghissi, 1999), family played an important role in influencing individual men and women’s decision to pursue higher education. However, the participants described their families’ influences on their academic aspirations in different ways. Family was regarded as the link between culture and individual aspirations, as a model for success and achievement and as a source of support and understanding. Although the participants highlighted the “positive” role of family in their lives, some also talked about the “unrealistic expectations” of family as a cause of anxiety and stress.

“Frame” of Reference

Family structure is the central unit of the Iranian society in Iran and abroad, and family relationships and loyalty to one’s family are highly valued. My conversations with the participants revealed that family values and cultural beliefs were closely connected. All participants talked about their families’ emphasis on education. However, they also pointed out that these expectations were not “explicitly” communicated to them; rather, they recall interpreting them as something that they “just knew”. The idea of the “unwritten code of success and achievement”, expressed by Nader and Nasrin, reveals the interrelationship between cultural values and their transmission through family expectations,

which are not “verbally communicated” (Nasrin, September 3, 2002); rather, are “just understood” (Nader, September 19, 2002).

Model of Appropriate Behaviors

In addition to serving as a “link” between cultural values and individuals’ academic aspirations, and a “cultural point of reference,” family also served an important role in providing role models for the participants in different contexts. Samira, whose parents were university-educated, talked about the important role her parents and in particular her mother, played in influencing her decision to go to university. Having an “educated mother” was the motivating factor for Samira to view women’s education and employment as acceptable and achievable. Similarly, Nader and Nahid, whose parents did not have access to higher education, equally emphasized the significance of their parents’, and particularly, their mothers’ life experiences as helping them see the value of education and providing them with better job opportunities and a brighter future.

Source of Support and Understanding

The men and women talked about the disadvantages of lack of family support in Canada. The feelings of loneliness and not having anyone to rely on was evident in statements made by Nader, Cyrus, Yalda, Nahid and Roxana who did not have any close family members in Canada. Family, more than providing its members with financial resources and facilitating their entry into social

networks, has an influential impact on a man's or a woman's life in diaspora.

Mahdi (1999a) writes,

This fact that the family is central to the social status of the individual and serves as the foundation of social life in Iran is not lost to the Iranian immigrants who have left their homeland. Family continues to serve as a familiar refuge against the unfamiliar world of the host society. It serves as a *buffer* [italics added] to cushion the challenges against the most cherished and unchangeable normative and behavioral aspects of immigrant lives and it also serves as an intermediate institution to aid in smoothly adopting new values, norms, and behaviors. (p.53)

Mahdi is careful to point out the significance of family as a system of support among the members of the Iranian community in Diaspora. His claim was supported by the data from the interview transcripts. The married women, Yalda, Nahid, Samira and Roxana, while acknowledging the responsibilities and obligations of married life, concurred that being married had provided them with a sense of security in knowing that they were protected by their husbands. Yalda said:

Yalda: As difficult as it is sometimes, [taking care of a family], I feel relieved when I come home to my husband and son. Knowing that I have a husband I can *depend on* [italics added] when I get here, someone to talk to, someone to listen to, or even just knowing that there is somebody to take you to the doctor when you are sick. It's nice to know that.

ج. بعضی وقتها هر چند هم سخت باشه، احساس راحتی می کنم، وقتی بر میگردم خونه پهلوی شوهرم و پسر. میدونم که یک شوهری دارم که بتونم روش تکیه کنم. وقتی که میرسم، یکی رو دارم باهاش حرف بزنم، حتی اینکه وقتی مریض میشی یکی هست ببرت یک دکتر. خویه که آدم اینو بدونه.

(February 17, 2003)

Similarly, for Roxana and Nasrin, family also played an important role in their lives by giving them autonomy and respect to choose their paths in life. For

Nasrin, her family's openness to different issues, and their encouragement of her education and academic aspirations were considered as important factors in encouraging her to pursue higher education. Family was considered to function as both a source of inspiration and support, but it was also regarded to be at the core of some of the participants' distress and anxiety. Despite the fact that Mitra talked about her father's high standards of academic achievement, she also talked about his empathetic response when she did not get into medical school. She explained in the following excerpt:

Mitra: I don't think my parents ever compared me to others to force me to study harder. Even when they mentioned something, I don't think it was comparing me to others to exert pressure, but, at least I think, it was to create a competition. However, it didn't mean that they felt others were better than me. My father had his own strategies [laughs], for example, he didn't like it when we watched television, he thought it was a waste of time, but on the other hand, he was open too. For example, when I was accepted into Nursing school, my mother was very upset that I didn't get into medicine, but my father was very sensitive. He was very happy, telling me that it's actually better that I didn't, because doctors work very hard, and their lives are not really theirs being in the hospital all the time. He was very supportive.

(March 11, 2003)

ج. فکر نمی‌کنم که پدر و مادرم منو هیچ وقت مقایسه کردن با دیگران که بهم فشار بیارن درس بخونم. حتی وقتی هم که چیزی می‌گفتن فکر نمی‌کنم که مقایسه بود که فشار بیارن، ولی فکر می‌کنم که، حداقل، یک رقابت بود. ولی فکر نمی‌کنم که حس می‌کردن دیگران از من بهترن. پدرم راه و رسم خودشو داشت (خنده)، مثلاً دوست نداشت ما تلویزیون تماشا کنیم، فکر می‌کرد وقت تلف کردنه. اما از اون طرف روشنفکر هم بود. مثلاً وقتی من وارد وارد پرستاری شدم، مادرم خیلی ناراحت بود که پزشکی قبول نشدم، ولی پدرم خیلی حساس برخورد کرد. خیلی خوشحال بود و بهم می‌گفت که بهتر شد قبول نشدم، برای اینکه دکترها خیلی سخت کار می‌کنن، زندگی شون مال خودشون نیست، همش توی بیمارستانن و اینا. خیلی پشتم بود.

Similarly, other participants talked about the importance of family on their educational aspirations and experiences. Roxana, for example, stated that her family's emotional support became her inspiration to pursue higher education. Her family's emphasis on her emotional and mental well-being, rather than

“pressuring” her to excel academically, was indeed a significant factor in helping her pursue her “own” desires and value education as a personal goal. She commented:

Roxana: My family wants me to be happy and healthy. Of course they want me to have a good education too, but first of all, I need to be happy and healthy to study [laughs]. They would never want me to exert myself too much. I have never felt that my family is pressuring me to get an education. If I am studying, it is because I want [to do it for] myself, not that they are pressuring me.

ج. خانواده ام همیشه میخوان که من خوشحال و سلامت باشم. البته دلشون میخواد خویم درس بخونم. ولی قبل از هر چیز باید سرحال و سلامت بود که درس بخونی. (خنده) اونا هیچ وقت دلشون نمیخواد که من به خودم زیادی فشار بیارم. هیچ وقت فکر نکردم که خانواده ام داره بهم فشار میاره که درس بخونم. اگه درس خوندم، به این خاطر بود که خودم می خواستم، نه اینکه اونا فشار آوردن.

(August 23, 2002)

The participants' narratives revealed the role of family and family relations in helping them make the transition between home and school. Family, which constitutes the base of an individual's social network within the Iranian society, continues to play a major role in the lives of these men and women in diaspora.

Multicultural Campus

For some of the participants, the cultural diversity on campus was a positive factor inasmuch as a multicultural environment helped them feel belonged and not alienated from others. They felt they were part of a community where everyone came from “somewhere”. Yalda believed that the existence of many different minorities in Canada, and their presence in Canadian society and

academia represented their “acceptance” within their communities, regardless of their country of origin. She said:

Yalda: Where I study, and especially in my program, there are a lot of people from all over the world. I don't feel discrimination, I really don't know. I can't express an opinion because, honestly, I have never seen it myself. But do you think if there was so much discrimination here, minorities would stay here, study, work and raise their children? Why would they want to live in such a place? If things are so bad for them, maybe they should have never come here or leave. I think the fact that there are so many minorities here shows that discrimination is not that bad.

(February 17, 2003)

ج. جانی که من درس میخونم، بخصوص توی این رشته من، از همه جای دنیا هستن. من اصلا تبعیض احساس نمی کنم، واقعا نمی دونم. نظری ندارم، چون راستش رو بخوای خودم ندیدم. ولی فکر می کنی که اگه اینجا تبعیض زیاد بود، اقلیت ها می تونستن اینجا بمونن، درس بخونن، کار کنن، بچه بزرگ کنن؟ چرا یک همچین جانی زندگی کنن؟ اگه اینقدر براشون بده، اصلا نباید اینجا میآمدن، یا باید برن. من فکر می کنم همون که اینجا اقلیت زیاده، نشون میده که تبعیض اینجا خیلی هم بد نیست.

Furthermore, for Yalda, a multicultural campus was not only representative of Canada's acceptance of minorities and immigrants, but also the presence of other minority students, and particularly minority professors, served as “role models” who gave her “confidence” to persist and overcome barriers confronted in academia. She explained:

Yalda: When I see minority professors, of course there are some exceptions [laughs] I feel more secure and confident. I feel it in my heart that if they did it, I can do it too. For example, last semester, we had a professor from [name of the country deleted] who couldn't speak English very well. I mean he had such a thick accent, that we could hardly understand. Even Canadian students had problems understanding him; imagine us, those who also spoke English

ج. من وقتی استادهای اقلیتی می بینم، البته استشنا هم بینشون هست (خنده) احساس امنیت و اطمینان خاطر می کنم. توی دلم فکر می کنم، اگه اونا تونستن این کارو بکنن، من هم می تونم. مثلا ترم قبل، یک استادی داشتم ... که نمی تونست خوب انگلیسی حرف بزنه. یعنی یک لهجه غلیظ داشت که خیلی سخت میشد فهمید. حتی دیگه دانشجویهای کانادائی هم نمی تونستن بفهمنش، دیگه چه برسه به ماها که خودمون انگلیسی زبان دوم

as a second language! [Laughs] but he was so knowledgeable and kind and such a nice person that I said to myself, "if he can get here with this accent, I can work hard and get there too!" He was a very wonderful example of a minority person who gives minority students courage and is a very good **role model**. Of course, as I said, there are also a few who cannot be considered to be very good **role models**! [Laughs]

Shiva: [Laughs] In what sense, what do you mean?

Yalda: For example, we had another professor from [name of the country deleted] who [had a] bad temper. We wouldn't dare go near him. But generally, whether you like someone or not, is not the issue. Even if the person, like that professor, is less than exemplary, still they show that it is possible to go up in the **system**, even if you are a minority, regardless of whatever else.

(February 17, 2003)

حرف می زنیم! (خنده) ولی اونقدر میدونست و مهربون بود و آدم خوبی بود که من به خودم گفتم "اگه این با این لهجه اش می تونه به اینجا برسه، من هم می تونم سخت کار کنم و همین جوری بشم!" البته اون یک نمونه عالی از یک اقلیتی بود که به دانشجویهای اقلیتیش هم جرات میداد و خلاصه **role model** خوبی بود. البته همون طور که گفتم، کسانی هم هستن که **role model** خوبی نیستن! (خنده)

س. (خنده) چه جوری؟ منظورت چیه؟

ج. مثلاً یک استاد دیگه داشتیم از... که خیلی بداخلاق بود. اصلاً جرات نمی کردی نزدیکش بشی. ولی کلاً، اگه از کسی خوشت بیاد یا نه، حتی اگه اون شخص مثل اون استاده نمونه هم نباشه، هنوز هم میشه که توی **system** رفت بالا، حالا دیگه هر چی.

Yalda emphasizes having a "role model" who has been able to make it within the "system" (Canadian higher education), as refutable evidence that with hard work and effort, anything is possible. From her perspective, factors such as accent or personality play a secondary role in determining one's success and how much he or she can accomplish.

Other participants viewed cultural diversity on campus an important factor in helping them create and maintain social connections. For Samira, who was experiencing difficulties connecting and communicating with mainstream Canadian students in her classes, talking and communicating with other minority

students was the only way she could feel that she “belonged” and was part of the academic environment. For her, other minority groups served as a social support network with whom she could identify. She stated:

Samira: I am very comfortable with other **minorities**. I have friends from all over, Blacks, **Asians**, Arabs, [pause] I think it's easier for me to connect to those who are **minorities** [than to Canadians]

ج. من با **minority** دیگه خیلی راحتتم. دوستای دوستای من از همه جای دنیا میآن، سیاه، **Asian**، عرب، (مکث) فکر می کنم که برام راحت تره با **minority** ارتباط برقرار کنم.

Shiva: Why?

س. چرا؟

Samira: Because they [minorities] know what it feels like to be a **minority** and an **immigrant**, even if they were born here, their parents went through what we are going through. They are kinder, they are nicer, and they don't look at you as if you don't belong here. They are more open to other people and **immigrants**. I feel like I can relate to them more easily.

ج. برای اینکه اونا میدونن **minority** و **immigrant** بودن یعنی چی. حتی اگه خودشون اینجا بزرگ شده باشن، پدر و مادرهاشون همین چیزها رو دیدن. مهربونترن، بهترن، طوری بهت نگاه نمی کنن که انگار به اینجا تعلق نداری. نسبت به دیگران و **immigrant** بازترن. من حس می کنم راحت تر باهاشون ارتباط دارم.

(January 6, 2003)

Samira's reference to “immigrant” and “minority” appears to extend beyond the literal meanings of the words. It conveys much more than the legal status of an individual or the number of the members of a cultural community in the host country. Being perceived as an immigrant, she believed, is linked to feelings of “belongingness” and social connection. It is for this reason that she feels less inhibited to contact and communicate with other “minorities”, because as she stressed: “they don't look at you as if you don't belong here”.

Age

“Age” seemed to play a paradoxical role in the lives of the participants.

Roxana mentioned that her “age” and being older than other students in her program had a “positive” influence on her academic abilities, and in general, in her daily life. For others, for example Samira and Nahid, “age” had a somewhat less positive impact. Roxana attributed her problem solving ability, and critical thinking to being older. For her, “age” was associated with “becoming wiser” and more “deliberative”; it was a sign of “maturity”. When I asked her whether she felt connected to other students in her classes, she commented:

Roxana: For me, I can get along with just about anybody. It doesn't matter where they come from or how old they are, Canadian, Iranian, anyone. Being older than other [students] in my classes doesn't bother me either, although we have quite a few students who are older and *mature*. I don't see my age as an issue; it's a personal matter. But, [pause], I mean, deep in my heart, I don't feel that I am 36 years old. I have friends that are 21, 22 years old, and a few who are the same age, but I still feel that I can be friends with everyone. As a matter of fact, I think my age in actually a very positive thing, it really helps me.

Shiva: [That's] interesting! Could you explain how?

Roxana: [Pause] I think, as I've got older, I've been able to make my decision more easily, and I've been able to find a solution to problems easier than I would have in the past.

Shiva: Do you attribute that [decision-making ability] to age or to having more education than when you were younger?

ج. برای من، من با همه کنار می‌آم. برام مهم نیست که از کجا می‌آن و یا چند سالشونه، کانادائی، ایرانی، هر کی. مسن تر بودن هم منو اذیت نمی کنه، هر چند چند تا دانشجوی دیگه هم هستن که از من مسن ترن و *mature* تر. من سنمو مساله ای درش نمی بینم، این یک مساله شخصیه. ولی (مکث)، یعنی ته قلبم، حس نمی کنم ۳۶ سالمه. دوستای ۲۱، ۲۲ ساله دارم، چند تا هم که همسن خودم، ولی هنوز حس می کنم میتونم با همه دوست باشم. در واقع فکر می کنم سن یک چیز خیلی مثبتیه، واقعا کمک می کنه.

س. جالبه، میتونی توضیح بدی چه طوری؟

ج. (مکث) فکر می کنم وقتی سنم زیاده تر میشه، راحت تر تصمیم میگیرم و راه حل مشکلاتم رو راحت تر از قبل پیدا می کنم.

س. یعنی این دلایل سنه یا تحصیلات بیشتر داشتن از اون زمانی که جوونتر بودی؟

ج. نه، نه، اصلا ارتباطی با تحصیل کردن نداره. (مکث) من فکر می کنم به خاطر سنه، و اینکه بزرگتر و عاقلتر شده ام. *mature* ترم.

Roxana: No, no! It has nothing to do with education. [Pause] I think it's because of my age, and the fact that I have become older and wiser, I am more **mature**, and I can deal with problems head on, and confront them face-to-face. It is something that comes with age, and not education. I see a lot of very educated people [who] have no wisdom, and [yet] they are very very educated. It has nothing to do with education. It's only because I'm older now, and I have more experiences.
(March 6, 2003)

با مشکلات زندگی رو در رو برخورد می کنم و باها شون مستقیم در میآفتم. این چیزیه که با سن میآد نه با درس خوندن. آدم های خیلی تحصیلکرده می بینم که اصلا عقل ندارن. و خیلی خیلی هم تحصیلکرده ان. هیچ ربطی به درس خوندن نداره. به خاطر اینکه که مسن ترم و تجربه بیشتر دارم.

Seeing herself as a “wiser” and more “experienced” woman, Roxana felt comfortable with those around her, regardless of how old they were. However, other participants perceived “age” from a different perspective. For Samira and Nahid, “age” played a relatively negative role. Samira, whose sense of self was closely related to her ability to pursue higher education and becoming an educated person, regarded her age as an “embarrassment”. At thirty-one (at the time of the first interview), she strongly felt that she should be working towards her doctoral degree, or, “at least a Master’s degree”. She also felt that her age is a barrier to communication and building bridges of friendship between her and other students. Therefore she reported feeling isolated and alienated from others in her classes. She offered this explanation:

Samira: I can't really connect to others in my classes. Maybe it is my age, I am over thirty, and I have to sit in classes with students who are eighteen, nineteen years old, well, at least, most of them. When people ask me how old I am and I tell them, they don't believe it, they say that they think I am much younger, maybe in my

ج. من واقعا نمی تونم با اونای دیگه توی کلاسها ارتباط برقرار کنم. شاید مساله سنمه. من از ۳۰ گذشته ام، و باید سر کلاس با دانشجوهائی بشینم که ۱۸، ۱۹ سالشونه، حداقل اکثرشون. وقتی ازم سؤال می کنن چند سالمه و بهشون میگم، باور نمی کنن، میگن جوونتر به نظر میرسم، شاید مثلا توی ۲۰،

early twenties. But deep down, inside [me], I feel that maybe because of my age I can't really connect to them. It is as if I have nothing to say to them. Maybe it is age, maybe it is cultural differences, maybe it is religion, and maybe it is language. I have nothing in common with them. I have nothing to say to them.

Shiva: So, you think it could be a lot of things involved, not just being older than others [in your classes]?

Samira: Yes, but I think age is a bigger factor. Maybe even if I were younger, but still veiled, and Iranian with an accent, I would have an easier time making friends here.

Shiva: Why do you think that is?

Samira: Then I would have more things in common with them. But it is not just about having friends. I think [that] I, myself, don't feel comfortable with the fact that I am *still* doing undergraduate work! It's kind of embarrassing. I shouldn't be doing this. It's kind of **embarrassing!** I feel that I lag behind those [who are] my age. I have a sense of **underachievement**, when I compare myself to even my friends in Iran. I should be over and done with my bachelor's degree, and [have] moved forward.

(July 25, 2002)

این طورا. ولی توی خودم این طور حس می کنم که شاید به خاطر سنمه که نمی تونم باهاشون ارتباط برقرار کنم. مثل اینکه که هیچ چی ندارم بهشون بگم. شاید سنه، شاید اختلافات فرهنگی، شاید مذهبه، شاید زبانه. هیچ چیز مشترکی باهاشون ندارم، هیچ چی ندارم بهشون بگم.

س. پس فکر می کنی دلایل دیگری وسطه یا مستتر بودن از همکلاسی هاته؟

ج. آره فکر می کنم سن یک مساله مهمتره. شاید اگه جوونتر هم بودم و حجاب داشتم و ایرانی بودم که لهجه داره، آسونتر بود برام که دوست بشم باهاشون.

س. چرا این طوریه فکر می کنی؟

ج. اونوقت چیزهای مشترک بیشتری باهاشون داشتم. فقط مساله دوست شدن نیست. فکر می کنم که من خودم هنوز راحت نیستم با اینکه دارم لیسانس می گیرم. خجالت آورده. من نباید این کارو بکنم. **embarrassing** هست! حس می کنم که از سنم عقب ترم. وقتی خودم رو با دوستانم توی ایران مقایسه می کنم، یک احساس **underachievement** دارم. من الان دیگه باید لیسانسمو گرفته باشم و جلو رفته باشم.

Samira perceived being an older undergraduate student as a communicative barrier between herself and her younger classmates. However, she also acknowledged the contribution of other factors such as language and religion in giving meanings to her educational experiences. Similarly, Nahid regarded "age" as a sign of "not having moved forward" and "staying in the same spot".

As the youngest participant, Nasrin claimed that lack of familiarity with the Canadian social and educational system creates difficulties for older newcomers. She concluded that this unfamiliarity with the social and educational system makes it more difficult for the older immigrants to “integrate” and adjust to the new environment. Younger immigrants, on the other hand, do not experience such difficulties, because they grow accustomed to the new system in their host country more easily, faster, and at a younger age.

Nasrin: I think most of the problems that Iranians, and maybe other immigrants here have is that, they come here at an older age, and when you are older, it is much more difficult to **adapt** yourself to the system in a new foreign place. When you are born and raised in [Iran], you know how things work, the educational system, the banking system, the government offices, etc. But when you come here, you have to learn everything all over again. You have to learn how the system works, from the educational system, to how to buy a car or a house. When you don't know how the system works, how are you going to take **advantage** of it? How can you make it work *for you* [her emphasis]? I think that's what makes **integration** difficult, not that they [Canadians] are prejudiced and **discriminate** against us.

(February 15, 2003)

ج. فکر کنم یکی از مشکلات بزرگی که ایرانی ها و شاید مهاجرهای دیگه دارن اینه که توی یک سن بالاتر میان اینجا. و وقتی که سنت بالاتره، سخت تر میشه که خودتو **adapt** کنی به سیستم یک کشور غریبه. وقتی که توی ایران به دنیا اومدی و بزرگ شدی، میدونی که کارها چه جوری می چرخه، سیستم آموزشی، سیستم بانکی، اداره های دولتی و غیره ولی وقتی میای اینجا، همه چیز رو باید از اول یاد بگیری. باید یاد بگیری که سیستم چه جوری کار می کنه، از سیستم آموزشی تا اینکه چه جوری ماشین و خونه بخری. وقتی که نمیدونی سیستم چه جوری کار می کنه، چه جوری میخوای ازش **advantage** بگیری؟ چه جوری میتونی بذاری به نفعت کار کنه؟ من فکر کنم این چیزیه که **integration** رو سخت میکنه، نه اینکه اینا متعصبن و بر علیه ما **discriminate** می کنن.

As Nasrin stated in the previous quote, “age” is a complex factor which cannot be considered in isolation from other elements in an individual's life. Familiarity with the host country's educational and social systems and language proficiency do, in fact, influence an individual's perceptions of her or his status in society. In

general, age seemed to be one of the many issues faced by the participants and in their lives in academia. While some viewed being an “older” undergraduate student in university as a barrier to building communication and connections with others in the classrooms, others regarded age as sign of maturity and emotional growth.

Second Language Literacy

Like many new immigrants, the participants in this study were faced with the challenges of learning a new language in their host country. All except Nasrin talked about the difficulties and barriers they had encountered in their daily lives as well as in their academic work, particularly in the early years of their immigration to Canada, despite their basic second language training in the Iranian educational system, which mainly emphasizes teaching grammatical structures through rote learning. Language served multiple purposes in the lives of these men and women (Parks & Maguire, 1999; Peirce, 1995). For Nahid and Samira lack of proficiency in the second language was a deterrent to communication and building bridges between themselves and other members of their communities. For others, it restricted their educational aspirations by directly or indirectly influencing their choice of academic programs. In the next section, I discuss participants’ similar and diverse views on second language literacy.

Speed bump

The participants viewed language learning as time-consuming process which had delayed their re-integration into the educational system of their new country. They believed that the process of second language learning requires time and energy that could have been used to further develop their careers and academic aspirations. All participants, including Nasrin who was fully fluent in English at the time of her immigration to Canada, regarded learning a new language as a “necessity” and “what one has to do in order to succeed”. However, they regarded learning a second language as a “negative” rather than a positive experience. Nasrin, the only participant who did not experience language problems after immigrating to Canada, contributed her linguistic competence to the intensive English instruction with private tutors starting at the age of seven. She told me that not encountering linguistic barriers was a major determining factor in her ability to continue her education soon after her arrival in Canada. Nasrin referred to the language learning of new immigrants as an unfortunate “waste of time” as she commented in one of our conversations. She viewed this linguistic barrier as a socially debilitating factor, which impedes second language learners’ integration into academic environments. She said:

Nasrin: I think that because I didn’t have to spend time to learn language [English], only the first few months that I came to Canada were *wasted* [italics added]. But when I look at it, I see that those who *wasted* a few years learning [English], they are truly behind.

ج. من فکر کنم چون وقت بذارم که زبان یاد بگیرم، فقط همون چند ماه اول که اومدم کانادا تلف شد. ولی وقتی بهش فکر می کنم می بینم اونانی که چند سال وقت تلف کردن یاد بگیرن، خیلی عقبن.

(September 3, 2002)

Similar to Nasrin, other participants regretted spending time learning English.

Nahid, while stressing that her English proficiency has improved since her early years in Canada, talked about second language learning as a “torturous” and “uncomfortable” process that she had to through in order to enter academia.

Nahid: [My English] is getting better everyday now. I still have problems, but it is much better than the first and second year. Even though in Iran, we read a lot of academic books and articles in English, nothing prepared me for what I had to learn here [in Canada]. Learning English was like torture [laughs], I was very uncomfortable in my [ESL] classes. I understood very little. That time is gone, I lost those years, but [pause] I had to do it [in order to] be able to survive university. I wish I didn't have to [lose those years] [sighs]

ج. الآن هر روز داره بهتر میشه. هنوزم مشکل دارم ولی خیلی بهتر از اون سال اول و دومه. با وجود اینکه توی ایران هم خیلی کتاب های درسی و مقالات رو به انگلیسی می خوندم، ولی هیچ چیز منو برای اون چیزی که باید اینجا یاد می گرفتم آماده نکرد. انگلیسی یاد گرفتن یک نوع شکنجه بود (خنده)، من خیلی در عذاب بودم توی کلاس هام. خیلی کم می فهمیدم. اون زمان گذشت، من اون سالها رو از دست دادم، ولی (مکث) باید اون کارا رو می کردم که بتونم توی دانشگاه دوام بیاورم. کاشکی این طوری نبود (آه کشید)

(March 5, 2003)

The participants viewed learning a second language as a “necessary” step to enter university; nonetheless, a step which they wish did not have to take.

Acquiring second language literacy was a time-consuming endeavor that interfered with their educational aspirations, and prevented them from fully concentrating on their academic goals.

Career Choices

For some of the participants, language had a significant influence on their decision to pursue a particular program of study. The participants stated that the linguistic demands of the course requirements in their academic programs were

determining factors that helped them decide to pursue particular programs of study and avoid others. They regarded an academic program whose course requirements entailed less intensive language proficiency as more “practical” than those with higher demands on linguistic knowledge and proficiency. From their perspectives, technical programs such as computer science and pure and applied sciences were preferred to those in humanities and liberal arts.

However, the desirability of an academic program is not excluded to its linguistic vigor and intensity, but also to its potential to help an individual enter the job market as Nader explained in one of our conversations:

Nader: The main reason that I chose to study **computer science** is that, when I came here [Canada], I had serious language problems, and to study **computer science**, you don't have to be really fluent in English. In all the **technical** programs that were available to me in university, **computer science** had a better prospect. I thought that I had a better chance of getting a **job** after I graduate. [Laughs] Well, I guess, it isn't so these days after the **market falldown**. But I am optimistic by the time I graduate situation will pick up, and I'll be able to find some kind of work.

(September 19, 2002)

ج. دلیل اصلی که اوادم **computer science** این بود که وقتی اوادم اینجا، مشکل زبان خیلی شدید داشتم، و برای اینکه **computer science** بخونی، لزومی نداره که انگلیسی ات خیلی خوب باشه. توی همه رشته های **technical** که توی دانشگاه هستن، **computer science** آینده بهتری داره. فکر کردم که شانس اینکه بعد از اینکه تموم کنم، یک **job** پیدا کنم خیلی بهتره. (خنده) خب، حدس میزنم این روزها بعد از **market falldown** دیگه اینجوری نیست. ولی امیدوارم تا زمانی که من فارغ التحصیل اوضاع بهتر بشه، و من بتونم یک کاری پیدا کنم.

