

Iranian Immigrant Women's Gender Identities, Agency, and Investment in Second
Language Learning

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Iranian Immigrant Women's Gender Identities, Agency, and Investment in Second Language Learning

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Iranian women's gendered identities and language learning through the theoretical frameworks of feminist poststructuralism of gender and language, imagined communities, and communities of practice. Additionally, these theoretical constructs were linked to the concepts of agency and investment in second language learning. This qualitative study aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. How do the Iranian immigrant women' imagined communities and gender identities affect their investment in second language learning before coming to the United States?
2. How do these women view their positions as Iranian immigrant women in the current communities of practice in the United States?
3. Do the imagined communities they formed before coming to the United States match the realities of the current communities of practice?
4. In what ways do these women's present perceptions of being a woman affected their adoption of agentive roles for participation or nonparticipation in the United States communities of practice, and investment in second language learning?

5. How do these women's present imagined communities and gender identities shape their decisions about future participation in the United States communities of practice and investment in second language learning?

For the research design of the present study, Seidman's (2013) three-series interview method was utilized to capture these women's past, present, and future life perceptions regarding their gender positioning and second language learning trajectories. The data obtained from the interviews were coded, thematically analyzed, and compared to answer the research questions of the study. The findings of the study revealed that although most of these Iranian immigrant women achieved higher academic and social statuses after their immigration to the United States, their journeys, both in their homeland, Iran, and in the United States, were not easy. In each of these contexts, they underwent various either gender or gender and racial discriminations. As the results of the study further displayed, such ambivalent positions in the American communities of practice had both positive and negative impacts on their second language learning trajectories. Those women who were marginalized due to their Iranian and immigrant identities invested less in second language learning. However, those participants whose language skills were not remarkable, perceived knowing English as the only way to gain the entry into the communities of the American society. The results further indicated that for those interviewees who had already been proficient in the English language before immigrating to the United States, knowing the language could not facilitate their access to the communities of practice. These women reported the most marginalization instances they experienced in the United States.

The study provided some insights for the ESL educators to consider the unequal discourse of the host societies as a powerful hindrance to immigrants' socialization and language learning in a new culture. Knowing the language of the host community is not a guarantee to cross the threshold of the target communities of practice. As a matter of fact, the knowledge of the language can be an enlightening tool for understanding the hidden racism and antiimmigrant discourse of a society or a region. Having known the target language, the proficient language speakers had the confidence in their linguistic abilities to gain the full membership of the native speakers' communities. However, they lost their initiatives as they confronted the unequal power structures which marginalized these immigrants due to their nationality and race.

Dedication

To anyone who does not underestimate people's life stories

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The idea that second language learning only takes place in classroom contexts is now outdated. Rogers (2004) believed that learning occurs both through exposure to language in informal environments, as well as formal classrooms. He also noted that although natural language learning is unstructured, it is considered as the most essential part of everyone's daily language learning experience. The natural theory of language learning receives more prominence in this new age of migration. Every year, people from various parts of the world immigrate to more prosperous countries in hopes of seeking higher education and/or better careers in life. Learning the language of the target community is one way of assimilating more into the new culture. Additionally, as individuals immigrate to new cultural and linguistic contexts, changes may occur in the way they view themselves as members of the new community. Such changes can have effects on not only their perceptions of who they are, but also their decisions to learn and use the target language.

Among the immigrant population, Middle Eastern women's identities may go through more changes. The variations between their images as women in their home communities are sometimes in sharp contrast with their new positions in the new local and academic communities. As an Iranian graduate student in the United States, I have always been curious to know about how Iranian women's gender identities are reconstructed as they participate in new target communities, and how these changes affect their participation and engagement in the social and academic activities of the target culture. Moreover, it is interesting to investigate how their views of who they are

as Iranian women may influence their investment and agency in second language learning.

In this regard, the feminist poststructuralist approaches to language and gender can shed light on how gendered identity and language issues are theoretically addressed in bilingual and multilingual contexts of today's world. Contrary to the essentialist perspectives which view gender as a fixed entity separate from other identity factors such as language, culture, social settings, and power relations, feminist poststructuralists believe that language and gender are joint phenomena, and both are constructed in everyday social practices of certain communities of practice (Cameron, 1995, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). As Piller and Pavlenko (2001) stated, this transcendence in the relationship between gender and language is due to the rise of bilingualism and multilingualism as dominant contexts in theories of second language learning.

Early Second Language Learning (SLL) theories were mostly concerned with cognitive and psychological traits of second language learners. For instance, Krashen (1981) believed that success in second language learning depends solely on the individual learner's cognition and motivation. He defined motivation as a fixed personality trait. To him, language learners are either motivated or unmotivated to learn the target language, and their level of motivation is not altered by the social contexts in which learning takes place. Such a view confines language learning to an individualistic process that does not depend on any social or cultural factors.

The application of the acculturation model proposed by Schumann (1978) elevates language learning to a better position. The model places learning in a social and cultural context rather than viewing it as an individual's responsibility. This theory is concerned with how the social distance between the second and target language groups can affect the socialization patterns and language learning of the second language group. Based on this model, the more congruent the two groups are, the more acculturation and language learning take place in the second language group. Schumann viewed language learning as the congruency between the two groups, the nondominance of the target and second language groups, and the positive attitudes of the two groups towards each other. Such a view, however, does not consider the intricacies of individuals' roles and identities in the acculturation process, nor their second language learning trajectories.

While acculturation model and the motivation theory emphasize on respectively the social and individual factors relevant to language learning, some poststructural SLL researchers believed that SLL theories need to focus more on the complexities of language learners as complex social beings and the relationship between language learning and their identities (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1995). Norton (1995) questioned the inadequacy of these theories in addressing the effect of power structures on the types of interaction between immigrant second language learners and the native speakers of the target culture. To her, the individual identity is socially constructed. Identity is therefore not unitary and fixed, but it changes over time due to the dominant power relations that exist in the target culture. Norton (2010) explained that contrary to the structural theories of language which regard the linguistic communities as

homogeneous groups who assign fixed meanings to words, poststructuralists believe that communities are heterogeneous and words have social meanings. These meanings are not fixed since the social practices that determine the meanings of words are constantly negotiated and changed due to changes in power structures of the community. Language is therefore not neutral; it is understood in the light of its negotiated social meaning. The poststructuralist definition of language as social phenomenon implies that gender identities are also constantly evolving. As individuals speak, their gender is also constantly negotiated in the social world.

Cameron (1995) believed that “one is never finished becoming a woman, or a man” (p. 43). To her, gender is constructed and negotiated as individuals try to accommodate to the masculine and feminine behaviors and discourse which are accepted as social norms in a society. Therefore, masculinity and femininity are not preassigned concepts, but can be evolved and negotiated through one’s language. As Pavlenko and Piller (2001) stated, gender in its new sense is regarded as a system of social and discursive practices which vary across cultures. Gender identity then is always changing as the individual enters new cultures and learn new languages.

Theoretical Frameworks

The main goal of the present study is to show the relationship between Iranian immigrant womens’ gender identities and their second language learning trajectories. As a result, it is important to indicate how gender identity is going to be addressed and defined throughout the study. To do so, the following section defines gender identity and learning from the poststructuralist perspective of communities of practice. The theoretical

framework of the community of practice was chosen, since its theoretical underpinnings are in line with viewing gender and language as social activities and not as separate and fixed entities.

Gender identity, learning, and communities of practice. The theoretical construct of community of practice offers a theoretical framework for situated and informal learning. According to Wenger (1998), learning is not an individual act which is distinct from everyday practices. Consequently, learning does not depend on any formal instruction. He viewed learning as a social phenomenon that takes place within the communities of practice in which the learners participate. Learning requires one to have social participation in the everyday activities of the communities. To Lave and Wenger (1991), learning happens if one's social practice follows the pattern of legitimate peripheral participation. In the community of practice framework, the concept of peripherality is considered as a positive term. It implies neither disconnectedness nor marginalization. It is a dynamic concept, since "it suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement" (p. 37).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) definition of identity in community of practice is parallel to learning. They believed that as a social practice, learning equates identity construction. It involves the whole person, including individuals' relations with specific social activities and the social community in which the activities gained their meanings. Because of the changes in the types of relations within the community, learning may evolve and in turn may lead to the formation of different identities. Consequently,

identities are defined through people's participations and changes of membership in the communities.

The notion of community of practice has also been applied in theories of gender identity and language learning (Cameron, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ehrlich, 1997; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001), with Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) as the pioneers in applying the concept of communities of practice in gender and language studies. The theoretical framework of communities of practice is viewed as a useful poststructuralist approach to the study of gender and second language learning because "they allow us to focus on the learning process, to examine ways in which gender mediates access to various practices, and to theorize the gender-based marginalization of particular community members" (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001, pp. 23-24). Communities of practice can define gender like learning in terms of social practices and membership in communities. Gender identity and language learning are no longer decontextualized from individuals' everyday participation in the local communities.

Gendered agency and investment in language learning. Participation in communities of practice is not only defined by the dominant power structure in the community. Individuals' decisions to participate also depend on their desires and actions to learn a second language. This can be explained through the agentive roles learners adopt while learning a second language. In the following section, the definition of agency in SLL and its relation to gender studies are discussed.

The concept of community of practice could provide identity theorists with the poststructural definition of identity in general and gendered identity, in particular. However, participation in communities of practice also depends on their desires and actions to learn a second language. Based on this theory participation is at the heart of identity formation. Full participation in communities of practice depends on both the power relations and the individuals' agency (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Some studies (Norton, 1995; Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001) have shown that to learn a second language, language learners need to adopt agentive roles to further their own language learning. Norton's (1995) study is a move towards the poststructuralist view of language and agency in which "agency is not an 'anything goes proposition', but is instead shaped and reshaped by a learner's unique concrete history" (p. 156).

As an extension to Norton's (1995) work, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) drew on the activity theory to account for how agency is defined within Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. Based on Lave and Wenger's theory of situated learning, learning is a mediated participation in communities of practice. Learning takes place as learners move from peripheral to full participation in communities of practice. Learning is therefore the product of the tension that occurs as the result of the ongoing negotiation between newcomers and the old-timers of the community. The individuals' agencies are thus mediated between them and the other members of the community. As a result, as Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) put it, agency in the community of practice framework is a coconstructed phenomenon, and is the result of the interaction between the learner or

individual's desires and intentions and those of the other members of the community. This definition of agency confirms that humans have the potentiality to change the conditions in which they live. Altering the physical world conditions can also have effects on the ways humans make sense of themselves and learn a second language. As they further argued, it is through the agency that investment in language learning is linked to actions.

Regarding gender, Pavlenko and Piller (2001) emphasized its role in second language learning by saying: "gender as a system of social relations and discursive practices emerges as one of the key factors that in certain contexts may influence the decision-making process, and, as a result, the outcome of second language learning and language shift" (p. 29). Norton (1995) also claimed that her study of immigrant women's imagined communities can also be considered as a poststructuralist analysis of learners' agency. To Norton, subjectivity (identity) is a site of struggle in which the individual is not a passive recipient, but "he or she is conceived of as both subject of and subject to relations of power within a site, community, and society: The subject has human agency" (p. 15). According to Pavlenko and Piller (2001), the decisions that agentive learners make about language learning can lead to either investment in or resistance to L2 learning. Pavlenko and Piller also concluded that learners' second language learning trajectories are mediated through their perceptions of language, gender, and their investment in language learning.

Imagined identity and investment in language learning were first introduced in SLL studies by Norton (1995). She based her definition of imagined identity on Lave and

Wenger's (1991) definition of imagination, who believed that imagination can help us construct our sense of selves. Since interaction with all the members of a community may not be possible, imagination becomes an inevitable act. The images individuals form about the world and themselves can help them make interpretations about their participation and explore the possibilities in the social world. Imagined community in SLL was first connected to the notion of imagined identity by Norton (2001). Norton and Toohey (2011) demonstrated how by focusing on future, language learners can imagine the various possibilities that language learning can offer them in terms of their identities and the communities in which they may participate. They believed that these imagined communities are as real as the communities of practice in which learners are engaged in their daily lives.

Investment in language learning is the result of individuals' wishes and desires. Contrary to the construct of motivation which was introduced by Krashen (1981) as a fixed personality trait, Norton (1995) coined the term investment in her study to account for a group of immigrant women's language learning trajectories in Canada. She found that language learners' imagined communities and identities can have influential roles in the formation of future possibilities in learners' minds; and therefore, it can affect their investment in learning a second language. In her view, language learners' investment in learning needs to be understood through their imagined communities. As Norton and Toohey (2011) stated, "the construct of investment seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and the language practices of the classroom or community" (p. 415). Investment in language

learning can then enhance and support the legitimacy of learners' imagined community as a source of (gender) identity formation based on which decisions about participation or non-participation in communities of practice are made.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing number of immigrants who leave their homelands and immigrate to more prosperous lands can raise questions regarding how these immigrants position themselves and are positioned in new target communities, and how their mediated identities affect their language learning trajectories. The early theories of identity, gender, and learning could not account for the intricacies of the new multicultural contexts and the factors which influence immigrants' participation in communities and language learning.

The essentialist perspectives to gendered identity and language perceive gender as a fixed and unproblematic issue. This definition of gender identity excludes the significant roles of social context and human agency in the construction of individuals' identities and learning trajectories (Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). Assimilation into the new culture is not always an easy task. Immigrants need to negotiate their gender identities to appropriate and accommodate themselves to the new power structures and the dominant gender ideologies of the target culture. Some may be marginalized by the dominant power relations and therefore avoid participation in the new culture, or resist second language learning (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2001).

Some studies on women immigrants (Norton, 1995; Pavlenko, 2001; Vitanova, 2005) have shown that marginalization and nonparticipation in local communities can

have negative impacts on women's identity construction and second language learning in both formal and informal language learning contexts. As Wenger (1998) believed, individual's identity should be defined in terms of practice. As people participate in communities, they constantly negotiate who they are, and what their statuses are as human beings in the community. If these participants do not move from the position of periphery to the position of full participation, they may be marginalized and ignored in the new culture. This may in turn lead to adopting nonagentive roles in learning the target language. Moreover, according to Norton (1995), individual's imagined communities can also have effects on the way they invest in language learning. Based on the imagined communities, individuals can foresee the possibility of becoming legitimate language learners. However, they only invest in language learning if they see the possibilities to be accepted as members of the communities of practice of the target culture.

In addition to individuals' identities, the structural notion of language should also be modified to match the new multicultural contexts in which language learning happens. As Lave and Wenger's (1991) new theoretical framework of situated learning proposes, learning is not only the outcome of instruction, but it is inherent in every social act. As a result, language should be regarded as a social practice which can affect the way people make sense of who they are. As Piller and Pavlenko (2001) mentioned, the mainstream SLL research falls short of considering gender and language within the social context. Consequently, there is a need for introducing and developing "a more context-sensitive approach to gender which treats gender as a system of social relations and discursive practices whose meanings vary across speech communities" (p. 3). There are various

studies indicating the relationship between immigrant women's gender identity and language learning trajectories within the feminist poststructuralist framework (Gal, 1978; Norton, 1995, Norton, 2001, Vitanova, 2005). However, this new area of inquiry still requires more literature focusing on how immigrant women coming from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds construct their new gender identities in social practice, and how these identities affect their investment in language learning. In so doing, the present study focuses on how a group of Iranian women coming to the United States as either graduate students or housewives perceived their gender identities and how these perceptions affected their participation, agency, and investment in the language of the native speakers' communities of practice in a small college town in Ohio.

Purpose of the Study

Identity and language learning are inseparable issues in this new multicultural world. The purpose of this study is to investigate how a group of Iranian immigrant women perceived their gender identities and language learning experiences in the United States. In this study, I hope to capture these women's case study narratives on the imagined communities they had in their minds before coming to the United States, and the degree that their imagined communities are aligned with the opportunities that they gain for the participation in current communities of practice. Moreover, their agentive roles and investment in second language learning in informal contexts are investigated in relation to the positions they take as Iranian women in the target communities.

Research Questions

In this study, the relationship between Iranian women's gendered identities and language learning was explored through the theoretical frameworks of feminist poststructuralism of gender and language, imagined communities, and communities of practice. Additionally, these theoretical constructs were linked to the concepts of agency and investment in second language learning. In particular, the present study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. How do the Iranian immigrant women's imagined communities and gender identities affect their investment in second language learning before coming to the United States?
2. How do these women view their positions as Iranian immigrant women in the current communities of practice in the United States?
3. Do the imagined communities they formed before coming to the United States match the realities of the current communities of practice?
4. In what ways do these women's present perceptions of being a woman affected their adoption of agentive roles for participation or nonparticipation in the United States communities of practice, and investment in second language learning?
5. How do these women's present imagined communities and gender identities shape their decisions about future participation in the United States communities of practice and investment in second language learning?

Significance of the Study

In this study, the relationship between Iranian women's perceptions of their gender positions and their agency and investment in second language learning was explored. By drawing on the concepts of community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), agency (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Vitanova, 2005), and imagined community and investment (Norton, 1995, 2001), this study aimed at investigating how Iranian women's gender identities are negotiated and mediated in communities of practice in the United States. Moreover, the relation between these identity transformations and the kind of participation, agency, and investment in language learning were investigated through in-depth interviewing with the women participants in this study.

The interpretation and analysis of the participants' perceptions about being an immigrant woman in the mainstream of the American culture can explain their participation and language learning trajectories. To my knowledge, this is the first study on Iranian immigrant women's gender identities within the framework of communities of practice. Other studies on women's agency and investment in language learning (Gal, 1978; Norton, 1995, 2001; Vitanova, 2005) also explored how language and gender as social practices mediate and influence each other in bilingual and multilingual contexts. The participants of those studies, however, were from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This study with a focus on Iranian women can add more insights to the current literature regarding the way identity, gender, and language learning are discussed.

Additionally, since participation or nonparticipation in communities of practice have impacts on immigrants' learning trajectories, the findings of the present study can have some implications for educational contexts. As the previous studies (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Norton, 2001) on identity and language have shown, immigrants' imagined communities and imagined identities seek full participation in communities of practice. Full participation is achieved when new members mediate and negotiate their views about themselves, future possibilities, and desires with the *old-timers* (gatekeepers of the target culture). The rejection of immigrants' full participation by old-timers may result in nonparticipation and noninvestment in language learning. As a result, these women's perceptions about their statuses in the United States communities of practice can shed light on the dynamics of the power structure of the target culture and its effects on these women's agencies and language learning trajectories.

Limitations of the Study

The present study had the following limitations. First, the participants' place of residence, which was a small college town in Ohio, could influence their socialization patterns and types of communities of practice which they had access to. Living in a small town can limit people's socialization. Bigger communities can provide more opportunities for the immigrants to establish more interpersonal communication.