Lack of “perceived confidence” in their ability to function in the second language academic environment influenced participants’ choices of academic programs and limited their options in career development. Mitra talked about her

devastating struggles with language and the constraints she experienced as the result of her lack of proficiency in English.

Mitra: When I came here [Canada] first, I wanted to study **electrical engineering**, and I enrolled in [name deleted] university. But then I found out that I had no **background** in the field. It was very difficult. Language turned out to be a big problem. It was really difficult. I had really made a big mistake, so I dropped out and decided to try something else.

Shiva: When you said, **background**, you meant language barriers, or the **technical** knowledge that you need to study in a program?

Mitra: [Pause] Well, to be honest with you, I think it was, [pause], well it was the language, because there are things that you learn in your classes, and the textbook, and your professor, but if you don't understand the language your professor speaks or can't understand the textbook, then you have a big problem. I think I wasn't able to understand even the most basic concepts, because of the problems I had with the language.

(August 21, 2002)

ج. اوایلی که اومده بودم کانادا می خواستم **electrical engineering** بخونم، وحتی توی دانشگاه ... اسم نویسی کردم. ولی وقتی دیدم که هیچ **background** ندارم توی این رشته، خیلی سخت بود. زبان تبدیل به یک مشکل خیلی بزرگ شد. یک اشتباه خیلی بزرگی کرده بودم، پس تصمیم گرفتم که ولش کنم و یک چیز دیگه امتحان کنم.

س. وقتی گفتی **background** منظورت مشکل زبان بود ویا اون معلومات **technical** که توی یک رشته احتیاج داری؟

ج. (مکث) خب، واقعیتش اینه که، فکر می کنم (مکث) زبان بود، چون چیزهائی که توی کلاس یاد می گیری، کتاب های درسی، و از استادها، اگه زبانی رو که استاد داره حرف میزنه رو متوجه نشی، یا کتاب درسی رو نفهمی، یک مشکل خیلی بزرگ داری. فکر می کنم نمی تونستم حتی ابتدائی ترین ایده ها رو بفهمم، به خاطر همون مشکلات زبان که داشتم.

Mitra's struggles with her second language were not limited to her unsuccessful experimentation with electrical engineering, but also surfaced when she wrote the entrance examination to enter a professional training program. The examination contained two sections: subject knowledge and language proficiency. The former she passed with flying colors; however, she was refused admission based on her score which was lower than the minimum

required on the test of language ability. Mitra explained the significance of the experience, which she described as devastating:

Mitra: I try to cheer myself up. It was a devastating experience. After I got the letter of rejection, I was completely torn apart. I am serious, I was really really **depressed**. All my friends know it, I was just sad. It would have been completely different if I failed the **subject matter test**, but not getting admitted because I failed the *language part* [emphasis hers] of the test? [Sighs and laughs] I tell myself, "it wasn't meant to be", maybe it wasn't supposed to happen, and maybe I'm better off not being accepted into that program. I could have been accepted, spend a couple of years in the program, spend a lot of money, and then find out that I don't like it after all. I try to console myself, but it still hurts, nonetheless.

ج. سعی می کنم که خودم رو خوشحال نگه دارم. یک تجربه داغون کننده بود. بعد از اینکه نامه ردی رو گرفتم، از هم انگار که پاشیده شدم. جدی میگویم. واقعا واقعا **depressed** شده بودم. اگه اون the **subject matter test** رو رد شده بودم، یک مساله دیگه ای بود، ولی قبول نشم به خاطر اینکه قسمت زبان رو رد بشم؟ (آه می کشد) به خودم میگویم، شاید نباید این اصلا میشد، شاید قسمت نبود، شاید اصلا همون بهتره که من وارد اون رشته نشدم. شاید اگه می شدم، یکی دو سال توی اون رشته می موندم، کلی پول خرج می کردم، بعد هم می فهمیدم که اصلا دوست ندارم. سعی می کنم که خودم رو تسکین بدم، ولی بازم اذیتم می کنه.

(August 21, 2002)

Mitra viewed her lack of second language proficiency as a barrier to pursue and achieve her educational aspirations. Knowing that her failure on the entrance examination was the result of her score on the language test became a source of emotional discomfort and distress. Her feelings were not only due to her lack of success on the language test, but also because she viewed the subject matter section as more essential and imperative to achieving her academic goals. Roxana and Yalda also mentioned the "technical" nature of their programs of study as one of the reasons behind their choices. Nader and Cysrus, while believing in the "economic potential" of a degree in computer science, talked

about their degree program as a relatively “easy field” which does not require a strong knowledge of the English language.

A Different Way of “Thinking”

Using language as a means of communication involves an ability to negotiate meanings and intentions. Heath (1993) argues that,

Being literate in today’s formal education system means being able to talk and write about language as such, to explain and sequence implicit knowledge and rules of planning, and to speak and write for multiple functions in appropriate forms. (p.55)

Heath pinpoints the functional use of the language as a medium for effective and meaningful communication between the individual language learners and others. Some of participants faced difficulties when functioning in their second language in academic environments. They mentioned that lack of language proficiency, in addition to other barriers they were facing in their lives, prohibited them to clearly communicate and express their ideas and opinions. For example, Nader stated that in addition to his limited financial resources, lack of fluency in English exaggerated the problems he was experiencing in Canada. However, he viewed the lack of second language proficiency as a “problem” which “exaggerated” other perceived barriers he was encountering in life. He said:

Nader: Studying was really difficult, particularly the first year. I also had financial problems, but the *language problem* was the one which was really affecting me, and the way I studied. When I look back now, I realize that if I didn’t have language problems, it would have been much easier. Financial problems are exaggerated when you have language problems

ج. درس خواندن خیلی سخت بود، بخصوص سال اول. مشکلات مالی هم داشتم ولی مشکل زبان دیگه خیلی روی من و روی درس خوندنم اثر گذاشت. وقتی که بهش میگردم نگاه می کنم، می بینم که اگه مشکل زبان نداشتم خیلی آسونتر بود. مشکلات مالی قوز بالا قوز میشن وقتی روش مشکل زبان رو هم اضافه می کنی.

exaggerated when you have language problems in addition.

س. این مشکلات زبان چه جوری روی درست تاثیر گذاشت؟

Shiva: How did language problems affect your [academic] work?

ج. کلا مشکلاتی که دارم موقع خوندن و نوشتن. البته الان خیلی بهتر می خونم و دیگه اون مشکلات رو ندارم، ولی نوشتن هنوز هم برام یک مشکل بزرگه. نمی تونم اون اون چیزی رو که فکر می کنم اون طوری که توی فارسی Farsi می تونم.

Nader: Generally, the problems I face when reading and writing. Of course, I can read much better now, and don't have the same problems, but writing is still a big problem. I cannot communicate what I am thinking the way I can in Farsi.

(September 19, 2002)

The disconnection between “thinking” and “writing” in the second language (Terrell, 1994) was reported as a common problem by other participants. Maguire (1994) reminds us that writing is part of learning, and using one's imagination (Maguire & Graves, 2001). Writing involves an act of “dialogism” (Bakhtin, 1986) through which one's “voice” enters a “dialogic encounter” (Maguire & Graves, 2001) with the readers of the text. Samira said that that her lack of proficiency in second language literacy skills hindered her ability to express her feelings and ideas in the classroom. In her opinion, cultural differences in promoting and developing an individual's critical abilities of students also created problems in such a way that she felt it was hard for her to “think” in her second language.

Samira: Writing **papers** are what make it so difficult for me. I'm not used to thinking [laughs]. I'm used to repeating what's in the textbooks. In Iran, they teach us not to think! We never learn to be **critical**. But here, they teach you to be **critical**; this is what they **demand** of the students. This is what made me really scared at the beginning when I

ج. **paper** نوشتن خیلی برام سخته. من عادت ندارم فکر کنم! (خنده) عادت دارم اون چیزی رو که توی کتاب درسیه تکرار کنم. توی ایران بهمون یاد میدن که فکر نکنیم! هیچ وقت یاد نمی گیریم **critical** باشیم. ولی اینجا بهت یاد میدن که **critical** باشی، از دانشجو **demand** می کنن. اوایل که دانشگاه رو

started university here. In choosing **courses**, I always made sure to choose those that didn't require **papers**, and **critiques**. But in this field, a few **courses**, maybe a few first year courses don't require **papers**; in all other [courses], we have to write at least one paper. I had to get used to it.

(July 25, 2002)

شروع کرده بودم از همین مساله خیلی می ترسیدم. وقتی **course** انتخاب می کردم مطمئن میشدم که اونائی رو انتخاب کنم که **paper** و **critique** نمی خواستن. ولی توی این رشته، یک چند تا **course**، شاید چند تا **course** سال اول **paper** نمی خوان. بقیه همه حداقل یک **paper** باید بنویسی. باید بهش عادت می کردم.

Samira's difficulty to "think" in English, her second language, made learning an intense and challenging task for her. Jerome Bruner (1983) points out that, "learning is most often figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you currently think" (p.183). Similarly, other participants reported a lack of practice and cultural awareness of the principles of "critical thinking" encouraged in Canadian academia as a source of major problems in their academic work. Mitra stated that "shifting" her cognitive process from an "Iranian" mode to a "Canadian" one was a challenging task that in fact adversely affected her understanding of the subject matter. Samira who was studying psychology, a program which she states demands an extensive knowledge of English reading and writing skills, links her linguistic competence to her academic performance on her assignments.

Samira: Because English is not my mother tongue, and psychology is a field that requires good English, I fear that I can't perform well, [pause], my reading speed is very slow, I can't finish, [pause], I mean I spend the time, even more than I should, but don't get results the way that I want to. [Language barrier] has slowed down my reading speed, and [consequently] my comprehension.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. چون انگلیسی زبان مادری من نیست و جامعه شناسی هم رشته ایه که انگلیسی خوب می خواد، می ترسم که نتونم بازدهی خوبی داشته باشم، (مکث)، یعنی وقت صرفش می کنم، حتی بیشتر از اون چیزی که باید بکنم، ولی اون نتیجه ای رو که می خوام نمی گیرم. سرعت خوندنم رو پائین آورده و درک مطلبو.

My conversations with Samira and other participants revealed that they tied their linguistic competence and proficiency to their academic performance. It is worth mentioning that, as Nader, Nahid, Cyrus, Mitra and Samira stressed that language barriers were not the only or even the main cause of difficulties they were encountering in the classrooms. With that in mind, second language proficiency was a critical factor in determining the individual participants ability to cope with the intense academic programs they were studying.

Space and Voice in the Classroom

Interpersonal communication, as one of the main social functions of language (Brown, 1994; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Savignon, 1991), may either be deterred or facilitated by an individual's linguistic competence. Bachman and Palmer (1996) define 'language use' as "the creation or interpretation of intended meanings in discourse by an individual, or as the dynamic and interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation" (p.61-2). The communicative function of language as a complex set of interactive negotiation of meanings between individuals entails the ability to create a discourse which "derives meaning not only from utterances or texts themselves but, more importantly, from the ways in which utterances and texts relate to the characteristics of a particular language use situation" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p.62). For Samira, using her second language, English, as a tool to negotiate meanings, has created significant constraints on her ability to express her feelings and thoughts, inside and outside of the academic

environment. For example, in this next excerpt Samira talked about her feelings when language becomes a deterrent to communication in social situations:

Samira: I feel that my [English] language is not good enough, as it should be, and when I think that I can't make myself understood, the situation gets worse. I mean, for example, when I feel passionate about an issue, and I can't express myself, well, I fear that I can't express my intentions and worse than that, I am **misunderstood**. When an issue is important to me, I, generally, can't get my intentions across. I become too **nervous**; I feel a lump in my throat and can't talk. Under such circumstances, I can't possibly think to say anything rational.

ج. فکر می‌کنم انگلیسی ام به اندازه کافی خوب نیست، اون طوری که باید باشه. و وقتی که فکر می‌کنم نمیتونم منظورم رو بفهمونم، وضع خراب تر میشه. یعنی، مثلاً وقتی در مورد یک موضوعی خیلی احساساتی میشم، و نمی‌تونم بیانش کنم، می‌ترسم که منظورم رو نتونم بگم و بدتر از اون **misunderstood** بشم. معمولاً وقتی یک موضوعی خیلی برام مهمه، نمی‌تونم منظورم رو بگم. خیلی **nervous** میشم، یه غده توی گلویم حس می‌کنم، و نمی‌تونم حرف بزنم. توی یک همچین شرایطی نمی‌تونم هیچ چیز عاقلانه ای بگم.

س. چرا این جور حس میکنی؟

Shiva: Why do you feel that way?

Samira: [Pause] Maybe because I think that my English is not as good as I want it to be. I want to be able to speak [English] the way I speak **Farsi**, or the way [Canadians] speak [English], but well, I can't! And that bothers me a quite a bit [that] I can't talk about what I think the way I want.

ج. (مکث) شاید به این خاطر که انگلیسیم اون طوری که می‌خوام خوب نیست. من می‌خوام همین طوری که فارسی صحبت می‌کنم، و یا اینا حرف می‌زنن، ولی خب، نمی‌تونم. همین خیلی اذیتم میکنه. نمیتونم در مورد اون چیزی که فکر میکنم اون طوری که می‌خوام حرف بزنم.

(July 25, 2002)

Samira's inhibition to use her second language and the fear of being

"misunderstood" by others resulted in a sense of "voicelessness" and self-

imposed silence. Not being able to speak English the same way that she speaks her mother tongue is a major source of distress for her. She attributes this stress as her lack of confidence in her ability to "accurately" negotiate her thoughts and ideas.

For Cyrus, language also functioned as a separation between the self and the other. Language was what separated himself from the “other”, and made him feel that he was in turn perceived as the “other” in the host society. Language, and in particular, proficiency in language use, as a marker of “social and cultural identity” (Norton Pierce, 1995; 1998, 2000) surfaces as a major theme throughout my interviews with Cyrus. Cyrus eloquently explained the interrelation between his ability to speak a language proficiently and his ability to do function socially. In the following excerpt, he resembles learning a new language is to the learning of the basic human functions, such as the ability to walk and talk:

Cyrus: When I first came [to Canada], I was like *paralyzed* [his emphasis] people. I think a lot of people are like that, at least to some extent. When I say *paralyzed*, I mean, the strength to get up and work. The same things we used to do in Iran. The simplest tasks become difficult, like an infant trying to learn how to walk. We had to learn how to do everything all over again.

(October 4, 2002)

من مثل آدم های فلج بودم اوایل که اینجا اومده بودم . فکر می کنم همه همینطورن ، حداقل تا یک حدی !
میگم فلج ، از این نظر که ،
توانایی از جا بلند شدن و کار کردن .
همون کارهایی که عادت داشتیم
توی ایران انجام بدیم .
ساده ترین کارها سخت میشن ،
عین یک بچه ای که داره راه رفتن
رو یاد میگیره .
ما هم باید همه چیز رو از اول یاد می گرفتیم .

Cyrus resembled lack of proficiency in English to being “paralyzed”, and the loss of ability to perform tasks which would be otherwise part of his daily routine activities.

Other participants viewed language as having a significant influence on their perceptions of who they are and their worth as individuals. The perception of self as “underachieved” seemed to be a recurring theme throughout my

interviews with both Samira and Nahid. For Nahid, the feeling of underachievement in Canada mainly as the result of linguistic barriers, translated into a desire to return to Iran where she believed she can benefit from a higher social status. For Nahid, lack of language proficiency deters her upward social mobility within the host country. Language was the link between her and full economic and social integration in Canada.

Nahid: I feel that if I knew the language [English] well, I could do something here. I could find a job. Well, I would have been able to do something somehow, I could push myself forward, but, [pause], what can I say? Sometimes I say to myself that if I were still there [Iran], my situation would have been much better, I mean, in terms of social status.

ج. حس می کنم که اگه زبان خوب بلد بودم،
یک کاری می تونستم بکنم. می تونستم یک کاری
پیدا کنم. می تونستم یک جوری، یک کاری بکنم و
خودم رو جلو بندازم، ولی، (مکث)، چی بگم؟ بعضی
وقتها به خودم میگم که اگه هنوز اونجا بودم، موقعیتم
خیلی بهتر بود، از نظر موقعیت اجتماعی میگم.

(August 2, 2002)

For Nahid, “language” was perceived as a means for upward social mobility and therefore, a signal of social status. Wishing that she had not left Iran — because she would have been able to find a job and “do something” — represents her perception of the connection between language proficiency and the ability to enter the competitive job market.

Moreover, Nahid also viewed language as a factor which determines her “space” within the classroom, in relation to other students as well as the professors. She referred to her language ability as making her “invisible” in the classroom and not being able to talk to other students and express her opinions. She elaborated in the following excerpt:

Nahid: Sometimes the professor asks a question in class, calling for opinions, I have an opinion [about the issue] but can't express it exactly the way I want to. I know that I know, but my language [English] is not fluent enough to answer the questions.

ج. بعضی وقتها که استاد یک سؤالی توی کلاس میکنه، و نظر می خواد، من یک عقیده ای دارم، ولی نمی تونم بیان کنم اون چیزی رو که میخوام بگم. میدونم که میدونم ولی زبانم اون قدر خوب نیست که جواب سؤال ها رو بدم.

(August 2, 2002)

Similar to Nahid, some of the other participants, Samira, Yalda and Mitra, also “chose” to remain silent and voiceless in their classrooms where they felt “vulnerable” (Shor, 1999). Studies of ESL learners in diverse academic environments point to the “silence” of language learners in classrooms (e.g., Losey, 1995; Jule, 2002; Mackie, 2003). bell hooks (1994) observes that “it is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silences or lack of student engagement” (p.39). The participants viewed mastery of their second language as a means for “empowerment” and finding their “voices” and “spaces” within the classrooms and their communities. As Adrienne Rich (1997) eloquently put forward: “language is power” (p. 67) and the participants believed that power and voice in the classroom could be realized through linguistic expressions of their experiences, thoughts, opinions, and feelings.

Language in addition to its role as an indicator of academic performance is also a marker of social identity. The inability or lack of confidence in second language proficiency can mean an “invisible” place and space in the classroom environment. The “invisibility” of the second language speaker in the classroom does not necessarily equate to a lack of interest or dissociation from the surrounding learning environment, but it can translate into a feeling of isolation

and looking in from the outside. The student, as a second language learner “silently” participates in classroom activities, while being “actively” engaged at a cognitive level, as Samira and Nahid attested.

Connection to the Iranian Community

Throughout the interviews, all participants expressed feelings of disconnection from other members of their own cultural community. They attributed this isolation and lack of connection as a voluntary decision mainly due to their busy schedules, and physical and mental exhaustion after a full day at work and school, and also the inability to find other Iranians with common values and interests. However, I observed a sense of sadness and disappointment in this disconnection from their cultural community. This implied to me that their decision, although seemingly voluntary, was not what they would have preferred to do. Some believed that given different circumstances and in different contexts, they would make different choices. For example, Roxana contributed her lack of contact with the members of the Iranian community in Montreal to her busy schedule as a full-time student. For her, disconnection from the community of Iranians implied a deep sense of “loneliness” and isolation, as she discussed in this conversation:

Roxana: Sometimes, I feel very lonely here
[Silence]

Shiva: Why do you feel this way?

Roxana: I don't have a lot of contacts with
Iranians here [in Canada]

Shiva: Is that why you feel lonely here?

Roxana: [Silence] I don't know!

Shiva: Do you want to not communicate with
them?

Roxana: I don't know!

Shiva: I've been lonely here too. My family was
far away, and I was always so busy with school
and work. I, too, didn't and don't have much
contact with [other] Iranians. Mostly because I
don't have time.

Roxana: Yes! That's exactly true! Here, it's
always work or study, or study or work! There is
no time left for anyone. Of course, we have a
few very very good Iranian friends here; you
also know a few of them! [Laughs] It's not like I
don't want [her emphasis] to have contacts with
Iranians. It's [my] situation. Of course, even if I
had the time, I still wouldn't have contact with
every single Iranian!

(August 23, 2002)

ج. گاهی اوقات خیلی احساس تنها نی
دارم . (سکوت)

س. چرا این احساس رو داری؟

ج. اینجا من زیاد با ایرانی ها تماس
ندارم . (سکوت)

س. برای همین احساس تنهایی می کنی؟
ج. (سکوت) نمیدونم!

س. آیا خودت می خوای که باهاشون
تماس نداشته باشی؟

ج. نمیدونم!

س. منم اینجا تنها بودم.

برام خیلی سخت بوده .

هم خانواده دور بوده و هم اینکه همش

مشغول کار و درس بودم .

منم با ایرانی ها تماس زیاد نداشتم و ندارم،
بیشتر به خاطر اینکه وقتش نیست .

ج. آره! من هم دقیقاً همینطور.

همش یا کار یا درس ، یا درس یا کار!

دیگه هیچ وقتی برای کسی نمیمونه!

البته چند تا دوست ایرانی خیلی خیلی خوب

هم اینجا داریم . تو هم چند تاشونو

میشناسی! (می خندد)

این نیست نه نخوام با ایرانی ها تماس

داشته باشم . بیشتر اوضاع آدمه!

البته با همه ایرانی ها حتی اگه

وقتشو هم داشتم رفت و آمد نمی کردم!

Similarly, Samira also talked about her isolation and disconnection from the
Iranian immigrant community, but she attributed that to her decision to wear the
veil. She believed that her "veil" is interpreted by other Iranians in the community
as an affiliation with fundamentalism. The political and social tribulations during
and after the 1979 Iranian revolution, and the establishment of the Islamic

Republic of Iran subsequently led to a resurgence of Islamic laws which extended to all aspects of social, political, and personal lives of Iranian citizens. This new Islamic revivalism, as Samira explains in the following excerpt, may also be considered as one of the main factors in creating friction among the members of the Iranian community in diaspora.

Samira: I think that for Iranians [who] live abroad, Hijab [Muslim women's veil] is still an issue.

Shiva: In what sense?

Samira: [Silence] I mean, [other Iranians] don't want to have any communication with a veiled Iranian woman like me, for example. I often see that the moment they see my veil they run away! [Laughs] [It seems] like they **fear** [me]! [Laughs]

Shiva: [Laughs] why? Do you have any explanations [for that]?

Samira: Honestly, I don't have any reasons for that, except that I am veiled [silence], and I think, I mean that's what I think that [because of my veil] I am guilty of starting the revolution! [Laughs] Well, they don't see me as an *insider* [italics added] [literal translation: one of themselves]!

Shiva: Even if you are an *educated* [original emphasis] Iranian?

Samira: *Even* [her emphasis] if you are an educated Iranian. Doesn't make any difference. [The moment] they see [your] veil, they **exclude** you.

(July 25, 2002)

ج. من فکر می کنم که ایرانی های خارج از کشور این مسأله حجاب هنوز برایشون حل نشده.

س. یعنی از چه لحاظی منظورت؟

ج. (سکوت)، یعنی دارم میگم که تمایلی ندارن با فرضاً "یک زن ایرانی که مثل من حجاب داره رابطه ای داشته باشن. خیلی اوقات می بینم دیگه ، به محض اینکه منو می بینن که حجاب دارم یک دفعه می بینن در میرن ! (خنده) اصلاً انگار **fear** دارن ! (خنده)

س. (خنده) واسه چی؟ هیچ دلیلی درش می بینن؟

ج. راستش هیچ دلیلی درش نمی بینم ، غیر از این که حجاب دارم (سکوت) و فکر می کنم، یعنی من اینجوری فکر می کنم، که شاید منو به خاطر اینکه مقصر می دونن که مثلاً "من انقلاب کردم! (خنده) خب، منو از خودشون نمیدونن دیگه! س. حتی اگر یک ایرانی تحصیلکرده باشی؟ ج. حتی هم اگر یک ایرانی تحصیلکرده باشی. هیچ فرقی نداره. روسری رو که می بینن بلافاصله **exclude** ات میکنن

Samira's comments touch on the sensitive issue of Muslim veil which she believes is regarded as a "symbol" of fundamentalism, or as a sign of sympathizing with fundamentalist ideology. Being categorized as such, made her feel isolated and "excluded" as she stated in the previous quote.

Interestingly, Mitra was the only participant who believed Iranians are able to build a close and united community in Diaspora. She stated that cultural differences between Iranians abroad and the members of the host country, and lack of understanding and cultural apathy, creates a situation where the members of the Iranian community feel closer because of their shared experiences as members of a minority group. She stated:

Mitra: Well, I think that Iranians here [in Canada], maybe not all of them, but generally, many of them, when they come here, they become closer to some extent.

Shiva: What might be reasons, you think?

Mitra: Of course, I'm not saying that it's always the case; it's not! But I think that because [you] don't have anybody else here; you get closer to your fellow [Iranian] citizens. Doesn't matter how long you stay here and learn the language [English and/or French, one of the official languages of Canada], you still can't communicate with them [Canadians] the way you can with another Iranian, your compatriot. Our cultures are not the same, they are very different, and because of that it is difficult to communicate [with Canadians]. It's like deep down in your heart, you don't understand what the other person is saying. [She or he] doesn't understand what you are saying either!

(March 11, 2003)

ج. خب من فکر می کنم که ایرانی های اینجا ،
حالا شاید نه همه، ولی بطور کلی، خیلی ها
وقتی میان اینجا تا یک حدی به همدیگه
نزدیک تر می شن.
س. فکر می کنی دلیلش چیه؟
ج. البته نه اینکه بگم همیشه، مواردی
هم هست که اینطوری نیست. ولی فکر
می کنم که شاید چون آدم اینجا
کس دیگه ای رو نداره، به هموطن های
خودش نزدیک تر میشه.
هر چقدر هم که اینجا بمونی،
وزبانشون رو یاد بگیری، باز هم نمیتونی
مثل یک ایرانی، یک هموطن خودت
باهاشون ارتباط برقرار کنی.
فرهنگمون یکی نیست، خیلی فرق دارن
با هم، و همین ارتباط برقرار کردن رو
سخت می کنه. انگار که ته دلت
نمی فهمی طرفت چی داره میگه.
اون هم نمی فهمه تو داری بهش چی میگی!

For Mitra, connection to others, Canadians and Iranians alike, is more than simply speaking the same language. Rather, interpersonal connections are built upon shared cultural values and worldviews. "Understanding what the other person is saying" runs deeper than the meanings of words in the language; it implies knowing the other person and his or her stance in the world in relation to oneself.

However, the relationship between individuals with shared cultural backgrounds is complex and multidimensional. When I asked Mitra whether she feels close to the Iranian community in Canada, she offered this response:

Shiva: Do you have any close communication with other Iranians?

س. با ایرانی های دیگه ارتباط نزدیک داری؟

Mitra: Not really, I have a few good friends, but that's about it. Even those friends, I don't see them that often. [We] are all so busy here that there is no time and energy left for socialization. Plus, depending on how [we] define *closeness to others*, I don't feel that I can open up to people that easily, Iranians I mean. You may think you know them well, but in reality, you really have to protect your privacy.

ج. نه خیلی، یک چند تا دوست خوب دارم، ولی همینکه. حتی اون دوستارم خیلی نمی بینم. اینجا انقدر سرمون شلوغه که وقت و انرژی برای معاشرت با دیگران برامون باقی نمی مونه. بعلاوه، بستگی داره چه طوری نزدیکی رو تعریف می کنی. من حس نمی کنم که بتونم با دیگران اون طور راحت باشم، ایرانی ها رو میگم. شاید فکر کنی خوب می شناسیشون، ولی در واقع باید زندگی خصوصیت رو ازش محافظت کنی.

Shiva: [What] you mean by protecting privacy [is] that it's hard to trust other [Iranians]?

س. منظورت از محافظت زندگی خصوصی اینکه که سخته بهشون اعتماد کردن؟

Mitra: Yes, you hear all these rumors and bad mouthing, and most of the time it's friends doing it to their friends. You really need to know someone to trust them. Even then, you have to be very careful how much you let them know about you.

ج. آره، غیبت می کنن و بد دهنی می کنن، و بیشتر اوفات دوستا با دوستاشون این کارو می کنن. واقعا باید بشناسی طرفو تا بهش اعتماد کنی، حتی اون موقع هم باید مراقب باشی چقدر در موردت میدونن.

(March 11, 2003)

I interpreted that Mitra's comments implied the need to protect one's privacy and personal life, which does not necessarily translate into a lack of trust for other members of the community. This interpretation is supported by her earlier comments with respect to the increased sense of closeness and affinity among the members of the immigrant Iranian community.

Several Iranian academics (Mahdi, 1997; Nassehi, 1995; Vaziri, 1993) have argued that the Iranian immigrant communities in diaspora are characterized by a common desire for a unified cultural identity. Vaziri (1993) contends that among the Iranian expatriates, there exists a strong desire to connect to the others members of the diasporic community in order to maintain their "Iranianness". Their efforts to retain cultural bonds are symbolized by their frequent travels between Iran and their countries of residence, their passion for Iranian food, music and cinema and their struggles to teach "Persian" to their children —second-generation Iranians. Bozorgmehr (2000), on the other hand, disagrees. He states that despite shared socio-political ties among Iranian immigrants, the heterogeneity of Iranians, in terms of their religious, ethnic and linguistics backgrounds, allows them to have the

option of identifying with their ethno-religious background [Jews, Christian Armenians, Assyrians, Zoroastrians, etc.] rather than with their Iranian nationality...this heterogeneity has prevented Iranians from developing a strong overreaching Iranian ethnicity, much less ethnic solidarity. (p. 89)

Although all participants shared the same religion, language and ethnicity, their disconnection from the Iranian immigrant community in Canada, be it as the

result of the lack of time and energy or to protect their privacy, validates

Bozorgmehr's observations.

Home Away from Home: Building New Connections

All participants expressed a longing to make a home for themselves and their families in Canada. There was a deep desire to feel belonged. For many of the participants, years of life in Canada meant getting used to the Canadian system and the opportunities that were open to them in their new country, extending from education to employment. These opportunities, not available to them in their country of birth, were major motivating factors to stay in Canada, struggle, and make efforts to and move forward in their lives. Yalda talked about the need to work hard and take advantage of the available opportunities in order to stay competitive in the ever-changing and developing Canadian society.

Yalda: Before I came to Canada, I had a completely different view of what was happening here. I used to think, I mean, it's like being on **vacation** all the time [laughs]. I had no idea of the kind of life people were living here, and how hard people work to make a living. Ever since I came here, there has been one problem after the other: learning a new language, taking care of a little child, do the housework, go to university. But that was our decision to come here. Of course, It is very difficult being away from family and friends, living in a foreign country. But, you learn to deal with that. You learn to forget what you left behind [in Iran], and look ahead. There are so many **opportunities** here that you can't afford to miss. You want to be a part of this society, and move forward with it. You can't

قبل از اینکه کانادا بیام ، اصلا یک تصویر کاملاً متفاوتی از اونچه که اینجا می گذشت داشتم . فکرمی کردم که ، یعنی ، مثل اینکه که همش **vacation** هستی (می خندد). هیچ تصویری نداشتم که مردم اینجا چطوری زندگی می کنند، و چقدر سخت باید کار کنن تا چرخ زندگیشون بچرخه . از موقعی که اینجا اومدم یک مشکل بعد از یک مشکل دیگه بوده :

یاد گرفتن یک زبان جدید ، نگهداری از یک یک بچه کوچک ، کار خونه کردن ، دانشگاه رفتن . ولی خب این تصمیم خودمون بود که بیاییم اینجا . خیلی سخته البته ، دوری از خانواده و دوستان ، توی یک کشور غریب زندگی کردن . ولی خب باید یادگرفت که با این مسائل برخورد کرد. باید یاد گرفت که فراموش کنی اونچه رو که داشتی و به جلو نگاه کنی . اینجا خیلی **opportunities** هست

afford to stay behind.

(August 28, 2002)

که نباید از دست داد.
باید عضو این اجتماع بود و باهاش جلو رفت .
اصلا نمی تونی عقب بیفتی .

As Yalda stated in the last excerpt, the new realities of life in Canada

contradicted with her previous pre-conceived notions of life in the West.

Therefore, she was compelled and felt the need to work hard and move on in her life.

Despite the struggles the participants faced as new immigrants in Canada, and the need to be familiarized with the social and political system of the host country and acquiring second language literacy, they all expressed satisfaction with their decision to come and live in Canada. Learning a new language, a new social system, and socioculturally appropriate codes of behavior, while requiring effort on the part of the participants, were considered as important and essential factors in helping them integrate in their new country. The new opportunities open to them in the host country outweighed lack of belongingness and feelings of isolation from their community and living far away from their family, friends and relatives. For some of the participants, student rights, individual freedoms, and self-determination were the unsurpassed advantages of life in Canada. Nasrin stated:

Nasrin: I really love it here [in Canada]. I really love the style of living here. I feel strangely comfortable. Because of that, I am very satisfied in my life. I am my own person here. Whatever I do, [pause], I feel satisfied. I should have been born here [in Canada] [laughs]

(September 3, 2002)

من اینجا رو خیلی دوست دارم .
از سیستم زندگی کردن در اینجا خیلی خوشم میاد.
احساس راحتی عجیبی دارم.
برای همین هم توی زندگیم خیلی راضی ام .
اینجا آدم خودم هستم ، هر کاری بکنم،....
احساس رضایت دارم .
اصلا "انگار باید اینجا به دنیا میومدم!
(می خندد)

The strengths of the Canadian educational system, when compared to Iran, were contributing factors to the participants' feelings of satisfaction and content with their lives in Canada, despite the many barriers they have to overcome as immigrants and newcomers. For example, Nasrin talked about the importance of "respect" for students within the Canadian academia, and its perceived absence in the Iranian higher education system. She explained:

Nasrin: Everything is different here, from the **opportunities** available to the students to the way they treat students here in Canada. I think there is more respect for the students. I know that in Iran, I felt that they were very rude to students, particularly to women. That [sense of] respect for *individual* [italics added] that exists here, is absent in Iran, at least that was my impression of the university I [attended] in Iran.

(August 2, 2002)

ج. همه چیز اینجا فرق داره، از اون **opportunity** که برای دانشجویان باز هست تا طرز رفتاری که با دانشجویها توی کانادا دارن. من فکر می‌کنم اینجا برای دانشجویان بیشتر احترام قائلن. حس می‌کنم که ایران خیلی پررو بودن نسبت به دانشجویان، بخصوص نسبت به زنان. اون احترامی که برای فرد اینجا هست توی ایران نیست، حداقل این تصور منه از اون دانشگاهی که ایران رفتم.

For Mitra, life in Canada meant the necessity to learn and adapt to a new set of social rules and codes of behaviors. Being a good citizen, and adapting to the "Canadian way" was important for Mitra. She said:

Mitra: I feel that I have to **adapt** to Canada. I think that for **immigrants** who come here [like us], we need to **adapt** to their rules. This is the only way you can survive, get a job and function [in the society]. Otherwise, you are in constant struggle with them and yourself. It's only fair. If some people want to live their own way, [which is] in contradiction with Canadian culture, they shouldn't come here. They have to stay in their own countries, and live that way.

ج. حس می‌کنم باید به کانادا **adapt** کنم. فکر می‌کنم برای **immigrants** که میان اینجا، باید به مقررات **adapt** بشن. تنها راهیه که میتونی دوام بپاری، کار پیدا کن و زندگی کن. در غیر اون صورت همش باید با اینا و با خودت بجنگی. همین طوریش هم درسته. اگه بعضی ها می‌خوان اون طوری زندگی کنن که با فرهنگ کانادایی مغایرت داره، اصلاً نباید بیان اینجا. باید توی کشور خودشون بمونن و همون طور زندگی کنن.

س. چه طوری مثلاً با فرهنگ کانادایی مغایرت دارن؟

Shiva: For example what [behavior or cultural belief] can be in contradiction with Canadian culture?

Mitra: [Pause] For example, sometimes, in different places, I see these women who not only cover their body and hair, they also cover their faces, you can hardly see their eyes. Sometimes I ask myself, how come they don't suffocate? [Laughs] And some of them complain that there is **discrimination**, and that they can't get jobs, and so on. I think they should stay where they are, and not come to Canada. In their own countries, they couldn't even work, or sometimes drive and vote. You come here, and you want to live here, you have to try to adjust to the [Canadian] way.

(March 11, 2002)

For Samira, living in Canada entailed a disconnection from her culture and her past in Iran. She attributed the lack of belonging that she felt to her physical distance from Iran, and her alienation from the social changes taking place within the Iranian society. She commented:

Samira: I have been here for a long time, and after you live in a place for a long time, you get used to it. I haven't been in Iran for quite a few years, and I think the Iranian society has greatly changed. I feel that I have **missed** that change, and I really don't belong there any more. It is the strangest feeling: when you are here, you think you are an Iranian, and when you go back there [Iran] you think you don't belong, and you are a stranger, and you feel that you are a Canadian. I feel that a lot of things have happened in Iran in the past years, a lot of changes, and I have **missed** [all those changes]. I wasn't there, I wasn't present in the society to see the changes and go forward with

ج. (مکث) مثلاً بعضی وقتها توی جاهای متفاوت، من این زن هائی رو می بینم که نه فقط بدن و موشون رو پوشوندن، بلکه صورتشون رو پوشوندن، به زحمت می تونی چشماشونو ببینی. بعضی وقتا از خودم می پرسم، اینا خفه نمیشن؟ (خنده)
بعضی هاشون هم میگن که اینجا **discrimination** هست و کار پیدا نمی کنن و از این حرفها. من فکر می کنم که اونا باید هر جایی که هستن بمونن و نیان کانادا. توی کشوری خودشون کارم نمی تونن بکنن، حتی رانندگی و رای هم نمی تونن بدن. میای اینجا و می خوای اینجا زندگی کنی، باید به راه و رسم ایناعادت کنی.

ج. من خیلی وقته که اینجا، و بعد از اینکه یک مدت زیادی یک جا زندگی کنی بهش عادت می کنی. چند ساله که ایران نبودم و فکر می کنم جامعه ایران خیلی فرق کرده. حس می کنم که اون تغییراتو **missed** کردم و دیگه به اونجا تعلق ندارم. خیلی احساس عجیبیه، وقتی که اینجا هستی به اونجا تعلق ندارم. خیلی احساس عجیبیه، وقتی که اینجا هستی فکر می کنی ایرانی، و وقتی بر می گردی، فکر می کنی که تعلق نداری، و غریبه هستی و کانادایی. من حس می کنم خیلی از اون چیزهایی که این چند سال اخیر توی ایران اتفاق افتادن، تغییرات خیلی زیادی، اینا همه رو من **missed** کردم. اونجا نبودم، توی جامعه نبودم که

the[changes]. You see, everything has changed, from the movies to the way people talk. The direction that the Iranian society is going towards has completely changed.

(January 6, 2003)

اون تغییراتو ببینم، و با همون جریان پیش برم. ببین، همه چی تغییر کرده، از فیلم های سینما، تا اونطوری مردم حرف می زنن. اون جهتی که جامعه ایرانی داره پیش میره الان کاملاً تغییر کرده.

Nahid, who was openly critical of the discriminatory practices she has encountered within Canadian academia and the broader Canadian society, also talked about her satisfaction with life in Canada. She mentioned that while living in a "foreign land" is difficult and heartbreaking, life in Canada is preferred to life in Iran. She explained:

Nahid: It's hard to be an immigrant. It's hard to live in a country where you feel like a *foreigner*, and most importantly you feel they [Canadians] are *foreigners*! Have you noticed how we Iranians call Canadians *foreigners*, even in their own country! [Laughs] It's funny, but it means a lot; it means we don't feel like we are at **home**. But regardless [of that feeling], in general, I am content to be in Canada. Sometimes, I feel that if I'd stayed in Iran, I would be much further along in life than I am here right now. But then, I look a bit [deeper], and see that it wasn't worth it. There are no individual rights in Iran. You can have tons of money, but if you can't choose what to wear, it's not worth a *dah-Shahi* [Dime]. The only thing that I truly **miss** about Iran is my family, and that's why I go back every now and then, and will go back [in the future]. If I had my family, my mother, my father, my brothers and sisters and their families here, I wouldn't even look back. There would be no need, I'd have whatever I need right here: my *family*!

(March 5, 2003)

ج. مهاجر بودن سخته. سخته توی کشوری زندگی کنی که همش فکر کنی خارجی ای، و مهم تر از همه، فکر کنی که اونها خارجیین. تا حالا متوجه شدی که ما ایرانیها به این کانادایی ها میگیم خارجی؟ حتی توی کشور خودشون! (خنده) خنده داره ولی این خیلی معنی میده. عینی ما این حسو نداریم که **home** هستیم. ولی از اون که بگذریم، من کلاً راضیم که توی کانادام. بعضی وقتها فکر می کنم که اگه ایران مونده بودم، توی زندگیم جلوتر از اینی بودم که الان هستم. ولی بعد نگاه می کنم و می بینم که ارزششو نداشت. توی ایران حقوق فردی وجود نداره. می تونی یک عالمه پول داشته باشی، ولی اگه نتونی انتخاب کنی چی بپوشی، یک دهشاهی ارزش نداره. تنها چیزی که من واقعا توی ایران **miss** می کنم خانواده ام هستن. و برای همینه که هر چند وقت یکبار بر می گردم، و بازم میرم. اگه اینجا خانواده داشتم، مادرم، پدرم، برادرام و خواهرام و خانواده های اونا اونجا، اصلاً پشتم رو هم نگاه نمی کردم. لزومی نداشت. خانواده ام، هر چی که می خواستم همین جا

Other participants seemed to agree with Nahid's statement, and believed that their families were the reason they still wanted to go back to Iran, and were still considering Iran as their "home". Nasrin stated:

Nasrin: What's a country anyways? It's just a fist-full of soil! [Italics added]. I'm not saying that I don't love Iran, not at all! I get upset whenever I hear people bad-mouthing Iran. I love Iran, I feel [that] it's like your child, even when you child has done a really bad thing, and you are really upset with [him or her] you still love [your child], and you get upset if someone says something bad about [him or her]. But despite those nationalist feelings, I don't miss much there, maybe because I really like being in Canada, I love being my own person. I miss my relatives and sometimes my friends, but the reality is, even in Iran, especially now a day, people lose contact with each other. And as they become preoccupied with their own lives, they don't see each other that much any more. Other than that, I'm not missing much! [Laughs]

(February 15, 2003)

ج. اصلا کشور چی هست؟ یک مشت خاکه! نمیگم که ایران رو دوست ندارم، نه، اصلا! ناراحت میشم وقتی میشنوم مردم درباره ایران بددهنی می کنن. من ایرانیو دوست دارم، حس می کنم عین بچه آدمه. حتی وقتی بچه ات یک کار خیلی بدی کرده، و از دستش خیلی عصبانی هستی، هنوزم دوستش داری و ناراحت میشی یکی بهش چیزی بگه. ولی از این احساسات ملی گرایی که بگذریم، من زیاد هواشو نمی کنم. شاید بخاطر اینکه دوست دارم کانادا هستم. من عاشق اینم که خودمم. دلم برای خانواده و بعضی وقتها دوستانم تنگ میشه، ولی واقعیت اینه که حتی توی ایرانم این روزها مردم کمتر با هم ارتباط دارن. و هر چقدر که سرشون به زندگی خودشون مشغوله، همدیگه رو زیاد نمی بینن. غیر از اون، من دلم زیاد تنگ نشده! (خنده)

For Cyrus and Nader, living away from their families, in addition to lack of access to their social and financial support, implied not benefiting from their families' emotional support, and ultimately led to feelings of homesickness and loneliness. All participants commented that they were generally happy with their lives in Canada, and were doing the best they could to "make a new home in Canada", to borrow Mitra's words. Cyrus Commented:

Cyrus: The life of an **immigrant** has many problems and barriers to overcome. But, if things were perfect in our own country, we wouldn't come here, would we? The reality is there are problems here that are very difficult, problems that we didn't necessarily have in Iran. But in Iran, we had other problems, and now that we are here, it's a decision that we have made and we have to live by it, and make the effort to make the most out of our lives in Canada.

(January 21, 2003)

ج. زندگی یک **immigrant** خیلی مشکلات و سختی ها داره که باید پشت سر گذاشت. ولی اگه کشور خودمون همه چیز بی نقص بود، اینجا نمیآمدیم، میآمدیم؟ واقعیت اینه که اینجا مشکلاتی هستن که خیلی سختن و مشکلاتی که ما لزوماً توی ایران نداشتیم، ولی توی ایران یک سری مشکلات دیگه است. و حالا که اینجا هستیم، این یک تصمیمیه که خودمون گرفتیم و باید باهاش بسازیم، و سعی کنیم که نهایت بهره رو از زندگیمون توی کانادا بگیریم.

The participants' "cultural memory" (Freire, 1999) of the social, political, and economic problems existing in the Iranian society intensified their desire to make Canada their home away from home.

Representations of Race and Gender in Education

Life in Canada, as men, women, Muslims and first-generation immigrants held different meanings for each of the eight participants. While Nahid, Samira, Cyrus and Nader openly discussed their experiences with discrimination and racism in Canadian academia and the broader society, the experiences of Nasrin, Roxana, Mitra and Yalda spoke of different realities and interpretations of their lived experiences. Some of the participants spoke about "being treated differently" as a signal of covert racism. Others talked about "context" and "situation" as determiners of how they interpreted a particular action or comment as discriminatory or racist. The common element among the participants' narratives, however, was their acknowledgment of the positive experiences from

their lives in Canada. Such experiences had made the difficulties they were encountering worthwhile.

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, I discuss the participants' perceived notions of being a "Muslim" man or woman. In the second part, I address individual men's and women's overt and covert self-reported experiences with racism and discrimination in academia and the community.

Muslims in the West

Samira: One of my professors, particularly after September 11, would keep going on about **suicide bombers**. Well, nobody confirms [that] or at least, should not confirm. What they [suicide bombers] do, is killing innocent people. But when they [Canadians] ridicule them, and make jokes about the whole thing, I can't really bear it. For example, this professor [whom] I [mentioned] earlier, once said that that the young woman, [the] **suicide bomber** killed herself, because her family found out that she was not a **virgin**. So she killed herself, before they did it! Or another time, he said that the **suicide bombers** are promised to go to heaven, and over there, God will give them beautiful angels to, pardon my language, **to F**. He said the **f. word**. I was so shocked. I don't react, because if I say something, I'll tear up and start crying, and it will be even worse. But I can't understand why he has to insult Islam and Muslims? [As] I said before, no one agrees with what they [the suicide bombers] do, but you can't attack every Muslim for the actions of a few individuals.

(January 6, 2003)

ج. یکی از استادی من، بخصوص بعد از سپتامبر ۱۱، همش در مورد **suicide bombers** حرف میزد. خب هیچ کس اینو تأیید نمی کنه، یا حداقل نباید تأیید کنه. کاری که اونا می کنن، مردم بی گناه رو میکشن، ولی وقتی اینا مسخره می کنن و در موردش جک میزنن، من واقعا نمیتونم تحمل کنم. مثلاً همین استاد که قبلاً گفتم، یکبار گفتش که اون زن جوون **suicide bomber** که خودشو کشت بخاطر این بود که خانواده اش فهمیدن **virgin** نیست، برای همین خودشو کشت، قبل از اینکه اونا بکنن. یا یکبار دیگه گفتش که این **suicide bombers** رو بهش وعده بهشت میدن، و اونجا خدا بهشون حوری های خوشگل میده که، ببخشیدا، **to f. word** رو هم گفت. خیلی شوکه شده بودم. ولی چیزی نگفتم، چون اگه چیزی بگم، اشکم در میآد و میزنم زیر گریه. و کار خرابتر میشه. ولی نمی فهمم که چرا باید اسلام و مسلمونها رو توهین کنه؟ گفتم که هیچکس با این کاری که اینا می کنن موافقت نمی کنه، ولی ولی دیگه تو هم نباید بخاطر کار یک عده به مسلمونا حمله کنی.

As Samira indicated in the above excerpt, “being a Muslim” in the West implied an inevitable association with stereotypical images of Muslims as terrorists and suicide bombers. After listening to Samira during this conversation and reviewing the interview transcripts, I could not conclude with certainty that I interpreted that professor’s comments as discriminatory or racist towards the entire community of Muslims. To determine that, one would need to know how that particular individual (the professor) views and defines fundamentalism and whom he considers as a terrorist, and whether or not he equates Islam and fundamentalism and categorizes them as similar. Nonetheless, Samira interpreted his comments as stereotypical and inappropriate.

While all participants were Muslim, they had unique experiences living and being identified as Muslims in Canada. Samira, Nahid, Cyrus and Nader were vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with the media images of Muslims and particularly Iranians as terrorists and being associated with violence. On the other hand, Nasrin, Yalda, Roxana and Mitra stated that they had not noticed such negative images of Muslims and Iranians in the media and in the wider society. When I asked them whether they felt there was a negative representation of Muslims, in general and Iranians in particular, each participant seemed to have a different outlook on how they would associate their identity with the larger Muslim community in Canada. Nader stated:

Nader: It's got to a point that that even when I go to **Loblaws** or **IGA**, and I'm paying for my grocery, I say to myself, "how would this person who is smiling and talking to me feel, when [she or he] finds out that I am an Iranian, and I'm a Muslim?" I know deep down that they [Canadians] don't treat us the same way they [treat] others [non-Muslims and non-Iranians]. It's not the same, it's just not the same.

Shiva: Why do you think that is?

Nader: Because of the **media** and the **images** of the Muslims as **terrorists** and **fundamentalists**. Sometimes when I think about it, I feel that they [Canadian public] are not really guilty. These images are so strong that unless you know a lot, and you spend a lot of time and energy on reading and analyzing what's going on in the world, you **automatically** start believing the same things they are feeding you. For example, I notice that when it comes to issues and problems in parts of the world that I am not familiar with, I start reciting what the **media** says and take their words [for granted].

(February 16, 2003)

ج. به جایی رسیده که وقتی میرم **Loblaws** یا **IGA** و دارم پول خرید رو حساب می‌کنم، به خودم می‌گم این شخصی که داره ببهم لبخند میزنه چه طور احساس می‌کنه اگه بفهمه من ایرانی هستم و یک مسلمونم؟ واقعا حس می‌کنم که با ما مثل اونای دیگه رفتار نمی‌کنن. یکسان نیست، یکسان نیست.

س. چرا این طور فکر می‌کنی؟

ج. به خاطر **media** و این **images** که از مسلمانها بعنوان **terrorists** و **fundamentalists** دارن. بعضی وقتها که بهش فکر می‌کنم، حس می‌کنم که اینا مقصر نیستن. این **media** اینقدر قوین که اگه تو خیلی چیز ندونی و یک وقت زیادی سر تجزیه و تحلیل اونچه که تو دنیا می‌گذره نکنی، به طور **automatic** شروع می‌کنی به باور همون چیزهایی که دارن به خوردت میدن. مثلاً من خودمم متوجه شدم که وقتی مسایلی میرسه توی اون نقاط دنیا که من باهاشون آشنایی ندارم، من هم شروع به تکرار کردن همون حرف های **media** می‌کنم، و حرفشون رو قبول می‌کنم.

Nader stressed the role of media's powerful images of the Muslim world and Iran in influencing and shaping the public opinion and interpretations of what was "really" going on in the world. "Ignorance" and media work side by side to create, promote, and encourage stereotypical images of Muslims as terrorists.

However, not all of the participants shared Nader's views. Mitra, for example, saw a genuine effort by the Western media to portray a positive and more representative image of the Muslim world. A television program that documented the improving situation of Iranian women as the result of their greater participation in education and the job market, confirmed her perceptions

of the media's strive for integrity and honesty in their representations. In the following conversation, Mitra explained this further:

Mitra: I didn't really feel any negative reactions against myself or other Iranians that I know, after September 11. I went to school the day after, and it was like *nothing had happened* [Italics added]. The same school, the same classes, the same [classmates]. I, myself, didn't feel anything, or see anything that says to me, something has changed now. [Pause] Actually, now that we are on the subject of Muslims and the media, I actually think that the media has tried to portray a positive image of Muslims, and especially Iranians. For example, a couple of months ago, there was a program on TV, a young Iranian-American woman went to Iran, and reported on the situation of women in Iran. [The report] was saying that Iranian women are the most educated in the Middle East, they work outside the home, and they are very strong. The image of women and Iranian women they were showing was in fact very positive. I have taped the program, and if you like I can lend it to you.

Shiva: Thank you, I would love that. But are you talking about the image of only women, or do you think what they were showing was more general?

Mitra: I think, what they showed was that the Iranian society, in general, is open to women and their education. There is a lot of freedom in the West. September 11 didn't create any problems for me or anyone that I know. Even at [name deleted] University, there was a demonstration by Palestinian students, they created a cemetery, it was shown on TV as well. They made these tombs and tombstones for those Palestinians who were killed in the conflict. Some Jewish students complained to the [Dean] and [he or she] said that "there is freedom here, and as long as they are not

ج. من بعد از سپتامبر ۱۱ هیچ عکس العمل منفی بر علیه خودم و یا ایرانی های دیگه متوجه نشدم. روز بعدش مدرسه رفتم و انگار که هیچ اتفاقی نیفتاده بود. همون مدرسه همون کلاس و همون همشاگردیها. من خودم چیزی ندیدم و احساس نکردم که بمن بگه که چیزی عوض شده. در واقع حالا که در مورد مسلمانان و رسانهها صحبت میکنیم بنظر من آنها سعی کردند که تصویر مثبتی از مسلمانان مخصوصا ایرانیان نمایش بدن. برای مثال چند ماه پیش یک برنامه تلویزیونی بود که یک زن جوان ایرانی آمریکایی رفته بود ایران و گزارش داد در مورد وضعیت زنان ایران میگفت که زنهای ایرانی توی خاورمیانه تحصیل کرده ترینها هستند توی خاورمیانه بیرون از خانه کار میکند و خیلی قوی هستند. اون تصویری که از زنهای ایرانی نشون میدادند خیلی مثبت بود. من اون برنامه رو ضبط کردم که اگر بخوای بهت قرض میدم.

س: خیلی ممنون. خیلی خوشحال میشم. ولی تو فقط در باره تصویر زنان صحبت میکنی یا اینکه چیزی که اونها نشون میدادند یک تصویر کلیتر بود؟

ج: بنظر من همه جامعه ایران بود که در کل برای زنان و تحسيلات اونها باز بود. توی غرب آزادی زیادی وجود داره. ۱۱ سپتامبر برای من و یا کسانی که من میشنادم هیچ مسعله ای بوجود نیاورد. حتی تو مدرسه یک تظاهرات توسط فلسطینیها برگزار شد که یک قبرستون درست کردند و توی تلویزیون هم نشون داده شد. اونها برای فلسطینیهای که توی درگیریها کشته شده بودند قبر و سنگ قبر درست کرده بودند. بعضی از دانشجویان یهودی هم به دین اعتراض کردند که اون در جواب گفت که اینجا آزادی وجود داره و تا زمانی که اونها کسی رو اذیت نمیکند هر کاری که دلشان بخواهد میتواند بکند و ما نمیتونیم از اونها جلوگیری کنیم. منظورم اینه که بقدری آزادی زیاد هست که هر کسی هر کاری که دلش بخواهد میتونه بکنه. آزادی بیان هست و هر کسی میتونه هر چی دلش میخواد بگه.

bothering anyone, they can do whatever they want to do and we can't stop them". What I mean is that there is so much freedom here that anyone can do whatever they want. There is freedom of expression, and as they say, freedom of religion, everyone has the right to express [himself or herself].

(March 11, 2003)

According to Mitra, the right to the freedom of expression in Canada, and generally in the western world, allows peoples of all religions to express themselves and state their opinions freely without fearing prosecution or retribution. Therefore, Muslims, similar to other religious and cultural groups, have the freedom to express their opinions in a peaceful manner.