Second, like other qualitative case studies, human life stories and experiences are unique, and cannot be easily transferable to other human subjects or even a different time frame. The female participants' perceptions about their statuses and language learning

trajectories in this study were also valid for the life experiences they had until the time the interviews were conducted.

Finally, the language learning in this study was defined in its informal context and assessed based on the participants' personal self-reflections on their own language learning trajectories rather than a language proficiency test results. This can seem to be viewed as a potential limitation by some readers. However, since the emphasis of this qualitative study was on exploring the interrelationship of the women' gender identity and second language learning, the results of a language proficiency test could not represent the constantly changing dynamics of language learning in relation to the learners' (gendered) identities.

Definition of Key Terms

Numerous terms were used when referring to issues of identity and language learning. For avoiding discrepancies in interpretations, the following terms are defined.

Agency. In poststructural framework of language and identity, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) defined agency by drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of community of practice. Agency is both an individual and a coconstructed phenomenon which results in a type of mediated relationship between the newcomers and the old-timers in the communities of practice. The relationships among the agencies are sometimes conflictive and at times collaborative. The nature of the mediated relationship between learners and the old-timers in these communities of practice is realized on two stages of peripheral and full participation. If learners do not invest in language learning,

they stay on the periphery without adopting any agentive roles to gain the full membership of the target community (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001).

Vitanova's (2005) definition of agency is based on Bakhtin's (1984) theory of voice and creativity. To Bakhtin, selfhood is a unique characteristic of individuals. This unmediated self is referred to as voice which always carries some emotional and volitional tones. It is through the voice that the individuals position themselves in relation to others through discourse. In Bakhtin's view, this self is never finalized since the individual needs to be creative in authorizing one's voice among others' opposing voices (Vitanova, 2005). Based on Bakhtin's framework, Vitanova (2005) regarded the immigrant language learners of her study as responsible agents who could reestablish their voices in the target culture and language. Agency in this sense is applicable to not only second language learners but also disempowered individuals. Bakhtin's theories of self and creative answerability can therefore transcend minorities to more empowering positions (Vitanova, 2005).

In the present study, both definitions of agency were utilized to discuss the findings. These two definitions of agency seem to be complementary to each other. The community of practice framework of identity focuses more on the coconstructive nature of agency and the role of target community members in legitimizing immigrants' memberships in the target community. Vitanova's (2005) definition of identity is more agentive since the individual's positioning is mostly determined by his or her responsibility to make his or her voice be heard and understood by others.

Imagined community/ imagined identity. Anderson (1991) coined the term imagined community as a way for defining nations of the world. To him, nations are imagined communities “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Thus, the concept of community is not always confined to time and space.

The theoretical construct of imagined community is also influential in new theories of second language learning. When language learners foresee future possibilities in the target community, their hopes and desires for future form their imagined communities. This imagined community constitutes learners’ imagined identities. It is through the concept of imagined identity that learners’ investment in the target language can be understood and defined (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Investment. Contrary to the psychological concept of motivation which regards language learners as fixed individuals who either have or do not have the desire to learn a second language, Norton (1995) introduced the sociological construct of investment. According to Norton (1995), while motivation is a property of language learners, investment “attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world” (p. 17). As Norton and Toohey (2011) stated, the theories of motivation did not fully capture the complex aspects of language learners’ identities. They often neglect the existence of the inequitable relations of power in communities. As they stated, “The construct of investment seeks to make a meaningful connection between a learner’s

desire and commitment to learn a language, and the language practices of the classroom or community” (p. 415).

Communities of practice. In explaining the concept of community of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) proposed a new definition of community by focusing on its members’ social engagement, rather than its location or size. As a result, participation and engagement in communities of practice become key elements which in turn give insights to learning and identity construction. They disregard the institutionalized notion of learning by saying:

In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world.

Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 50).

Learning and identity are then nonunitary concepts. They are constantly negotiated and reconstructed in the communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defined communities of practice as places in which individuals with various worldviews gather to develop and negotiate their understandings of the world.

Based on this social definition of community, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) found the concept of communities of practice useful for introducing a new way of looking at gender and language learning since it places individuals in the community in relation to their participation in the community and not based on the abstract and separate classifications such as sex, ethnicity, and age. From their perspective, “a community of

practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations-in short, practices-emerge during their joint activity around that endeavor” (p. 8). In the present study, the women’s participation in both social and academic communities were investigated through the theoretical lens of community of practice.

Summary

The essentialist perspective into gender and language studies has provided language researchers with a limited understanding of the intricacies of the relationship between gender identity and language learning, naming gender as a fixed entity separate. However, poststructural feminism has altered this perception by considering gender identity as a fluid and changing rather than a static phenomenon. Such a view could help language researchers shift away from exploring language in formal settings to more informal contexts.

Due to the waves of immigration taking place in all over the world, the new concept of language learning in informal context gained more significance. With the introduction of learning as a social act, the relation between immigrants’ identity reconstruction processes and their language learning trajectories within the target communities of practice could clarify many of the reasons behind their social marginalization and noninvestment in language learning. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to understand and interpret the experiences and endeavors which a group of Iranian women experienced through their life journeys from their homeland to

the U.S, and how such perceptions affected their gendered identities and second language learning trajectories.

The Organization of the Following Chapters

This dissertation consists of nine chapters. In the second chapter, the literature review, detailed descriptions of the theoretical frameworks of communities of practice, agency, gender and language and their applications in the empirical research are presented. The studies pertaining to the present research are also discussed, and the gap in the literature is identified.

In the third chapter, the research methodology utilized in the study is explained. This included the explanations for choosing the narrative method of analysis, the description of the research participants, the procedures for data collection and data analysis. Issues of credibility, and transparency in this qualitative study are also mentioned and discussed.

Before starting to analyze the Iranian women participants' narratives, it is helpful to know where these women come from, and in what historical contexts their gender identities were first constructed. In this vein, the fourth chapter provides the readers with a historical overview of Iran and Iranian women over a period of almost three millennia. The social and political positions of Iranian women in preIslamic and contemporary Iran are also reviewed and explained.

In chapter five, the researcher introduced the women participants based on their demographic information. Chapters six, seven, and eight the researcher's focus was on the analyses of the participants' narratives of their life experiences in Iran, the United

States, and their perceptions about their future statuses in bigger communities of practice are addressed. In so doing, the discussion chapters were organized based on the findings of the cross-comparative analysis of each participant's phase of interview with the other participants of the study. Chapter six is dedicated to these women's past lives. In chapter seven, the researcher discussed their present statuses in the United States, and later addressed the women's future predictions about their future roles in the United States in chapter eight. In the last chapter, the summary of the findings, further discussions and the educational implications which the present study can entail are presented.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Theories of identity in language studies have become popular in the last few decades. The migration of people between nations from all over the world raised issues about bilingualism, multiculturalism, and identity. Because language is a means of communication, it does not operate in a vacuum. Cultural and social factors have inevitable effects on the way language is learned and identity is constructed. In the same vein, the process of language learning for immigrants is not just confined to acquiring the vocabulary and the grammatical structures of the target language. Immigrants' mastery over the linguistic knowledge of the target language is not the only criterion for establishing successful communication with the native speakers. How immigrants view themselves, as both individuals and language learners, and the way the target community accepts them as legitimate participants can affect immigrants' language learning experiences.

Among the immigrant population, the immigrant women coming from more socially and culturally restricted backgrounds may undergo more radical changes in the way they perceive themselves and are perceived as women in the new target community. Such changes can have effects on their participation or nonparticipation in the communities of practice. In addition, since learning in its new sense is a situated activity which can be acquired through participation and social engagement (Lave & Wenger, 1991), their acts of participation or nonparticipation can affect their decisions to learn the target language.

In addressing the literature on language and identity, first the changes occurred in the field of language and identity will be viewed from the essentialist and poststructural perspectives. The early postmodernist theories on identity and subjectivity will be presented as the basis which SLL researchers drew on for their studies on identity and its relation to language learning. The current views about identity define it as a social practice. This definition is in line with how learning is viewed in new sociocultural theory of situated learning. The section on new sociocultural theory of learning will elaborate on how learning can be a way of identity construction. As individuals participate in everyday practices, they learn and make sense of who they are. The theory of situated learning with its emphasis on social practice can help SLL researchers base their identity and language studies on the theoretical concept of communities of practice. The application of this construct and how it relates to second language learners' agency and investment in language learning will also be discussed. The last section of this literature review will focus on showing how the theoretical concepts of gendered identity and language have undergone the same line of change as theories of identity and language.

Current Theoretical Perspectives in Identity and Second Language Research

Theories of identity have been changed due to the impact of postmodernist perspectives on language and identity. The new postmodernist insights can help language researchers figure out how language is learned as the result of the interactions between language learners and their social contexts, as well as how learners' identities are involved in this process. In the following sections, first the relation between identity and

language will be explored from early essentialist perspectives. Then, Bakhtin's theories of dialogue and voice will be introduced as one of the pioneer postmodernists' views on *self* along with its application in studies of language and identity. Finally, the feminist poststructural theories of language and (gender) identity will be presented as the frameworks on which the current study is based.

The earlier literature on identity in SLL is mostly based on viewing identity as a group attribute (Omoniyi, 2006; Ricento, 2010). In defining identity in SLL, Omoniyi (2006) made use of the term essentialism:

Essentialism is the philosophy behind labeling any number of normative characteristics or practices as constituting the core of an individual or group which are then used to define them and held to be true of all members of the group. (Omoniyi, 2006, p. 16)

In the same way, Ricento (2010) believed that being a member of a distinct social group separated by some predefined criteria, was a prominent feature of the early identity theories applied in SLL.

The theory behind the ideas of social membership and social categorization that SLL researchers drew on in their early works was based on the social identity theory proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986). In this theory, they claimed that an individual belongs to a social group when both he and others define that person as a member of that social category. They believed that such social classifications are necessary for the definition of the social identity theory. These social categories may classify people by their race, gender, nationality, religion, or sex. However, the nature of defining these

social groups is subjective since the classification of an individual is done regarding one's self. People classify others based on the similarities and differences that exist between them and other people. Consequently, they perceive others as either in-group or out-group members. These classifications can change the in-group and out-group perceptions and behaviors towards each other.

Although the social identity theory places the individual within the social context, it only accounts for the individual identity in relation to memberships in unchanged social groups and not in relation to the dynamic social practices. Omoniyi (2006) stated that based on social identity theory, identity is regarded as a static entity which is confined to the categorization of individuals into predefined social groups rather than a product of moment-by-moment social action. Additionally, Ricento (2010) criticized early identity studies in SLL since they were mostly concerned with the social distance between the individual's culture and the target culture, and therefore, these studies cannot explain for the constant changing position of the individual within the target community. Ricento believed that the more the two cultures are similar, the better the language learners can identify with the new culture and learn the target language. He concluded that in those early works on identity and language learning, "there was little emphasis on the interaction of an individual's multiple memberships based on gender, class, race, linguistic repertoire, or on how these memberships were understood and played out in different learning contexts" (p. 898).

Due to the above mentioned theoretical shortcomings, the social identity theory cannot account for the dynamic nature of identity. Neither does it consider language

learners' roles in reconstructing and shaping their own identities in relation to social contexts. Additionally, in this theory language learners' identities are defined only in terms of the social categories that they are assigned to. New postmodernist perspectives, however, have assigned more active roles to language learners in constructing and shaping their own identities.

Within the realm of poststructural sociolinguistics, identity has been defined as a dynamic and fluid entity (Block, 2006; Omoniyi, 2006; Ricento, 2010). Omoniyi (2006) maintained that poststructuralism has moved the notion of identity away from a static position to a more multitheoretical, multidisciplinary, and performative stance. From this new perspective, language and identity are interrelated and cannot be separated. In poststructuralism, identity is fluid and individuals can act as performers with multiple identities in response to the various social settings they need to identify with. Similarly, Block (2006) contended that identity is not a fixed entity, but a dialogic negotiation between who the individuals are and what they are exposed to. Consequently, fluidity and ambivalence are natural constituents of human identity. Ricento (2010) also stated that the sociocultural perspectives on identity disregard the group-based classification of individuals' identities according to their ethnicities and nationalities. Instead, he defined identity as a dialectic process involving the relations between learners and the experiences they have and act upon.

The shift of focus from the essentialist approach to identity as a static phenomenon to the new poststructural definition of identity has influenced sociolinguistics and applied linguistics. The role of language learners and the context in

which language learning takes place have been reexamined by language researchers, and the new insights from current poststructural identity studies have been applied in SLL research. The following section will present an overview of the current theoretical perspectives regarding identity and how they are applied in second language learning.

Bakhtin, self, and language. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory of language contributes to the description of language and language learners' identities since it views language or dialogue as a social process through which individuals negotiate who they are. As Hall, Vitanova, and Marchenkova (2005) stated, unlike structuralists who define language as an abstract system of signs with fixed meanings, Bakhtin viewed language as a dynamic tool that links our history and knowledge to our present context and helps us maintain our views or reshape them based on our purposes. To Bakhtin, the nature of speech is dialogic: "To be means to communicate dialogically. When the dialog is finished, all is finished. One voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing, two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 213). The dialogism in Bakhtin's theory has implications for second language learning and identity construction. Dialogue in Bakhtin's view necessitates the existence of language as its medium. Without language, neither dialogue nor identity can be formed.

Freedman and Ball (2004) elaborated on Bakhtin's dialogic model in relation to self-formation. They believed that Bakhtin was concerned with the individual growth. However, Bakhtin did not view this growth as an isolated concept. To Bakhtin, ideological becoming is the process through which individuals develop their world views and ideas. This process needs an ideological environment to result in self-development

and growth. In such an environment, diverse voices come together and make communication not only challenging but also exciting. Although this environment is full of conflicts and tensions, new possibilities for personal change and growth can arise out of these conflicts. In Bakhtin's view, self-growth depends on the existences of others. More conflicting views bring about more learning and self-reconstruction.

Weedon's subjectivity theory. Weedon's (1987) postmodernist views on identity have also been applied in language and identity studies. She believed that the choice of theory is determined by politics. She argued strongly against the dominant patriarchal theories and urged on changing the liberal feminism to a more radical stance. She asserted that society and culture should consider race, gender, and other social or cultural factors equally. In her criticism of the dominant patriarchal society, she introduced the term subjectivity. From her perspective, subjectivity is "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). In this way, an individual's identity can be constructed in two ways. On one hand, a person may be in a position of power. On the other hand, he or she may be placed at a lower power position. Weedon also addressed the role of language by saying: "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (p. 21). Weedon's integration of language and identity led language theorists to reconsider the role of identity in the process of language learning.

Weedon's discussion of the characteristics of subjectivity has been applied in SLL research (Norton, 1995; Norton, 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2011). According to Weedon (1987), subjectivity is a multiple, decentered, and dynamic entity, and identity construction is also a site of struggle. In this sense, identity is formed as the result of the negotiation of one's position in relation to power structures. In linking subjectivity as a site of struggle to SLL, Norton (2010) highlighted the functions of language and human agency in helping language learners resist the power structures that limit their opportunities to communicate in another language. Lastly, from Weedon's (1987) point of view, subjectivity is open to change. Norton and Toohey (2011) claimed that this dynamic and evolving nature of subjectivity can help educational systems offer new transformative practices so that language learners can gain a more powerful position in both formal and informal learning contexts.

Social identity theory. By drawing on Weedon's (1987) subjectivity theory, Norton (1995) based her theory of social identity on the premises of Weedon's proposed features of subjectivity. Norton (1995) criticized the social identity theory that had been developed by SLL theorists since it did not account for the integration of the second language learner's identity into the context of language learning. Moreover, she believed that SLL theorists have not investigated how power relations can affect the social interactions between the target language speakers and the second language learners. Norton insisted that even those SLL theorists who emphasized the role of social factors presented a simplistic view of their social effects on the process of language learning.

Norton concluded that most SLL theorists have not considered how the unequal power relations can minimize the language learners' opportunities in informal contexts.

In response to the shortcomings of the traditional social identity theory, Norton (1995) proposed a social identity theory based on the findings of her longitudinal case study which aimed at investigating the language learning experiences of a group of immigrant women in Canada. In her study, learners' complex identities were realized in the light of inequitable social structures that they encountered during their daily interactions. In this new theory, social identity is characterized as a multiple entity which changes over time. This kind of identity is a site of struggle since learners are active agents who take various subject positions when confronting different power relation structures.

As central to the notion of identity, Norton (1995) emphasized the role of language in the construction of learners' social identities. Therefore, language is not neutral, but carries its social meanings. It is through language that learners' identities are formed and renegotiated. It is a medium through which language learners can manifest their multiple subject positions in various social settings.

Identity as a Sociocultural Phenomenon

The rise of sociocultural theory gave prominence to the social and cultural contexts in which language is learned. The sociocultural theory of language learning was proposed by Vygotsky (1978). His ideas rest on the premise that learning first emerges in a social context. This can have implications for identity and self-formation theories. Additionally, in the sociocultural theory, learning is a social activity, so second language

learners' participation in local communities can have some impacts on negotiation of their identities and informal language learning. The following section will deal with first an overview of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and its contributions to learners' identity construction. Then, the way the sociocultural theory of situated learning can account for individuals' identities will be investigated by attending to the notion of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice.

Vygotsky's mediation theory. Vygotsky is known as the founder of the cultural-historical approach to the development of the human mind. Although Vygotsky's work mostly concerns with the development of children's minds, his theory is labeled as a sociocultural theory of learning in SLA research. The legitimacy of naming his theory as sociocultural may be due to the existence of two prominent themes which underlie all his works. Smidt (2009) referred to these themes as context and culture. She further explained that to Vygotsky, the study of the human mind rests on two premises. The first one is understanding humans' mental development through their social experiences and relationships. And the second one is knowing how human mental development takes place as the result of using cultural tools such as objects and symbols. Vygotsky used the term cultural to refer to the socially organized structures based on which social tasks are shaped. As the child encounters these social tasks, he or she is provided with physical or mental tools to master the given tasks.