On the other hand, Cyrus believed that living in the West as a Muslim man does not entitle him to the same rights and privileges as the non-Muslims. The right to the freedom of expression is an exclusive privilege that does not extend to *all*. In our conversations, he talked about the West's "hypocrisy" and "double-standards" with regard to individual citizen's right to freedom of speech. He asserted:

Cyrus: They say there is freedom of expression here, they say you can say whatever you [want to] here, but I personally don't buy it. It's all superficial at best. And after September 11, it's not even superficial anymore. The discrimination against Muslims and people from the Middle East is in your face. They [Canadians and people in the West] are open. Yes, they are very open. But to their own people. People like us do not have the same entitlement to **freedom of expression**, like a

ج: می‌گند اینجا آزادی بیان هست, می‌گند هر چی خواهی میتونی بگی, ولی من شخصاً اینرو قبول ندارم. همه این حرفها خیلی سطحی هست. بعد از 11 سپتامبر هم که دیگه سطحی هم نیست. تبعیض علیه مسلمانها و خاورمیانه ایها جلوی صورته. اونها باز هستند, قبول, خیلی هم باز هستند ولی برای مردم خودشون. آدمهای مثل ما **freedom of expression** ی که سفیدپوستان کانادایی و غیر مسلمانها بهشون تعلق میگیره تعلق نمیگیره. واقعیت زندگی برای ما اینه که **freedom of expression** و باز بودن به ما تعلق نداره.

white Canadian, or anyone else who is not a Muslim. The reality of our lives [as Muslims] is that, those set of rules of **freedom of expression** or openness don't apply to us!

expression و باز بودن به ما تعلق ندارد.

(January 21, 2003)

I was intrigued by Cyrus's comments, particularly because of his physical characteristics that do not make him stand out as a "visible minority" and/or a Muslim in Canada. Like Mitra, Cyrus acknowledged the existence of the right to freely express one's opinions and viewpoints in Canada. However, unlike Mitra, he emphasized the exclusion of Muslims from the right to freedom of speech. Similarly, Samira and Nahid observed that while the principles of freedom of expression may apply in the Western societies, they do not necessarily extend to members of diverse cultural and religious groups. Samira talked about the existing double standards of freedom of expression, and the "power" over "voice" in the academy and the broader society. She pointed out:

Samira: It was really interesting when I first came here. I would watch TV, listen to people, and even in my classes, I notice they [Canadians] are so rational and logical in the way they approach different issues. Whereas we Iranians are always emotional and get sentimental when we have an opinion about something, they [Canadians] always try to analyze issues and look at them from different angles. But it didn't take me long enough to realize that they are like this when they are talking to their own people. When they are addressing us, they are as **ignorant** and dogmatic as you can get; they are not open to our ideas, *only to their own* [ideas].

ج: وقتی اولها اینجا اومدم خیلی جالب بود. تلویزیون نگاه میکردم، به مردم گوش میدادم، و حتی توی کلاس متوجه میشدم که اونها خیلی معقول و عقلانه به مسائل نگاه میکند. در حالی که ما ایرانیها همیشه وقتی نقطه نظری داریم احساساتی و حساس هستیم؛ اینجا مسائل رو تجزیه و تحلیل میکند و از جوانب مختلف بهش نگاه میکند. ولی زود متوجه شدم که اینها وقتی با مردم خودشون صحبت میکند اینجوری هستند. وقتی با ما صحبت میکند خیلی **ignorant** میشوند؛ آنها به عقاید ما باز نیستند، و فقط به عقاید خودشون اینطورند.

(January 6, 2003)

Samira observed that “voice” and “power” are intricately interconnected and inter-related. The right to freedom of expression has a complex relationship with “who”, “when”, “how” and “what” of the perspective one is attempting to express.

Moreover, Samira elaborated that the West’s stereotypical images of Muslims and Islamic cultures not only do not recognize and acknowledge differences between and across Islamic societies, but also fail to take into consideration differences amongst individual members of Muslim communities.

She stated:

Samira: Sometimes, not always, there are situations in my classes that make me uneasy. For example, in one of my classes, a professor was showing us a film about Saudi Arabia, and there was this lady who was well-educated, and university professor, but was the second wife of a rich man. He was making the point that this [polygamy] is so accepted among Muslims, and is a part of their culture. But what they [Canadians] don’t understand is that even here, if you go from Montreal to Toronto to Vancouver, people have different customs, act differently, the culture is different. For example if you go from a big city to a small town, the differences are even more noticeable. Why is it that when it comes to Muslims, we are all the same and not different from one another? If there was a law centuries ago, and maybe even now, that men could marry two, three, four wives, it doesn’t mean that everybody is doing it, or that it has become accepted by the entire society. Yes, there are men who **abuse** the laws and the situation, but it is not everyone. I get upset when hear them [Canadians] talk like that, but I can’t say anything. I feel embarrassed.

Shiva: Why can’t you say anything?

Samira: [Pause] Because, especially in the

ج: همیشه که نه ولی بعضی وقتها توی بعضی از کلاس ها مواردی پیش میاد که من رو خیلی ناراحت میکنه. مثلاً توی یکی از کلاس هام استاد ما فیلمی در باره عربستان رو داشت نشون میداد در باره یک خانمی که بسیار تحصیل کرده هم بود و استاد دانشگاه هم بود ولی زن دوم یک آدم ثروتمند بود. منظور فیلم این بود که چندتا زن داشتن جزئی از فرهنگ مسلمانها هست و براشون قابل قبوله. ولی چیزی که اونها نمیفهمند اینه که اینجا هم وقتی از مونترال به تورنتو یا ونکوور بری مردم رسم و رسوم مختلف دارند و فرهنگ هاشون فرق میکنه. برای مثال هم وقتی از یک شهر کوچیک به بزرگ بری این اختلافات مشخصتر میشه. چطوره که حالا که به مسلمونها میرسه همه ما یکی هستیم و با هم فرق نداریم؟ آگه به قانونی قرنها پیش وجود داشته و یا حتی الان که مردها میتودن دو، سه، و یا چهار زن داشته باشند، این به این معنی نیست که همه اینکار رو میکنند. و یا اینکه جامعه این رو قبول کرده. بله مردانی هستند که از قانون و این موقعیت **abuse** میکنند، ولی همه که نیستند. من خیلی ناراحت میشم که اونها اینطوری حرف میزنند، ولی من حرفی نمیتونم بزنم. من احساس شرم میکنم.

س: چرا چیزی نمگی؟

ج: [مکث] چون توی اون کلاس مخصوصاً اگر چیزی میگفتم، میترسیدم که استادم بعداً توی نمره دادن بهم نمره خوبی نده و یا به چیزی مثل این. من حتی به دانش آموزان دیگه هم جواب ندادم، چون نمی خواستم که موقعیت رو از اونی که بود داغتر کنم و برای خودم

[context] of the classroom, if I say something, I fear retaliation from the professor, that I will get a lower grade, or something [in those lines]. I even refuse to respond to other students, I don't want to create more tension, and make enemies in the classroom. I prefer to keep the peace!
[Laughs]

(July 25, 2002)

موقعیت رو از اونی که بود داغتر کنم و برای خودم دشمن توی کلاس درست کنم. ترجیح دادم که آرامش کلاس رو حفظ کنم. [خنده]

Similar to Samira, other participants also criticized the West's generalizations of a homogenous Muslim culture, particularly with regard to women's rights. As Samira stated in the previous excerpt, such generalizations fail to take into consideration the individual differences within Islamic cultures, and variations in personal interpretations of Muslim laws. Nader believed that such generalizations are fabricated and portrayed by the media and consumed by the general public in the West. The power and strength of media, Nader believed, rarely allows an individual to question the credibility of such representations. He explained:

Nader: You know, most of these negative images we see exist about Muslims [and] the violent Muslim, this whole **terrorist stereotypes**, these are mostly, at least in my opinion, are created by the **media**. Here, the **media** is very powerful, and really influences the way people think. When you are constantly bombarded with these images, even if you are very intelligent and educated, you just start to automatically believe in them, or least stop questioning them. It's truly the case! For example, we [Iranians and Muslims] are more critical of the **media** when it comes to issues surrounding Muslims and the Middle East. But

ج: اکثر این تصاویر منفی که در مورد مسلمانها وجود داره، مثل مسلمونهای وحشی، یا **terrorist stereotypes**، اکثراً بنظر من توسط **media** درست شده. اینجا **media** خیلی قوی هستند و واقعاً روی مردم اثر میگذارند. وقتی دائماً این تصاویر بخورد آدم میشه، اگر هم خیلی باهوش باشی، خودبخود شروع به قبول اونها میکنی، و یا حداقل درباره اونها سوال نمیکنی. مثلاً ما خودمون از رسانه ها وقتی در باره مسلمانها و یا خاور میانه ایران صحبت میکند **critical** هستیم ولی در مورد خبرهای دیگه مثل بقیه جامعه این خبرها بخوردمون داده میشه و ما خودبخود قبولشون میکنیم. چرا؟ چون بهتر از این نمیدونیم. ما متکی به **media** هستیم که اطلاعات را به ما بده.

in case of other news, we are just like the rest of the society, we are fed with this information, and we automatically believe them. Why? Because we don't know any better! We rely on the media to give us the information we need.

(September 19, 2002)

As conveyed in the previous quote, Nader emphasized the power of the media in creating and representing images that are not necessarily representative of Muslims in particular, and more generally the world. These images are created and endorsed to give the “ignorant” public the information that they “need” in order to make sense of what is going on in the world. Cyrus, however, believed that the media’s power is limited to the representation of those images that “we”, the public, already know and believe in. He argued:

Cyrus: Of course the **media** is very powerful, but I don't really believe in the **media conspiracy** that some people, especially some Iranians and Muslims and other people alike, believe in. [This] is my opinion: these **stereotypes** have always been there, before the media was created. Now, it's only more visible and we hear about it to a greater extent.

Shiva: So, what do you think is the role of **media**?

Cyrus: **Media** only portrays what we already believe in; otherwise, we wouldn't buy it for a second. A simple example is these TV [sitcom] shows. If people don't watch them and don't like them, they are cancelled. It means that your mind must be already set on some idea before they can sell it to you. You must believe that Muslims are violent and terrorist, for whatever reason, to believe the **media** and

ج: البته که **media** خیلی قوی هستند ولی من به این اعتقاد ندارم به **media conspiracy** که بعضی از مردم مخصوصاً ایرانیها و مسلمانها به اون معتقد هستند. من میگم که: این **stereotype** همیشه اینجا بوده، قبل از اینکه رسانه ها درست بشند، و حالا توی یک بعد بیشتر دیده میشه و شنیده میشه.

س: خوب بنظر تو نقش **media** چی هستش؟

ج: **media** فقط چیز هایی رو که ما قبلاً به اونها اعتقاد داریم نشون میدن، و اگر بغیر از این بود ما هیچ اونها رو قبول نمیکردیم. یه مثال ساده همین شوهای تلویزیونی هست که اگر کسی اونهار رو نگاه نکنه قطع میشند. یعنی باید بجیزی معتقد باشی که بتونند اون رو بهت بفروشند. باید معتقد به وحشی بودن و تروریست بودن مسلمانها باشی، به هر دلیلی که میخواد باشه، که اعتقاد به چیزیه که **media** میخواد بگه داشته باشی، و غیر از این معتقد نمیشی.

what it is trying to tell you, otherwise you wouldn't believe it.

(January 21, 2003)

Cyrus's comments reveal his strong conviction in the freedom to choose what we believe in. The media's power begins and ends with what we already know about the world. Media's images are indeed a mirror view of our own interpretations and meanings that we contribute to the world events, and support our own personal convictions, beliefs and values.

Veiled Perceptions: Muslim Women and Oppression

Being the target of discrimination based on religion and nationality was a recurring theme in my conversations with Nahid, Cyrus, Nader and Samira. Samira, the only veiled woman in my study, attributed her encounters with discrimination and racism, whether in academic environments or the community, to her decision to wear the veil as the symbol of her religious beliefs. In the following excerpt from one of our conversations, Samira talked about her direct confrontation with a Canadian man who had aggressively attacked her and questioned her existence in Canada where, in his opinion, she did not belong.

Samira: I had a very bad experience with a man a couple of years ago that really affected me. He cut in front of me in the line up at a drugstore and gave me the *look*. I ignored him, but when I came out of the store, I saw him waiting for me on the street. He pinned me against the wall, put his fist in my face, and said, "you are not from our race. We don't

چند سال پیش من یک واقعه بد با یک مرد داشتم که واقعاً روی من تاثیر گذاشت. توی صف داروفروشی جلوی من زد و به من نگاه چپ چپ کرد. من بهش توجه نکردم ولی وقتی بیرون اومدم بیرون منتظرم بود. من رو چسبوند به دیوار و مشتش رو تو صورتم گره کرد و گوت که تو مال فرهنگ من نیستی. ما تو مملکت تو نمایم ولی تو میایی. ما نمیخواهیم که اینجا باشی. اون واقعه واقعاً روی من اثر گذاشت. میخواستم

come to your country, you come to our country. We don't like you to be here". That incident really affected me. I wanted to cry. I was very upset, and when I'm upset, I can't respond, I feel a lump in my throat. I only remember that I told him that "is not so, you are wrong". But [that] affected me very negatively. I feel like after that my views towards here [Canada] and the people completely changed. For a long time after that, I would look around the streets to see if I can find him. But I still think that one shouldn't **focus** on a negative experience. In my opinion, every bad experience leaves a negative influence. But then I thought, maybe he was just a mean person. Still, till today, when I see someone is **mean** to me, I can't say whether this person is generally a **mean** person, or is [he or she] treating me like this because I wear a veil. My first reaction is always that it is because of my veil.

(January 6, 2003)

که گریه کنم. خیلی ناراحت شدم و وقتی که ناراحتم نمیتونم جواب مناسب بدم و احساس کردم که یه چیزی تو گلویم. من فقط یادمه که بهش گفتم که اینطوری نیست و تو اشتباه میکنی. ولی اون جریان اثر خیلی منفی روی من گذاشت. احساس کردم که بعد از اون نظر من نسبت به اینجا و مردمش کاملاً عوض شده. برای مدت زیادی تو خیابون نگاه میکردم که گیرش بیارم. ولی هنوز معتقدم که نباید به یه تجربه بد **focus** کرد. بنظر من هر تجربه بد یک تاثیر بد میزاره. ولی بعدش گفتم که شاید اون یه آدم **mean**. هنوز هم من وقتی یکه نفر با من **mean** رفتار میکنه نمیتونم بگم که اون کلاً **mean** یا با من که حجاب ددرم اینطوره. همیشه اولش فکر میکنم که بخاطر حجابمه.

Samira's interpretation of that confrontation was joined with uncertainty and indecision. While she seemed aware of her "difference" as a veiled Muslim woman in Canada, she had difficulty labeling her experiences and categorizing them explicitly as encounters with racism and discrimination. Such experiences did not seem to be daily occurrences. However, when they did happen, they left Samira with an uncomfortable feeling about her identity as a Muslim immigrant in Canada. Later in our conversation, Samira talked about another experience that had left her uneasy, and questioning "why" it had happened to *her*. She explained:

Samira: I feel that, after I came here, I mean maybe three or four years after I came here, I had not noticed many negative encounters myself, but, [pause], then I understood that there is a difference. For example, once I went shopping with friends, and saw that a man was following us. [At first] I thought he is following us [to pick us up] [laughs], but then my friends – those who have been here longer – told me that because we were wearing veils he was following us to make sure we don't steal anything. It was the first negative experience that I had. I said to myself "why, why do they think that we wanted to do that [shoplift]?" I was so upset that I felt a lump in my throat, and left everything that I had picked up to buy right there, and left the store. It was very difficult for me to accept that.

(January 6, 2003)

ج: من حس میکنم که بعد از اینکه اینجا اومدم، یعنی شاید 3 یا 4 سال بعد از اینکه اینجا اومدم، هیچ برخورد بدی خودم شخصاً متوجه نشده بودم، ولی، [مکث] بعداً فهمیدم که به تفاوتی هست. مثلاً یکبار رفته بودم خرید با دوستانم، و یک مردی دیدم دنبال ما میامد، فکر کردم دنبالمون افتاده (خنده)، ولی بعد دوستانم که اینجا بیشتر بودن بهم گفتن که بخاطر اینکه ما حجاب پوشیدیم اون داشت دنبالمون میکرد که مطمئن بشه که ما چیزی نمیدزیم. این اولین تجربه بدی بود که من داشتم. بخودم گفتم "چرا، چرا آنها فکر میکند که ما میخواستیم اون کار رو بکنیم؟" اونقدر ناراحت بودم که حس کردم که به چیزی تو گلو گیر کرده، و هر چیزی رو که برداشته بودم که بخرم گذاشتم همونجا و از مغازه اومدم بیرون. برام خیلی سخت بود که قبولش کنم.

Samira questioned the roots of such social encounters, and wondered about their connection to her identity as a Muslim and an Iranian. The need to "belong" and yet not being accepted by the society because of her veil left Samira with deep feelings of sadness and distance from others in the community. She felt "unwelcomed" as the result of reactions to her appearance. She attributed those negative reactions to being perceived as a "fundamentalist" Muslim and a terrorist by the general public, as she pointed out in the following excerpt:

Samira: I don't feel that I am **welcomed**. At the beginning, when we first came here, I didn't really notice it. I wouldn't feel that people didn't like me because I wear a veil. But then, I had several encounters with different people, and I realized that they don't really like us. One of my friends who was veiled at the beginning, had to take off, because she said that she was not

ج: من احساس نمیکنم که اینجا **welcomed** هستم. اوایلش که اینجا اومده بودیم چیزی متوجه نمیشدم. احساس نمیکردم که چون حجاب دارم مردم از من خوششون نمیداد. ولی بعداً تعدادی برخورد با مردم داشتم که متوجه ام کرد که اونها واقعاً از من خوششون نمیداد. یکی از دوستانم که محجبه بود روسریش رو مجبور شد که دربیاره، چونکه میگفت مردم با اون خوب برخورد نمیکردند. او جزئیات جریان رو نگفت

being treated well. She didn't get into details, but I assumed, I mean, I understood from what she was saying [was] that she had seen things, and heard things that made her feel uncomfortable, just the way I feel.

Shiva: Why do you think your veil makes people uncomfortable?

Samira: Well, because they look at me and think I am a **fundamentalist**, a **terrorist**. It's been much worse since September 11.

Shiva: In what sense?

Samira: That I actually hear things and see things that I wouldn't before. But in a way, I feel that it is much better when it's out in the open.

Shiva: Why?

Samira: Because it is right there and no body can deny it. It is not camouflaged any more. [Now] you know what you are dealing with!

Shiva: Do you think, it's only you or...?

Samira: I think it's mostly towards Muslims, [and] not just myself. But I think, if you are like me [veiled], perhaps, their reactions seem to be much more severe.

Shiva: Why is that?

Samira: Because they know right away who I am, they don't have to guess! [Laughs]

(January 6, 2003)

ولی فکر کنم که چیز هایی رو دیده و شنیده که اون رو ناراحت کرده بود. همونطور که من رو ناراحت کرده.

س: بنظرت چرا حجاب مردم رو ناراحت میکنه؟

ج: فکر کنم چونکه به من نگاه میکنه و پیش خودشون فکر **fundamentalist** یا **terrorist** هستم. بعد از 11 سپتامبر هم بدتر شده.

س: چطور؟

ج: که من چیز هایی رو میشنوم و میبینم که قبلاً نمیدیدیم و نمیشنیدیم. ولی از یک لحاظ هم فکر میکنم که بهتره حالا که آشکارا شده.

س: چرا؟

ج: چونکه جلوی چشته و هیچکس انکارش نمیتونه بکنه. دیگه مخفی نیست. و میدونی که با چی طرفی.

As stated in the previous quote, Samira perceived that the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York City's World Trade Center (WTC) on the morning of September 11, 2001 which caused the loss of nearly three thousand innocent

lives, brought about changes in public perceptions and behaviors towards the members of the Muslim community. Being physically identified as a Muslim, because of her veil, Samira believed that these recent open and direct expressions of dislike towards Muslims, can in fact, be a blessing in disguise. She argued that that as the result of strongly emotional public reactions to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, discrimination against Muslims “is not camouflaged any more. [Now] you know what you are dealing with!”

Haya (حیا): The Measure of a Woman’s Modesty

The participants believed that the Iranian culture and society holds two different sets of standards for socially appropriate gender roles and behaviors. These culturally defined gender roles determine what is generally accepted as appropriate women’s behavior and what is frowned upon as culturally unacceptable. They contended that this double standard is mainly observed in social situations where there is an exchange of opinion, such as in the academic/classroom environment where interactions between student-teacher and student-students require an ability to actively engage in arguments and willingness to express personal perspectives.

The Iranian concept of “ba-haya” (با حیا), translated to mean “modest” and “virtuous” (Haim, 2000), highlights the cultural importance of maintaining social harmony and avoidance of confrontations through modesty and “keeping a low profile”. Interestingly, in Persian, which is not a gendered language (i.e., does not distinguish between feminine and masculine forms of the words), the concept

of *haya* generally refers to women's modesty. *Haya* is commonly used to refer to quiet young girls, and functions as an incentive to encourage development of socially-accepted behaviors. On the other hand, "*bi-haya*"—one who lacks modesty—refers to women who do not observe sociocultural codes of behavior. The understanding of the Iranian concept of modesty is important since it may influence women's behaviors and interactions with others within academic environments, and may be misinterpreted as lack of interest and/or critical thinking. Within the context of a western classroom, a woman's modesty may inevitably encourage the stereotypical images of Iranian women as women from an oppressive Muslim culture. In the following excerpt, Nahid eloquently explores this cultural issue:

Nahid: For us women, they [family] always taught us to be polite and **ba-haya** [modest], and be considerate to others. Well, we try to be considerate, but they [Canadians] think that we don't know, that we are not knowledgeable. For example, if in a classroom, either the professor or one of the students makes a mistake, or even when I look at it from a different perspective and see it differently, I can't raise my hand and say, "no, I think you are wrong", or "I have a different explanation". But Canadians are very free in terms of correcting others when they see a mistake. I personally think that for Iranian women, it's even worse. We are brought up to listen; we are not brought up to disagree; we are not brought up to give a different perspective. [Laughs] The other person's perspective is always **perfect**, [there is] no need for ours [laughs].

(August 2, 2002)

ج: برای ما زن‌ها اون‌ها همیشه به ما یاد دادند که مودب و باحیا باشیم و مراعات دیگران را بکنیم. خب ما سعی میکنیم مراعات کنیم. ولی آنها فکر میکنند که ما نمیدونیم، که چیزی حالیموم نیست. مثلاً اگر توی یک کلاس یه استاد یا یکی از دانشجو‌ها یک اشتباه بکنه، یا حتی موقعی که من یکجور دیگه به مسئله نگاه میکنم، نمیتونم دستم رو بلند کنم و بگم "نه فکر میکنم که اشتباه میکنی" یا "من یک توضیح متفاوت دارم". ولی کانادایی‌ها خیلی راحتن توی تسحیح کردن دیگران وقتی اشتباهی میکنند. من شخصاً فکر میکنم که برای زنان ایرانی بدترم هست. ما رو بار آوردن که گوش بدیم، طوری بزرگمون نکردن که مخالفت کنیم. ما بزرگ نشدیم که یه عقیده مختلف بدیم [خنده]. عقیده اون طرفمون همیشه **perfect** نیازی به مال ما نیست.

As Nahid states in the previous quote, "haya" implies politeness, consideration for another individual's integrity and authority. A woman who is "ba-haya" does not engage in arguments that are perceived as confrontations—a behavior that is culturally unacceptable and socially inappropriate.

Samira's views towards the concept of women's modesty is similar to Nahid's. However, Samira's choice of word for defining a woman's modesty is "shyness" (Khejalat, خجالت). A "shy" (khejalati, خجالتی) woman is perceived as demonstrating a socially accepted behavior—a concept that is different from the general perception of "shyness" in Canadian culture which can be seen as a negative personality trait. Furthermore, Samira links the Iranian culture's emphasis on women's modesty to the authoritative nature of the culture. She stated:

Samira: We are an **authoritative** nation, well, at least most of us, if not all. They [Canadians] give more freedom to their children, especially women. For us Iranians, it is very important that the child is polite, and doesn't talk back; that the child respects the parents. But for them [Canadians] this is not important at all. They just don't care about that. They care more that the child is **independent**, being polite is secondary. It is more important [for them] that the child can stand on his/her own two feet, and can express opinions. I really think, when it comes to either politeness in our culture, or **independence** in theirs [Canadian culture], the focus is more on women than on men. They [Canadians] emphasize that the women get an education [and] are able to defend themselves. But we Iranians, on the other hand, we are more concerned that the woman should be **politically correct** [laughs], [and] be polite. I mean, god

ج: ما یک ملت **authoritative** هستیم، خوب حداقل اکثرمون اگر همه مون هم نیستیم. اینها به بچه هاشون بیشتر آزادی میدن بخصوص به زنها. برای ما ایرانیها خیلی مهمه که بچه مون مودب باشه و جواب نده و اینکه بچه به پدر و مادرش احترام بگذاره. ولی برای اینها این اصلاً مهم نیست. اصلاً بهش اهمیت هم نمیدند. براشون بیشتر مهمه که بچه **independent** باشه، مودب بودن بودن درجه دومه. این مهمه که بچه بتونه روی دوتا پایهای خودش بایسته و ابراز عقیده کنه. من واقعاً فکر میکنم که وقتی مسئله ادب توی فرهنگ ما یا **independence** توی فرهنگ اینهاست توجه بیشتر روی زنهایست تا مردها. اینها تاکید میکنند که زنها درس بخوندند و بتونند از خودشون دفاع کنند. ولی از طرفی ما ایرانیها بیشتر نگرانیم که زنهامون **politically correct** باشند [خنده]. مودب باشند. یعنی خدارحم کنه اگر یه چیزی بگه که یه کسی ناراحت بشه. تا حالا متوجه شدی که توی ایران وقتی میخواند بگند چه دختر خوب کوچولوی میگن "وای خدا، چه دختر خجالتی کوچولوی!!" توی فرهنگ ما که خجالتی بودن رو تشویق میکنند ولی

forbid if she ever says anything to anyone that upsets [him or her]. Have you [ever] noticed in Iran, when they want to say what a nice little girl, they say: Oh god, what a *shy* [emphasis hers] little girl! In our culture, shyness is encouraged, especially for women, but here, [it] is very unacceptable. In Iran, shyness is a measure of politeness; here, shyness is a measure of weakness. These are cultural differences that, honestly, I think [are] very important in an educational setting.

(July 25, 2002)

اینجا اصلاً قبول نشده است. توی ایران خجالتی بودن نشونه مویب بودن، اینجا خجالتی بودن نشونه ضعفه. اینها تفاوت‌های فرهنگی هستند که، راستش رو بخواهی، فکر میکنم توی محیط‌های آموزشی خیلی مهم ان.

Politeness, modesty, and haya generally encourage the social perception of women's need to be "politically correct" and considerate to others. On the other hand, Roxana, Mitra and Nasrin described different experiences growing up in Iran. They talked about their perceptions of their families' encouragement and support for the open expression of their opinions and perspectives at home and in the society. They talked about their active participation in family decision-making affairs, and their parents' emphasis on their independence and authority in their personal lives. I believe it is important to mention that neither of these women had a brother. I found this to be an intriguing observation, because as Mitra explained in the following conversation, not having a "son" in the family, may have, in fact, influenced the parents' treatment of their daughters. Mitra elaborated:

Mitra: I have two sisters, and I think being the oldest, I was involved in family decision-making, maybe even more than my sisters. Of course, when I was old enough that I could actually express an opinion. Later on, as my sisters grew older, they also had a say in how the household was run. My parents would ask for opinions, and would never make an important decision without involving us and asking us first. Now that I think about, I say to myself, maybe if they had a son, his opinion would have been given more weight than their daughters. Then I think, well, the reason that I was consulted is because they [my parents] wanted me to be like their son [laughs]. But then, I really don't know. It's really difficult for me to guess something that didn't happen. But in general, they [my parents] always encouraged us to **express** ourselves and what we think.

(March 11, 2003)

ج: من دوتا خواهر دارم و چون فکر میکنم از شون بزرگترم از خواهرهام هم توی تصمیم گیریهای خانواده شرکت میکنم. البته وقتی که اونقدر بزرگ شدم که بتونم عقیده ام رو ابراز کنم. بعدها هم که خواهرام بزرگ شدن اونها هم در مورد امور خانواده حرفی داشتن بزنند. پدر و مادرم از من عقیده هامون رو میخواستند و هیچ وقت به تصمیم مهم بدون مشورت و صحبت با ما نمیگرفتن. حالا که بهش فکر میکنم به خودم میگم که اگر یه پسر داشتن عقیده اون مهمتر از دخترها بود. بعد فکر میکنم که خب دلیلی که با ما مشورت میکردن شاید به خاطر این بود که میخواستن ما پسرشون باشیم [خنده]. ولی بعداً , من واقعاً نمیدونم. این خیلی برام سخته که حدس بزنم در مورد چیزی که اتفاق نیفتاد. ولی بطور کل اونها همیشه ما رو تشویق کردن که خودمون و اون چیزی رو که فکر میکنیم **express** کنیم.

Roxana's experiences revealed similar experiences within her family structure.

Moreover, she expressed that she also had an influential and active part in family decision-making, as she explained in the following excerpt:

Roxana: I had a great influence in the family. My father used to consult me all the time, so did my mother. My opinion was very important; I mean, it wasn't like they consult you and they did whatever they wanted afterwards! No, they really considered what my sister and myself had to say. Of course, it was after we reached an age that we could make decisions and knew right from wrong.

(August 23, 2002)

ج: من توی خانوادمون خیلی نقش مهم داشتم. پدرم همیشه با من مشورت میکرد, مادرم هم همینطور. عقیده ام خیلی مهم بود, یعنی اینجوری نبود که باهات مشورت کند و بعد برن هر کاری دلشون بخواد بکنند. نه, اونها واقعاً اون چیزی که من و خواهرم میگفتیم در نظر میگرفتن. البته بعد از اینکه به یه سنی رسیدیم که میتونستیم تصمیم بگیریم و خوب رو از بد تشخیص بدیم

I asked Roxana to explain the possible reasons behind her parents' decisions to involve their daughters in the process of family decision-making. She talked about the influence of their educational background on their open and liberal childrearing practices. Her father—a university educated businessman—and her mother—a retired government employee and high school graduate—firmly believed in encouraging and supporting their children's independence, regardless of gender.

With regard to women's roles within the family, Cyrus' and Nader's experiences closely resembled the female participants'. Cyrus, who has one older sister, commented that the "age hierarchy" which exists in the Iranian culture and may indeed have a greater influence on the treatment of children than "gender". Being an older child in the family, be it a son or a daughter, grants one a position of authority that requires respect and obedience from the younger siblings. With that being said, both Nader and Cyrus also acknowledged the importance of "haya" as a measure of a woman's modesty, and talked about the differences in the treatment of "sons" and "daughters" within Iranian households. Nader elaborated on his observations in the following excerpt:

Nader: The reality is [that] even in the most open and educated Iranian families, there are different expectations from girls than there are from boys. Girls are expected to be **ba-haya** [modest] and **mahjoub** [virtuous, modest]. I don't mean that boys can do everything they want. No, this is not the case. But what I mean is that girls are expected to have a mode down-to-earth behavior, for example, don't laugh loudly, don't speak too much, don't dress a

ج: واقعیت اینه که حتی توی بازترین و تحصیلکرده ترین خانواده های ایرانی، انتظاراتی که از دخترها و پسرها دارند با هم فرق میکنند. دخترها باید با حیا و محجوب باشند. نمیگم که مردها و پسرها هر کاری دلشون میخواد میتوند بکند، نه، اینطور نیست. منظورم اینه که انتظار دارن دخترها سربزیر باشن. مثلاً بلند نخندند، بلند صحبت نکنند، یه طورهای لباس نبوشن و دوست پسر نداشته باشن. در بعضی خانواده ها حتی اجازه نمیدن که با پسر خاله یا پسر دایی حرف بزنن. ولی پسرها این محدودیتها رو ندارن، آزادترن این

certain way, and don't have boyfriends. In some families they can't even speak to their [male cousins]. But boys don't have the same restrictions; they are freer to do what these things. If a family's son has a girlfriend, even if they don't like it, they say, "well, it's a phase, he'll get over it", but [if] a girl has a boyfriend, it's a completely different story.

کارها رو بکنن. اگر پسر یه خانواده دوست دختر داره، حتی اگر خوششون نیاد میگن "خوب این یک مرحله است، میگذره". ولی یه دختری که دوست پسر داره، یک داستان جداگانه است.

(September 19, 2002)

There are two sets of rules: What daughters *can't* do, and what sons *can* get away with. This double standard does not mean, as Nader stated, that men are free to do as they wish. Rather, it implies the existence of stricter regulations on women's behaviors, at home and in the community.

Experiencing Racism and Discrimination in Education

The participants gave different accounts of their encounters with racism and discrimination in Canada. As discussed previously, the stereotypical images of Muslims and Islamic cultures, held by some individuals in the community in and out of the classrooms, led some of the participants to perceive being discriminated because of their religious and/or cultural affiliations. Nader, Cyrus, Samira and Nahid talked about their perceptions of less explicit and subtler forms of discrimination against Muslims or members of cultural minority groups in Canada. In the next section, I discuss and interpret, in detail, the participants' perceptions of racism and discrimination in Canadian higher education and the wider society.

The “Invisible” Fist

The interview transcripts revealed a common thread across some of the participants' narratives with respect to their perceptions of racial discrimination in Canada. They pointed to the existence of a “less visible” and “subtle” form of discrimination in Canadian education system. They defined “subtle” racism as a form of discrimination which is not verbally articulated; rather, is “felt” or “perceived”. For example, Nader talked about his “subtle” encounters with racism and discrimination in academia. In his experience, discriminatory treatment of students by professors and the administration took place against students considered as “immigrants” and “foreigners”. Although he could not account for any particular overt displays of discrimination and racism against himself or other students, he believed that the position of immigrant students as minorities made them a “target” for discrimination and recipients of a “different kind of treatment” from the mainstream majority students. In the following conversation, he elaborated further on his observations:

Nader: I haven't had many problems with the professors. At the undergraduate level, you don't have much contact with them anyways. But the university's administration didn't seem to be supportive. They wouldn't cooperate. Some times, they showed favoritism towards Canadian students. I always feel that. It's difficult for me to explain how and why I feel this way. But I know this for a fact that if you are a Canadian, your problems are resolved faster than, for example, an Iranian like me. [If you are a Canadian] they are friendlier towards you; they feel more responsibility towards you. You can even see the difference between the grin

ج: من مشکل خاصی با استادها نداشتم. تو مقطع لیسانس هم که زیاد ارتباط نداریم. ولی کارکنان دانشگاه خیلی بنظر نمیرسید که کارشون رو خوب انجام بدن. اونها همکاری نمیکردن. بعضی وقتها هوای کاناداییها رو داشتن. من همیشه این رو احساس میکردم. من میدونم که چطور توضیح بدم که چرا این احساس رو دارم، ولی میدونم که اگر کانادایی باشی کارهات زودتر درست میشه تا مثل من ایرانی برای مثال. باهات دوستانه ترند. احساس مسئولیت نسبت بتو میکنند. و حتی میتونی تفاوت بین اون نیشخندی که بتو میزنند و اون لبخند ملیحی که به اونها میدن رو ببینی.

س: تا حالا هیچ وقت بطور مستقیم مورد تبعیض بودی، یعنی چیزی که کمتر مخفیه؟

they give you, if at all, and the pleasant smile they give [Canadian students].

Shiva: Have you experienced any direct discrimination, I mean, something that is less subtle?

Nader: As I said, it's usually like that. I mean, you can't really put a face on it. You *feel* it. I'd say it's like an invisible fist! [Laughs]

Shiva: "Invisible fist"? It's an interesting metaphor; can you explain a bit more?

Nader: It means it hits you hard in the face, but you don't know where it came from! [Laughs] You know you are the **target**, but you just can't prove how, who, and why this is happening to you.

Shiva: Why do you think you might be the **target**?

Nader: Because you are not one of them. You are not the same. Doesn't matter what they say, [that] they smile in your face, and [they] are polite. The reality is, they don't see you as one of them, and we are just not the same. We are not treated the same, we are not given the same **opportunities**.

Shiva: and why do you think they don't see you as one of them?

Nader: [Pause] Of course, it's our religion, being Muslims here. Above that, it's being Iranian. We are the target of even a worst kind of discrimination, because of being a Muslim and [being] an Iranian.

(September 19, 2002)

ج: همونطور که گفتم معمولاً مثل اینه که، یعنی، واقعاً نمیتونی اسمی روش بذاری. احساسش میکنی. من میگم مثل یه مشت نامرئی! [خنده].

س: مشت نامرئی؟ مثل جالبیه. میتونی کمی توضیح بدی.

ج: یعنی اینکه محکم میاد تو صورتت میخوره ولی نمیدونی از کجا میاد! [خنده]. میدونی که **target** هستی ولی نمیتونی ثابت کنی چجوری، کی، و چرا این برات اتفاق افتاده.

س: چرا فکر میکنی که ممکن **target** باشی؟

ج: برای اینکه یکی از اونها نیستی. مثل اونها نیستی. مهم نیست که بهت چی میگن، و به صورتت لبخند میزنن، و مودب ان. واقعیت اینه که اونها تو رو از خودشون نمیدونن، ما مثل اونها نیستیم. با ما یه جور رفتار میشه و همون **opportunities** رو نداریم.

س: و چرا فکر میکنی که اونها تو رو از خودشون نمیدونن.

ج: [مکث] البته اینجا این مذهبونه. مسلمان بودن، و بالاتر از همه ایرانی بودن. ما **target** یه نوع بدتر تبعیض هستیم بخاطر مسلمان و ایرانی بودن.

For Nader, whose physical characteristics do not make him stand out as a visible minority in Canada, encounters with racism and discrimination are subtle and subdued. He talked about having experienced “feelings of being treated differently than other students” and targeted as a result of his religious and cultural background. Nader’s interesting metaphor of the “invisible fist” refers to a subtle, yet deeply felt experience of being target of cultural discrimination.

Similarly, Nahid’s encounters with discrimination in Canada have been frequent, yet also subtle. In our first conversation, she remembered an incident with the departmental secretary in her university which left her feeling uneasy.

She said:

Nahid: We say being discriminated, right? Once, I remember exactly, I went to the departmental secretary to ask her a question. She told me, “No, you don’t have the right to enter from this door, come in through the other door”. But I always saw other students were using the same door that [I did]. But she wanted to teach me that you *have* to use the other *door* to enter the room. *This door* is not for *you*. So I started knocking on the *other door* to enter her room, but I’d still see other [students] use the [other] door without even knocking, go in, and take whatever they wanted, even use the **printer**.

ج: ما می‌گیم که علیه ما تبعیضه درست یه یکبار دقیقاً یادمه که رفته بودم پیش منشی دیپارتمان که یه سوالی ازش بکنم. به من گفت “نه؛ تو حق نداری از این در بیای تو برو از اون در بیا تو”. ولی من همیشه دانشجوهای دیگه رو میدیدم که از همون در میرفتن. ولی اون میخواست به من یاد بده که از اون یکی در برم تو. این در مال تو نیست! بنابراین من اون یکی در رو زدم که وارد اتاق بشم، ولی هنوز دیدم که اونهای دیگه از اون در استفاده میکنن، حتی بدون اینکه در بززن میرن توو هر چی میخوان بر میدارن، حتی از **printer** استفاده میکنن.

س: فکر میکنی این حرف رو زد چون علیه تو تبعیض میکرد؟

Shiva: Do you think she said that because she was discriminating against you?

ج: [مکث] من هیچ توضیح دیگه ای ندارم که چرا اون کار رو کرد. هیچ **idea** ندارم. ولی تنها چیزی که بنظرم میاد اینه که بخودش گفت این ایرانیه و نمیدونه چطور رفتار کنه. من فکر میکنم این بود.

س: هیچ چیزی بعد از اون دیدی یا شنیدی که اون احساس رو بهت بده؟

Nahid: [Pause] I don’t have any other explanations for why [she] would do that. I don’t have any [other] **ideas**. But the only thing that comes to my mind is that she said to herself “she is an Iranian and doesn’t understand how to behave. I think that was it.

ج: [مکث] آره فقط اون شخص نبود. این یه عده بودن توی دفتر. مثلاً پارسال من **assistant** یه استاد بودم

Shiva: Did you see or hear anything after [that incident] that made you feel the same way?

Nahid: [Pause] Yes, it wasn't just one individual, it was a group of people in the administration. For example, last year I was working for a professor as an **assistant**, and he gave me his code to the departmental **printer**, and asked me to photocopy a few articles for him. Well, I go to the department, and as soon as I start **printing**, two secretaries jump at me, yelling, "what are you doing? You can't use this printer, you have to have **authorization**", and when I told them the story, they didn't believe me! [Laughs] Imagine I destroy my reputation for a couple of photocopies, and make up such a big lie! [Laughs] the situation was finally resolved after the professor called them.

Shiva: Do you think they were discriminating against you or just trying to make sure that a student doesn't use the printers without authorization?

Nahid: No! It wasn't about the **printer** and **authorization** at all. Even though I know other students who used the same **printer**, and [the secretaries] didn't even raise their head to look and see what [the students] were doing. It's really about *the way they talked* to me, the tone of their voice. First of all, they were very loud, as if they are yelling at me, and the way I felt was that they thought I didn't know how to use a **printer**. I really don't know how to explain that, it's just the feeling that I had.

Shiva: How did that make you feel?

Nahid: [Tears in her eyes] Very sad, very sad. I went home and cried. I know it's not really worth it, but I kept saying to myself, "what have I done to them? What I did do wrong?" And the reason I say they were doing this to me because of being Iranian, is that some time later, I was talking to another Iranian guy in the department who was having serious problems with them, just like I did. He finally transferred

و اون به من کد **printer** دپارتمان رو داد و ازم خواست که چند تا مقاله براش فتوکپی کنم. خب من میرم دپارتمان و به محض اینکه شروع میکنم به **print** دو تا منشی میریزم سرم و داد میزنن "چیکار میکنی؟ نمیتونی از این **printer** استفاده کنی! باید **authorization** داشته باشی"، وقتی بهشون داستان رو گفتم باورم نکردن! [خنده] تصور کن که من آبروی خودم رو بخاطر دو تا کپی ببرم، و یه دروغ به این گنده گی بگم! [خنده]. بالاخره بعد از اینکه استادم بهشون زنگ زد ماجرا درست شد.

س: فکر میکنی این تبعیض بود بر علیه تو یا اینکه فقط میخواستن مطمئن بشن که دانشجوها بدون **authorization** از **printer** استفاده نکنن؟

ج: نه! ماجرا اصلاً سر **authorization** و **printer** نبود. حتی چند تا دانشجو رو خودم میشناسم که از همون **printer** استفاده کردن، و حتی سرشون رو بالا نکردن که ببینن اونها دارن چیکار میکنن. این بیشتر اون طرزى که با من حرف زدن، تن صداشون. اولاً خیلی بلند حرف زدن، انگار که دارن سرم داد میزنن، و من احساس کردم که فکر میکنن من نمیدونم چجوری از **printer** استفاده کنم. من واقعاً نمیدونم چجوری توضیحش بدم. این فقط احساسیه که داشتم.

س: چجور احساسی داشتی؟

ج: [اشک توی چشماش] خیلی ناراحت، خیلی ناراحت. رفتم تو خونه و گریه کردم. میدونم که ارزشش رو نداشت، ولی هی بخودم میگفتم مگه من بهشون چیکار کردم؟ چیکار کردم؟ و دلیل اینکه میگم بخاطر ایرانی بودنم با من اینکار رو کردن اینه که چند وقت بعدش داشتم با یه پسر ایرانی دیگه توی دپارتمان حرف میزدیم که اون هم مشکلات خیلی جدی باهاشون داشت، درست مثل من. آخرش هم دانشگاهش رو عوض کرد چون که دیگه نمیتونست تحمل کنه.

to another university. He just couldn't take it any more.

(August 2, 2002)

Nahid's and Nader's accounts point to their shared experiences of "feelings" of being discriminated and excluded as the "other". The one who is the "other" is distinguished from the rest of the student population solely on the ground of religious and/or cultural affiliation.

Another participant, Cyrus talked about the "consequences" of being the target of what he called "hidden racism". Interestingly, similar to Nader, Cyrus's physical characteristics do not make him stand out as a "visible minority".

However, Cyrus, too, talked about his perceptions of a more covert and subtler form of discrimination as he discussed in the following excerpt:

Cyrus: Everywhere I go, I *feel* that people look at me differently and treat me differently because of being an Iranian and especially [because of] being a Muslim.

ج: هر جا که میرم احساس میکنم که مردم به جور دیگه بمن نگاه میکنند و باهام رفتار میکنند چرا که ایرانی هستم مخصوصاً اینکه مسلمونم.

س: بهت چیزی میگن و کاری میکنن؟

Shiva: Is it anything they say or do?

Cyrus: No, it's definitely not what they say, because most of the time they don't say anything. It's the way they treat you, after they find out who you are and where you come from. There's kind of a *hidden racism* here that you can't really see or hear, but it's hiding and waiting to get you! [Laughs].

ج: نه مطمئناً چیزی نیست که بگن چونکه اکثر اوقات چیزی نمیگن. بیشتر رفتار شونه، وقتی میفهمن که کی هستی و از کجا اومدی. به نژادپرستی مخفیانه اینجا وجود داره که نمیتونی ببینی و بشنوی ولی قایم شده که به روزی سراغت بیاد [خنده]

(October 4, 2002)

The narratives of participants, such as Samira, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus, pointed to their perceptions of a subtle and covert form of racial discrimination in Canadian higher education and the wider society. They interpreted their experiences as encounters with “hidden racism”, the “invisible fist”, being the “target”. and the “other” student in the faculty.

Taking it Personally

Mitra, Roxana, Nasrin and Yalda could not isolate any personal experiences that could be identified as racial discrimination. I asked them whether they knew of someone who felt he or she was being discriminated against, and whether or how they empathized with that person. They pointed out that, at times, “adverse life situations” may lead an individual to feel they are the target of racism and discrimination. Their definitions of “adverse life situations” were diverse, ranging from “getting low grades”, and “not being able to get a job”, to “personal confrontations with difficult individuals”. Yalda, who herself stated that she had not experienced discrimination in Canada, commented that she had in fact met Iranians, and particularly veiled Iranian women, who perceived being discriminated against by the instructors and professors. She explained:

Yalda: They [professors and university staff] are good to me. But when I talk to many Iranian students, particularly those who wear a veil, I realize that actually *there is* discrimination. They say that they get lower grades, their work is good, but they aren't graded fairly, these sort of things. But I still don't know, because I

ج: با من خوبن. ولی وقتی با چند تا از ایرانیهایی دیگه مخصوصاً اونها که حجاب دارن صحبت کردم متوجه شدم که تبعیض وجود داره. میگن که نمره کمتری میگیرن, کارهاشون خوبه ولی عادلانه بهشون نمره نمیدن. همین چیز ها. ولی هنوز نمیدونم چونکه هنوز خودم ندیدم, ولی شنیده ام. بعضی وقتها بعضیها خیلی حساس هستن. همه چیز رو شخصی میگیرن.

haven't seen it [discrimination] myself, but I've heard about it. Sometimes I think that some people are too sensitive. They take everything personally.

(February 17, 2003)

Although Yalda acknowledged that she initially empathized with those students, she stated that, in her opinion, "feelings" of being discriminated against are reactions of "overly sensitive" individuals "to specific situations and in particular contexts. Under different circumstances and from a different perspective, for example from the point of view of a less "sensitive" individual, those "feelings" might not be interpreted as acts of discrimination.

Similarly, Nasrin talked about "personal feelings" and being "overly critical" as the main reasons to explain why some individuals interpret certain behaviors or attitudes as discriminatory while others do not. In our conversation, she defined an "overly critical person" as "someone who pulls hair out of yogurt" (مر رو از ماست می کشه!)—a commonly used Persian proverb which refers to a

faultfinding personality. She elaborated:

Nasrin: I have met people who say there is a lot of discrimination here, and they say: "They treated me this way because I am an Iranian". But I personally haven't experienced [discrimination] myself. Sometimes you see behaviors that you also [experienced] in your own country, but because this is different from your homeland, we think they treat us [like that] because we are not one of them. In my opinion, some people are generally more critical than others; [they] criticize everything. [They just pay too much attention to details]

(February 15, 2003)

ج: من خیلی ها رو دیدم که میگن اینجا تبعیض وجود داره و میگن باهاشون اینجوری ان بخاطر ایرانی بودنشون. ولی شخصاً من هنوز چیز ی تجربه نکردم. بعضی اوقات رفتارهایی رو میبینی که خود تو هم تو مملکت خودت میکنی ولی چون اینجا کشور خودت نیست فکر میکنی چونکه یکی از اونها نیستی باهات اینجوری اندیه عقیده من بعضیها در کل بیشتر از بقیه انتقاد میکنن و از همه چیز انتقاد میکنن. خیلی به جزئیات توجه میکنن.

Nasrin's viewpoint was shared by Mitra, Yalda and Roxana who stated that experiencing discrimination and racism is a uniquely individual perception which is affected by one's unique character and personality. Who a person is, his or her stance in life in a particular social context, and his or her past experiences are all crucial factors in determining whether or not he or she labels specific experiences as racist and discriminatory.

Out of Mind, Out of Site!

My conversations with the participants made me think about the reasons behind the diverse range of their experiences with discrimination in Canada. I became particularly interested to know why some of the participants openly talked about the existence of discrimination in the society, while others did not. I asked them to explain why different individuals might interpret the same experiences differently. Their responses revealed an interesting pattern in how they interpreted and reacted to perceived negative attitudes and behaviors. Yalda who, as mentioned in the previous section, believed that she had not personally experienced discrimination, talked about her decision to not "think about" the meanings behind other individuals' words and behaviors.

Yalda: like everything else, the more think about racism, the more you keep saying to yourself, "God, [he or she] is racist", or "God, they are really racist", [and therefore] the more you suffer yourself. I say to myself, I shouldn't think about these things, I shouldn't care about them. It's just too much suffering.

ج: مثل هر چیز دیگه هر چی بیشتر به تبیین فکر کنی بیشتر به خودت میگی که خدایا اون طرف نژاد پرسته یا اونها واقعا نژاد پرست هستن. و بیشتر خودت ضربه میخوری. من بخودم میگم که نباید به این چیز ها فکر کنم و نباید بهشون اهمیت بدم. این خیلی زجر آور میشه.

(February 17, 2003)

In the previous quote, Yalda pointed a conscious decision on her part to disregard otherwise negative attitudes and behaviors. Interestingly, Roxana who, throughout our entire conversations, persisted on “never” having experienced any form of discrimination in Canada, talked about her desire to refrain from “thinking” and “talking” about racism and discrimination. She argued:

Roxana: To be honest with you, I try not to *think* [Italics added] about **discrimination**, and because I don't think about it, I also have no opinion about it either. I don't know. *I just don't feel if.* Everything has been wonderful since I came to Canada. Of course, there are problems, but I can't say discrimination is one of them. Because, personally, I don't pay attention to it. If you don't care about it, it doesn't bother you, does it?

(March 6, 2003)

ج. راستش رو بخوای، سعی می کنم که به **discrimination** فکر نکنم، و چون بهش فکر نمی کنم، هیچ نظری هم در موردش ندارم. نمیدونم. اصلاً حسش نمی کنم. همه چیز عالی بوده از موقعی که اومده ام کانادا. البته مشکلاتی هم هست، ولی نمی تونم بگم که تبعیض هم یکی از اونا بوده، برای اینکه خودم شخصا بهش توجه نمی کنم. اگه بهش اهمیت ندی، اذیتت هم نمی کنه، می کنه؟

Seemingly, Roxana and Yalda have adopted a strategy that would help them “cope” with what would otherwise make them “suffer”, as Yalda said, or “bothered”, as Roxana's claimed. Each viewed experiencing racism and discrimination as feelings which could be repressed by merely avoiding to think and talk about.

Yalda: There are times that I spend a lot of time and energy on an **assignment**, and then when I get it back, I am very **disappointed**. I feel that I deserved better. I ask myself whether what others are saying is true, and they are discriminating against me too. But then I see I can't live like that. At some point, you have to decide that you need to work harder, and not let these things get to you. I

ج. یک وقت هائی هست که خیلی وقت و انرژی صرف یک **assignment** می کنم، و وقتی که پشش می گیرم، خیلی **disappointed** ام. حس می کنم که لیاقتم بیشتر بوده. از خودم میپرسم، نکنه اون چیزائی که دیگران میگن راسته، و دارن در مورد من هم تبعیض قائل میشن. ولی بعدش میبینم که این طوری نمی تونم زندگی کنم. در یک مقطعی باید تصمیم بگیری که لازمه سخت تر کار کنی و اجازه ندی

mean, what kind of a life is it when you have to constantly worry about discrimination? You will be destroyed.

که این چیزا خردت کنه. یعنی، این چه جور زندگی که همش باید نگران تبعیض باشی؟ داغون میشی.

(February 17, 2002)

Both Yalda and Roxana avoided thinking about situations they felt might bring about negative emotions. In doing so, they were able to protect themselves from feeling disappointed, depressed, and helpless.

Separating the “Self” from “Others”

For some of the participants, personal experiences with discrimination and racism led to a desire for—what I interpreted—as a self-imposed separation of self from others, or a form of social isolation and alienation. This desire was created as the result of the individual's inability to connect and communicate with others at a personal level. Nahid explained this eloquently in the following excerpt:

Nahid: Making and keeping relationships with them [Canadians] was very difficult for me. As an Iranian woman it was very difficult to get along with them [Canadian]. They had no desire to approach me and I didn't have any desire to approach them. I feel very lonely. But I think, in a way, I prefer to be alone than to be constantly humiliated because of who I am.

ج. با اینا رابطه ایجاد کردن و ادامه دادنش، برام خیلی سخته. بعنوان یک زن ایرانی برام خیلی سخته که باهاشون کنار بیام. اونا هیچ رغبتی ندارن که که نزدیک من بیان و من هم هیچ رغبتی ندارم نزدیک اونا برم. خیلی احساس تنهایی می کنم، ولی این طوری فکر می کنم که ترجیح میدم تنها باشم تا اینکه دائما تحقیر بشم بخاطر اون کسی که هستم.

(March 5, 2003)

As Nahid stated in the above quote, “being looked at differently” and the feeling that “one does not belong” in the community, may in fact lead to using self-imposed “isolation” as a coping strategy in order to protect oneself from being further discriminated against. Cyrus aligned himself with Nahid by avoiding negative experiences through attempts to isolate and alienate himself socially, and “not talking” to people. He said:

Cyrus: Of course there is discrimination here. I feel it; you may feel it too. Everyone knows it. But those Iranians who don't admit it, or they deny it, if you look at them you see: they are not even economically independent yet. They haven't entered the job market, and may not do it for many years to come. When you stay at home, or the most you do is going to classes, where you can easily **isolate** yourself, of course you won't see it, or you'd think it doesn't matter. It doesn't affect you directly, so you decide that it is not there. I wonder what these Iranians will say when start looking for jobs, or when they find a job, and they see that they are treated differently. They haven't been here long enough!

(January 21, 2003)

ج: البته که اینجا تبعیض وجود داره. من حس میکنم, تو هم میتونی احساس کنیش. همه میدونن. ولی اون ایرانیهای که اعتراف نمیکن یا قبول نمیکن اگر تو چشماشون نگاه کنی متوجه میشه که هنوز از لحاظ اقتصادی هم روی پای خودشون نیستن. هنوز وارد بازار کار نشدن و تا سالهای درازی هم ممکن که واردش نشن. و قتیکه همیشه تو خونه بمونی و یا حداکثر فقط بری مدرسه که براحتی میتونی خودت رو **isolate** کنی معلومه که نمیبینیش و یا اینکه میگی اهمیتی نداره. مستقیماً روت اثر نمیزاره و برای همین میگی که وجود نداره. من میخوام ببینم اون موقه چی میگن که میخوان دنبال کار بگردن و یا کار پیدا کردن و متوجه میشن که باهاشون مثل بقیه رفتار نمیشه. اونها اینجا به اندازه کافی نبودن.

Samira whose visibility as a young veiled Muslim woman separates her from the other participants, also talked about her decision to avoid people in situations that make her feel uncomfortable about her identity. In the next excerpt, which explains one of the many experiences she has had in Canada, she described an encounter with a woman who had intentionally and knowingly ignoring and avoiding her in one of her classes.