Vygotsky (1978) explained that signs (like language) have the same function in solving psychological problems as physical tools do in labor. The analogy between signs and tools in Vygotsky's theory rests on mediation which in Smidt (2009) is defined as:

The use of cultural tools or signs to bring about qualitative changes in thinking. So, we can talk of mediation as the use of communicable systems for representing reality as well as for acting on it. Communicable systems are ways of sharing thoughts and ideas: language is a communicable system. (p. 22)

Vygotsky (1978) further elaborated on how the use of signs is internalized in a child's mind. For an external operation to be internalized in a child's mind, a series of transformations should take place. The external operation, which was formerly used to delineate the external behavior, gradually occurs internally through the first stage of the internalization process. The second stage is marked by the transformation of an interpersonal process to an intrapersonal one. This stage of transformation is crucial to Vygotsky's theory, since he viewed the direction of a child's cultural development from interpsychological (between people) to intrapsychological (inside the human mind). Accordingly, higher mental development depends on the social interaction between the child and the other people. Vygotsky's theory of mediation highlights the role of social interaction in learning and shaping one's thought. It is through socialization that identity is formed. Within this process, language functions as a tool to construct thought. In the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) model, Vygotsky further addressed how interaction and collaboration with others can enhance one's self-development.

Zone of proximal development. Although Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mediation and his remarks about the relation between language and thought highlighted the importance of context and culture in children's mental development, mediation theory mostly focuses on the mental transformations rather than focusing on the nature of

interactions between the interlocutors. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, however, can give insights into the nature of human learning, and the role of a child's participation in fostering mental development.

The rise of sociocultural theory gave prominence to the social and cultural contexts in which language is learned. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning and development in children has been applied to various educational domains such as second language learning, since it integrates learning with social interaction. The previous theories about learning and development either separate or combine these two phenomena. Contrary to such views, Vygotsky believed that "learning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life" (p. 84). However, he did not equate learning with development, but considered learning as a prerequisite of a child's higher levels of mental development.

In Vygotsky's (1978) view, there are two levels of development. On the actual developmental level, the child is capable of those certain mental functions which have already been mastered and the child can handle them independently. On the potential developmental level, there are higher mental abilities which the child can master with the help of others through the process of problem-solving. The distance between the child's actual developmental level and his or her potential development is what Vygotsky referred to as zone of proximal development or ZPD. The ZPD "is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). To Vygotsky, the learning

which happens with the assistance of others shows a more elaborate level of mental development than those tasks which are accomplished on one's own.

Vygotsky's idea of ZPD demonstrates the significance of the social nature of learning. It is through this social participation and collaboration that a child internalizes and masters the socially accepted behaviors, and thus develops his or her identity. The direction of learning in Vygotsky's view is from social to individual. First, the child learns new skills and knowledge through collaboration and then the knowledge becomes internalized and finally results in the child's higher developmental levels. Although Vygotsky's mediation theory and the ZPD model have been applied in SLL research on language learning, it cannot address some language learning issues in today's multicultural world.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and identity. The contribution of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of language learning to the notions of identity and self-formation has been studied by some language researchers (Jackson, 2008; Marchenkova, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is the outcome of collaboration and cooperation between the learner and the expert. It is through the interactions between these two interlocutors that the learner's identity is shaped and reshaped. Therefore, learning is a social and mediated activity. Marchenkova (2005) regarded self in Vygotskian theory as the product of the learning process. In Vygotskian theory, self-formation starts from social and moves to individual. As the child engages in learning, he or she is open to other selves and internalizes the social norms in his or her environment. As Marchenkova (2005) put it, the internalization of the social norms results in a linear pattern of self-

evolution. This process is linear since to Vygotsky, communication is realized in terms of individuals' cognitive development. Therefore, self-development is not an inherent feature of every communication, but it should be defined in terms of one's ZPD.

Marchenkova (2005) further discussed the nature of the dialogue that occurs in Vygotsky's ZPD. The interlocutors in the ZPD are unequal and have different levels of knowledge. Accordingly, experts have a more significant role in the formation of novices' identities. Although in Vygotsky's ZPD the interlocutors have unequal levels of knowledge, the communication that takes place between them is based on some common grounds. Due to the inequality which exists between the learner and the expert, the expert can shape the learner's identity based on the accepted social norms in a learning context.

Jackson (2008) also addressed the relation between ZPD and identity. To her, what makes learning dialogic are the elements of interaction, collaboration, and participation that are inherent in the ZPD. She found that the similarity between Bakhtin and Vygotsky's views lies in the difference between interlocutors. In both views, difference is the source of self-growth and development. However, their views diverge regarding the power relations that exist between the interlocutors. While Vygotsky viewed the inequality between the novice and the instructor's level of knowledge as an asset to learning, Bakhtin's definition of learning rests on dialogues between two equal selves.

A criticism of Vygotsky's definition of identity is that ZPD assigns subordinate roles to learners, and does not account for learners' agency. Within this framework,

identities are socially accepted if they are not in contrast with more knowledgeable experts' views. Although in the ZPD model learning is the result of interaction and collaboration between interlocutors, learning and intellectual growth are mostly the outcomes of the homogeneity of experts and novices' identities and goals. Thereby, according to Marchenkova (2005), Bakhtin's notion of identity is superior to Vygotsky's because it fosters learners' creativity and agency to authorize their voices in this multicultural world. As an improved model, the theory of situated learning could enhance the role of learners and novices in social learning contexts.

A New Sociocultural Approach to Learning and Identity (Situated Learning)

Vygotsky's ZPD model implies that learning occurs when learners reach their potential developmental levels through the guidance of more knowledgeable experts. However, Lave and Wenger (1991) criticized Vygotsky's ZPD model because it views individuals as unproblematic cognitive units who acquire knowledge through an easy process of assimilation or transmission. They believed that Vygotsky's ZPD only functions in small pedagogical social contexts, and it does not account for learning in broader social structures. They postulated that their new interpretation of the ZPD model offers a more collectivist perspective. In this regard, learning is a process of social transformation which Wenger (1998) referred to as *legitimate peripheral participation*. According to Wenger, participation is the result of the negotiation of meaning between individuals' everyday experiences and the constantly evolving forms of social activities. In such a context, relations between old-timers and new comers are constantly changing. When new comers first join a community, their participation is limited and they stay at

the periphery. This periphery is legitimate, since it offers new learning opportunities to new comers. By interacting with the old timers, new comers gain more competence and move away from the position of peripherality and become full members. Legitimate peripheral participation stands in sharp contrast with the static pedagogical contexts mentioned in the conventional interpretations of ZPD. This new definition of learning is congruent with participation in Lave and Wenger's definition of learning in communities of practice:

In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world.

Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 50)

Lave and Wenger (1991) further mentioned that learning is therefore neither fully internalized nor completely externalized. It is both about experience and abstraction, and a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation of meaning. It focuses not on persons but on persons in the world. As a social practice, learning then equates identity construction involving the whole person. It includes individuals' relations with specific social activities and the social community in which they gained their meanings. Regarding identity formation, Lave and Wenger stated that "viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership" (p. 53). Therefore, identities are defined based on people's participations and change of membership in the

communities. The social structures are constantly reproduced and may clash with individuals' experiences and can cause tensions. Learning and identity are the outcomes of such tensions. By the same token, the tension and conflict that arise from interaction is central to Bakhtin's notion of the development of self.

The views on learning and identity proposed by Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning contradict its previous sociocultural theories which confine learning to the process of passing knowledge. As Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) put it, participation is not just about being in a new social or cultural setting, but "it is about a profound struggle to reconstruct a self" (p. 174). From the collectivist sociocultural perspective, identity formation and learning are the results of participation in communities of practice and interaction with the members of those communities. The transformative type of participation helps learners construct and reconstruct their identities as they struggle to gain full membership. Hence, understanding the concept of community of practice can bring new insights into learning in general and language learning process, in particular. The following section will focus on how communities are defined and in what ways they contribute to our understanding of language learning and language learners.

Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) elaborated on the concept of participation and its relationship to identity and learning. By participation, he meant something more than mere involvement in certain local activities with a fixed group of people. Instead, he defined participation as "a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (p. 4). He

further introduced community of practice as an influential theory of learning. In his view, such a theory should encompass all the four fundamental elements of meaning, practice, community, and identity. The theory of community of practice implies certain implications for both individuals and communities. It helps individuals understand the implications of learning as contribution and engagement in the practices of their communities which are open to new members' versatile practices. In explaining the concept of community of practice, Wenger first defined the concept of practice:

The concept of practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do. In this sense practice is always social practice. (Wenger, p. 47)

Practice, according to Wenger, is not fixed. Instead the communities of practice are places in which individuals with various worldviews gather to develop and negotiate their understandings of the world. Within the framework of practice, Wenger further elaborated on how communities of practice have bearings on identity and learning.

To Wenger, our identities are a combination of who we are and who we are not. He asserted that individuals define themselves in terms of the practices they are engaged in as well as those which they are not practicing. Thus, identity is a combination of participation and nonparticipation, or “a mixture of being in and being out” (p. 165). In this sense, nonparticipation can function as a source of identity, too. Both participation and nonparticipation have effects on identity.

Peripherality and marginalization are the results of the interplay of participation and nonparticipation. In peripherality, some degree of nonparticipation is a prerequisite

for achieving full membership. Here, nonparticipation is the enabling factor for promoting participation. Moreover, in the theory of community of practice, individuals' multimembership in different communities of practice is appreciated, because identity is not defined as a single trajectory. Therefore, identity entails both multimembership in various communities and a reconciliation to maintain one identity across different community boundaries (Wenger, 1998).

Wenger's community of practice accounts for not only the learners' identities but also the nature of learning. In Wenger's theory of practice, learning is regarded as a source for social structure. But this structure is not a static object. It is an emergent structure, since this type of learning is gained through negotiation of meaning among the members of the community. This emergent structure makes the practice both *perturbable* and *resilient*. Hence, learning is a combination of perturbability and resilience, and it ultimately results in adaptability. Learning is thus not stable, and it constantly emerges out of a system of order and chaos.

The theory of practice with its emphasis on defining meaning, learning, and identity in communities has been the focus of those language theorists who investigate the role of participation in target language communities in the process of language learning. The significance of this theory is more visible in multicultural contexts in which multimembership in various communities of practice is inevitable. In the following section, the application of the theory of community of practice in identity and SLL will be discussed.

Community of Practice, Agency, and Language Learning

The application of the construct of community of practice and the idea of language as a social practice in SLL studies (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2010; Norton, 1995; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) introduced agency as an important element in both poststructuralist views of identity construction and second language learning. Norton's (1995) study of immigrant women is a pioneer research on learners' agency in unequal social contexts. Norton's theory of social identity with its emphasis on the multiplicity and contradictory nature of subjectivity stems from the idea that identity is constructed in various social sites and is negotiated by relations of power. In such a context, the person may take different positions and may be positioned differently by the community. It is the person's active role in negotiating his or her subjectivity which Norton referred to as agency.

Similarly, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) also highlighted the role of social participation and negotiation as the major sources for identity construction. Their focus of study is on the legitimacy of first person narratives as a fruitful source of data on language learning, and how human agency can have a significant role in constructing identity in narratives. To them, identity does not solely exist within individuals, "but are constructed between them in interactions" (p. 171). Identity is therefore the product of the negotiation of human agency and the practices of the communities in which individuals participate. It is however, in these researchers' later work (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001) that the concept of agency was theoretically defined based on the construct of communities of practice, and its relation to language learning was explored.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) applied the theory of community of practice in SLL contexts to understand language learners and their identities. They analyzed language learners' different levels of participation in the communities of practice based on their agency and investment in language learning. Based on the feminist poststructuralist views, they asserted that language learners have multiple identities, and may participate in a variety of linguistic communities. However, the practices of these communities may not be identical. In this way, learners may be discouraged to participate in certain communities of practice. Nonparticipation in such contexts is not due to the lack of learner's agency, but their failed attempts to participate in the target communities of practice.

Based on the premises of activity theory, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) stated that language learning happens if learners' motives, desires, and intentions are taken into consideration. Moreover, activity or practice is a distributed process that depends both on learners' agency and the other agencies. The relations between these agencies are sometimes conflictive and full of tensions. Hence, language learner's agency or identity should be viewed as a coconstructed phenomenon. Learners' identities are first shaped based on the goals they have for learning a foreign language. However, their agencies are dynamic and may deteriorate due to lack of acceptance by the host community. The coconstructed nature of agency affects not only learners' identities but also their language learning trajectories.

The empirical studies (McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2010) that investigated the relationship between learners' agency and their language learning highlighted either the

role of communities in empowering learners and enhancing their agencies or the individual's choice in adopting an agentive role. For instance, Miller (2010) believed that the agentive capacity that can be identified in immigrants' discourse may be constrained by the norms and actions in the target community: "Though one can be constituted as an empowered agentive individual, being constituted as an agent does not straightforwardly lead to empowerment" (p. 485). Consequently, one's agentive discourse is not sufficient for the eradication of immigrants' marginalization and nonparticipation in the new context.

McKay & Wong (1996), however, believed that agency is mostly constructed within individual learners. Their study of a group of adult immigrant Chinese language learners in English language classrooms in California indicates the interrelation of agency and power. They found that the learners' goals to invest in language learning varies based on their multiple identities. Some learners may not adopt agentive roles in language learning since they have access to other identity options that can be made possible through ways other than proficiency in the target language. In this study, then, the choice of being an active participant acting as an agent did not depend on the norms and power relations in the target community, but mostly on the individual's choice in enhancing the identities that he or she desired to construct and negotiate in the new context.

The definition of agency based on the community of practice is not the only valid way of looking at the role human agency plays in language learning. Vitanova (2005) approached the concept of agency from a different angle. She based her interpretation of the immigrant women's acts of participation and resistance on Bakhtin's theories of

dialogue and voice. As an introduction to Bakhtin's concept of agency, Vitaonva (2013) mentioned that the cornerstone of Bakhtin's dialogic framework lies in the relationship between the self and others. Based on this framework, human's consciousness and sense of self can be realized in relation to others. She further explained that utterances are the major units of analysis in Bakhtin's theory of language. These utterances are not neutral, but they carry social values and emotional-volitional tones. Vitanova argued that these active and meaningful utterances are the basic stones of Bakhtin's concept of agency and authorship.

In her study on immigrant women, Vitanova (2005) claimed that the immigrant women in her study were marginalized and silenced since they could not authorize their voices through discourse. She based her findings on Bakhtin's theory of voice and creativity. This theory emphasizes on the construction of one's self through establishing one's voice with the intention of being heard and understood by others. To Vitanova, learners' lack of agency can lead to resistance to having discursive practices with others which may ultimately result in marginalization and nonparticipation.

Imagined Communities, Imagined Identities, and Investment in Language Learning

The community of practice is not the only community in which learners participate. The future possibilities that investment and learning can bring for them are as real as their actual practices. Consequently, second language learners' imagined communities also contribute to both learners' identities and their learning trajectories.

The term imagined community was first coined by Benedict Anderson (2006). He argued that from the anthropological perspective, a nation is an imagined political

community “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Anderson further expanded the way the term nation is imagined as limited, sovereign, and a community. To Anderson, the concept of nation is limited since even the largest nation sets boundaries for being distinguished from other nations. Consequently, people of that specific nation never dream of having all human beings as members of their community or nation. The nation is imagined as sovereign because questioning the legitimacy of any universal religion and setting nations free from accepting such divinely-ordained realm is only possible through sovereignty. And finally, the nation is imagined as a community because “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (p. 7).

Wenger (2003) adopted Anderson’s concept of imagination. To Wenger, what is significant about Anderson’s definition of imagined community is that he did not equate imagination with fabrication and falsity. Wenger believed that describing nations as imagined communities “does not connote fantasy as opposed to factuality” (p. 78). Wenger (1998) suggested that neighborhood communities or religious ones are not the only legitimate communities that individuals can have affiliations with. He further claimed that participation in the actual practices of a community is not the only way of developing a sense of belonging to a community. To Wenger, imagination is another legitimate source of community. He also included imagination as one of the three modes of belonging to a social learning system. He believed that imagination is a process of “constructing an image of ourselves, of our communities, and of the world, to orient

ourselves, to reflect on our situation, and to explore possibilities” (p. 7). He further mentioned that knowing about the facts in the world requires a series of imaginary acts. For example, knowing that the earth rotates around the sun requires us to imagine ourselves as small creatures on a huge ball which is flying in space in a specified way. Likewise, as a member of a community, one needs to use the power of imagination to create images of himself or herself when he or she is not engaging in social activities with other fellow citizens or members. Such images can have tremendous influence on self-identity and learning.

By drawing on the notion of Anderson and Wenger’s imagined community, Norton (2001) proposed a new definition of imagined community with respect to second language learning and second language learner’s identity. While imagination in Lave and Wenger’s (1991) view is about making one aware of his or her own relation to the learning system and pushing that person to engage more in social acts, Norton believed that imagination does not always result in participation and engagement. When the imagined community of the newcomer extends beyond the actual reality of the community of practice, instances of nonparticipation may occur. This nonparticipation is a reaction to the state of marginality in the community of practice.

The implications of imagined communities as imagined identities have been further addressed by several language researchers (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Norton & Toohey, 2011). From Kanno and Norton’ (2003) perspective, the notion of imagined community can enhance language learning on temporal and spatial dimensions. From the temporal perspective, learners’ imagined communities can

reflect their present actions and identities. On the spatial level, learner's imagined community can reflect the relationship between national ideology and learner's identity. It also indicates how transnationalism can affect language learning and identity construction. Kanno and Norton believed that imagined community offers a theoretical framework for identity construction by motivating learners to invest their time and energy in future possibilities, and that "our identities are understood not only in terms of our investment in real world but also in terms of our investment in possible worlds" (p. 248). The possibilities that language learners have about who they will be and to what communities they will belong can even have stronger effects on the learners' investment in learning a second language than the actual engagement in learning.

Learners' imagined communities are as legitimate as the communities of practice they participate in. As a result, according to Norton (1995) imagined communities can be a source of identity formation in second language studies. Norton and McKinney (2011) agreed upon the fact that language learners' imagined communities are no less legitimate than the other communities that learners have daily engagement in. Kanno and Norton (2003) also argued that the theoretical underpinnings of imagined communities and imagined identities can be applied to SLL research because it places the learners' hopes and desires as an integral aspect of their identities. In the same vein, Norton and Toohey (2011) discussed the significance of imagined communities in language learning and the construction of identity. To them, an imagined community is a legitimate part of learners' conception of the target language community. Learners' imagined communities are ideal since they offer learners opportunities to form vernacular identities.

Language learners' imagined communities and imagined identities can result in their *investment* in second language learning. The term investment was first introduced by Norton (1995). She used investment as a substitute for motivation. In her study on a group of immigrant women, she noted that the refinement of the concept of motivation is essential to the reconceptualization of the role of language learners in the process of second language learning. In her view, investment should not be equated with instrumental motivation since motivation is a fixed property of language learners: "the conception of instrumental motivation generally presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of the target language speakers" (p. 17). The instrumental motivation, therefore, seems to be rooted in the structural views of language learning since motivation is assumed to be a fixed personality trait.

However, the assumption that a high level of motivation can lead to better language learning was refuted later by Norton and Toohey (2011). They found out that even highly motivated learners cannot be successful if unequal power structures inhibit learners' participation in the cultural practices of the target community. Norton and McKinney (2011) also asserted that the learners' resistance to invest in language practices is not always because of low motivation, but may be due to the racist, sexist, or other unequal power structures in classroom or other social contexts. Accordingly, Norton (1995) introduced the concept of investment for motivation to elevate the construct of motivation to a social rather than an individual property.

In linking investment to second language learning and identity, Norton (1995) drew on Bourdieu's (1977) economic metaphor of cultural capital to justify the notion of learners' investment in learning a second language. Bourdieu claimed that cultural capital has various exchange values in different social settings. Similarly, Norton (1995) believed that learners invest in language learning if their investment leads to more accessibility to their cultural capital. Norton and Toohey (2011) further elaborated on the connection between investment and identity by saying that "as the value of learners' cultural capital increases, so learners reassess their sense of themselves and their desires for the future" (p. 17). In this regard, language learners' various desires and hopes may give them multiple identities based on which they may invest in learning an additional language. According to Norton (1995), when learners speak not only do they transfer information, but they also construct and reconstruct who they are and what their positions are in the social world. The concept of investment, therefore, indicates how learners' multiple identities and possible desires affect their decisions to learn a second language. For these reasons, learners' imagined community can also contribute to the formation of learners' identities.

The constructs of imagined community and imagined identity can be sources for investment in learning an additional language. Norton and Toohey (2011) believed that imagined community is as legitimate as other communities. It is through the imagined community that language learners think of their desires and the future possibilities for reaching those goals and aims. The reality of such imagined identities and communities may even be stronger than learners' social engagement in daily activities and its impact

on learners' investment in language learning can be stronger. As Kanno and Norton (2003) stated, "imagined communities expand our range of possible selves" (p. 246). The possibility of achieving a desired identity in the target community will therefore result in more investment in learning the language of the target culture. This conclusion was clearly stated by Norton (2001) as he argued, "a learner's imagined community invites an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context" (p. 166).

Essentialist Perspectives to Language and Gender

Like the way essentialist perspectives define the relationship between identity and language, gender identity was also discussed in terms of poststructural approaches to second language learning and gender. The essentialist approaches to gender and language emerged during the 1970s and continued to early 1990s. As Piller and Pavlenko (2001), and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) stated, structural approaches to language and gender consider gender as a fixed entity which remains unchanged across different cultures and settings. Gender in this sense is a separate aspect of social identity apart from race, ethnicity, nationality, and age. Additionally, this definition excludes social relations or contexts from the discussion of gender and language.

The impacts of the essentialist approach to gender and language on sociolinguistic studies have been discussed by several researchers (Cameron, 1995, 1996; Ehrlich, 1997; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). Cameron (1995, 1996) and Ehrlich (1997) criticized the early variationist studies of language and gender within sociolinguistics. Such studies tend to ignore the questions regarding the *socio* aspect of

gender. By excluding the social context from gender and language studies, the complexities of gender as a multilayered and unstable phenomenon could not be addressed. In addition, overgeneralizations and oversimplifications about gender led to inappropriate gender roles for men and women since based on the variationist perspective “women and men cannot be usefully treated as analogous to geographically, ethnically and socially defined communities our frameworks were designed for” (Cameron, 1996, p. 34). The global classification of gender roles without considering the effects of social context on the realization of gender and its relation to language gave simplistic and socially decontextualized results to the studies of language and gender.

Between 1970s and the early 1990s, the essentialist approach to language and gender was widespread. During this time, three gender paradigms were introduced. Cameron (1995, 1996) and Pavlenko and Piller (2001) described these three models in their discussions on the relationship between language and gender in multicultural contexts naming *deficit*, *dominance*, and *cultural difference*. As Pavlenko and Piller (2001) stated, the sociolinguistic studies based on the deficit model indicate women as inferior and muted language users. Cameron (1996) viewed this disadvantageous position of women as the result of “the early sex-role socialization” (p.39) that these women were associated with. The dominance model, according to Cameron (1996), is based on an ethno methodological framework in which women try to negotiate and reconstruct their disadvantageous positions as they interact with men. As Pavlenko and Piller (2001) put it, based on this paradigm, the linguistic differences between men and women originate from superiority and dominance of men over women. Such patriarchal dominance has

been institutionalized by the power structure of the society. Pavlenko and Piller (2001) introduced the cultural difference model as a two-culture approach. This paradigm “shifted the focus from linguistic features to male and female styles in cross-gender communication” (p. 20). The advantage of this approach to the previous models is that it does not compare men and women’s styles with the aim of proving the masculine behavior and speech as the dominant norm. Consequently, women and men are viewed as different people who constitute culture differently. Due to these difference, the communication between men and women may break down in some situations.

The three essentialist paradigms proposed for multicultural studies on language and gender received criticism for their inadequacy to account for the role of social practice in defining gender and investigating its relationship with language learning. Pavlenko and Piller (2001) believed that all these three models “were grounded in problematic universalizing assumptions, speaking of women and men in ways that obscure heterogeneity across and within cultures” (p. 21). To Pavlenko and Piller, the paradigms recognized men’s speech as normal and *unmarked* and *ungendered* and therefore could not picture the range of men and women’s diverse experiences in local communities. Cameron (1996) also mentioned that these models have shortcomings since they “have at their center the idea of individuals who speak as they do because of who they are, and not because of the way they are positioned in interaction with others in various contexts” (p. 41). Like what Pavlenko and Piller (2001) stated, Cameron (1996) also emphasized the inadequacy of these paradigms in explaining gender in the light of the diverse social practices that men and women can be engaged in.

The traditional models of gender and language fell short of presenting a complete account of the complexities of gender in linguistic studies. As Cameron (1995) claimed, as the result of ignoring the active and dynamic role of gender in language studies, “in the study of language and gender, it is language that is taken as the phenomenon to be explained, and gender which constitutes the explanation” (p. 39). To Piller and Pavlenko (2001) and Cameron (1995), the subordinate position of gender to language in these studies made gender remain untheorized and limit it to a binary classification of individuals into men or women. Early sociolinguistic studies of language and gender, then, as Cameron (1996) stated, is about men and women bearing the attribute of gender and “our task is to catalogue the ways they mark this attribute in their linguistic behavior” (p. 42). In this regard, gender is an attribute that exists prior to one’s behavior and is not constructed within the social contexts in which men and women participate.

In conclusion, as Piller and Pavlenko (2001) mentioned, the shortcomings of the essentialist approach called for a more context-sensitive approach to the studies of gender and language in bilingual and multilingual settings. This new perspective defines gender as social practices whose meanings differ from one community to the next one. In the following section, the current poststructural approaches to gender and language will be introduced. Since the focus of the present study is on gender and identity in communities, the contributions of the theoretical framework of communities of practice to language and gender studies will also be discussed.

Feminist Poststructural Approaches to Language and Gender

The simplistic view of gender proposed by the essentialist perspectives towards language and gender makes a binary distinction between men and women by generalizing gendered identity as a fixed attribute that remains the same in all contexts. The need for a reconceptualization of the concept of gender has been discussed by some language and gender researchers (Cameron, 1995, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ehrlich, 1997; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) encouraged researchers to adopt a new perspective to language and gender which introduces them as joint constructs produced in everyday social practices of certain communities. They believed that by investigating gender as a social practice and on a local level, the traditional myths about gender need to be abandoned. Gender should no longer be viewed as a distinct aspect apart from other elements of social identity, and the realization of gender and the linguistic manifestations of it are not the same across various communities. These shortcomings are what Cameron (1995, 1996) referred to as the reasons for which gender remains undertheorized and neglected.

Regarding the problem of theorizing gender, Cameron (1995) offered a solution which can be regarded as the foundation for perceiving gender as a social doing rather than a discrete attribute of an individual. Cameron urged the need to think of gender as “a problem, not a solution” (p. 42). Generalization of men and women’s gender roles and behaviors only leads to ignoring how a person becomes a man or a woman. As Cameron further explained, while considering gender as a fixed attribute can be a solution to the explanation of men and women behavior, postfeminist approaches to gender identity

emphasize that “one is never finished becoming a woman, or a man. Each individual subject must constantly negotiate the norms, behaviors, discourses, that define masculinity and femininity for a particular community at a particular point in history” (p. 43). Cameron then suggested that language styles are not the products of being a man or a woman, but instead linguistic styles are assigned as masculine or feminine, “and that individuals make varying accommodations to those styles in the process of producing themselves as gendered subjects” (p. 43).

Cameron’s (1995, 1996) definition of gender identity and its relation to language is similar to Bakhtin’s (1984) poststructural theory of self. Cameron’s discussion of gender identity in relation to language legitimizes gender identity as something that men and women do rather than what they have or are. Like Cameron who believed gender identity is a process of becoming a man or a woman, Bakhtin also stated that self is never finalized and the individual is constantly engaged in the creative process of negotiation and authorization of his or her own voice. In the same way, Cameron (1996) argued that gender is the result of participation in certain social practices. As individuals enter different communities, they reconstruct and appropriate their gender identities or may resist the gender norms of that community. Like Bakhtin’s theory of self, according to the poststructural approach to language and gender, gender identity is a construct which is realized in a social context and in negotiation with other members of the community.

In addition to the common view that Bakhtin (1984) and Cameron (1995, 1996) shared regarding the role of participation in everyday social activities as sedimentary to identity formation, their views about the relation between language and gender also

indicate a similar trend. To Bakhtin, an individual's voice is constructed in discourse, and his or her voice is transferred through discourse since utterances carry emotional and social values. People negotiate who they are through the language they use. It is through the language that identity is formed and reconstructed. In the same vein, Cameron (1996) stated that the feminist poststructural approach to language and gender should be *deconstructive* and help resolve the complexities of language and gender relationship. For doing so, instead of seeing language as the outcome of gender, gender should be viewed as a set of linguistic acts. These acts may vary as individuals participate in different communities. Consequently, gender identity like self is manifested and constructed in repeated discourse performances as interlocutors negotiate their positions in a certain social context.

The new poststructural approach to language and gender can also address the issue of power and inequality in gender and language studies. Norton's (1995) revision of the theory of social identity was due to its inadequacy in accounting for the impacts of power relations and inequality in the process of identity formation. Similarly, as Pavlenko and Piller (2001) discussed, the traditional perspective to gender identity could not address issues of inequality and power, either. For alleviating this problem, Pavlenko and Piller suggested a reconceptualization of the concept of gender based on which gender is no longer regarded as a trait or role, "but as a product of social doing" (p. 22). In their view, gender as a social practice implies its recognition as a cultural, social, and historical construct. Such a construct does not render itself to overgeneralizations about masculine

and feminine gender roles in various social settings. Instead, this new definition of gender justifies variations in masculine and feminine roles and ideologies across communities.

Similarly, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) asserted that instead of emphasizing gender differences, researchers should focus on “people’s active engagement in the reproduction of or resistance to gender arrangements in their communities” (p. 472). As a result, gender should not be abstracted from social practice, but we need to focus on “gender in its full complexity: how gender is constructed in social practice, and how this construction intertwines with that of other components of identity and difference, and of language” (p. 472)

Feminist poststructuralism with its focus on practice and social participation as the fundamental issues in constructing gender identity could therefore shift the direction of language and gender studies, too. As Pavlenko and Piller (2001) stated, gender as social doing can shift the focus of language and gender studies from language to considerations of gender and language ideologies. Such studies can investigate individuals’ perceptions of gender and language, and the constant gender appropriations of one’s language in the process of negotiation with others.

Gender and communities of practice. New approaches to gender and language, combined with the shift of focus in language and gender studies could alter the primary unit where earlier studies were conducted (Pavlenko & Piller, 2001). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) mentioned, to understand how gender and language interact, researchers need to investigate gender and linguistic practices of a certain social community very closely. The primary local community which the essentialist studies of

language and gender were based on was speech community proposed by Gumperz (1982). He defined a speech community as a group of speakers who share norms and rules for using a language. To Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), speech community: suggests the importance of practice in delineating the sociolinguistics significance of groupings, but it does not directly address social relations and differentiation among members of a single community. Nor does it make fully explicit the role of practice in mediating the relation between language and society. (p. 464)

Pavlenko & Piller, (2001) further explained that the absence of addressing the mediating role of practice in earlier studies of language and gender required researchers to come up with a more concrete unit of analysis; a unit which according to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) can articulate “how social practice and individual place in the community interconnect” (p. 464). The construct of the communities of practice seemed to match the feminist poststructural approaches to gender and language.

Some researchers (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001) discussed the advantages of the application of Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice in gender and language studies. Adopting the construct of community in language and gender studies, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) were pioneers who defined these communities as:

An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor, ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations- in short, practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community,

primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which the membership engages. (p. 464)

In general, as Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) discussed in their discussion of the application of the theory of communities of practice in language and gender research, due to the centrality of social practice in the theory of communities of practice, this construct is much richer and more dynamic than its previous counterparts like speech communities or social networks. The superiority of communities of practice over speech communities is that membership in the former on depends on shared practices and not having certain behavioral and social properties that are considered as fixed norms in the community.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) also mentioned that communities of practice can give a clearer account of the interrelationship of language and gender. Within this framework, individuals are engaged in social practices and at the same time they can be members of multiple communities. To them, the possibility of multiple memberships in various communities is an important feature of this social construct since the relations among communities of practice are important in understanding the complexities of language and gender relationship.

Likewise, Pavlenko and Piller (2001) mentioned that communities of practice presented a useful framework since it makes researchers able to investigate the mediating role of gender in accessing linguistic resources, and language learning processes. In addition, communities of practice can help researchers theorize why some members of a community become marginalized.

In the preceding sections the essentialist and poststructural theoretical underpinnings of identity and language and gendered identity were introduced. Similar trends and basic concepts such as communities of practice in feminist poststructural social identity theory were reapplied in the discussion of gender identity and language. The current focus of both types of identities is on the significance of interpreting identity in the light of individuals' social practices in local communities of practice. Since the goal of the present study is investigating the interrelationship of Iranian women's their perceptions of gender identities and its relations to their language use and language learning trajectories, the findings of similar studies on gender and language can be insightful for the interpretation of the results of the present study. In so doing, the studies with the focus on immigrant women's language learning experiences in bilingual and multicultural contexts with a focus on the issues of agency and investment in second language learning will be presented.

Gender identity, agency, and investment in language learning. Studies on an additional language learning and gender cover a wide range of topics. Pavlenko and Piller (2001) listed these areas as gender studies with a focus on accessing linguistic resources, studies which investigate gender performance in bilingual and multilingual contexts, the effects of feminist pedagogy on current educational practices, and finally the research on gendered agency and investment in second language learning. Among these classifications, the studies of how gendered identity affects one's agency and investment in learning an additional language are the focus of attention in this literature review. In the following section, some empirical studies on women immigrants' examples of

gendered agency, motivation, and investment as social products and their contributions to learning an additional language will be presented.

Norton's (1995) pioneer study of social identity and investment in language learning illustrated under what conditions the five immigrant women coming from Scandinavian countries either decided or resisted to speak English in the target communities. The findings of this longitudinal study indicate that these women's motivation to practice ESL in social contexts was mediated by their investment in second language learning. According to Norton, both deciding to speak English and remaining silent can be interpreted as strategies for resistance to the unequal power structures in communities of practice. For instance, Felicia, one of the participants of this study, resisted to speak English because she did not want to be recognized as an immigrant in Canada. Norton believed that the unequal power relations that may threaten immigrants' social identities can lead to noninvestment in language learning. However, in case of some other participants like Martina, who was the mother and caregiver in her family, more desire and investment in language learning was detected. As Norton elaborated, although Martina had feelings of inferiority and shame due to her lack of linguistic proficiency in English, she had to face the everyday challenges of being a mother and breadwinner of her family. Therefore, her multiple social identities urged her to invest in language learning.

These women's resistance to or investment in language learning can also be viewed as an act of agency. As Norton (1995) mentioned, the positions that an individual takes in relation to the unequal power structures can be the evidence of human agency.

As a result, these immigrant women should not be regarded as passive recipients of these inequalities, but as active agents who could make decisions and acted accordingly. These participants' investment in language learning can be therefore viewed as agentive acts.

In poststructural studies of language and gender, second or additional language learners do not have passive roles in determining their learning trajectories and choice of gender performances. They all perform some types of agentive roles. By adopting agentive roles, learners sometimes should abandon the way they used to be in this world to become proficient in a second language. In other cases, they try to keep the balance between the two worldviews and identities that they have developed. And finally, sometimes learners resist the second language since they are placed in positions of marginality in the community of the second language (Pavlenko and Piller, 2001). However, human agency is not the whole story. The power structures of the local community are also influential in how the individual is positioned in the society. Consequently, agency in poststructural studies is a coconstructed phenomenon (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001).

Pavlenko's (2001) study indicated the transformations of gender performances within American linguistic communities. In this study, Pavlenko approached gender identity as a social construct. The societal feminine conceptions of the female immigrants' home communities differed from the American gender roles. Instances of assimilation and resistance in these female autobiographies indicated that coconstruction of one's agency is not always an easy task, and the decision to learn the second language does not always convey having agentive choices. By analyzing both the autobiographies

and first person oral narratives of some immigrant women L2 learners, Pavlenko concluded that most of these women's agentive roles and their decisions to learn English were due to escaping from the patriarchal and disadvantageous gender positions that they used to have in their home culture.

Pavlenko further explained since the range of subjectivities that cultures offer, some of these women had to demonstrate only those gender performances which were appropriate in an American vein. In the analysis of her findings, Pavlenko (2001) found that the process of assimilation for Caucasian immigrant women was much easier than for those whose "racial and ethnic identities do not neatly fit within the gender stereotypes created by the dominant ideologies and reproduced by the media which continue to ignore the racial, and linguistic diversity of contemporary America" (p. 162). In such cases, feelings of marginalization and otherness becomes internalized in those immigrants whose ethnicities were in sharp contrast with the ideologies and norms of the target community. Pavlenko concluded that individuals negotiate their gender identities at various levels and in relation to other related phenomena such as ethnicity. As a result, language is not the only means through which gender subjectivities are modified.

In another study by Gal (1978), a group of Austrian-Hungarian women peasants' preference to speak German instead of Hungarian was to reach a higher social and economic status in the new communities of practice, hoping to escape the disadvantageous positions that they were placed in the peasant community. By choosing the job places located in German areas, these women indicated their inclinations to the gendered identities that they longed for. However, their acts of gendered agencies in this

study differ from those in Pavlenko's (2001) since in this study the women had the motivation to alter the current gender relations in their own favor to achieve better goals in future. In Pavlenko's study, however, the women were forced to assimilate into the mainstream gender ideologies of the dominant culture. These women did not necessarily fit into the new culture, but only described their perceptions about what being an American woman means.