Samira: In one of my classes, there was this lady, **Quebecois** lady, who used to greet everyone in class each and every morning, but not me. I even noticed that she does it intentionally. I mean, she would actually look at me briefly and then turn her face away. I was shocked at the beginning. I thought maybe it is because I am a Muslim. But then I realized that there was a Lebanese lady in our class, an **immigrant** like me, and she [the **Quebecois** lady] would talk to her, and she [the Lebanese] was also a Muslim, but she didn't have [a] veil. Then, I found out that it is not because of my religion and that I am a Muslim, [but] it is because I am veiled that she doesn't want to talk to me. I feel they think they are better than us; they are **superior** to us. They think of veil as a sign of inferiority. I feel that they have an **issue** with me, because of the way I look, and because I want to wear the *veil*. I really don't have an **issue** with them, but when I see someone is avoiding me, or is not nice to me, I avoid them too, maybe to protect myself.

(January 6, 2003)

ج: توی یکی از کلاس هام یه زن **Quebecois** بود که هر روز صبح به همه سلام میکرد بغیر از من. من حتی متوجه شدم که از قصد این کار رو میکنه یعنی بهم برای چند لحظه نگاه میکنه بعد صورتش رو برمیگردونه. اولش خیلی تعجب کردم و فکر کردم شاید به این خاطره که من مسلمون هستم. ولی بعد متوجه شدم که یه خانوم لبنانی هم توی کلاس هست که مثل من **immigrant** و با اون صحبت میکنه که او همه مسلمونه ولی مثل من حجاب نداره. بعد فهمیدم که بخاطر مذهب نیست و اینکه من مسلمون هستم بلکه بخاطر اینکه من حجاب دارم. فکر کنم اونها فکر میکنن که از ما بهتر هستن یعنی **superior** نسبت به ما. اونها فکر میکنن که حجاب نشانه عقب مونندگیه. فکر کنم که با من بخاطر طوری که هستم و بخاطر حجابم **issue** دارن. من واقعاً باکسی **issue** ندارم ولی وقتی میبینم که من رو ترد میکنن و یا باهام خوب نیستن من هم سعی میکنم تردشون کنم که شاید بتونم از خودم مراقبت کنم.

Roxana, Mitra, Yalda and Nasrin, who did not regard discrimination as a major obstacle in their daily lives and in academia, also pointed out to the nature of their "life styles" which keeps them busy and isolated from others, Canadians Iranians alike. Social isolation was not only limited to the host society, but also extended to the smaller cultural communities they belonged to. Roxana commented:

Roxana: I am so busy that I really don't have any time to have friends or do things with other people. My husband and I are very busy with our own school and work, and can't really do anything else besides that. We haven't gone out in a very long time. Of course, we have a few friends, Iranian friends, that we have communications with. But even that could be months before we see them. Everyone is so busy with their own lives here in Canada. There is really no time to do anything else.

(August 23, 2002)

ج. من انقدر اینجا سرم شلوغه که وقت ندارم دوست داشته باشم یا بادیگران کاری بکنم. من و شوهرم انقدر با مدرسه و کار مشغولیم که که هیچ کار دیگه ای نمی تونیم بکنیم. یک مدت طولانی که اصلاً بیرون نرفتیم. البته یک چند تا دوست داریم، دوستای ایرانی که باهاشون رفت و آمد می کنیم، ولی اونها رو هم بعد از چند ماه که میگذره می بینیم. اینجا، همه سرشون شلوغه با زندگی خودشون توی کانادا. هیچ وقتی برای چیز دیگه ای نیست.

For Yalda and her family who did not have much contact with anyone else, “feeling isolated” and “lonely” was attributed to a lack of a family network in Canada. Being far away from one's family, entails lack of access to their financial, and also moral and emotional support—which are at the core of an individual's physical and psychological needs. Yalda stated that:

Yalda: We have no one here in Canada. All my family is either in Iran or they are living in [Europe]. This makes it very hard for us. You really don't have a family to have any contacts with. I feel very lonely. I wish at least one of my sisters could come here, so that I wouldn't be so alone.

Shiva: Don't you have contact with other people, [either] Iranians or Canadians?

Yalda: No not really. Everyone is so involved with their own lives here. No one has time for some one else. Plus, it's never like family. Family is something else. Every now and then, we have friends over, Iranian friends, but very rarely.

Shiva: do you have Canadian friends too?

ج. ما اینجا هیچ کس رو توی کانادا نداریم. همه خانواده ام یا ایرانن یا خارج. این برامون خیلی سخته. خانواده ای نداری که بتونی باهاشون تماس داشته باشی. خیلی احساس تنهایی می کنم. آرزو می کنم که حداقل یکی ازخواهرام اینجا بود که اینقدر احساس تنهایی نمی کردم.

س. هیچ تماسی با دیگران نداری، ایرانی یا کانادایی؟

ج. نه اون جور. همه اینجا مشغول زندگی خودشون. هیچ کس برای کس دیگه ای وقت نداره. بعلاوه، مثل خانواده که نیست. خانواده یک چیز دیگه اس. هر چند وقت یکبار دوستامون میان، دوستای ایرانی، ولی خیلی کم.

س. دوستای کانادایی هم داری؟

ج. نه. یکی دو تا دوست *immigrant* دارم! (خنده)
 Yalda: No. I have a couple of other *immigrant* friends! [Laughs]

س. فکر می کنی چرا این جوریه؟
 Shiva: Why do you think that is?

ج. برای اینکه توی کلاسای من *immigrants* زیادن ولی کانادایی زیاد نیست.
 Yalda: Because in my classes there are a lot of *immigrants*, and not many Canadians.

(August 28, 2002)

Interestingly, all participants claimed that they did not have any Canadian friends, and contributed that to the under-representation of Canadian students in their programs of study, and lack of time to socialize outside the classrooms. Interestingly, Mitra who was in a committed relationship with a French Canadian, talked about cultural conflicts between her and her partner's family. She believed that her boyfriend was different from "other Canadians", because he was able to "understand her" and "listen to her".

Mitra: One of the biggest problems [Iranians] have here is the cultural differences between [us] and the Canadians. Even when we understand the *language of their speech* [emphasis hers], we can't understand the *language of their heart* [Italics added]. For example, you are sitting and talking to a Canadian, and you understand what [s/he] is saying, I mean you understand the words. But you don't really understand the intentions, and therefore, you don't know how to react, you don't know what to say. So, you have to look natural, and don't say anything, because you are living in their country. It's harder if you weren't raised here. For example, for my younger sisters, they really don't care about what [Canadians] say, it doesn't bother them. But sometimes, I can't really handle it. I keep asking myself, why [s/he] said that, why [s/he]

ج. یکی از بزرگترین مشکلاتی که اینجا دارن، تفاوت فرهنگی مونه با کانادایی ها. حتی وقتی که زبون محاوره ای هم رو می فهمیم، زبون قلب هم رو نمی فهمیم. مثلاً نشستنی و داری با یک کانادایی حرف میزنی، می فهمی که داره چی بهت میگه. یعنی کلماتشو می فهمی، ولی مقصودشو نمی فهمی، و بنا براین نمیدونی چه طور رفتار کنی، نمیدونی چی بگی. برای همین یک قیافه طبیعی میگیری و هیچی نمیگی، چون داری توی کشور اینا زندگی می کنی. سخت تره اگه اینجا بزرگ نشده باشی. مثلاً، یکی از خواهرای کوچکتر من، اصلاً اهمیت نمیدن اینا چی میگن، اصلاً اذیتشون نمی کنه. ولی بعضی وقتها من نمی تونم تحمل کنم. همش از خودم سوال می کنم چرا این حرفو زد؟ چرا این کارو کرد؟ من بعضی وقت ها با مردم اینجا مشکل دارم، بخصوص وقتی که حس می کنم قضاوت میکنن که من کی ام و چی ام و از کجا میام،

did that? Sometimes I have problems with people, especially when I feel they pass judgments on me because of who I am and where I come from, and I think it's because I know my culture very well, and they don't. I tell my parents that you should have either come here when I was much younger, or stayed in Iran, and never came here.

(March 11, 2003)

و فکر می‌کنم که به خاطر اینکه که من فرهنگ خودمو خوب میدونم، ولی اونا نمی‌دونن. به پدر و مادرم میگم که یا باید موقعی که من خیلی جوان بودم میومدیم اینجا یا می‌موندیم ایران و هیچ وقت نمی‌آمدیم.

Samira attributed discrimination and culturally inappropriate behaviors and attitudes to "ignorance" and lack of understanding and familiarity with other cultures and other people. According to Samira, this ignorance is embodied in the unwillingness of the mainstream Canadian public to communicate with the "other", and the "immigrant". The lack of intercultural understanding is commonly portrayed through displays of particular non-verbal behaviors, such as turning the gaze, and avoiding to look into the eyes of those identified as "different". Samira explained:

Samira: I have to say that on the university campus I have been treated well. But, [pause], there have been situations. For example, in some of my classes, they say things that are not appropriate. In general, I feel that the people here are very *ignorant*, to the extent that they even *avoid* looking into your eyes if you are not one of them. I think that says a lot: it means they don't want to communicate with you, [and that] they don't want to have a relationship with you. They don't even want to look at you.

Shiva: You said [they are] *ignorant*. Could you explain how, and in what sense?

ج. باید بگم که توی دانشگاه خوب باهام رفتار شده. ولی موقعیت‌هایی پیش اومده مثلاً توی کلاس‌ها که حرفایی که زدن درست نبوده. به طور کل من فکر می‌کنم که مردم اینجا خیلی *ignorant* هستن، تا جایی که اگه از خودشون نباشی حتی *avoid* می‌کنن توی چشمت نگاه کنن. من فکر می‌کنم این خیلیه، یعنی نمی‌خوان باهات حرف بزنن. نمی‌خوان باهات رابطه داشته باشن. نمی‌خوان حتی بهت نگاه کنن.

س. گفتی *ignorant* هستن.

میتونی توضیح بدی یعنی چه جوری؟

ج. یعنی، آدمایی هستن که، البته من همه رو

Samira: I mean, there are people, of course I don't mean everyone, but most people here are very **isolated**, and don't know anything about other cultures. Sometimes I feel they look at us as something other than normal, ordinary human [beings]. And I think it's mostly because they are very much focused on their own culture, and what they know is limited to what they see around them.

(July 25, 2002)

منظورم نیست، ولی بیشتر مردم اینجا خیلی **isolated** هستند، و هیچ چیز در مورد فرهنگ های دیگه نمیدونن. من بعضی وقتها فکر میکنم که به ما غیر از آدم های نرمال و عادی نگاه می کنند. و فکر می کنم بیشتر به خاطر اینکه که روی فرهنگ خودشون تمرکز می کنند، و هر چی که میدونن محدوده به اون چیزایی که دور برشون می بینن.

For Cyrus cultural "ignorance" and lack of acceptance of those who are perceived as "foreigners" and "different" was a rather painful experience. In the following conversation, he talked about an encounter which left him feeling uncomfortable and uneasy and made him choose seclusion over hurtful social interactions.

Cyrus: I have an experience I wanted to tell you. A few years ago, I went into a store, and was paying for something. The **cashier** started talking to me, and of course, as usual [laughs] she asked where I came from. I told her, "can you guess?" she stared counting all the countries she knew [laughs] I kept nodding my head and said "No, no! Make another guess". I think she named every country on the map, except Iran. Finally, I told her I was Iranian, and all of a sudden the smile on her face vanished, and she looked at me seriously, and said, "really?" I said, "of course, I'm Iranian." It was obvious to me she didn't want to talk to me afterwards. [Laughs] Of course, these incidents shouldn't matter, but you know this is how people think of you. After that, every time I go into a store, I never talk to anyone.

ج. من یک تجربه ای دارم که می خواستم بهت بگم. چند سال پیش رفتم توی یک مغازه و داشتم پول چیزی رو میدادم، **cashier** شروع کرد حرف زدن و البته، طبق معمول، (خنده) ازم پرسید از کجا میآم. بهش گفتم میتونی حدس بزنی؟ شروع کرد هر چی کشور میدونست پشت هم قطار کرد (خنده) من هم هی سرم رو تکیه دادم و گفتم، نه، نه، دوباره حدس بزن. فکر کنم هر چه کشور رو نقشه جغرافیاست اسم برد الا ایران. آخرش گفتم ایرانیم، و یه دفعه لبخند روی صورتش محو شد، و خیلی جدی بهم نگاه کرد و گفت واقعا؟ من هم گفتم خب البته من ایرانیم. مشخص بود که بهد از اون نمی خواست باهام حرف (خنده) البته این جور اتفاق ها نباید مهم باشن، ولی میدونی که مردم در موردت این طور فکر می کنند. از اون موقع به بعد هر وقت میرم توی یک مغازه، دیگه با کسی حرف نمیزنم.

س. به خاطر همون تجربه؟

Shiva: Because of that experience?

Cyrus: Yes, and other experiences like that, that happened everywhere, in school, in society, everywhere. There comes a point that you can't take that kind of **bull shit** from people. **Pardon my language!** [Laughs] I've just decided it's better not to talk to anyone than be insulted and degraded.

(January 21, 2003)

ج. آره، و تجربه های دیگه ای مثل اون، که همه جا
ود، توی مدرسه، توی جامعه، همه جا. به یک جایی
میرسی که دیگه نمی تونی این جور **bull shit**
رو از مردم قبول کنی.
Pardon my language!
(خنده) تصمیم گرفته ام که بهتره با کسی
حرف نزنم تا اینکه خارو خفیف بشم.

Being viewed as “different” and treated as the “other” was the main reason behind some of the participants’ decision to isolate and alienate themselves from other members of their communities. They believed that, as painful as social isolation and alienation is, they are, in fact, protecting themselves from unforeseen humiliation and degradation.

What They Don’t Know Won’t Hurt You!

Yalda saw discrimination as a “personal” experience that can be “avoided” by avoiding situations where one’s identity is revealed as a “foreigner” and the “other”. Therefore, by concealing his or her ethnic and cultural identity, an individual can avert negative attention, and avoid being the target of discrimination. She said:

Yalda: Everybody has their own traditions, Muslims, Catholics, etc. Many people [Muslims] don't like it, but I don't have any problems saying that I am a Muslim. But if I don't say it, no one will know that I am a Muslim. I know many Iranians that say they are Italian, or Greek. How would they [Canadians] know? It's not like it's written on your forehead [Laughs], unless you admit it yourself, and say

ج. هر کسی رسم و رسوم خودشو داره، مسلمانا،
کاتولیکا، و دیگه. خیلی ها خوششون نمیآد ولی
من هیچ مشکلی ندارم که بگم مسلمانم. خیلی
ایرانی ها رو می شناسم که میگن ایتالیایی یا
یونانی. چه طور بفهمن؟ روی پیشونیت که نوشته نشده!
(خنده) مگر اون که خودت اعتراف کنی و بگی که
مسلمانم. ولی اگه نکنی، هیچکس هم نمی فهمه.
من معمولاً هیچی نمیگم مگه اینکه ازم بپرسن.

that you are a Muslim. But if you don't, no one will know. I usually don't say anything unless I'm asked. Why should I? They just think I'm one of *them*. [Italics added].

چرا بگم؟ فکر می کنند من از خودشونم.

(February 17, 2003)

As Yalda explained in the previous excerpt, “don’t ask, don’t tell”, seemed to be the strategy whose main purpose was to avoid one’s “true” cultural and religious identity from being exposed and revealed to the public. For Yalda, Roxana and Mitra, not disclosing who they are and where they come from acted as a “social buffer” which separated them from their cultural identity and brought them to a “safer” social environment. This safe social zone, which involved a desire for “blending in” and “passing as mainstream”, meant that they were less likely to be excluded because of their cultural and religious affiliations. Transforming certain physical characteristics such as clothing, hair color, and even eye color by wearing opaque contact lenses were mentioned as different methods of “looking” mainstream and avoid not identified as an Iranian or a visible minority.

Mitra commented:

Mitra: [Pointing to her hair] this is not really my natural hair color, but you knew that anyways, didn't you? [Laughs] In Iran, I couldn't even color my hair or wear makeup, because my parents were completely against it [and said] that “single young women” should not do these things. When I came here, I decided to color my hair, because it was just *too dark* [italics added]. Even my father, agreed and said, I would look less Iranian, even though still a lot of Iranians recognize I'm an Iranian.

ج. این رنگ موی طبیعی من نیست، ولی میدونستی، نه؟ (خنده) توی ایران، من مو رنگ نمی کردم، حتی آرایش هم نمی کردم، چون پدرم مخالفش بودن، و اینکه دخترهای جوون نباید این کارو بکنن. وقتی که اینجا اومدم، تصمیم گرفتم موهام رو رنگ کنم، چون خیلی تیره بود. حتی پدرم هم موافقت کرد و گفت، کمتر شبیه ایرانی ها میشم. ولی الآن هم خیلی ایرانی ها متوجه میشن ایرانیم.

س. وقتی گفتم موها تو رنگ کردی چون تیره بود، به خاطر این بود که می خواستی کمتر قابل تشخیص

Shiva: you said you colored your hair because "it was too dark", was it because you wanted to be less visible?

باشی؟

ج. آره، البته من بهش اهمیت نمیدم که زیاد تیره باشه. ولی فکر کردم که اون طوری زیاد توی جامعه دیده نمیشم.

Mitra: Yes. Of course I don't care about that. I don't mind it if it's too dark. But I thought I would be less noticeable in the society.

س. تغییری توی شرایط ایجاد میکرد؟

Shiva: would that make a difference in your situation?

ج. (مکث) واقعا نمیدونم. فکر نمیکنم که هدف نژاد پرستی یا چیزی مثل اون میشدم، ولی فکر می‌کنم که راحت تر میشد کار پیدا کنم و ... (سکوت)

Mitra: [Pause] I don't really know. I don't think I would be the target of racism or anything like that, but I think that it would be easier to get a job and... [silence]

(August 21, 2002)

Mitra decided to change her "too dark" hair color in order to become "less noticeable" in the community. She also believed that in doing so, her chances of finding employment may be increased. Her comments are particularly intriguing since she associated "being less [physically] noticeable" to "better chances in the job market", yet did not characterize diminished career opportunities of the more "noticeable" (and visible) individuals to institutionalized racism and discrimination.

Another participant, Cyrus, who himself cannot be identified as a "visible minority", talked about the decision of his (male) acquaintances to change their physical characteristics, and "pass as *real* [italics added] Canadians" by changing their hair color, removing their body hair with electrolysis and in one particular case, wearing color contact lenses. Cyrus stated that such attempts at changing one's physical appearances were "proof enough" that discrimination existed and was "fully at work".

Cyrus: To be honest with you when I saw X [name of the person deleted], it was on campus. I was rushing to go to one of my classes, and all of a sudden X appears in front of me. I was shocked, a little bit scared! Couldn't believe my eyes. All that change! But that tells you that they are going to these **extremes** to avoid being discriminated against. I even had a friend who would imitate a British accent, because he said that most people thought he was British, and left him alone. I personally think it's funny and also sad. When I talk to my friend who's from Africa, and tell him about all the discrimination against Muslims, he asks me to imagine life as a dark-skinned [man]. There would have been much more discrimination!

(January 21, 2003)

ج. راستشو بخوای، وقتی (طرفو) دیدم، توی دانشگاه بود، داشتم میودیدم که به کلاسام برسم، که یه دفعه (طرف) اومد جلوم. شوکه شدم، یک کمی هم ترسیده بودم! باورم نمیشد، اون همه تغییر! ولی بهت میگه این **extremes** رو میرن چون بر علیه شون تبعیض قائل میشن. من حتی یک دوستی داشتم که لهجه انگلیسی تقلید میکرد چون می گفت مردم فکر میکنن انگلیسیه و راحتش میزارن. من شخصا فکر می کنم این هم خنده داره و هم ناراحت کننده. وقتی با دوستم حرف میزنم که مال آفریقاست و بهش در مورد تبعیض علیه مسلمانا میگم، اون بهم میگه که زندگی رو بعنوان یک سیاه پوست تجسم کنم. اون جوری تبعیض هم خیلی بیشتره!

Concealing one's true identity, whether through withholding personal information or changing physical characteristics, indicates a desire to "pass as a real Canadian" and being identified as the "other".

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed individual participants' interpretations of family, age, culture and discrimination, as members of an immigrant Iranian community in Canada. Participants' narratives revealed a broad range of diverse experiences and different ways of making meanings of those experiences. While some participants openly discussed personal encounters with discrimination and racism on and off university campuses, others spoke of different realities. Nonetheless, the men and women's positive dual frame of status mobility — that is, comparing and contrasting their lives and experiences in Iran and in

Canada— revealed that they enjoyed their lives in Canada, an open society which respects individual rights and encourages women's equal access to education and the work force.

Chapter Seven: Reflective Interpretations

In this dissertation, I explored the educational experiences of eight Iranian men and women. My primary objective was to gain a better understanding of their experiences as first-generation immigrants in Canadian academia. In doing so, I embarked upon a qualitative phenomenological inquiry of their individual experiences and perspectives. Informed by Vygotskian sociocultural Activity Theory (1978), and within the framework of phenomenological research methodology, I asked the question: "What is the experience of being a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canadian higher education?" The understandings that emerged point to the existence of shared cultural beliefs with regard to educational inspirations among these eight individuals. The participants' perceptions of an "educated person" and the role of education in their lives was embedded in their cultural beliefs and their lived experiences. All participants acknowledged the importance of education in determining an individual's status and social prestige in Iranian culture. The reflective understandings also underline the impact of factors such as gender, linguistic competence, family relations and religious affiliation in shaping these men's and women's lived experiences in higher education.

My goal in this chapter is to provide a reflective interpretation of the participants' narratives. I agree with Wolcott (2001) that making conclusions to qualitative research studies is a difficult, if not impossible, task. A conclusion marks the end of a journey; it entails a, sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit, belief in the *truthfulness* of the researcher's account of the process of

inquiry. It is for this reason that I have chosen to refrain from making concluding comments, because I view this dissertation as a continuous process of “unfolding of ideas” (Peshkin, 2000) that I developed throughout this study. The stories of these eight men and women are a starting point in our understandings of diverse lifeworlds and experiences of Iranian immigrant students in higher education. With this in mind, I now turn to an exploration of my reflective understandings and interpretations.

A Cultural Phenomenology of Education

The impact of Iranian cultural beliefs on the participants’ academic aspirations and expectations was unquestionable. All participants expressed a clear understanding and awareness of culturally defined inscriptions of the value of an “educated person”. As Nader observed, being a *danesh-jo* (the *seeker* of knowledge; university student) entails an individual’s higher status, and brings about “respect and acceptance” by other members of the community (September 19, 2002). These men and women viewed education as a pivotal point in their lives. For them, education was, to borrow Mitra Shavarini’s (2001) words, a “path with no parallel” (p.90). However, the situated meanings of education and what it means to be an “educated person,” was to a great extent, linked to the individual men’s and women’s lived experiences and their stances in relation to themselves and to the world at a particular moment in their life histories. As the French phenomenological philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1992) reminds us, “[a]ll consciousness is perceptual...the perceived world is the always

presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and all existence". Merleau-Ponty's statement stresses the underlying role of human experiences and perceptions in shaping and defining how we view the world and our stances in relation to others. For Mitra, Cyrus and Nader, who were experiencing financial difficulties in their lives, education was seen as a means for economic advancement and upward social mobility. Others, while acknowledging the role of higher education in improving one's socio-economic status, mentioned an array of other factors which had significantly influenced their decisions to pursue their studies. For Roxana, education was a personal journey, an inner desire to learn and achieve. For Nasrin, education was a paradigm, a worldview through which she experienced the world and relationships. For Yalda, education brought about "savad," social awareness and critical consciousness. For Nahid, education was the road to a better future that her parents had been denied. For Samira, education was to "become a somebody" and to find her space in life. For Nader, education brought about financial security. The diverse lifeworlds of these men and women speak of individual perceptions of education as a "phenomenon," shaped by their culture and lived experiences and the meanings they make out of those experiences. Education was a phenomenon they perceived thorough the windows of their own eyes and life histories.

The participants rejected the notion of "becoming a better person," as a natural outcome of education. Although ideally desired, they believed that formal education does not inevitably lead to character development (Brooks & Goble, 1997). Neil Postmen (1997) talks about the difference between "schooling" and

“education” to identify the disjuncture between the teaching and learning that takes place in the classrooms and the inability of educational institutions to produce more socially responsible citizens. He explains:

I know that education is not the same thing as schooling, and that, in fact, not much of our education takes place in school. Schooling may be a subservient or a conserving activity, but it is certainly a circumscribed one. It has a late beginning and an early end and in between it pauses for summer vacations and holidays, and generously excuses us when we are ill. (p.ix)

Postman’s description of “education,” refers to the continuous process of learning that takes place throughout the life cycle of an individual and goes beyond the four walls of the classrooms. The participants’ acknowledgement of the disconnection between character development and formal education reveals their understanding of the difference between, what Postman calls, the idea of “education” and the notion of “schooling”. While the former is the process of life-long learning and building relationships and connecting to others and community; the latter refers to a prescribed form of learning which has a beginning and an end. However, the participants stressed that, regardless of one’s personality and character, his or her level of education is the measure of his or her social status and prestige. As Nahid pointed out (August 2, 2002), a university degree is the reason for social “superiority” of those with “awful personalities” over the “hardworking”, yet uneducated masses.

The men’s and women’s perceptions of what it means to be an “educated person,” within the Iranian culture and society, pointed to the role of education as a social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1993) which constructs and secures

one's status and prestige in the community and the family. Education as a cultural capital provides the "educated person" with opportunities and resources which will not be accessible otherwise, be it a "brighter future", "women's independence", "job accreditation", "social status and prestige", or "economic advancement". However, the multiplicity of the participants' situated meanings of education and their perceptions of an "educated person", as Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) assert, implicates that,

The value of [cultural] capital depends heavily on the social setting (or field)...there is an important difference between the possession and activation of capital or resources. That is people who have social and cultural capital may *choose* [italics added] to activate capital or not, and they vary in the skill with which they activate it....rather than being an overtly deterministic continual process, reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually negotiated by social actors. (p.39)

This quote highlights the significance of "choice" and "agency" of social actors in determining and evaluating the value of cultural capital, and their subsequent decisions to activate and re-produce that capital.

The participants criticized the Iranian educational system's ineffectiveness to promote critical thinking and character development. Their situated interpretations of education, and their reflective understatings of their years of experience within the Iranian educational system led them to evaluate and critique an approach to learning and teaching which discourages "critical thinking," (Samira, July 25, 2002), and disapproves "independence" (Nader, September 19, 2002). The Iranian educator and author, Jalal Al-e-Ahmad (1962, 1992), criticized the frailty of Iran's educational system which he believed is

grounded on an aimless curriculum and “superfluous” ideology of education. In his groundbreaking book, *Weststruckness* (غرب زدگی), he writes:

From the standpoint of education, we're undisciplined, like wild grass. There is earth, a seed brought there by the wind or just a bird's beak, and rain helping the grass to grow... There is no previous plan whatsoever, no consideration of where schools are needed and where schools are superfluous. The concern for quantity still prevails over the wise minds in the Ministry of Education. (p.147)

Noteworthy is that since the initial publication of this book in 1962, Al-e-Ahmad's criticism of the Iranian educational system remains to be continually recurring at different periods of the country's social and political development. In the mid-and late seventies, during the Shah's reign and Iran's economic boom, Samad Behrangi (1978) contributed the ineffectiveness of the Iranian educational system to its lack of relevance to the students' real life experiences. He believed that the prevalent “depository” method of learning and teaching — Freire's banking system of education (1970) — fails to consider the importance of the students' unique experiences throughout the learning process. Therefore, the disconnection between the lived experiences and realities of the lives of Iranian students and the learning and teaching that takes place in the classroom, leads to the *creation* of citizens who lack the ability to ask questions and criticize the social inequality existent in Iranian society.

More recently, Dr. Sari'ul Ghalam (استاد سریع القلم) (2002), the professor of Economics and Political Science in Iran's Shaheed Beheshti University, has criticized the current educational system, and attributed its “failure” to produce more socially conscious citizens to cultural problems and individual Iranian's lack

of openness to change and challenge the traditionally held beliefs and values. He shares Samira's conviction (Samira, July 25, 2002) that the history of authoritative ruling in Iran has been, without a doubt, a significant factor in establishing educational systems with an authoritative approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, the prevalent Iranian discourse of education inevitably aims to produce *citizens* who are *authoritative* and unwilling to accept new ideas and challenge the current social and political systems.