Vitanova's (2004, 2005) studies of gender and agency practices in the second language presents a different theoretical underpinning for the study of gendered identity and agency through the lens of Bakhtin's theory of self. According to this theory, an individual's emotions are only validated when understood through other individuals. By drawing on the first-person narratives of four East European couples, Vitanova (2004) analyzed the couples' gendered experiences in the second language. The study focused on how these couples positioned their gendered identities in relation to the English native speakers and to their partners. Although in this study both males and women lost their linguistic voices they had in their first language and positioned as others by native speakers, their gendered agencies resulted in different linguistic performances. The findings of the study indicated that the women in this study showed better linguistic performances within their families than with native language speakers. As Vitanova further stated, although the women tried to be responsible and fit into the linguistic experiences of the target culture, those women participants who had already been marginalized in their families due to their gender perceived more power inequality between themselves and the native speakers.

The Literature on Iranian Women's Gender Identities and Language Learning

Although to the researcher's knowledge, there has been no study using the theoretical framework of the community of practice to investigate Iranian female immigrants' gendered identities in diaspora, some scholars (Ebtekar, 2012, 2014; Hojati, 2009; Messing, 2011; Sadeghi, 2007) have explored Iranian women's positioning in academic and everyday social settings of the host communities of practice. Among these studies, Ebtekar's (2012, 2014) research also explored the effects of Iranian women's agentive acts and identities on their language learning trajectories.

Through the analysis of a group of the Iranian middle-class female university students' narratives in the United States, Messing (2011) problematized the generally accepted assumption that living in the Western world can save Middle Eastern women from the atrocities and gender inequalities prevalent in their home cultures. She argued the Iranian female participants exercised as much political and social agency in the United States as they used to do in Iran. The narratives of these women indicate that their identities in Iran were politically defined since they constantly employed acts of resistance against the stifling social environment for Iranian women. These women reported their success in accessing professional and educational opportunities in Iran despite the existence of the gender inequalities and discriminations against Iranian women. Additionally, these women narrated their hardships that they encountered as Muslim and Iranian foreigners in the United States. Messing believed that the cultural discriminations against these women in the American society is the result of the

depictions of Middle Eastern women “as either eroticized or veiled, passive and silent, and victimized” (p. 115) in the Western media.

In a similar study, Hojati (2009) interviewed eleven Iranian female graduate students in Canada from a standpoint which explored racialized women’ voices. Like the women in Messing’s (2011) study, the analysis of these women’ narratives show that even these educated Iranian women who could get access to the educational opportunities of a sociocapitalistic society like Canada, had to bear the negative assumption that characterizes Iranian women “as Muslim, backward, tradition-bound, uneducated, and the subject of male-domination” (p. 55). The women in this study faced difficulties in displaying their academic abilities due to the existence of Canada and the United States’ state policies, which according to Hojati propagandize neoliberalism and the military pressure on the countries in the Middle East. Such policies impact the educational and social positions of the immigrants coming from the countries in the Middle East. The female graduate students in the study were also racialized due to not only their skin color, but also their nationality and religion.

Sadeghi’s (2007) qualitative study of a group of Iranians’ lived experiences in Canadian higher education institutions also revealed that how the immigrants’ identities were shaped by their social statuses in the Canadian society. While the participants regarded literacy as social and cultural capital, some of these individuals perceived their being Iranian and Muslim as a hindering force against attaining the membership of the host culture. As the result of their cultural and religious affiliations, some of these participants experienced discriminations in both the educational and social contexts. The

kind of discriminations that most of these participants experienced in the higher educational institutions in Canada was “hidden racism, the invisible fist, being the target, and the other in the faculty” (p. 108) which were mostly felt rather than verbally uttered.

In the studies carried by Ebtekar (2012, 2014) the relationship between a group of Iranian immigrant women’s language learning and their identity formations was explored through the poststructural research framework. In her 2012 study, Ebtekar employed a single case study design to depict the dynamic nature of an Iranian female’s identity formation process and her language learning trajectories. Marjan’s, the participant of the study, life history consisted of a series of contradictory and multiple accounts. She adopted various voices as she narrated her life experiences back in Iran and then in Australia. Marjan’s subdued voice in the new Australian context gave its place to a community worker’s voice helping the new immigrants in Australia. It was due to the identity negotiation that Marjan decided to invest in language learning and rebuild her identity after her initial failures when she first arrived in Australia.

In her more comprehensive study, Ebtekar (2014) investigated identity negotiation and language learning in Iranian and Afghan women in Australia. Focusing on the narratives of these two groups of women, Ebtekar concluded that the participants’ language learning experiences were closely connected to the degree they participated in society. The successful language learners were those who could build mutual relationships with the native speakers and were constantly engaged in the reconfiguration of their identities and meanings. The role of gender in shaping these women’s images of themselves was also investigated. Through the analysis of both Afghan and Iranian

narratives, Ebtekar found that these women prioritized their gendered roles and responsibilities as mothers or wives over their social and educational participation.

As Ebtekar (2014) further mentioned, the agentive acts which these women performed against marginalization in the new context were varied. By connecting to their own ethnic community, some of these Iranian women tried to confirm their social identity and overcome the negative feelings of marginalization. Challenging or avoiding the status quo of the host community were the other two strategies employed by the Iranian women against the institutional discriminations and violence that they experienced in Australia. Though these strategies, these participants were either able to achieve more negotiated selves, or they preferred to avoid social contacts with the old timers. Striving for excellence in academia and career pathways was another strategic act which some of the women adopted to achieve more opportunities to negotiate their identities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the various theories of identity which emerged in sociolinguistic studies were discussed in detail. The early essentialist approaches to identity and language and the inadequacies of this perspective in accounting for language learning experiences in multicultural contexts were also presented. The feminist poststructural theories of identity proved to be better substitutes for the traditional and static views of identity and its relation to language studies. Within the poststructural framework, the inclusion of the notions of imagined communities, communities of practice, agency, and investment in language learning presented in this chapter could thoroughly contribute to the intricacies and complexities of negotiating and reconstructing one's identity in

various social setting. Such poststructural notions emphasize the recognition of the concept of identity as a social practice and not as a unitary and static concept.

Additionally, the constructs of communities of practice and second language learners' imagined communities function as the theoretical bases of the present study based on which the interrelationship between language and gender was explored.

As the goal of the present study is to investigate the interrelationships of Iranian immigrant women's perceptions of their gender identities and their agency and investment in learning the second language, the historical changes in the definition of gendered identity which were proposed by various structural and feminist poststructural language and gender researchers were categorized and introduced. The comparisons between the changing trends in theories of identity and gender identity revealed many similarities in the way these two concepts were approached and applied in research. As the trend indicates, gender is no longer a distinct attribute of one's identity, but it is an inherent and inseparable from other aspects of identity such as race and age (Cameron, 1995, 1996). Gendered identity in this sense refers to how gender roles are constantly constructed and reconstructed as the result of participation in daily practices of local communities. Since gendered identity is parallel to identity regarding its application in sociolinguistic research, the concepts of communities can also be fruitful in understanding how second language learners' gendered identities are realized socially and linguistically.

Moreover, the presented empirical studies on language and gender with the focus on gendered agency, and investment in second language learning shed light on how gendered identity can be interpreted in various studies with different research designs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate Iranian immigrant women's perceptions of their gendered identities and language learning experiences in the United States and back in Iran in relation to their imagined communities and participation in communities of practice. In this study, I tried to capture these women's narratives on the imagined communities they formed in their minds before coming to the United States, and the degree that their imagined communities were aligned with the opportunities that they were provided with to participate in their current communities of practice. Additionally, their agentive roles and investment in second language learning in informal contexts of communities of practice were investigated in relation to their positions as Iranian women in the target communities. The research design is multiple case study narrative inquiry, depicting these Iranian women's lives. Such a design provided the researcher with a rich description of the participants' views of being female in the two cultures, and how their perceptions could shape their investment in language learning.

The following sections of this chapter includes explanations for the application of the qualitative research method, and the selection of the narrative inquiry as one of the most suitable methods of analysis based on the previous studies carried out on language and gender. Moreover, the researcher's role, future participants of the study, interview questions and the literature that supports these questions will also be presented. Finally, the suggested methods of data collection and data analysis will be discussed.

Research Questions

From feminist poststructural perspectives to language and gender, gender is defined as participation in communities of practice. The purpose of the present study is then to explore Iranian immigrant women's perceptions about their participation in the communities of practice in the United States and the impacts of such views on their gender identities, agencies and investment in second language learning. Particularly, the study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. How do the Iranian immigrant women' imagined communities and gender identities affect their investment in second language learning before coming to the United States?
2. How do these women view their positions as Iranian immigrants in the current American communities of practice?
3. Do the imagined communities they formed before coming to the United States match the realities of the current communities of practice?
4. In what ways do these women' present perceptions of being a woman affected their adoption of agentive roles for participation or nonparticipation in the United States communities of practice, and investment in second language learning?
5. How do these women' present imagined communities and gender identities shape their decisions about future participation in the United States communities of practice and investment in second language learning?

Research Design

Based on the nature of the proposed research questions, qualitative research design was utilized in this study. The purpose of the qualitative research is to investigate a research problem in depth. As Creswell (2009) mentioned: “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). To him, the qualitative research process takes an inductive style. It first starts with the emergence of a question. Data is then collected in the sites. Data analysis is also inductive, and it is based on making meaning out of the emergent themes. The researcher’s task is then to make sense of the themes and interpret the results. Patton (2002) believed that qualitative methods are advantageous because they emphasize the production of detailed information. Such information can provide the researcher with more understanding of situations and people’s experiences.

Qualitative research can be identified from its quantitative counterpart in several ways. A synthesis of the characteristics of the qualitative research can make the differences between these two types of research methodologies more distinguishable.

1. Qualitative research is interpretive since it deals with multiple meanings of human affairs. The interpretation of the findings depends on the participant-researcher interaction (Stake, 2010).
2. Qualitative research pursues a naturalistic line of inquiry. It studies the emergent situations as they unfold. It is noncontrolling and nonmanipulative. In this regard, qualitative studies are empirical and field-oriented (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010).

3. Qualitative approach assumes that reality is socially constructed. Therefore, it is constantly changing. Reality is a relative term which depends on specific locations and people (Glesne, 2006).
4. Qualitative research paradigm does not seek generalization, and it is therefore personalistic. It is empathic and based on people's perceptions and diverse views. The interpretation is not based on prefabricated constructs (Stake, 2010).
5. The researcher is the primary instrument of the research. Accordingly, the validity of the qualitative research depends on the researcher's rigor and skill (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010).
6. Qualitative research is based on inductive data analysis procedures.
Qualitative researchers use a bottom-up approach for categorizing the data into abstract themes. They start from raw data and come up with a theory or patterns of meaning (Creswell, 2009).

The characteristics of different types of studies can help researchers identify the best method or procedure to carry out a study. For answering the research questions of this study, since understanding participants' perceptions of their gendered identities and language learning processes was crucial, the qualitative research seemed to be the right choice. The decision to choose the qualitative research was further supported by Stake's (2010) definition of the term qualitative: "By qualitative we mean that it relies primarily on human perception and understanding" (p. 11).

Since the research questions of the present study sought the Iranian immigrant women' detailed accounts of their life and second language learning experiences, narrative case study analysis was chosen as the method of inquiry. In the following section, the literature which supports the use of narratology in identity and language studies will be discussed. Moreover, since the researcher made use of narrative case study as the research instrument, a brief description of the specific type of the case study incorporated in this research will also be presented.

The Narrative Method of Analysis in Identity and Language Studies

The present study used narrative analysis as the method of inquiry. Narrative analysis or narratology "reveals cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 115). The procedure for collecting data in narrative analysis starts with a series of open-ended and in-depth interviews to illustrate the narrative of a life, a cultural group, or individuals' perceptions of some events. Such data can also be collected through compilations of several short life stories which in turn can describe people's complexities and dilemmas (Glesne, 2006).

Various researchers and theorists in the field of identity and language (Norton, 2012; Norton & McKinney, 2011; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Ricento, 2010) believed that narrative inquiry is most suitable for language and identity studies, especially those related to second language learners' instances of marginalization in either formal or informal language learning contexts.

Ricento (2010) argued that since the notion of identity implies dynamism and change, quantitative methods of inquiry such as questionnaires cannot be suitable means

for capturing the intricacies of the concept of identity. Instead, he proposed methods such as first-person narratives, longitudinal studies, and in-depth interviewing as more insightful ways of “exploring L2 users’ introspective accounts of their experiences crossing into other cultures and languages” (p. 904).

In their discussion of the usage of first-person narratives, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argued that “in the human sciences, first-person accounts in the form of personal narratives provide a much richer source of data than do third-person distant observations” (p. 157). To them, personal narratives have the potentials of revealing those aspects of learners’ second language learning trajectories which cannot be explained through the traditional and experimental approaches to research. Pavlenko and Lantolf believed that first-person narratives are translucent accounts of people’s experiences of becoming marginalized bilinguals. These experiences are anecdotal in nature and cannot be captured by objective methods of inquiry.

In a similar way, in addressing issues of language learners as social beings and the inequitable language learning contexts, Norton and McKinney (2011) suggested that qualitative research strategies and methods are more appropriate for investigating learners’ identity construction. They referred to the dynamic nature of identity as one of the reasons for utilizing qualitative methods of inquiry such as narratology. Moreover, they believed that the critical analysis of the issues of power structures does not render itself to quantitative and objective methods of analysis.

Norton (2012) legitimized the application of narrative inquiry in poststructural identity and language studies by drawing on Halliday’s (1978) belief that narratives are

interpreted in relation to individuals' familiarity with the cultural norms. In her view, identity is not fixed and it is constructed in relation to the social community in which language learners live. In relating narratives to imagined communities, Norton believed that narratives can link marginalized second language learners' past lives to the present and form new identities and possibilities through their imaginations. Narrative constructions can therefore be a safe way of identity formation and identity practice for second language learners.

Based on the nature of my study and the application of narrative analysis in previous studies on similar topics, narrative inquiry was chosen for collecting more comprehensive accounts of the participants' life stories and experiences. The detailed information that were obtained from open-ended interviews in this study could help the researcher investigate the depth and breadth of the problem.

Narrative Case Study Analysis

To capture the heuristic accounts of the participants' narratives, a suitable qualitative strategy for data analysis needed to be incorporated. Case study analysis with its emphasis on understanding the details of individuals' life stories and experiences could be an efficient method of inquiry for my present research. As Yin (2003) stated, "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, international relations, and the maturation of the industries" (p. 2). Since the present study is based on analyzing the participants' past,

present and future life stories, case study analysis was chosen as the analytical tool in the present study.

Additionally, the research questions of the present study support the usage of case study as being the advantageous method of analysis over the other methods since they try to probe the *hows* to capture “a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003, p.9). In other words, narrative case study can reflect those qualities and meanings which are inaccessible to the researcher and cannot be understood and captured by other research methods (Brandell & Varkas, 2010). Likewise, in the present research how the female participants’ past, present and future perceptions defined their identities and second language learning investments could only be fully captured through the method of narrative case study.

Case studies are based on “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Cases have idiographic nature based on which multiple variables can be investigated. The results obtained from case studies render generalizations which are supported by inferences and analysis rather than probabilities and statistics (Brandell & Varkas, 2010). Moreover, in case studies the context in which stories and events take place plays a significant role in understanding each case. As a result, it is hardly possible to differentiate between the case and the context in which stories take place (Merriam, 1998). As Brandell and Varkas (2010) further mentioned, the importance of understanding the context in narrative case studies can help the researcher to connect the past elements to the present ones and form a reliable basis for her further in-depth investigation. In the present study, adopting the

narrative case study design could strengthen the researcher's understanding of how the female participants' identities were constructed and reconstructed through their transition from the past to the present context, and how the shifts in their identities affected their investment in second language learning.

For the present research, multiple case study design with the comparative structure were adopted due to the number of participants (twelve). The narratives of the twelve Iranian women were analyzed and synthesized through a cross-analysis technique. As Merriam (1998) stated, multiple cases studies are advantageous to single-case studies since having more study participants can increase both the dependability and generalizability of the research.

Data Collection

In-depth semistructured interviewing. For the present study, in-depth semistructured interviews were used as the method of data collection. To some qualitative researchers (Glesne, 2006; Seidman, 1991; Wengraf, 2001) semistructured interviewing can probe the depth and breadth of research problems. Glesne (2006) emphasized on the usage of semistructured interviewing since it includes those types of questions which are both *open* and *depth-probing*. In her point of view, these types of interview can encompass an understanding of the full complexities of a phenomenon. To her, the open and depth-probing questions utilized in this type of interview not only capture the unseen information, but also reflect the respondents' way of thinking, feeling and explaining their experiences.

Likewise, Wengraf (2001) talked about the features of in-depth interviewing as a designed practice. He believed that research interview is a kind of special conversational interaction which is designed for seeking the informants' realities in great depth. Wengraf also classified semi-structure interviewing as one kind of in-depth interviewing. He proposed that an in-depth interviewing should be planned and prepared like other kinds of research methods. It is a deliberate *half-scripted* interview. The questions are only partially prepared in advance and the rest need to be mostly improvised by the researcher. Based on his idea, in-depth interviewing is not a single production but a *joint production* of both the interviewer and the participant.

Seidman (2013) viewed interviewing as a basic and powerful mode of research for educational issues. He believed that through in-depth interviews, researchers know about people's stories, experiences or realities. The way that people symbolize their experiences is through language. Therefore, understanding about a person's behavior is possible through two persons talking and asking questions from each other. To Seidman, "recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans have made sense of their experience" (p.2). He further explained that telling stories is a meaning-making process. Since individuals reflect on their experiences in a chronological order (beginning, middle, and end), the audience can make sense of what they narrate more easily. If the interviewer's aim is not understanding what the participants try to communicate through their experiences, then the other venues of inquiry such as examining documents, observations or questionnaires and surveys can be better choices.

Adopting in-depth semistructured interview is also in line with the type of interview recommended to researchers conducting case studies. Within case study design framework, interview is the most important type of data collection. Interviewing can be particularly beneficial when researchers are interested in knowing about the participants' unobservable perceptions, feelings, and past experiences. Case study design requires open-ended and less structured questions. The questions should guide conversations rather than structuring the respondents' speech (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Particularly, Merriam (1998) emphasized on the usage of semistructured interviews over structured ones. In such interviews, specific information is elicited from respondents. However, the order and wording of the questions are not necessarily the same for each informant.

The type of semistructured interview which utilized in the present study is Seidman's (2013) three-interview series which is an example of a valid in-depth interviewing technique. The rationale underlying this structure is that people's behaviors are understandable if placed in the context in which those people live. In the first interview, the interviewer's task is to contextualize the participant's experience by asking him or her to talk about himself or herself in relation to the topic up to the present time. Through the second phase, the concrete details of the interviewee's present experience in the topic are studied by asking the participants to reconstruct the details. During the final phase, the interviewees reflect on the meaning of their past and present experiences. The reflection in the third stage is also a meaning-making process since it requires the participants to explore the past to clarify the events that put them in the present situations. The detailed description of their present experience leads the interviewees to reflect on

what they are doing in their lives now. The last stage can also “take a future orientation; for example, ‘Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?’” (p. 22).

In explaining his adherence to the three-interview series, Seidman (2013) claimed that an in-depth, open-ended interview with a preplanned structure helps both the interviewer and the subject maintain a sense of focus during the various parts of the interview. He, therefore, implicitly approved of using semistructured interviews since they are both open-ended and require researchers to have a framework for asking questions and conducting the interview.

Interview questions and thematic classifications. The interview questions for this study were mostly gathered through reviewing the related literature. The interview questions for this study cover:

1. the female participants’ imagined communities and imagined gender identities before coming to the United States;
2. their current positions as immigrant women in American communities of practice;
3. the extent of the alignment between their imagined communities and the realities of the target communities of practice;
4. the effects of their current gendered positions on their participation, agency, and investment in their second language learning;
5. their perceptions about their imagined communities and future gender positions in the United States in future.

The interview questions for this study are based on some prior research studies. The questions relating to participants' imagined communities, imagined gender identities, and investment in language learning were taken from Norton (1993), Al Harthi (2014), Trentman (2013), and Pavlenko (2001). The interview question regarding the alignment between the participants' imagined communities and the communities of practice belonged to Trentman (2013) and Song's (2012) research questions. Finally, the questions relating to the women participants' gender positions in American communities of practice, and the impacts of such positions on their participation in social acts, agency, and investment in language learning were adopted from the following studies: Norton (1995), Norton (1993), Vitanova (2004), Song (2012), and Pavlenko (2001).

Interview format. For the research design of the study, based on Seidman's (2013) three-series model, each female participant was interviewed three times. In this type of interview, the first phase focuses on the participants' life stories and experiences up to the present time. During the second phase, the participants' present experiences are the focus of attention. Finally, in the last part of the interview the participants reflect on their past and present situations and take future orientations.

The interview questions for this study were arranged according to these three series of interviews: retrospective descriptions of the women participants' past life experiences, their present situations, and their future life directions. For doing so, the interview questions were divided into three parts: past, present, and future. The list of all the interview questions, their source documentation, and the research questions that they trigger are listed in Appendix A. As Seidman (2013) suggested, each interview is set to

take about 60 to 90 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English. However, the participants were provided with further clarifications and the translations about the interview questions if needed. The participants were also given the permission to code-switch to Farsi whenever they thought they could not express themselves adequately in English.

For the first part of the interview, the women participants were asked about the type of American imagined communities and the self-images they formed in their minds before coming to the United States. All the questions in the first section probed the participants' past intentions for coming to the United States and investing in learning English. For the second part of the interview, the participants were asked about their current positions as a woman in American social or academic communities of practice. They were further asked to compare the differences between what they had imagined about their participation in social and linguistic communities and the realities of everyday practices in these communities. Additionally, these women were also interviewed about their gender positions as Iranian immigrant women in the United States, and the impacts of such positions on their participation in target communities and investment in second language learning. In the last session of the interview, the women's images of their future statuses as immigrant women in the United States and their future language learning investment were explored.

Data Analysis

The procedures which researchers utilize for qualitative data analysis included both analysis and synthesis. Researchers gather data, analyze the patches (interesting

parts), and then synthesize the parts (Stake, 2010). For the present study, the narrative analysis was used as the analytic technique for the data analysis. The participants' first person narratives which were collected through interviews were analyzed and interpreted based on the ideological perspective of poststructuralism feminist theory of gender and language.

For this study, like most of the qualitative research studies, first the data were recorded and then organized through transcription. Out of twelve participants, three used their native language, Farsi (Persian), to have the interviews. Thus, the Farsi transcripts were first translated into English. The data then were carefully read and reduced to some predefined themes of imagined communities and imagined identities (positioning), investment in second language learning, gender positioning, participation in communities of practice, and agency. To place data into these categories, the researcher made use of a mechanical strategy, proposed by Merriam (1998) to prepare data for writing the results of the study. In this strategy, *File folders* are used to store coded interviews. First, photocopies of the entire interviews were made. Then, based on the careful reading of the interview lines, the observation notes made during the interviews, and the tentative codes which emerged out of the data, the researcher cut up the coded sections and placed them into the file folders which were labeled by a specific theme or category. To easily find the original place of the cut raw data, the original page number and the name of the participant which the raw data belonged to were also written on each piece of the filed data.

According to Merriam (1998), two stages of analysis need to be carried out for multiple case studies, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. First, a within-case analysis was made for each participant of the study. As the analysis chapters are based on the participants' past, present, and future narrative perceptions, the within-case study analyses of each participant were divided into the three phases of the interviews about their past, present, and future life stories. For the second phase of analysis, a cross-case analysis of all the twelve participants was made for each phase of their life narratives separately.

Research Study Sampling Strategy

The process of selecting the female participants for this study was based on purposeful sampling. As Merriam (1998) stated, since the aim of qualitative research is not generalizing the results, random sampling strategies are not suitable nor justifiable in qualitative research. Consequently, purposeful sampling is the best choice for most of the qualitative studies. According to Patton (2002), the aim of purposeful sampling is to discover and understand the depth and breadth of a research study; therefore, the chosen sample should provide the researcher with information-rich data.

The type of the purposeful sampling which was used in this study is *maximum variation sampling strategy*. Maximum variation sampling was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as part of their goal to figure out the best strategies of grounded theory in qualitative research. They believed that minimizing differences among the comparative groups has the disadvantage of yielding similar data on a specific theme. In contrast, maximizing the differences helps the researcher not only collect varied data, but also

distinguish the similarities which can uniform the scope of the study. Likewise, Patton (2015) also emphasized while heterogeneity seems to be a problem with small samples, maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling turns this weakness to a strength since “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of interest and value in capturing the core experiences, and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p.283).

To obtain the maximum variation sampling strategy, the researcher chose those participants from the Iranian female population who had different ages, marital statuses, cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. The aim of such selection was to get the results which, as Patton (2015) stated, indicate not only detailed and high-quality descriptions of each case, but also the significant shared patterns which emerge out of heterogeneity.

The chosen participants were asked if they willingly agreed to participate in the study. They were not offered any monetary incentives for their participation in this study. Since all the participants' level of reading comprehension in English was satisfactory, the consent form given to each participant at the beginning of the interview was written in English. The interview questions were asked first in English and then Farsi so that language was not a barrier for participants in comprehending the researcher's questions and concerns. Additionally, the participants were given a choice to code-switch to Farsi whenever they felt they could not express their views and feelings in English.

For ethical considerations, the researcher kept her informants' identities confidential by assigning each participant a name of a flower as a pseudonym. In chapter

five, the participants will be introduced by presenting their demographic information and brief life stories.

The Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection. Accordingly, the validity of the qualitative research highly depends on the skills and knowledge of the researcher (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010). The friendly relationship between the researcher and the participants may be both an advantage and a disadvantage. As a researcher, one can obtain more intimate and detailed information about participants when friendly relationships have already been established. Being an insider in the community can help the researcher establish the rapport which is necessary for eliciting participants' perceptions and worldviews about the topic under the investigation. Moreover, the similarities of the interviewer and interviewees' personal characteristics such as gender, age, and native language can increase more communication and data collection (Glesne, 2006).

However, according to Glesne (2006), having friendly relations with informants can raise the ethical dilemma of how to deal with the confidentiality of the informants' personal information. To minimize the negative impacts of such biases, as Glesne (2006) suggested, researchers need to reflect on the nature of their relationships with the participants, follow the rational ethics, and analyze the power relations between the researcher and the participants. In so doing, efforts were made to highlight the role of the interviewer as the researcher rather than a friend. Since the researcher of the present study was an insider in the Iranian community in this college town, and she was an

acquaintance to most of the participants, much caution was exercised on behalf of the researcher to act as an interviewer rather than a friend.

Additionally, being an insider can carry potential risks of not being neutral to what participants tell. As Patton (2002) explained, establishing rapport with the people with whom the researcher interviews should not undermine neutrality. The interviewees' responses should not make the interviewer react to the content of the responses.

Consequently, the researcher of the study was careful about not reacting to or making any judgments about the participants' responses to the interview questions.

Issues of Data Transparency

Transparency in qualitative research has been referred to as *conformability*. Conformability is compatible with objectivity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). However, as Patton (2002) mentioned, the researcher's biases are inevitable even in carrying out objective quantitative research. In the case of qualitative research, the researcher can avoid his or her personal biases if the focus is on reporting the participants' views rather than the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). There are some techniques that the researcher can use to guarantee the transparency of the data.

Data is transparent when the researcher goes through the process of *self-reflexivity*. According to Patton (2002), self-understanding and self-questioning are essential components of self-reflexivity. Shenton (2004) asserted that to achieve self-reflexivity, "beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted should be acknowledged within the research report, the reasons for favoring one approach when others could have been taken explained and weaknesses in the techniques actually

employed admitted” (p. 72). One technique which can help readers keep track of the research process is *audit trailing*. It can either indicate the process of data formation (data-oriented), or help readers know how they can follow the theoretical constructs that underlie the research (theory-oriented). In the present research, throughout the analyses and discussion sections, attempts were made to show the connections between the theoretical constructs of the study and the data analyses.

To make the findings transparent, researchers may also use the sequential reporting or adopt a cross-analysis of the various interpretations of the results to indicate the points of convergence and divergence. A synthesis of the various interpretations can also be considered to increase the transparency of the research findings (Clarke et al., 2014). For my study, first a cross-analysis of the findings was utilized, and then various interpretations were synthesized for any potential explanations or theories to emerge.

Issues of Credibility

The construct validity in quantitative research has been referred to as credibility (internal validity), and transferability (external validity or generalizability) in qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). There are some strategies which were used to enhance the internal validity of the current study:

1. The inclusion of correct research methods can increase the validity of the study. Methods of data collection and data analysis should be compatible with the construct which is being measured (Shenton, 2004). Similarly, Messick (1995) mentioned that the structural aspect of the construct validity reflects how the scoring systems is based on the theory of the construct domain.

Narrative analysis was utilized as the most compatible method to make meaning of the future participants' experiences and life histories.

2. Familiarity with the culture of the participants is another important strategy to ensure the validity of research (Shenton, 2004). As an Iranian female in the United States, I have adequate familiarity with my participants' culture (Persian culture) to ensure the credibility of the research.
3. Theory triangulation is another method of enhancing credibility. According to Patton (2015), the triangulation of theories or perspectives is one of the four ways to achieve credibility. When the researcher brings various theoretical lenses to the field to analyze the same data, theory triangulation can be achieved. In the present research, the researcher's utilization of various theoretical frameworks of language and gender, investment, and agency could enhance the credibility of the study.
4. Participants' honesty contributes to validity. Voluntary participation in a study can guarantee more truthful responses (Shenton, 2004). The consent forms were given to the participants of the present study before the conduct of the interviews. Moreover, the participants were encouraged to be honest and frank in answering the questions.
5. The researcher's role in making the data transparent and valid is of paramount importance (Clarke et al., 2014; Creswell, 2009, Shenton, 2004). Discussing how the research developed in detail could increase not only the transparency, but also the validity of the study.

6. Member checking was another strategy to increase validity. The participants in the study were asked to check the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and findings after writing up and reporting the findings (Creswell, 2009; Shenton, 2004).
7. The examination of previously conducted research which is relevant to the topic can help the researcher to evaluate the study (Shenton 2004). Similar empirical studies on gender identity and language learning in informal contexts were included and referred to in the study to increase the validity of the new findings.

Issues of Transferability

The external validity or generalizability of research in qualitative studies is referred to as transferability (Shenton, 2004). The generalizability aspect of construct validity shows if the score interpretation can be generalized to not only the sample tasks but also the construct domain (Messick, 1995). As Shenton (2004) mentioned, generalizability in quantitative research is concerned with the extent to which the results of a quantitative study can be applied to a wider population. However, in qualitative research the number of participants is small and the contextual factors may be different from those in other similar studies. Shenton believed that readers should be provided with a thick description of the topic or the phenomenon under investigation. Future researchers, then, can compare their own emergent themes with the ones in similar studies. However, various representations of realities should not be considered as invalid and an understanding of these reasons can be useful to the readers.

To increase the transferability of my study, thick descriptions of the data collection and data analysis procedures used in the study were presented. Additionally, the researcher's personal reflections on meaning making processes out of the participants' interviews could add to the transferability of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Several qualitative research authors have discussed the significance of the ethical and moral considerations in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002; Stake, 2010). The naturalistic inquiry reports what people do, and how they speculate on events. In-depth interviewing reveals people's hidden thoughts and feelings. Consequently, qualitative research is much more intrusive than quantitative methods such as questionnaires and surveys (Patton, 2002). The quality of interviews can be improved if the interviewer takes the moral issues into account. Qualitative study participants are more concerned about how critically they may be questioned; consequently, their resistance to self-disclosure may increase (Creswell, 2009). Since in-depth interviewing may reveal participants' personal thoughts and feelings about critical and sensitive issues, the following precautions were taken to ensure participants' privacy and rights. Seidman's (2013) detailed consent form for in-depth interviewing was adopted for this study. The consent form consisted of seven major parts:

1. The interviewer explicitly presented what she asked the participants to do. A brief statement of the problem was provided and the purpose of the research was clarified. The interviewees were informed about how long the research lasts.

2. The participants knew about the possible risks that may have threatened them during or at the end of the interview.
3. Interviewees' rights were outlined. These rights included the participants' voluntary participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, the right to review and withhold the gathered interview data, and the right to privacy.
4. Possible benefits were outlined.
5. The form contained the information about how the researcher intended to keep the participants' identities confidential.
6. The researcher clarified her intentions regarding the dissemination of the findings for extensive use such as a journal article or a book.
7. The researcher provided the participants with her detailed contact information for any further inquiry.

Summary

Chapter three addressed the procedures through which data collection and data analysis were done. The aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between Iranian women's gendered identities and language learning based on the theoretical frameworks of feminist poststructuralism of gender and language, imagined communities, and communities of practice. Additionally, these theoretical constructs were linked to the concepts of agency and investment in second language learning. Seidman's (2013) three-series interview were adopted for collecting the data. The three phases of this type of interview could help the researcher capture the participants'

detailed perceptions about their gender positions and second language learning experiences in the past, present, and their perceived statuses in the future. The thematic categories based on which the interview questions were based focused on concepts of positioning, imagined community, participation in communities of practice, agency, and investment in language. Moreover, the sampling strategy for choosing the participants of the study was discussed. Finally, the researcher explained how she addressed the issues of credibility and transferability in the present study.

Chapter 4: Iran and Iranian Women through the Lens of History

Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to introduce the context in which the women of the study were born and lived for many years. In so doing, this chapter begins with a short overview of the history of Iran beginning from the prehistoric era to the present time. Additionally, Iranian women's social and historical positions during these historical times were discussed and analyzed based on the review of the related literature.

A History of Iran

The following excerpt on the history of Iran was taken from: *A history of Iran: Empire of the mind* by Michael Axworthy (2008). In his book, Axworthy chronicled the long history of Iran, trying to keep it devoid of partialities and historical distortions. Thus, Axworthys's account provides a reliable source for presenting a fair and neutral perspective into the historical accounts of Iran.

Iran, which was called Persia before 1935, is in the southwestern part of Asia. The existence of the country dates to almost 2500 B.C. Iranians were among a group of Indo-Europeans who migrated from the Russian steppes and later settled in Persia. The descendants of the immigrants coming to Iran were named Medes and Persians. After overcoming Assyrians in 612 BC, Medes established the first Iranian empire.

The migration of Persians to the Middle East coincided with Zoroaster's, the Persian prophet, birth in 1000 or 1200 BC. *Zoroastrianism* and its modern version, *Mazdaism*, became the prominent Persians' religion until the invasion of Arabs and the introduction of Islam in the 7th century A.D. Zoroaster's theology is based on the two

opposing forces of *Ahura Mazda* (the god of truth and light, meaning Wise Lord), and *Ahriman* (the devil and darkness). As Nietzsche mentioned in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Zoroaster is the first creator of the moral world. Zoroastrianism elevated the Totemic beliefs widespread at that time to a more humanistic level with its emphasis on human choice and responsibility.

The Median Empire was overthrown by Cyrus (the son of a royal Persian) in 549 B.C. He established the Achaemenid Empire in Persia. During his monarchy, he made the greatest empire that the world had witnessed up to that time. The empire stretched from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River. However, the Achaemenid Empire was collapsed by Alexander the Macedonian during the kingdom of Darius III. Alexander's intention was to dominate Persia through spreading Greek culture. To achieve this goal, he burnt Persepolis (the Achaemenid Court), killed many teachers, and extinguished the fires in temples (fire has been a symbol of divinity for Zoroastrians).

After Alexander's death, Persia was revived by the Parthian (Arsacid) and the Sassanid Empires. Parthians were a group of people who lived in the eastern part of the Caspian Sea before and during the Achaemenid Empire. Parthians ruled Persia for several centuries. However, in the early 3rd century A.D., one of the descendants of Achaemenids, named Ardashir, could win the war against the last king of the Arsacids. He came to the throne in 228 A.C.

During the Sassanid Empire, bureaucracy expanded in the government and new titles such as *ganzwar* (treasurer) or *dibir* (scribe) were assigned to the officials. The economy was improved by founding new cities and expanding the existing ones. Science

and medical schools were established in some cities like Gondeshapur. Khosraw Anushirvan, one of the Sassanid kings, contributed a lot to the application of justice and wisdom in Persia. His court was a center for learning. The Greek Neoplatonist philosophers who were disappointed with the Greek emperor of that time were welcomed in Anushirvan's court. During his time, many texts were translated from the Indian, Greek, and other languages into Pahlavi (the Middle Persian language).