My own experiences within the Iranian educational system —although I did not attend an institution of higher education— depict similar observations. As a young student in Iran, I remember learning to “respect” and “not question” the authority of the teacher whose role was to transmit facts and “knowledge” (دانش) onto the students. In fact, the word “teacher” in Persian, “Mo’alem” (معلم), is the inflected form of the word, “elm” or “knowledge” (معلم), and literally means: one who teaches “elm”. Learning was both ta’lim (تعليم) and tarbiyyat (تربيت): We gained knowledge and we learned “civility.” We learned to silently listen to the lectures, and only speak when called upon to answer a question. Even then, our voices seemed to be audiotaped versions of the lectures, as the expected “correct answers” (جواب صحيح) were, in fact, the “knowledge” conveyed by the teacher. My memories of my years of schooling and “learning” in Iran take me back to endless hours of studying, memorizing facts, and learning to find the “correct answer” in the textbooks. To know more than what was in our textbooks was not encouraged. I remember that when I was in grade seven —the middle

school —my friends and I decided to start a book club and a small library in our classroom. The school library had been closed for several years since the revolution. We were told by the school administration that there had been “unIslamic” and inappropriate books stacked on the library shelves. The contents of these books, as the rumor went, conflicted with the Islamic moral codes, as they depicted open relationships between men and women. While we never understood why a few books led to the closedown of the entire library for several years (it was, as it seemed, relatively easy to locate and remove a “few” books from the library shelves), we instead decided to “engage” (Fine, 1993; Lather, 1986, 1992) with the world and “intervene” (Freire, 1970, 1998) in what we perceived as the “sour reality” of our lives. Hoping to get support and encouragement from our teachers and the school administration, we discussed our plans with the school principal. Our dreams of a small class library and a student book club were shattered when we were all suspended from school for one week, received a D (12/20) on our transcripts for lack of “discipline,” and were threatened to be expelled if such “inappropriate behaviors” (رفتار نا مناسب) would continue in the future. Every student in Iran, starting in grade one up until grade 12, received an annual evaluation and a grade for “discipline” (انضباط), which was representative of the “appropriateness” of the student’s behavior throughout the school year. These grades were taken into consideration at the time of application to institutions of higher education, and in addition to scores on Konkour and the personal interviews, were factors that determined a potential candidate’s acceptance into higher education. Fearing that we will lose our

chances of ever getting into university, we abandoned our plans and “learned” to behave as “expected”.

Interestingly, Azar Nafisi’s (2003) recent book, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, shares a resemblance to my experience as a young grade seven student yearning to read and learn. In her brilliant book, Nafisi narrates her life in Iran as a professor of English Literature at the University of Tehran. Constrained by the government imposed laws and regulations which did not allow reading and teaching “unIslamic” foreign books, such as Vladimir Nabakov’s *Lolita*, she began a book club with seven of her female students. Starting in 1995, they met every week for two years, and read and critiqued literature which were banned from university campuses. Nafisi’s book is an account of her struggles to not only teach literature, but also to encourage her students to appreciate the value of freethinking. She highlights the crucial necessity to exercise agency in one’s life to choose, read, and think.

Reflecting back at my own experiences lead me to acknowledge and agree with the underlying arguments made by the participants. I acknowledge Samira’s convictions who openly criticizes the Iranian educational system for its inability to promote critical thinking and openness. I agree, to some extent, that the ideology of education prevalent in Iranian educational system attempts to promote and reinforce culturally, as well as politically “accepted” codes of behaviors and ways of thinking (Mehran, 1991; Yaghmaian, 2002) which do not adhere to the tenets of freedom of expression and critical thinking. The Iranian dominant discourse of education is deeply embedded in cultural values and

political history of the people of Iran. As Jerome Bruner (1996) comments, “[e]ducation is not an island, but part of the continent of culture” (p.11). Nonetheless, I also value the notion of “agency” and having control over one’s decisions, thoughts and behaviors, which were recurring themes in the participants’ narratives. Roxana longed to have “control over her life” and continue her education despite her husband’s wishes to have a child. For Yalda, agency was defined as “having a say” in the family and “control over what is going on in her life” (August 28, 2002). All participants acknowledged and recognized the bonds that tie them to their culture, through family, friends, and community. However, they also yearned to act as free agents in their lives and possess the power to think, choose, and shape their futures. In his book, *The Culture of Education* (1996), Jerome Bruner points out:

Nothing is “culture free,” but neither are individuals simply mirrors of their culture. It is the interaction between them that both gives a communal cast to individual thought and imposes a certain unpredictable richness on any culture’s way of life, thought, or feeling... Life in culture is, then, an interplay between the versions of the world that people form under its institutional sway and the versions of it that are products of their individual histories. (p.14)

As Bruner observes, the unique lived experiences of Iranians like Samira, Roxana and Yalda who think and criticize, despite their experiences in an “authoritative” educational system, points to the presence of agency, choice and the ability to think critically in their lives.

Family

Family was also an important mediator in transmitting cultural patterns and belief systems. However, the role of family in facilitating participants' educational aspirations was paradoxical at times. For Roxana and Nasrin, family seemed to be a source of inspiration and support through creating a safe environment where open communication would take place between the individual and significant others. For Samira and Mitra, family expectations were one of the factors that caused emotional distress and feelings of inadequacy, shame and embarrassment. From the participants' diverse experiences, I interpreted that the influence of family expectations did not go entirely one way or the other. Rather, the family's role in one's life is complex, contextual, and multi-faceted. For example, Samira expressed a genuine sadness about not having "listened to her mother's advice" (Samira, July 25, 2002) to postpone her marriage until after graduating from university. She also regarded her mother as a "positive role model" who taught her children the importance of education through her own education and career as a professional working woman. Nonetheless, she felt pressured to fulfill her mother's expectations, and expressed a feeling of "embarrassment" and "underachievement" for not achieving what she was "expected" to. Mitra also talked about her dissatisfaction with her parents' and in particular her father's emphasis on studying sciences and medicine (Mitra, August 21, 2002). But she recognized and appreciated her father's efforts to console her after not being admitted into Medical school, when they were in Iran.

Feeling depressed and disappointed, her father's words became a source of emotional comfort and support.

In the lives of these men and women, family obligations played a somewhat complex role. The married women with children —Samira, Nahid and Yalda — considered raising children and taking care of a family as detrimental to their educational aspirations. The duality of their roles as caretakers and career women further complicated their positions in the higher education as first-generation immigrants with limited linguistic and financial resources. Roxana, also married but childless, recognized the complexities of women's roles within the families. For her, her husband's plan to have children in the near future contrasted with her own desires to pursue her academic studies at the graduate level. For these women, responsibilities and obligations associated with marriage and motherhood were regarded as deterrents to realizing their educational aspirations. Similarly, the single women, Mitra and Nasrin, acknowledged the paradoxical impact of marriage and "taking care of a family" on a woman's academic career, and mentioned that as a determining factor in choosing to remain single and finish their studies before they marry.

A Gendered Discourse of Education

All participants, regardless of their gender, emphasized the significant role of higher education in their lives. They also believed that, within their families, men and women received the same encouragements to pursue their education. The participants' narratives, however, revealed that despite the apparent equality

of men's and women's education in Iranian culture and society, men's education is perceived to have a greater importance within their families. Men's central role, as breadwinners and heads of the family, affected the family dynamics and influenced the decision-making affairs. For example, after coming to Canada, Samira, Roxana and Nahid had all postponed continuing their university education in order for their husbands to pursue graduate studies. According to Nahid (August 2, 2003) and Samira (July 25, 2002), a woman's education and income are at the periphery of the household, regardless of her level of education, income and her financial contribution to the family. They also talked about the "perceived" equal emphasis on the education of men and women within the family and the broader Iranian society. However, the perceived openness towards women's education did not secure a woman's status as an influential decision-maker within the family. Women's education, while encouraged and emphasized, holds a lesser value, both in terms of its priority and also the economic support they receive to continue their education. As Yalda (August 28, 2002) pointed out, there are very few Iranian men, if any, who would help their spouses with the financial burden of higher education.

The participants believed that Iranian immigrant women feel the effects of immigration on relationships more than men. Immigration, as they stated, changes the structure of the Iranian family, both in terms of perceived social expectations of women, and also women's own perceptions of their roles within their families. Samira (July 25, 2002) talked about the pressures felt by Iranian women to get an education, enter the job market and contribute to the family's

income. A woman who does not have an education and does not have a job is identified and labeled as “lazy”. However, despite a women’s financial contribution to the household, her money and income will never have the same “value” as the man’s. Similarly, Yalda and Nahid talked about the increased pressures of Iranian women to work inside and outside the home. The immigrant Iranian woman plays the double role of a professional wife and mother, or as Ziba Mir-Hosseini calls, becomes “an educated housewife.” Skelton (1993) contends that the double role of women as wives, mothers and workers implies their “domestication” within the household. Women’s domesticity tends to preserve the traditional role of women as mothers and nurturers and caregivers while the family benefits from their economic involvement in the job market. She goes on to point out that the ideology of domesticity reinforces women’s position and role in the family and society as subordinate to men’s. She elaborates in this excerpt:

Whilst the ideal for working-class females was the ‘good woman’, for their sisters in the middle classes the aim was to be a ‘perfect wife and mother’. The ‘good woman’ was one who demonstrated her *practical* abilities and skills as housewife, wife and mother. In contrast, the ‘perfect wife and mother’ was achieved by middle-class women using *organizational* skills to provide a stable, supportive domestic environment. Ironically, this conducive home setting could only be operationalized through the paid labor of working-class women. (p.326-327)

The participants’ reference to “haya” in Iranian culture is analogous to Skelton’s notions of a “good woman” and a “perfect wife and mother”. An Iranian woman is encouraged to be, as Samira (July 25, 2002) and Nahid (August 23, 2002) pointed out, “ba-haya,” or as Nader ((September 19, 2002) explained, “Mahjoub”.

The Moroccan feminist and sociologist, Fatima Mernissi (1987) reminds us that the concept of an “honorable woman,” as modest and virtuous, represents the unwillingness of Islamic cultures to challenge and redefine age-old traditional gender roles. Mernissi (1987) states:

Everyone is afraid of change, but Muslims are more so, because what is at stake are their fantasies about power. And women all over the world know very well how important power fantasies are to one’s self-empowerment. (p.xi)

Samira, Nasrin, Mitra and Nahid shared Mernissi’s Convictions. They stated that men’s power, authority and central position within Iranian families is not challenged as the result of a man’s or a woman’s educational level and background. Patriarchy continues to survive, regardless of a man’s high levels of education.

Change is nevertheless happening in all social and political fronts in Iran—a country most commonly identified as a “fundamentalist state” (Gerami, 1996). In recent years, the Iranian society has witnessed the willingness and courage of women and men who are struggling to create changes in the lives of women living in the Islamic Republic. Inside and outside of Iran, feminist scholars such as Mehrangiz Kar (1999, 2000) and Shirin Ebadi (1998)—the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize laureate—Valentine Moghadam (2000), Haleh Afshar (1998), Afsaneh Najmabadi (1998), Gity Neshat (1986), Nayereh Totdidi (2001), Heideh Moghissi (1999b), Ziba Mir-Hosseini (1999) and Parvin Paidar (1996) continue an “intellectual” battle against the institutionalized patriarchy in Iran. In her moving book, *A research About Violence Against Women in Iran* (2000), Mehrangiz Kar

addresses the increasing concern over violence against Iranian women, which she considers an important crisis shaking the very fabric of the Iranian society. The book contains detailed descriptions of real-life cases of violence against women in the family courts of the Ministry of Justice of the Islamic Republic. The graphic pictures illustrate the depth of crimes committed against these women who are often victims of domestic violence within their own families. Kar's book marks a new chapter in raising social consciousness and awareness about a social crisis that has been considered taboo for a long time. Kar (2000) points out that violence against women in Iran is mainly as the result of these women's attempts to change and transform their situations. She explains:

Proper women are those who do not attempt to change their disadvantaged situation. When they do so, they are confronted by social resistance, accused of rebellion and immorality, and face the risk of losing social safety, and consequent loss of their basic civil rights. (p.427-428) [translation is mine]

In recent years, Kar's concerns have been addressed through different social and political channels. The new wave of Iranian cinema attempts to address and critique social problems existent in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Films such as *The Circle* (دایره), directed by Jafar Panahi (جعفر پناهی)—which depicts the lives of three women—have tried to tackle some of the issues faced by Iranian women today. In my study, the participants' willingness to challenge traditional views of women's roles in the family and society was evident in their narratives. What was interesting was that Cyrus and Nader also acknowledged the peripheral stance of women in the Iranian family and society. Nader (September 19, 2002) acknowledged that life is "difficult" for women in Iran.

Similarly, the female participants questioned the authority of traditional women's roles as nurturers, daughters, wives and mothers although the participants did not necessarily condemn or dismiss such traditional feminine roles. They also emphasized the necessity of women's economic independence by stating their desires to "become a somebody", "have a brighter future" and as Nahid (August 2, 2002) eloquently stated, "not beg [one's husband] for money to buy a pair of socks!"

"Immigrant", "Different", "Other"

Cultures maybe represented as zones of control or of abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element. Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger's phrase, with other ways of telling. (Edward Said, 1989, p.225)

The participants talked about their lives as members of a cultural minority group in Canada. Their narratives unfolded diverse experiences and different perceptions of being an "immigrant", of being "different" and of being the "other". As Edward Said (1989) states in the previous quote, culture provides us with diverse ways of positioning ourselves in the world and in relation to others. Similarly, the participants viewed their cultural worlds not as "monolithic" (Minh-Ha, 1991), rather as complex phenomena which were interconnected to their own perceptions and those of others'. For Cyrus, Nader, Nahid and Samira, being an Iranian and a Muslim meant that they were identified as the "other," as "different" and as "not one of them". They talked about the "look," the "gaze"

(Foucault, 1980) that marked them as different and reminded them of that difference. As Nahid (August, 2, 2002) recounted, being identified an Iranian meant that she was not entitled to the same privileges as other Canadian students. These privileges were at times as trivial as using the departmental printer or going through doors without fearing the secretary's wrath. The participants' subtle encounters with "hidden racism" and the "invisible fist" indicated the prevalence of a "softer" form of discrimination that is not explicitly articulated. What was interesting was that Nader and Cyrus who openly talked about the existence of discrimination in Canada cannot be physically identified as "visible" minorities. Moghissi (1999a) explains:

Iranians are not always identifiable by skin color as a non-European ethno-racial minority. But a variety of other factors, including national origin, culture, names and accents, make them identifiable as immigrants of Third World origin. In Canada, as throughout the West, distorted and exaggerated images of Islam and Muslims accentuate Iranians' 'otherness'; these perceptions make them subject to individual acts and practices which work to exclude, inferiorize and discriminate against persons conceived, as the external other. In this sense, Iranians suffer from what some commentators have identified as the 'new' racism—that is, a form of 'cultural racism', a 'differentialist racism', in which "cultural difference replaces the earlier and now scientifically discredited biological theorization". (p.208-209)

As Moghissi (1999a) asserts, the function of "cultural racism" is to differentiate between and exclude the members of the mainstream Canadian culture and Third-World immigrants, regardless of their skin "color".

The participants talked about feelings of isolation, of not belonging and of separating the self from "others" and the community. Foucault (1980) asserts, under the weight of the "gaze", the individual "will end by interiorising, to the point

that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself" (p.115). Nader, Cyrus, Nahid and Samira physically disconnected from mainstream Canadians by not engaging in conversations or seeking friendships. Roxana, Nasrin and Yalda dissociated the self (Bannerji, 1995) from "hurtful" situations by not thinking about it.

Home and Belonging

"Home" was a concept whose definition went beyond referring to a particular country or place of birth. "Home" was defined as a place where one "belongs", and one feels "welcomed". As Nasrin commented, home is more a "fist-full of soil" (February 15, 2003). Nonetheless the participants talked about their emotional distress as the result of being away from their families and their social networks. Life in a new host country entailed overcoming barriers which were mainly caused by the unique conditions of an immigrant community. Among such barriers, the participants mentioned learning to communicate and function in a new language, trying to understand new cultural and social codes of behaviors, financial difficulties, and lack of strong family and social networks. However, despite the at times harsh realities of life in a foreign land, all participants expressed a genuine sense of satisfaction with their lives in Canada. They possessed a "positive" frame of status mobility. For what they had lost in Iran, they had gained many more in Canada. They were Iranians who were trying to make a "new home" in the country they had "chosen" to live in. Their culture and cultural frames of reference, as they all alluded to, were different from

the Canadian culture. However, they did not regard the mainstream Canadian culture as the “enemy”. “Hurtful” comments were the result of “ignorant” and “mean” personalities, not institutionalized racism. Regardless of the problems they were facing, they benefited from privileges such as western liberal views towards women’s education and employment and access to academia in Canada. All participants prized Canadian society’s openness and “respect” for individual rights. For Roxana, Nasrin and Mitra, openness of gender relations and the equal treatment of men and women in Canadian higher education, starkly contrasted with their past experiences in Iranian universities. For Samira, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus, who had experienced discrimination and culturally insensitive behaviors in Canada, on and off campus, the advantages of available opportunities outweighed negative experiences. For Yalda, who was refused admission into a university in Iran, Canada symbolized “a land of opportunities” where you cannot “afford to stay behind”. Our conversations revealed the participants’ content and satisfaction with their lives in Canada —the country that gave them what they could have not had in their own homelands.

Implications of the Study

In this study, I did not aim to find an overarching explanation and description for the experiences of *all* first-generation Iranian immigrants in Canadian higher education. Nonetheless, the findings of the study will be useful in understanding diverse individual experiences through an exploration of their narratives. The insights from this particular study may also help raise awareness

about the experiences of other immigrant minority groups in Canadian universities. Such awareness might indeed lead to the creation of culturally sensitive campuses across Canada. Furthermore, I aimed to provide a forum for marginalized voices of first-generation Iranian immigrants to be heard, thereby bringing the importance of their social and educational experiences to the forefront of educational research.

Throughout my years of experience in the Canadian educational system, both as a learner and a teacher, I have discussed the difficulties and obstacles faced by immigrants in Canadian classrooms with my students and teaching faculty and staff. One of the most common solutions to the situation — surprisingly from educators and teacher education candidates alike — is that: “Those who aren’t happy *here*, should go *back* where they came from!” Time and time again, this seemingly simple solution to a complex situation has been put forward by individuals from diverse cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds as a legitimate ideology whereby the *immigrant issue* can be *dealt with* effectively within the educational system. *Should* we, or better yet, are we *entitled* to request the return of those who are experiencing difficulties inside the classrooms to their respective homelands? The realities of life inside schooling communities all across Canada point to the futility of this proposition. The “new wave” immigrants (Simmons, 1995) have chosen Canada as their home. Those who were at point considered “undesirable immigrants” — as the result of the nationality preference immigration policy prior to 1968 (Hall, Troyato & Driedger, 1995) — now make up a significant portion of Canadian urban population

(Canadian Census 2001, [On line], Available:<<http://www.statcan.ca>). This means a radical shift in the ethnic, religious and linguistic make-up of the Canadian multicultural mosaic (Li, 2003). Despite the many problems these immigrants face they are determined to stay and “do the best they can” (Nahid, March 5, 2003) and build a “home away from home” (Moghissi, 1999a) in their new homeland. They may be uprooted, but are longing to transplant their old roots into a new soil.

The voices of the participants in my study pointed to a general lack of understanding and acceptance of Iranian immigrant students among the faculty and administration in the institutions of higher education. Some of the participants, for example Samira, Nahid, Nader and Cyrus, identified their encounters with covert discrimination as cultural “ignorance”. Others, for example Yalda and Roxana, talked about their “conscious decision” not to think about “negative” things that happen around them. However, regardless of how they approached the issue of discrimination, the impact of such experiences ran deeper than the surface, and left them with feelings of loneliness, sadness and lack of belonging. Acknowledging the significance of listening to students’ individual voices and stories, the faculty staff and administrators need to be sensitive to the needs of students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. As Newton (1939) observed,

Education must aim, first of all, at the building of minds that are sensitive to the social realities of the world in which they live, that are free, that have acquired the capacity for thinking for themselves, because they have had the opportunity to think for themselves. (p.213)

First-generation immigrant students are and continue to be an important part of Canadian society and educational system. Inclusion of their voices and experiences will not only facilitate their educational and social integration, but will also enrich Canadian school communities. To achieve this goal, we need to go beyond minimalist and simplistic descriptions of what constitutes a “multicultural society” and avoid reducing multiculturalism to, as Uma Narayan’s (1997) states, an ideology of “eating cultures,” or celebration of exotic cuisines and colorful annual festivals. All societies, without an exception, are multicultural, but what distinguishes a “multiculturalist” society from a “multicultural” one, is the commitment of its diverse social and political organizations to promote equality and respect and acceptance of all its citizens, regardless of their linguistic, cultural and religious affiliations. A true multiculturalist society does not only “acknowledge” the difference of different cultures and communities, but also accepts and “recognizes” all its citizens’ individual rights and equal dignity. In his seminal essay on multiculturalism, *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), Charles Taylor talks about the importance of acknowledging, accepting and respecting differences. He writes:

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (p.25)

Taylor asserts that our identity and the way we view ourselves and the world around us is very much linked and related to how we are perceived by others and whether we are acknowledged by them.

Suggestions for Future Research

From a methodological perspective, there are issues surrounding generalizations of small-scale qualitative inquiries to an entire population. Therefore, as I have stated elsewhere in this dissertation, (Chapter Three: Methodology), the findings of this research may be used mainly as an exploration of the experiences of the eight particular individuals who participated in my project.

Iranians are stereotypically perceived to share common cultural, linguistic and religious beliefs and values. The common image of an Iranian immigrant in Canada identifies him or her as Persian (or Farsi) speaking, and of Muslim faith. But in reality, there are diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious fractions within Iranian communities, in Iran and abroad. Turks (Azerbaijanis), Kurds, Lors, Gilaks, Balouchis, Armenians, Assyrians, Arabs, Jews, Baha'is and Muslims (including Sunii and Shii and other smaller Muslim sects, such as Ismailis, Daravish, etc.) altogether make up a very complex picture of Iran as a diverse and multicultural society. The social experiences of the members of each of the ethnic, religious and linguistic communities are influenced by their unique histories and social status within the Iranian society. The experiences of the participants in this study, as members of the dominant cultural group in Iran—

educated, Persian-speaking, middle-class — may be different from the experiences of members of subordinate cultural and religious groups, such as the Baha'i community whose members are prohibited to compete in Konkour (post-secondary admission test) and therefore, cannot attend university. Future research studies should address complex issues such as ethno-religious and linguistic diversity amongst the first-generation Iranian students across all levels of undergraduate and graduate programs in higher education.

Another restriction of this study may be related to the short period of time during which the interviews took place. While longitudinal studies are time-consuming and difficult to conduct—in terms of their financial demands and high participant attrition rates—they may provide us with clearer and deeper understandings of how individuals describe, explain, and make meanings of their experiences. Long-term research studies may also help us understand how individuals view their experiences at different periods in their lives, and whether and how their perspectives are changed and/or re-defined throughout the process of their university studies. After all, memories of old experiences take on different meanings and significance in the context of new life circumstances: old memories fade and their interpretations may seem starkly different from what they were in the past. Also, studies that attempt to compare the educational experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants may provide educators and administrators with invaluable insights into the inter-generational experiences of immigration in the context of education. For example, in a study of 25 Nicaraguan youth in the United States, Konczal's (2002) found significant

differences between the academic expectations of first and second-generation immigrants. Similar investigations in the Iranian immigrant community will provide fascinating insights into the lives of newcomers and second-generation Iranians.

As Brah (1996) points out:

Clearly, the relationship of the first generation to the place of migration is different from that of subsequent generations, mediated as it is by memories of what was recently left behind, and the experiences of disruption and displacement as one tries to re-orient. (p.194)

Therefore, through such inter-generational research projects, theorists and practitioners may be able to take a closer look at the role of cultural values, and their transmission across generations of a particular cultural community. For example, in a study of thirty second-generation Iranian undergraduates in the United States, Shavarini (2001) found that her participants were aware of their parents' academic expectations, and family values had a greater influence on their educational experiences than their peers or the academic institutions.

Furthermore, in recent decades, Canada has become a "chosen destination" for an ever-growing number of immigrants from different corners of the world. Hence, there is a growing need in educational research to explore and investigate the experiences of first-generation immigrants in order to gain a better understanding of their needs and the issues they face within the educational system. Comparative research studies that attempt to explore experiences of immigrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds will be particularly useful in unraveling common and diverse sociocultural perspectives towards academic achievement and social integration.

Epilogue: Weaving the Pieces

Nahid: Usually, it's very hard for me to talk about these issues. I mean, you know, the problems that I've had here [in Canada]. But, on the other hand, I also feel that, not just right at this moment, but whenever we talk to each other, I *unload* myself. I know that you know [about these problems] too.

(March 5, 2003)

معمولا "خیلی برام سخته در مورد
این جور مسائل صحبت کنم.
یعنی میدونی مشکلاتی که اینجا
داشته ام . ولی از یک طرفی هم
حس می کنم ، نه فقط الان ،
ولی هر وقت با هم صحبت می کنیم ،
که خودمو خالی می کنم .
میدونم که تو هم میدونی .

As I approach to end this dissertation, I believe it is necessary to reflect upon the journey which has brought me this far in my life. Writing this dissertation has given me the courage to look back at my own experiences and retell the past, as painful as it appeared at times. To this end, I share with Nahid the gratification of "*unloading*" my "*self*".

I feel privileged for the opportunity to listen to the voices of the six women and two men who participated in my study. The willingness and generosity of Samira, Nahid, Roxana, Mitra, Yalda, Nasrin, Nader and Cyrus to share their "lifeworlds" (Sizoo, 1997; Van Manen, 1997) provided me with valuable insights into their lived experiences as Iranian immigrants in academia, and those elsewhere in society. As a first-generation immigrant myself, I had a vested interest in hearing their untold stories. Atkinson (1998) reminds us that:

Reclaiming our story is part of our birthright. Telling our story enables us to be heard, and acknowledged by others. Story makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, and unformed formed, and the confusing clear.
(p.7)

Nonetheless, writing this dissertation has been a cyclical tug-of-war between the multiple spaces occupied by my own experiences as an immigrant and those of my participants. In the beginning, I strove to reach the phase of phenomenological “*epoche*” (Moustakas, 1994), by setting aside my own pre-conceived notions and personal history. Being “one of them,” I thought I knew all there was to know about the difficulties in the lives of immigrants and the barriers they face in higher education. But how much did I really know about them and their lives? Throughout my years in Canada, the vast majority of people I have been able to relate to at a personal level were first-generation immigrants from different corners of the world. They have been my friends, classmates, students, colleagues, and storytellers. However, the way I perceived them was greatly influenced by my own values and history. I saw *their* worlds through the window of my own eyes. My struggles to reach *epoche*, reminded me of the need to “bracket” my thoughts and feelings and confront my pre-conceived notions about culture, education, gender and identity (Anderson, 2002). I questioned what it means to be an “immigrant”, an “Iranian,” and a “woman”.

But above all, the most precious gift that my interviews with the participants and writing this dissertation have awarded me is the value and importance of “respect” for individual stories and experiences. When there is no respect and validation of the “other’s” voice, research is nothing more than an elaborate pretense. In the end, I ask, once again, the question: “What is the experience of being a first-generation Iranian immigrant in Canadian higher education?” My participants’ voices have demonstrated that there is no one

answer and no one story. The end of this dissertation could only be considered as the beginning of our understandings and the need for more stories to be told.

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Appendix A

The Little Black Fish

It was the coldest night of the winter. At the bottom of the sea an old fish gathered together 12,000 of her children and grandchildren and began to tell them a story: Once upon a time a little black fish lived with its mother in a stream which rose out of the rocky walls of a mountain and flowed into a valley. Their home was behind a black, moss-covered rock, under which both of them slept at night. The little fish longed to see the moonlight in their home just once. From morning till evening, the mother and child swam after each other. Sometimes they joined other fish and rapidly darted in and out of small places.