However, the glamor of the Sassanid Empire deteriorated due to being involved in several wars with the Byzantine Empire. As a result, when the Arabs invaded Iran, they could defeat the Persian army at Qadesiyya and Nahavand in 637. King Yazdegerd III fled and was later killed in 651. The end of Sassanid dynasty and the invasion of Arabs resulted in the degradation of Persians and their religion, Zoroastrianism. Based on the Islamic rule, Jews and Christians are tolerated, since they are considered as 'the people of the Book'. However, that was not the case for the Zoroastrians in Persia. Many of their temples were burnt, and many priests were killed by Muslim Arabs. Trying to avoid the social pressures placed on Zoroastrians, many Persian elites converted to Islam, while ordinary Iranians remained Zoroastrians for several centuries afterwards.

Since the invasion of Arabs, the land of Persia was ruled by foreign monarchs for almost a millennium. The Umayyad dynasty was the first Muslim government ruling Persia. The Umayyad caliphs' (leaders) efforts to show the Arab supremacy lead to *shu'ubiyya* movement through which Persians tried to defend their cultural identity. The next dynasty, the Abbasid government, boosted their economy by looking back at the Persian golden age. The Abbasid period was the era of advancement in art, literature,

science and architecture during which the East was much ahead in scientific advancements than the Europe at that time. During the Abbasid regime, some Persian-origin dynasties (e.g. Taherids of Khorasan, Saffavids of Sistan, and the Samanids of Bokhara) arose and established themselves as oppositions to the Arab central authorities. All these governments adorned and followed the Persian bureaucracies in their courts. Even the caliphs of Baghdad who only relied on their military forces imitated the policies and systems of Persian courts.

It was during this period that the savior of the Persian language, Ferdowsi, wrote *Shahnameh* (the Book of Kings) during the Ghaznavids (an originally Turk government ruling Persia after the Abbasid). The themes in *Shahnameh* represent and revive the pre-Islamic cultural policy. The stories in *Shahnameh* depict the nostalgia of the chivalries of the Sassanid army before Islam. Although *Shahnameh* was not welcomed enough by the Ghaznavid ruler, it had a huge impact on unifying the Persian language (Ferdowsi avoided to use Arabic words in *Shahnameh*) and cultural identity. It has also become the model of manner and conduct for many Iranians up to the present time.

It was in the 11th century that the Seljuk Turks defeated the Ghaznavids and ruled Persia until the end of the 12th century. Khwarezmshahs was the next Persian dynasty. During their monarchy, Persia witnessed the deadliest invasion in its history by the Mongols occurred in the 13th century. The invasion was a vengeful reaction of the Mongols to the deaths of some of their merchants and ambassadors killed in Persia. The number of killings in Merv and Nishapur was reported to be around 1.3 million people. Although the Mongol invasion destroyed Persia's economy, the Persian literature could

survive during that grim social atmosphere. Four great Persian poets (Rumi, Iraqi, Sa'di, and Hafez) flourished in this era.

After the decline of Mongols, Persia countered another destructive invasion. This time, Timur (with Turkic origin from Transoxiana) imitated what Genghis Khan Mongol did to Iran. To frighten his Persian enemies, his army was marching with pillars of human heads as they were crossing the Persian provinces. He attacked Persia under the name of *Sunni* Islam, and ruled Persia until late 15th century.

In the latter years of the fifteenth century, a Turkic dynasty from Anatolia, naming themselves as the Safavids, came to the throne. The Safavids' choice of *Shi'ism* as the religion was merely a political act to consolidate their control over in the region. Since the Shi'a shrines in Iraq were constantly attacked by the Ottoman Empire, the emergence of Shi'ism in Persia encouraged the Ulemas (Shi'as leaders) align themselves with the Safavids, and consequently, could gain political power. With the emergence of Shi'ism, the other religions in Persia (e.g. Zoroasterians, Sunni Muslims, and Sufis) were humiliated and frowned upon. Coffee houses were closed, and public music and dancing were prohibited. Women were forced to stay home, and the Islamic dress code became mandatory for them. The introduction of Shi'ism during the Safavids' era paved the way for the foundation of the modern Iran.

The Safavids government was overthrown by Nader, who was Tahmasp's (the last Safavid king) victorious army man in the war against Afghans. Unlike the Safavids, Nader Shah was tolerant of the Sunni Islam, and became a rival to the Ottoman Empire in a war for gaining the supremacy over the Islamic world. Nader could also defeat Mongols

on his way to siege India. He took away lots of jewelries among which were *Kuh-e Nur*, *Taj-e Mah*, and *Darya-ye Nur*. He had no scruples about massacring those who provoked riots against him.

After Nader Shah was assassinated, Persia went through decades of chaos and destruction. Finally, Karim Khan Zand (from Lorestan) could overcome his rivals and become the ruler. He refused the title of king for himself, and instead called himself *vakil-e ra'ya* (the deputy of people). He was not a warrior, and his government was moderate and compassionate. However, the peace in Persia did not last long, and after Karim Khan's death civil wars out broke in Persia again, finally ended with the foundation of Qajars' monarchy.

During the Qajar dynasty, Fath Ali Shah Qajar made a prominent effect on the history of Persia. His reign coincided with the French revolution, during which the European powers were looking for allies and colonies. Hoping to make Persia as their own ally, many Europeans started travelling to Iran, either as tourists or official representatives.

The 18th century is marked as a period of decline for the Islamic world. Ottoman Empire, Safavids, and Mongols lost their powers, and the Europeans became dominant over the economy of the East, leading to Ulemas and merchants' dissatisfaction. The Persian merchants were not content with having deals with the foreigners. Having been afraid of losing their power, Ulemas were against Shah's establishment of the new schools which weakened the traditional influence on the education. The bazaar merchants and Ulemas began to demand *mashruteh* (constitution) to limit the king's power. After a

series of strikes, they could finally make the Shah sign the order for establishing *Majles* (national assembly). In October 1906, the first draft of the constitution was prepared. The Majles stimulated the creation of some further *Anjomans* (political societies) for minorities like Jews, Christians, and Armenians. During this time, the first political societies for women were also founded.

The British power over Persia increased after it won the First World War. Lord Curzon, the British secretary at that time, forced Ahmad Shah to sign an Anglo-Persian Agreement which would have declined Persia to a protectorate, while Britain would oversee military and governmental responsibilities. Such a proposal was disgraceful to Persian nationalism. A Cossacks soldier, named Reza Khan, was assigned by the British troop leader to show that Persians officers were qualified enough for the assigned position. Reza Khan and his army moved to Tehran (the capital), and Ahmad Shah assigned new members to the government. In the new government, Reza Khan became the commander of the army and later the Minister of War. In 1954, by showing his fake support to the Ulemas in Najaf and gaining Majles' approval, Reza Khan overthrew Qajar dynasty and established the Pahlavi monarchy.

Reza Khan was a nationalistic figure who developed and modernized Iran to make it independent and free from any foreign interventions. For doing so, he followed the policies which Kemal Ataturk applied in Turkey. Many military and social transformations occurred in his time. The expansion of the army, boosting transport infrastructure, expanding education by sending students to Paris, and founding the University of Tehran in 1935 were among some of the advancements during Reza Shah's

time. As part of Reza Shah's goal to modernize Persia, he banned veil for women. He wanted women to dress in Western clothes and look modern. He also agreed with opening schools for girls. In 1935, Reza Khan changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran in international official communications for making it distinct from the antinational political acts of the Qajar dynasty. He also ordered for a language reform to remove nonPersian words and substitute them with Persian vocabulary. Although Reza Khan was in favor of modernization, he established his political supremacy through censorship. Writers and poets had no freedom of speech during his era.

In the meanwhile, the Ulemas who had lost their positions in laws and education after the Constitutional Revolution, became afraid of losing their roles as judges. They also disliked the Western dress code. To show their disagreement to Shah, the Ulemas organized some riots against Reza Khan. During one of these protests in Mashhad, Reza Khan's army killed many citizens participating in a religious ceremony.

Reza Khan's nationalistic viewpoints and his ideological inclinations to considering Iranians and Germans as the descendants of the Aryan race turned him to be called a proGerman. During the Second World War, the allies (the Soviet, Britain) forced Reza Shah to expel Germans. But, Reza Shah refused to do so, and as a result, the allies' armies entered Iran in 1941. In late 1943, Tehran hosted a meeting in which Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin took part. During that meeting, the allies were committed to leave Iran within six months. The destructive effects of the World War, the presence of the foreign troops, and the shortage of food made Iranians rebel against Reza Khan. Finally, he was driven into exile in South Africa and then died and was buried there in 1944.

After Reza Khan, his son Mohammad Reza Shah (Shah), came to the throne. Learning from the coup in his father's time, Shah established a secret security Agency named SAVAK to have a complete control over politics and repress any radical political movements against the regime. Although Shah invested in education and industry, the rural places were left neglected. The 1953 a coup d'état resulted in the overthrowing of Mohammad Mossaddegh, the prime minister of Iran who tried to limit the British control over Iranian petroleum. Between 1963 to the time of the revolution in 1979, oil price surged upwards. Iran, as one of the main countries which exported oil, benefited from this boom in the oil price.

Shah dreamed of making Iran as powerful as the Persia during the Achaemenid Empire. He spent huge amounts of money on reviving the grandeur of the Achaemenid monarchy by holding an event in Persepolis in remembrance of the twenty-five-hundredth anniversary of the Persian monarchy and inviting the kings and heads of all the monarchies in the world. He also changed the Islamic calendar to a new one which was based on the year of Cyrus' accession. Although Shah had some success during his time, he could not make his regime popular among ordinary people. He rarely visited people and was so remote from the peoples' demands and concerns. Finally, due to the public's demonstrations led by Ayatollah Khomeini (Iranian Marja-e-Taqlid), Shah was forced to leave the country and Khomeini returned to Iran from exile two weeks later.

In March 1979, a referendum for establishing an Islamic Republic was set, and 97 percent of Iranians approved it. Later, Khomeini formed a Revolutionary Guard Corps named *Sepah-e Pasdaran*, and ordered the execution of old regime figures. He based the

new government on the doctrine of *velayat-e faghih* (the protectorship of the Islamic jurists), giving him the complete power to decide on the legitimacy of all actions and rules.

In September 1980, three years after the Islamic revolution, Iraqi soldiers under the leadership of Saddam Hossein, invaded Iran and could take some parts of Iran's territory. Iran's failure was due to the technological imbalance in the structure of the two armies. Although Western countries claimed to be neutral in the war, they equipped Saddam's army with the newest weapons. Despite the lack of sufficient weapons, Iranians could withdraw Saddam's army to the border and retake Iran's besieged lands. Khomeini's instance on continuing the war in hope of eradicating Saddam led the situation to a stalemate. Finally, in July 1988 Khomeini accepted the UN resolution of 598 for a cease-fire.

The outcomes of the eight-year war were not promising. People expected the government to fulfill their promises in return for their sacrifices during the war. In 1989, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani became the president and announced his presidency as the era of reconstruction. During his presidency, the middle class bazaaris (merchants) finally became wealthy (after a long history of support for the Ulemas). The first eighteen years of the revolution brought with it some benefits to ordinary and especially rural people. Remote villages were equipped with pipe water, electricity, and schools. However, due to the sharp increase in population and the high rate of unemployment Rafsanjani's second term was doomed to failure. In June 1989 Khomeini died, and his close confidant, Khamenei, became the religious leader of Iran.

In 1997, a reformist named Mohammad Khatami became the president, making most young people hopeful about their future situations. During his presidency, Khatami made some attempts to open conversations with the American government, but Iranian government's hostile attitudes towards the United States, and the American government's memory of the hostage crisis in the United States embassy in 1979 made these negotiations impossible. Unfortunately, the other reforms were not welcomed by both the governments, either.

The troubled relationship between Iran and the United States entered a new phase during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. People voted for him since he was not a Mullah (clergyman). He spent a lot of money for his political aims in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon while Iranian people lacked housing and jobs. Ahmadinejad's denial of Holocaust and his biased stance towards Israel and Palestine's historical disagreement became more threatening after his insistence on having safe nuclear program. Although the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEI) did not find any evidence regarding Iran's atomic weapon program, they found some undeclared atomic materials which were produced in unsafe sites. In 2005, the UN Security Council demanded Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment program. It was during this time that many countries imposed sanctions on Iran.

The book reported the events up to Ahmadinejad's second term. As a result, the researcher continued the account of the significant events in the later ten years from her own point of view. In 2008 presidential election, while many people in urban areas voted for the reformist candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, Ahmadinejad was reselected for the

second time. The distorted election results led to the emergence of the Green Movement (a movement in support of Mir Hossein Mousavi) in Tehran and other big cities in Iran. Many people and university students were killed or imprisoned by the government. The demonstrations led to more news censorship and the emigration of many educated and talented youths to other countries.

Due to the sanctions, the economy of Iran went into a crisis, and the rate of dollar was tripled. Medications, medical equipment, and airplane spares were not sold to Iran anymore. The ordinary people faced poverty and lost hope in any reforms and improvements. In May 2013, Dr. Hassan Rouhani was elected president. With the aid of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Zarif and his committee members, Dr. Rouhani could reach a nuclear agreement by which the sanctions against Iran were lifted on January 16, 2016.

The history of Iran can set a background for introducing the context in which the participants of the present study grew up and lived for many years. Iran as a diverse ethnic nation has survived all the tensions and hardships during history. The role of women in the history of Iran was also substantial. Their statuses have been changed as new governments with various policies and religious beliefs ruled Iran. The following sections will present Iranian women's social and political positions during the preIslamic and Islamic eras.

Women in the PreIslamic Era

There is not much direct evidence about what Iranian lives were like in ancient times. This lack of evidence is largely due to the destructive invasions of Alexander the

Macedonian, and the Arabs. In the same way, little is known about Persian women's social statuses in the ancient times. According to Brosius (1996), many of the historical records about female Achaemenes were written by Greek historical writers (like Herodotus), who were largely influenced by the antagonist relationships that existed between Persia and Greece as the two powerful ruling empires at that time. Additionally, part of these distortions may be due to the differences in what was considered acceptable social behavior for women in Persia and Greece. While the Greek women were dependent and did not enjoy any political or economic powers, Persian royal women were mostly depicted as dominant in Persian courts, and the kings were introduced as effeminate and powerless. Fortunately, these distorted descriptions and roles assigned to women living in the Achaemenian Empire were proved to be wrong in middle of the twentieth century.

According to Brosius (2010) the most significant resource for discussing Achaemenid era is Persepolis Fortification Tablets (PFT). Thousands of these Fortification texts in Persepolis were discovered by the Oriental Institute of Chicago; and as a result, more accurate information about the Achaemenian Empire and the women of those days is now accessible to researchers. The Fortifications were written in the Elamite language which dates to 509 and 494 B.C. These PFTs could provide the researchers with invaluable insights into the economic and social life conditions of both Achaemenian royal and nonroyal women.

The women in Achaemenid Persia had much higher rights than their counterparts in other civilizations. For instance, women were involved in male professions such as

carpentry, winery working, treasury clerks, and their salaries were the same as men. They also had high managerial positions and could own properties. Additionally, pregnant women enjoyed maternity leave, and were treated equally to men in heritance (Farrokh, 2014).

Although the royal Achaemenian women lived in complete luxury in kings' palaces, they were not excluded from social and economic activities (Brosius, 1996, 2010). Among the royal Persian women, the king's mother had the highest rank, followed by the king's wife, and his sisters and daughters. These women enjoyed authority in the courts, and they had the power to administer huge amounts of money and properties. While the king had the sole authority, these royal women had the freedom to act independently in the *spectrum of standards* set by the king. The fact that official mourning ceremonies were held for these royal women can indicate how important their statuses were in the society of Achaemenian Persia (Price, 2000). Brosius (1996) stated that during the Achaemenid Empire, royal women accompanied the kings in their tour campaigns to highlight kings' public images, and took part in court feasts. Contrary to what Persian women practiced in those days, Greeks thought that the presence of noble women in gatherings and feasts was an indication of barbarianism and a sign of men infemination.

The Achaemenian royal women were also involved in economy and business. Some of them were estate owners and were economically independent. They owned lands not only in Persis (Fars), but also in Egypt, Syria, and other parts of the Persian Empire. These women had their own personal seals, and they could rent or sell their lands.

Moreover, the Persian royal women could have managerial positions. They employed workforce and travelled to visit their estates and collect taxes and rents (Brosius, 1996, 2010).

The economic independence of women in Achaemenid Empire was not just common among the royal class women. One of the most famous Achaemenian women employers was Irdabama, who was not from a royal family. During the Achaemenian Empire, women worked along with men, and the numbers of female and male workers were balanced. The workers were mostly supervised by women called *arashshara* (great chief), who received the highest ration among the other labor force. The criteria for determining each worker's salary was based on the laborers' qualifications and not their genders. Only in nonspecialized professions men seemed to receive one third more than women in the same profession. Additionally, mothers of newborns received extra rations of food and wine. While Persian women enjoyed more social rights in comparisons with other women in the world, there were still gender discriminatory acts against women. For instance, when newborn babies were male, the mothers were given twice the amount of food in comparison with the mothers of baby girls (Brosius, 1996, 2010, Price, 2000).

Regarding women's clothing during the preIslamic era, the depictions of Achaemenian women with partial or no veils on seals and figurines indicate that veiling was optional and it was not used as a means for women's subjugation and seclusion. Veiling had been a common tradition in Mediterranean and Mesopotamian cultures. In Assyrian culture, veiling was a sign of a woman's high status. As a result, it was practiced by royals while prohibited for lower class women (Price, 2000).

In summary, although the Achaemenian era was still patriarchal, and men enjoyed more rights than women, the evidence from the FPTs reveal Persian women's advantageous statuses and economic independence in comparison with the women in other countries before Islam. They could become employers and employees and earn money. As Price (2000) and Brosius (1996) concluded, the gender studies of ancient Persian women can reveal the fact that they were not undifferentiated masses behind the walls, secluded from social activities. Unfortunately, the marginalization and seclusion of Persian women were observed after the collapse of the Sasanian Empire, and the beginning of the Islamic era.

Women in Contemporary Iran

The Persian women's statuses in contemporary Iran have been paradoxical since their roles and their participations in the society have largely been influenced and determined by the political and religious doctrines of any government or dynasty that has ruled the country so far. Women in contemporary Iran have never been the sheer followers of the anti-female rules. During different eras, they have defended their rights, and they were as influential as men in making the history of their country.