The little fish was an only child, for of the 10,000 eggs which the mother had laid, only this one had survived. For several days the little fish had been deep in thought and said very little, but swam lazily and indifferently back and forth from the near to the far bank. Mostly, the fish lagged behind the mother who thought her child was sick and soon would be well. In fact, the black fish's "sickness" was really something else! Early one morning before the sun had risen, the little fish woke the mother and said, "Mother, I want to talk to you." Half-asleep, the mother responded, "My dear child, this isn't the time to talk. Save your words for later. Wouldn't it be better to go swimming?" "No, Mother! I can't go swimming anymore. I must leave here." "Do you really have to leave?" "Yes, Mother, I must go." "Just a minute! Where do you want to go at this hour of the morning?" "I want to go see where the stream ends. You know, Mother, I've been wondering where the end of the stream is...I haven't been able to think about anything else. I didn't sleep a wink all night. At last, I decided to go and find where the stream ends. I want to know what's happening in other places." The mother laughed. "When I was a child, I used to think a lot like that. But, my dear, a stream has no beginning and no end. That's the way it is. The stream just flows and never goes anywhere." "But mother dear, isn't it true that everything comes to an end? Nights end, days end, weeks, months, years..." "Forget this pretentious talk," interrupted the mother. "Let's go swimming. Now is the time to swim, not talk." "No, Mother, I'm tired of this swimming, I want to set out and see what's happening elsewhere. Maybe you think someone taught me these ideas but believe me, I've had these thoughts for a long time. Of course, I've learned many things here and there. For instance, I know that when most fish get old, they complain about everything. I want to know if life is simply for circling around in a small place until you become old and nothing else, or is there another way to live in the world?" When the little fish finished the mother exclaimed: "My dear child, are you crazy? World!... World! What is this other world! The world is right here where we are. Life is just as we have it..." Just then, a large fish approached their home and said: "Neighbor, what are you arguing about with your child? Aren't you planning to go swimming today?" Hearing her neighbor's voice, the mother came out of the house and said, "What's the world coming to! Now children even want to teach their mothers something! "How so?" asked the neighbor. "Listen to the places this half-pint wants to go!" replied the mother. "Saying over and over again I want to go see what's happening in the world. What pretentious talk!" "Little one," said the neighbor, "let's see. Since when have you become a scholar and philosopher and not told us?" "Madam," answered the little fish, "I don't know what you mean by 'scholar' and 'philosopher,' I've just gotten tired of these swims. I don't want to continue this boring stuff and be happy as a fool until one day I wake up and see that like all of you, I've become old, but still am as dumb as I am now." "Oh, what talk!" exclaimed the neighbor. "I never thought my only child would turn out this way," said the mother. "I don't know what evil person put my sweet baby up to this." "No one put me up to anything," said the little fish. "I have reason, and intelligence and understanding. I have eyes and I can see."

"Sister," said the neighbor to the little fish's mother, "do you remember that twisted-up snail?" "Yes, you're right," said the mother. "He used to push himself on my baby. God knows what I would do to him!" "That's enough, Mother," said the little fish. "He was my friend." "Friendship between a fish and a snail," said the mother, "I've never heard of such a thing!" "And I've never heard of a fish and a snail being enemies," replied the little fish. "But you all drowned the poor fellow." "Let's not bring up the past," said the neighbor. "You brought up the subject yourself," said the little fish. "It served him right to be killed," said the mother. "Have you forgotten the things he used to say everywhere he went?" "Then," said the little fish, "kill me too since I'm saying the very same things." To make a long story short, the arguing voices attracted the other fish. The little fish's words angered everyone. One of the old fish asked, "Did you think we'd pity you?" "That one just needs a little box on the ears," said another. "Go away," said the black fish's mother. "Don't you touch my child." Another of them said, "Madam, if you don't raise your child correctly, you must expect it to be punished." The neighbor said, "I'm ashamed to live next to you." Another said, "Let's do to the little fish what we did to the old snail before it gets into trouble." When they tried to grab the little black fish, its friends gathered around and took the fish away from the brawl. The black fish's mother beat her head and chest and cried, "Oh, my baby is leaving me. What am I going to do? What a curse has fallen upon me!" "Mother, don't cry for me. Cry for the old fish who stay behind." "Don't get smart, half-pint!" shouted one of the fish from afar. "If you go away and afterwards regret it, we won't let you come back," said a second. "These are useful fancies. Don't go," said a third. "What's wrong with this place?" said a fourth. "There is no other world. The world is right here. Come back!" Said a fifth. "If you turn reasonable and come back, then we'll believe you really are an intelligent fish," said a sixth. "Wait, we've gotten used to having you around..." said a seventh. The mother cried, "Have mercy on me. Don't go! Don't go!" The little fish didn't have anything more to say to them. Several friends of the same age accompanied the fish as far as the waterfall. As they parted, the fish said, "My friends, I hope to see you again. Don't forget me!" "How would it be possible to forget you?" asked the friends. "You've awakened us from a deep sleep. You've taught us many things that we had not even thought about before. We hope to see you again, learned and fearless friend." The little fish swam down the waterfall and fell into a pond full of water. At first the fish lost its balance but after a while began to swim and circled around the pond. The fish had never seen so much water collected in one place. Thousands of tadpoles were wriggling in the water. They laughed when they saw the little black fish, "What a funny shape! What kind of creature are you?" The fish looked them over thoroughly and said, "Please don't insult me. My name is Little Black Fish. Tell me your names so that we'll get acquainted." "We call one another tadpole," replied one of the tadpoles. "We come from nobility," said another. "You can't find anyone prettier than us in the whole world," said another. "We aren't shapeless and ugly-faced like you," said another one. The fish said, "I never imagined you would be so conceited. That's all right. I'll forgive you since you're speaking out of ignorance." In one voice the tadpoles demanded, "Are you saying we're stupid?" "If you weren't ignorant," replied the fish, "you'd know that there are many others in the world who are pleased with their appearances. You don't even have names of your own." The tadpoles became very angry. But since they knew the little fish spoke truthfully, they changed their tone and said, "really, you're wasting words! We swim around the world every day from morning till evening, but except for ourselves and our father and mother, we see no one. Of course, there are tiny worms, but they don't count." "You can't even leave the pond," said the fish. "How can you talk about traveling around the world?" "What! Do you think there's a world other than the pond?" exclaimed the tadpoles. "At least," responded the fish, "you must wonder where this water comes from and what things are outside of it." "Outside the water!" exclaimed the tadpoles, "Where is that? We're never seen outside of the water! Haha .. haha ... You're crazy!" Little Black Fish also

started to laugh. The fish thought it would be better to leave the tadpoles to themselves and go away, but then changed its mind and decided to speak to their mother. "Where is your mother?" asked the fish. Suddenly, the deep voice of a frog made the fish jump. The frog was sitting on a rock at the edge of the pond. She jumped into the water, came up to the fish and said: "I'm right here. What do you want?" "Hello, Great Lady," said the fish. The frog responded "Worthless creature, now is not the time to show off. You've found some children to listen to you and are talking pretentiously. I've lived long enough to know that the world is this pond. Mind your own business and don't lead my children astray." "If you lived a hundred years," said the little fish, "you'd still be nothing more than an ignorant and helpless frog." The frog got angry and jumped at Little Black Fish. The fish flipped quickly and fled like lightening, stirring up sediment and worms at the bottom of the pond. The valley twisted and curved. The stream became deeper and wider. But if you looked down at the valley from the top of the mountains, the stream would seem like a white thread. In one place, a piece of large rock had broken off from the mountain, fallen to the bottom of the valley, and split the water into two branches. A large lizard the size of a hand, lay on her stomach on the rock. She was enjoying the sun's warmth and watching a large, round crab resting on the sand at the bottom of the water in a shallow place and eating a frog he had snared. The little fish suddenly saw the crab, became frightened, and greeted him from afar. The crab glanced sideways at the fish and said, "What a polite fish! Come closer, little one. Come on!" "I'm off to see the world," said the little fish, "and I never want to be caught by you, sir!" "Little fish, why are you so pessimistic and scared?" asked the crab. "I'm neither pessimistic nor afraid," answered the fish. "I speak about everything I see and understand." "Well, then," said the crab, "please tell me what you've seen and understood that makes you think I want to capture you?" "Don't try to trick me!" responded the fish. "Are you referring to the frog?" queried the crab. "How childish you are! I have a grudge against frogs; that's the reason I hunt them. Do you know, they think they're the only creatures in the world and that they're very lucky. I want to make them understand who is really master in the world! So you don't have to be afraid, my dear. Come here. Come on." As the crab talked, he was walking backwards towards the little fish. His gait was so funny that the fish couldn't help laughing and said, "Poor thing! You don't even know how to walk. How did you ever learn who runs the world?" The black fish drew back from the crab. A shadow fell upon the water and suddenly a heavy blow pushed the crab into the sand. The lizard laughed so hard at the crab's expression that she slipped and almost fell into the water. The crab couldn't get up. The little fish saw that a young shepherd was standing at the edge of the water watching the fish and the crab. A flock of sheep and goats came up to the water and thrust their mouths in. The valley filled with the sounds of "meh meh" and "bah bah." The little black fish waited until the sheep and goats had drunk their water and left, then called the lizard, "Dear lizard, I'm a little black fish who's going to search for the end of the stream. I think you're wise, so, I'd like to ask you something." "Ask anything you want." "All along the way, they've been frightening me a great deal about the pelican, the swordfish and the heron. Do you know anything about them?" "The swordfish and the heron," said the lizard, "aren't found in this area, especially the swordfish who lives in the sea. But it's possible that the pelican is farther down. Be careful he doesn't trick you and catch you in his pouch." "What pouch?" "Under his throat," explained the lizard, "the pelican has a pouch which holds a lot of water. When the pelican's swimming, fish, without realizing it, sometimes enter his pouch and then go straight into his stomach. But if the pelican isn't hungry, he stores the fish in his pouch to eat later." "If a fish enters the pouch, is there any way of getting out?" asked the fish. "There's no way unless the fish rips open the pouch," answered the lizard. "I'm going to give you a dagger so that if you get caught by the pelican, you can do just that." Then the lizard crawled into a crack in the rock and returned with a very sharp dagger. The little fish took the dagger and said,

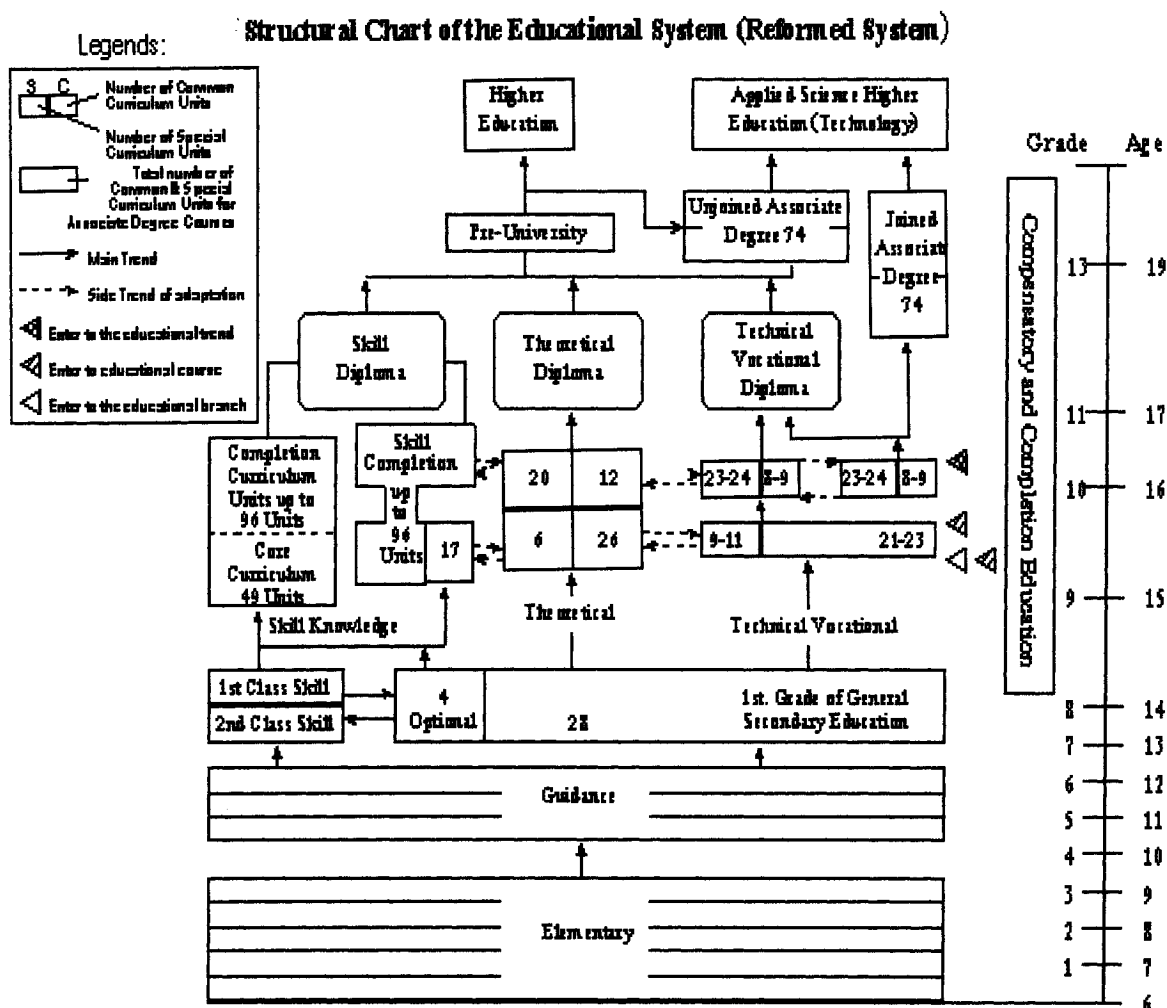
"Dear lizard, you are so kind! I don't know how to thank you." "It's not necessary to thank me, my dear. I have many of these daggers. When I have nothing to do, I sit down and make daggers from blades of grass and give them to smart fish like you." "What?" asked the fish, "Have other fish passed here before me?" "Many have passed by," the lizard replied. "They've formed themselves into a school and they give the fisherman a hard time." "Excuse me for talking so much," said the black fish, "but if you don't think me meddlesome, tell me how they give the fisherman a hard time." "Well," answered the lizard, "they stick together. Whenever the fisherman throws his net, they get inside, pull the net with them, and drag it to the bottom of the sea." The lizard placed her ear on the crack, listened and said, "I must excuse myself now. My children have awakened." The lizard went into the crack in the rock. The black fish had no choice but to set out again. But all the while there were many questions on the fish's mind. "Is it true that the stream flows to the sea? If only the pelican doesn't catch me! Is it true the swordfish enjoys killing and eating its own kind? Why is the heron our enemy?" The little fish continued swimming and thinking, in every stretch of the way the fish saw and learned new things. How the fish liked turning somersaults, tumbling down waterfalls, and swimming again. The fish felt the warmth of the sun and grew strong. At one place a deer was hastily drinking some water. The little fish greeted her. "Pretty deer, why are you in such a hurry?" "A hunter is following me," replied the deer. "I've been hit by a bullet. . . . right here!" The little fish didn't see the bullet hole, but from the deer's limping gait knew she was telling the truth. At one place turtles were napping in the sun's warmth. At another place the boisterous noise of partridges twisted through the valley. The fragrance of mountain grass floated through the air and mixed with the water. In the afternoon the fish reached a spot where the valley widened and the water passed through the center of a grove of trees. There was so much water that the little black fish had a really good time. Later on the fish came upon a school of fish. The little fish had not seen any other fish since leaving home. Several tiny fish surrounded Little Black Fish and said, "You must be a stranger here!" "Yes," responded the black fish, "I'm a stranger. I've come from far away." "Where do you want to go?" asked the tiny fish. "I'm going to find the end of the stream," replied the black fish. "Which stream?" "This very stream we're swimming in," answered the black fish. "We call this a river," stated the tiny fish. The black fish didn't say anything. "Don't you know that the pelican lives along the way?" inquired one of the tiny fish. "Yes, I know," answered the black fish. "Do you know what a big wide pouch the pelican has?" asked another. "I know that too," replied the black fish. "In spite of all this, you still want to go?" exclaimed the tiny fish. "Yes," said the black fish, "whatever happens, I must go." Soon a rumor spread among all the fish that a little black fish had come from far away and wanted to find the end of the river. And the fish wasn't even afraid of the pelican! Several tiny fish were tempted to go with the black fish but didn't because they were afraid of the grown-ups. Others said, "If there weren't a pelican, we would come with you. We're afraid of the pelican's pouch." A village was on the edge of the river. Village women and girls were washing dishes and clothes in the river. The little fish listened to their chatter for a while and watched the children bathing, then set off. The fish went on and on and on, still farther on, until night fell, then lay down under a rock to sleep. The fish woke in the middle of the night and saw the moon shining into the water and lighting up everything. The little black fish liked the moon very much. On nights when the moon shone into the water, the fish longed to creep out from under the moss and speak with her. But Mother would always wake up, pull the fish under the moss, and make it go to sleep again. The little fish looked up at the moon "Hello, my lovely moon!" "Hello, Little Black Fish. What brings you here?" "I'm traveling around the world." "The world is very big," said the moon. "You can't travel everywhere." "That's okay," said the fish. "I'll go everywhere I can." "I'd like to stay with you till morning," said the moon, "but a big black cloud is coming toward me to block out my light." "Beautiful moon! I like your light so much. I wish you'd always shine on me." "My dear fish, the truth

is, I don't have any light of my own. The sun gives me light and I reflect it to the earth. Tell me, have you heard that humans want to fly up and land on me in a few years?" "That's impossible," exclaimed the fish. "It's a difficult task," said the moon, "but whatever they want, humans can. . . ." The moon couldn't finish her sentence. The dark cloud approached and covered her face. The night became dark again, and the black fish was alone. The fish looked at the darkness in surprise and amazement for several seconds, then crept under a rock and fell asleep. The fish woke up early in the morning and saw overhead several tiny fish chattering. When they saw that the black fish was awake, they said in one voice, "Good morning!" The black fish recognized them right away and said, "Good morning! You followed me after all!" "Yes," answered one of the tiny fish, "but we're still afraid." "The thought of the pelican just won't go away," said another. "You worry too much," said the black fish. "One shouldn't worry all the time. Let's start out and our fears will vanish completely." But as they were about to set out, they felt the water all around them rise up and a lid was placed over them. It was dark everywhere and there was no way to escape. The black fish immediately realized that they had been caught in the pelican's pouch. "My friends," said the little black fish, "we've been caught in the pelican's pouch, but there's a chance to escape." All the tiny fish began to cry. One of them said, "There's no way to escape! It's your fault since you influenced us and led us astray." "Now he's going to swallow us all, and then we'll die," said another. Suddenly the sound of frightening laughter twisted through the water. It was the pelican. He kept on laughing and said, "What tiny fish I've caught! Ha. Ha. Truly, my heart bleeds for you. I don't want to swallow you! Ha, Ha . . ." The tiny fish began pleading, "Your Excellency, Mr. Pelican! We've been hearing about you for a long time. If you'd be so kind as to open your distinguished beak a little so that we might go out, we'll always be grateful to you." "I don't want to swallow you right now," said the pelican. "I've some fish stored. Look below." Several large and tiny fish were scattered on the bottom of the pouch. "Your Excellency, Mr. Pelican!" cried the tiny fish, "we haven't done anything. We're innocent. This little black fish led us astray . . ." "Cowards!" exclaimed the little black fish, "are you crying like this because you think this dishonest bird is merciful?" "You don't know what you're saying," said the tiny fish. "Just wait and see . . . His Excellency, Mr. Pelican, will pardon us and swallow you!" "Of course I'll pardon you," said the pelican. "But on one condition." "Your condition, please, sir!" begged the tiny fish. "Strangle that meddlesome fish, and then you'll get your freedom." The little black fish moved aside and said to the tiny fish, "Don't agree! This deceitful bird wants to turn us against each other. I have a plan . . ." But the tiny fish were so intent on saving themselves that they couldn't think of anything else. They advanced towards the little black fish who was sitting near the back of the pouch and talking slowly. "Cowards! Whatever happens, you've been caught and don't have a way to escape. And you're not strong enough to hurt me." "We must strangle you," said the tiny fish. "We want freedom!" "You've lost your senses," said the black fish. "Even if you strangle me, you won't escape. Don't fall for his tricks . . ." "You're talking like this just to save yourself," said the tiny fish. "Otherwise you wouldn't think of us at all." "Just listen," said the black fish, "and I'll explain. I'll pretend I'm dead. Then, we'll see whether or not the pelican will free you. If you don't agree to this, I'll kill all of you with this dagger or rip open the pouch and escape while you . . ." "Enough!" interrupted one of the fish. "I can't stand this talk. Oh, wee . . . oh, wee . . . oh wee . . ." "Why did you ever bring along this crybaby?" demanded the black fish upon seeing him cry. Then the fish took out the dagger and held it in front of the tiny fish. Helpless, they agreed to the little fish's suggestion. They pretended to be fighting together. The black fish pretended to be dead. The others went forward and said, "Your Excellency, Mr. Pelican, we strangled the meddlesome black fish . . ." "Good work!" laughed the pelican. "Now, as a reward, I'm going to swallow all of you alive so that you can have a nice stroll in my stomach!" The tiny fish never had a chance. Quick as lightening they passed through the

pelican's throat and were gone. But, at that very instant, the black fish drew the dagger, split open the wall of the pouch with one blow and fled. The pelican cried out in pain and smashed his head on the water but he couldn't follow after the little fish. The black fish went on and on and still farther on until it was noon. The river had passed through the mountains and valleys and now was flowing across a level plain. Several other smaller rivers had joined it from the right and the left, increasing its water greatly. The black fish was enjoying the immensity of the water. Soon the fish realized the water had no bottom. The fish swam this way and that way and didn't touch anywhere. There was so much water that the little fish got lost in it! No matter how far the fish swam, still the water was endless. Suddenly, the fish noticed a large, long creature charging forward like lightening. There was a two-edged sword in front of its mouth. The little fish thought, "The swordfish! He's going to cut me to pieces this very instant!" Quickly the fish jumped out of the way and swam to the surface. After a while the fish went under the water again to look for the bottom. On the way the fish met a school of fish-thousands and thousands of fish. "Friend," said the fish to one of them, "I'm a stranger. I've come from far away. Where is this place?" The fish called his friends and said, "Look! Another . . ." Then replied to the black fish, "Friend, welcome to the sea." Another said, "All rivers and streams flow here, except some which flow into swamps." "You can join our group anytime you wish," said one of the fish. The little black fish was happy to have reached the sea and said, "I'd like to travel around first, then I'll come join your group. I'd like to be with you the next time you pull down the fisherman's net." "You'll get your wish soon," answered one of the fish. "Now go explore. But if you swim to the surface, watch out for the heron who isn't afraid of anyone these days. She doesn't stop bothering us till she's caught four or five fish a day." The black fish then left the group of sea fish and began swimming. A little later the fish came to the surface of the sea. A warm sun was shining. The little black fish enjoyed feeling the sun's bright rays on its back. Calm and happy, the fish was swimming on the surface of the sea and thinking, "Death could come upon me very easily now. But as long as I'm able to live, I shouldn't go out to meet death. Of course, if someday I should be forced to face death-as I shall-it doesn't matter. What does matter is the influence that my life or death will have on the lives of others . . ." The little black fish wasn't able to pursue these thoughts. A heron dived down, swooped up the fish, and carried it off. Caught in the heron's long beak, the little fish kicked and waved but couldn't get free. The heron had grabbed the fish's waist so tightly that its life was ebbing away. After all, how long can a little fish stay alive out of water? "If only the heron would swallow me this very instant," thought the fish, "then the water and moisture inside her stomach would prevent my death at least for a few minutes." The fish addressed the heron with this thought in mind. "Why don't you swallow me alive? I'm one of those fish whose body becomes full of poison after death." The heron didn't reply. She thought, "Oh, a tricky one! What are you up to? You want to get me talking so you can escape!" Dry land was visible in the distance. It got closer and closer. "If we reach dry land," thought the fish, "all is finished." "I know you want to take me to your children," said the fish, "but by the time we reach land, I'll be dead, and my body will become a sack full of poison. Why don't you have pity for your children?" "Precaution is also a virtue!" thought the heron. "I can eat you myself and catch another fish for my children. . . but let's see . . . could this be a trick? No, you can't do anything." As the heron thought she noticed that the black fish's body was limp and motionless. "Does this mean you're dead," thought the heron. "Now I can't even eat you! I've ruined such a soft and delicate fish for no reason at all!" "Hey little one!" she called to the black fish. "Are you still half alive so that I can eat you?" But she didn't finish speaking because the moment she opened her beak, the black fish jumped and fell down. The heron realized how badly she'd been tricked and dived after the little black fish. The fish streaked through the air like lightening. The fish had lost its senses from thirst for seawater and thrust its dry mouth into the moist wind of the sea. But as soon as the fish splashed into the water

and took a new breath, the heron caught up and this time swallowed the fish so fast that the fish didn't understand what had happened. The fish only sensed that everywhere was wet and dark. There was no way out. The sound of crying could be heard. When the fish's eyes had become accustomed to the dark, it saw a tiny fish crouched in a corner, crying. He wanted his mother. The black fish approached and said: "Little one! . . . Get up! Think about what we should do. What are you crying for? Why do you want your mother?" "You there . . . Who are you?" responded the tiny fish. "Can't you see? . . . I'm . . . dy...ing. O, me . . . oh, my . . . oh, oh . . . mama . . . I . . . I can't come with you to pull the fisherman's net to the bottom of the sea any more . . . oh, oh . . . oh, oh!" "Enough, there!" said the little fish. "You'll disgrace all fish." After the tiny fish had controlled his crying, the little fish continued, "I want to kill the heron and give peace of mind to all fish. But first, I must send you outside so that you don't ruin everything." "You're dying yourself," replied the tiny fish. "How can you kill the heron?" The little fish showed the dagger. "From right inside here, I'm going to rip open her stomach. Now listen to what I say. I'm going to start tossing back and forth in order to tickle the heron. As soon as she opens her mouth and begins to laugh, you jump out." "Then what about you?" asked the tiny fish. "Don't worry about me. I'm not coming out until I've killed this good-for-nothing." The black fish stopped talking and began tossing back and forth and tickling the heron's stomach. The tiny fish was standing ready at the entrance of the heron's stomach. As soon as the heron opened her mouth and began to laugh, the tiny fish jumped out and fell into the water. But no matter how long he waited, there wasn't any sign of the black fish. Suddenly, he saw the heron twist and turn and cry out. Then she began to beat her wings and fell down. She splashed into the water. She beat her wings again, then all movement stopped. But there was no sign of Little Black Fish, and since that time, nothing has been heard. The old fish finished her tale and said to her 12,000 children and grandchildren, "Now it's time to sleep, children. Go to bed." "Grandmother!" exclaimed the children and grand-children, "You didn't say what happened to that tiny fish." "We'll leave that for tomorrow night," said the old fish. "Now, it's time for bed. Goodnight." Eleven thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine little fish said goodnight and went to sleep. The grandmother fell asleep too. But try as she might, a little red fish couldn't get to sleep. All night long she thought about the sea

Appendix B



Source: Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ministry of Science, research and Technology. [On line] Available: < <http://www.msrt.gov.ir/English/Policy/htm> >

Consent Form

I,-----, willingly agree to participate in this research project conducted by **Shiva Sadeghi** as part of her PhD dissertation on the educational experiences of Iranian women in Canadian Universities.

1. I understand the purpose of this study and know about the risks, benefits and inconveniences that this research project entails.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study without justifying my reasons for doing so.
3. I understand that my anonymity will be maintained during this research project by not providing specific information about my identity. This means my name, information program of study, educational institution will not be revealed, and all specific information about my personal and professional life which I may communicate with the interviewer will be kept strictly confidential and not released under any circumstances.
4. I understand that the information gathered during the interviews and the transcripts will be used strictly for the purposes of the researcher's PhD dissertation, and publications related to the PhD dissertation.

I have carefully studied the above and understand my participation in this agreement. I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print)-----

Signature----- Date-----

Contact Number-----