Contemporary Iranian women got the awareness to improve their conditions in the twentieth century. Before that, they mostly had restricted lives that were confined to childbearing, housekeeping, and some religious and social rituals. In tribes and villages, women had to burden heavy physical labor. In both cases, men were considered as breadwinners. Men had the right to take a second, third, and fourth wife and as many *Sighehs* (temporary wives) as they wished. Men could also divorce their wives whenever

they desired, and could take the custody of the children, too. During the last years of the twentieth century and due to the influence of the West, some Iranian intellectuals called for a constitution reform in the ruling system of the Qajar dynasty. These reformers asked for equality of all the Iranians, including the Iranian women. However, since women were banned from voting and becoming members of the parliament, several protests were lodged in support of women's demand of enjoying constitutional rights. The disputes continued between the clerics, who successfully suppressed women, and the liberal journalists and reformers, who published articles regarding the comparison of women's conditions in Iran and Europe (Esfandiari, 1997). The constitutional reformists' assumption for supporting women's education was based on the idea that educated women were better mothers. This perspective could elevate women to better statuses. They became more productive and useful laborers whose agentive roles in the society were influential (Etemad Moghadam, 2011).

As Esfandiari (1997) mentioned, despite all the oppositions, women in big cities like Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan established their own schools, and published their journals and magazines. Finally, in 1919 the first school for girls was founded by the government. Additionally, one teacher training college for women was established. Reza Shah, as a modernist and a secular ruler, continued the expansion of schools for girls. In 1936, when he opened Tehran University, the number of girls accepted was only twelve. He also founded a midwifery school to reduce the number of mothers and children's deaths that resulted from the deliveries done by untrained midwives. Reza Shah's boldest step was the abolition of veil in 1936.

In Iran veiling was the product of the urbanization and men's dominance rather than religious thoughts. As more Iranians became city dwellers, the rate of women working outside the house increased. Veiling was a sign of men's higher status. Through veiling women, they were customized as goods to be possessed. Such views about women were not prevalent in the preindustrial Iran. Before 1900 and the urbanization of Iran, half of the Iranians were nomadic. In such a context, women's roles were as crucial as men. They had to make important decisions while their men were away. Their traditional tribal clothes were colorful and had no element of veiling. Even among the peasants and farmers, women had to work on fields. As a result, wearing veils seemed to be incompatible with such activities (Axworthy, 2008).

Reza Shah considered veiling as a sign of backwardness. As a result, he ordered his army to enforce the new law by force when necessary. The abolition of veiling was a radical measure that had never been practiced by any other Islamic country. Even Atatürk, who was a secularist, did not tear away women's *Chadors* (complete veiling) in the public as Reza Shah did. Veiling was ultimately substituted by European dress code. Reza Shah's justification was that unveiling interfered with the integration of women in the workforce and the society. After the enforcement of the law, many women entered secretarial and clerical professions. They were also employed in civil services and factories. Moreover, coeducational primary schools were established and expanded rapidly; scouting became compulsory for both boys and girls, and girls could take part in sports, too. Newspapers started to advocate this new image of the Iranian women, and this image became acceptable and approved (Esfandiari, 1997).

As Esfandiari (1997) stated, although Reza Shah insisted on modernizing the image of Iranian women in the public, he was very cautious about the political and legal status of women. He was not in favor of enfranchising women. He let women enter universities, but they were separated from men. After the establishment of Tehran University, the government sent students to study abroad, but no female could get government scholarships during that time.

Since the constitutional revolution, none of the legal rules, except the Personal Status Law (marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws), was under the control of the religious court. They were instead modernized and transferred to the secular court (*Vezerat-e-Dadgostari*). The laws pertaining to gender inequalities and marriage, however, remained to be like the medieval Islamic rules. During Reza Khan dynasty, there were some minor modifications in the Personal Status Law in favor of women which later rose objections among the clerics (Etemad Moghadam, 2011). During the Reza Shah regime, polygamy was not banned, probably because the Shah himself took three wives. However, the marriage age was raised, and married men were required to tell their future wives that they had already been married. In addition, all temporary marriages were required to be registered, too. Women could also stipulate the right of divorce when they signed the marriage contracts (Esfandiari, 1997).

Mohammad Reza shah's monarchy (1941-1979) started with the formation of many political parties which had women branches. These politically active women seek more improvements in women status. Shah removed the ban on veiling, and women with chadors could come to the streets freely. The clerics who lost their power during Reza

Shah gained their political voice back. In 1963, during the referendum of Shah's reform program known as the *White Revolution*, women leaders set up voting stations and polled women. Despite their efforts, their votes were not counted. However, a month later Shah granted Iranian women the right to vote and become elected as parliament members. In 1965, Iran hosted the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women conference in Tehran. The conference focused on both the activities of women in general and the Iranian women, in particular. Following that conference, the most significant improvement in women's status took place in 1967: The enactment of the Family Protection Law (FPL). To insure its consistency with the Islamic laws, FPL was approved by the *marja*'s (source of emulation) (Esfandiari, 1997).

Based on the FPL and its future revision in 1975, women could get divorced for a specified number of reasons (addiction, insanity, long desertion, impotence). The marriage age first raised from thirteen to fifteen, and later in the revised form raised to eighteen. The man needed his first wife's permission to get married again, limiting men's polygynous marriages. In the first version of FPL, the decision of who should take the child custody was discerned by the court. Before the FPL, in case of a father's death, the child custody was given to the father's family. In the revised FPL, however, the child custody after the death of the father was granted to the child's mother and not to the dead father's family (Halper, 2005, Esfandiari, 1997).

Another breakthrough regarding women status in Iran during Pahlavi dynasty was the foundation of the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI). The organization was first established by Ashraf, Reza Shah's daughter. In Shah's regime, WOI launched an

educational program for women through fulfilling the rural women's needs such as family counseling and legal advice. Additionally, the centers provided women with literacy and vocational classes. Because of the WOI's efforts, the FPL was revised and the working mothers were granted a seven-month paid maternity leave as well as having the option to work part-time until the child becomes three years old. The factories and private sectors were required to be equipped with day-care centers. In general, by 1979 Iranian women could gain a wide variety of positions and jobs such as being ministers, ambassadors, judges, doctors, lawyers and engineers. They also served in military and could become traffic police officers. By the end of the Pahlavi regime, education was not exclusively for the rich. By that time, women made up 33 percent of all the students in higher education (Esfandiari, 1997).

Iranian Women and the Islamic Revolution

In the 1970s, Iran experienced rapid economic inflation which resulted in a vast migration to big cities. Such economic problems were mostly associated with Iran becoming westernized. Moreover, Iranians' religious and national identities were jeopardized as the society values changed. This first gave rise to a series of disagreements over obtaining more political freedom followed by religious demands of overthrowing the monarchy and establishing an Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. During the 1970s, Khomeini, who lived in exile in Paris, set the course of the revolution, and finally in 1979 he returned to Iran and overthrew Shah's monarchy. During the revolution, women from all social classes and statuses participated in the riots against Shah. During his speeches, the Islamic leader, Khomeini, stated that women's

rights would be protected within the framework of Islam. However, women's situation underwent drastic changes in the years following the new Islamic regime (Esfandiari, 1997).

Gender inequality was the basis of the new government. As Kian (2011) mentioned, *hijab* (veiling) was first compulsory for working women and later applied to all women. The FPL was flouted, and the divorce and custody laws allowed men to practice polygamy and take the custody of the child after getting divorce. The age of marriage for girls was lowered from eighteen to nine. Moreover, based on the new laws, women could no longer have judiciary occupations, but they could still vote and be members of the parliament.

Based on the ideologies of the new government, an ideal Muslim woman was a housewife and mother. This new image of woman was also publicized in schoolbooks and mass media. However, the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq led to an economic inflation, making women's labor necessary for the families' economic survival. Based on the new interpretation of the *Sharia* (religious rules), women were given the right to work, but they remained socially dependent on their husbands (Kian, 2011).

The role of Sharia in confining Iranian women's rights was very influential. As Kar (2007) mentioned, Sharia rules have always been applied in all aspects of Iranian lives. However, after the Islamic Revolution, these rules were interfering with all aspects of Iranian people's personal, social, and political lives. The Iranian government was after establishing a religious utopia in Iran. In so doing, a Guardian Council was formed to Islamize every aspect of people's lives, especially Iranian women.

Despite all the restrictions, Iranian women tried to restore the previous rights they acquired during the Pahlavi regime. Many letters were sent to the women members in the parliament, asking for the modifications of the antifeminist Islamic laws. Family laws went under revisions, and Special Courts were founded to handle family-related cases. However, the government continued the segregation of the sexes in universities and public places. In the 1990s, the government established a Woman Organization which consisted of various offices, each dealing with different women's issues. The president of Iran started to assign advisors for women's issues (Esfandiari, 1997). Although the feminine activists have tried to secure more rights for women in Iran, the inequalities and discriminations against women are still visible in most of the family, legal, and criminal laws in the Iranian Constitution. The reason is that most of these laws were enacted based on the extreme version of Sharia doctrines adopted by the current government of Iran after the Islamic Revolution. In this section, some of these laws which Kar (2007, pp. 5–7) listed are presented:

Family Law

- The age of maturity for a girl is nine lunar years and for boys is fifteen lunar years.¹
- The age of marriage for a girl to be thirteen lunar years and a boy fifteen lunar years, marriage before this age is contingent on the approval of their guardian (*vali*).²

¹ See, in general, Kamran Hashemi, "Religious Legal Traditions, Muslim States and the Convention on the Rights of the Child: An Essay on the Relevant UN Documentation," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 29, 1 (2007), pps 199-201.

- Boys older than fifteen years may freely choose their wives, whereas women older than eighteen can freely choose their spouses if they are virgins. The legality of their marriage is also contingent on the father's or the parental grandfather's approval.³
- The husband is designated the head of the household.⁴
- A woman cannot leave the country without her husband's approval.⁵
- A woman is legally obligated to be obedient to her husband.⁶
- A man may take more than one wife.⁷
- A man may prohibit his wife from employment.⁸
- A man has undisputed and unequivocal right to divorce.⁹
- In case of divorce, the legal custody of the child is with the mother up to age of seven and thereafter is determined by courts.¹⁰

² Article 1041, Iranian Civil Code, which was amended (reformed) in July 2002 by *Majma-I tashkhis-I Maslihat-I nizam*.

³ Article 1043, Iranian Civil Code.

⁴ Article 1105, Iranian Civil Code.

⁵ Immigration and Passport Regulations, ratified 1971.

⁶ Articles 1108 and 1114, Civil Code.

⁷ Article 942, Civil Code.

⁸ Article 1117, Civil Code.

⁹ Article 1133, Civil Code.

¹⁰ Article 1169, Civil Code, revised article 1382.

- The management and supervision of affairs of children below the age of eighteen is with the father or parental grandfather, and the mother has no legal say.¹¹
- A daughter's inheritance is only half that of a son.¹²
- Departure from the country of the children below the age of eighteen is possible only with the approval of the father. The mother has no legal say.¹³
- Should the father pass away, the guardianship of the children lies with the paternal grandfather, not with the mother.¹⁴
- Citizenship is that of father.¹⁵
- The portion of the wife from inheritance is very limited.¹⁶
- A Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman, and the children of such marriage are considered Muslim. But a non-Muslim man does not have the

¹¹ Article 1181, Civil Code.

¹² Article 907, Civil Code.

¹³ Immigration and Passport Regulations, ratified 1971.

¹⁴ Article 1181 and 1183, Civil Code.

¹⁵ Article 976, Civil Code.

¹⁶ Women will get only one-quarter of the furniture and liquid assets of the dead spouse if there are no children, and if there are children, it is reduced to one-eighth. This does not include land or property.

right to marry a Muslim woman unless he has converted to Islam before his marriage.¹⁷

Criminal Law

- In the case of a murder, the blood money of a Muslim woman is half that of a Muslim man. In this case if the family of the woman insists on *qesas* (retribution), then the family of the woman is obliged to pay half of the blood money to either the murderer or his family.¹⁸
- In most cases, the testimony of women is not sufficient in a court of law.¹⁹
- In some cases, the testimony of two women is the same as that of one man.²⁰
- In some cases, the blood money for a woman's lost limb is half that of a man.²¹
- Women are tried as adults after nine years of age, whereas men are tried as adults when they are fifteen.²²
- When a father or paternal grandfather murders their child or grandchild, the perpetrator does not face death penalty and may be asked to pay only blood

¹⁷ Article 1095, Civil Code.

¹⁸ Article 209, 213, and 300, Laws of Islamic Punishment.

¹⁹ Article 137, Laws of Islamic Punishment.

²⁰ Article 74 and 75, Laws of Islamic Punishment.

²¹ Article 301, Laws of Islamic Punishment.

²² Article 49, Laws of Islamic Punishment.

money, which may be waived by the courts altogether. But if the mother kills her children and is proven guilty, then she will be sentenced to death.

Not a Completely Bleak Picture

Although the violation of women's rights can be traced in almost all aspects of women's lives in Iran, Iranian women's lives are not in complete darkness. Kouhi Esfahani (2014) described how Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's first religious leader, advocated women's social and political participation. Ayatollah Khomeini's awareness of the kind of political assistance that women could render the Islamic regime became his motive to give women partial freedom. In this regard, as Kouhi Esfahani (2014), Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006), and Axworthy (2008) mentioned after the revolution, women's education was highly encouraged. Since veiling became compulsory, and gender segregation was applied in schools in Iran, traditional and religious families became positive towards the environment of schools as safe places for their daughters to study.

Many of the present women activists in Iran benefited from the educational opportunities that the regime offered to women. However, the apparent contradiction between Iranian women's high level of education and the gender discriminations that they face on daily basis led to the establishment of women's organizations and movements in the postrevolutionary era (Welodek-Biernat, 2010). As Mohammadi (2007) put, after the war between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988), women activists in Iran started fighting against the discriminatory laws which position Iranian women as second-tier citizens.

The changing interpretation of hijab is one example of the modifications made in the Islamic *Sharia* laws in Iran. The government policy towards women's veiling after

the revolution has turned out to become what Esfandiari (1997) referred to as *the battle of the hairlines*. As Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006) stated, during the Iran and Iraq war, a woman without full chador was decried. During the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, however, women's dress code eased. Despite the severe control of the dress code by the *moral police*, young Iranian women began to undermine the Islamic dress code by wearing shorter robes, colorful headdresses, and loose scarves around their necks and shoulders. New vocabulary for describing the women's Islamic dress code was coined. These words indicate the gradation which shows how proximate the women's clothes are to the ideal Islamic dress code. Based on this classification, chador is the *superior hejab*, showing a little hair is *loose veiling*, and a dress which violates the standards of the Islamic dress code is *bad veiling*.

New Form of Gender Inequality

Although young Iranian women enjoy freer intimate gender relations in comparison with the previous generation, they still suffer from gender inequality and masculine dominance. As Mouzzari and Sadeghi (2006) believed, "young women find themselves caught between the conventions of feminine sexual virtue and the youth discourse of sexual freedom" (p. 26). In many families, heterosexual socialization is still a taboo. In some families, boys can have social and sexual affairs while girls are more restricted. Girls are supposed to be dependent on boys, and therefore males have the control over the relationship. In such unequal situations, young girls make use of the charm of makeup and fashion to distinguish themselves from other girls in boys' eyes. "Without an organic feminist critique of male-centered social and sexual standards,

young women compete against each other, and criticize each other, in a vicious cycle that benefits men” (p. 27).

Today Iranian women, like other women everywhere, are socially more accepted in society. They are more educated and are aware of the authorities’ gender policies. However, they are not equal with men before the law. They are not rebellious of the unequal gender conventions, either. They only adopted the new behaviors without setting themselves free from the traditional inequalities. Not being satisfied with the patriarchal rules, young women do not show any modern feminist power. They are trapped in the new form of gender inequality in which they are held responsible for their own lack of power (Mouzzari & Sadeghi, 2006).

Despite all the improvements in Iranian women’ social and legal statuses, the gender inequality manifest itself in a new form. The young women are now exposed to public sexual harassments, gender inequalities at workplaces, and sexual double standards. Women are now expected to have equal responsibilities while the society is still in favor of male dominance over women. Consequently, Iranian women still need to fight for their rights in this unequal battle of sexes – the battle which many women avoid.

Chapter 5: The Flowers of Iran (the Women in Iran)

Biographies and Past Life Reflections

I was very frustrated because we were not what they were trying to make us, you know. Women had power. Women participated to change the system in the revolution of 1979. Women were the main citizens in that country that changed the system, the whole system by coming to the street, and you know, the strikes and things like that.... We had to have freedom, we had to be able to think for ourselves, we had to choose what we wanted to be, we had to have equality in the country. But that wasn't the case. We always treated so different, you know as a second citizen in that country. I mean we all women are really treated bad.

—Daffodil, a research participant

The women in contemporary Iran have gained various social, economic, political, and cultural positions in the society since the Pahlavi monarchy. However, their onward journeys towards achieving more gender equalities have not been without hardships and sociopolitical confrontations. Iranian women have so far achieved many breakthroughs in different fields and pushed the boundaries that have been set by the masculine-dominant society of Iran. Although not all Iranian women are involved in such rebellious acts against the inequalities of the patriarchal society of Iran, there are still women who dare to be the agents of change in both their private and social life domains.

As the literature on Iranian women's ancient and contemporary history indicates, since the Elamite Civilization (2200 B.C.) until the beginning of the Islamic era in Persia, no ancient civilizations, not even Egyptians and Greeks, transcended the level of

women's equality and rights as the one in Persia. Zoroastrianism was the manifestation of old Persia's gender equality in all aspects of life (Borbor, 2008). After the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651 A.D., women's roles, especially in politics were minimized. Until the 1900, although women were restricted, the nomadic or seminomadic structure of Persia required women to make decisions and lead their families when their husbands were away. With the emergence of urbanization and the presence of prostitutes in cities, women's confinement was interpreted as a sign of men's high status. Women's appearance in streets without veil brought shame on their husbands and fathers. Consequently, women were gradually excluded from social activities, and they became socially immobilized (Axworthy, 2008).

The first women's movements initiated during the Qajar dynasty during which women demanded equal rights in marriages and society. The Constitutional Revolution, with its emphasis on equality among all Iranians, paved the way for further women's achievements. It was during this time that the first school for girls was established. Being influenced by the westernization movement in the East, Reza Shah Pahlavi continued making Iran a modern society. In so doing, he mandated the abolition of hijab. During Pahlavi dynasty, women were provided with health centers; they could go to universities, and they gained more legal rights regarding child custody and getting divorced. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 dismantled many of Iranian women's legal rights. However, Iranian women did not retreat from their request for gender equality reforms. Since then, various women-founded organizations have tried to get back the rights that were taken away from them since the 1979 Revolution (Esfandiari, 1997).

All the women of the present study were born and grew up in the context of the contemporary Iran. As the interviews were conducted, it became apparent that most of these women suffered from gender discriminations against women either in their families or at social settings. In this chapter, these women's life stories and gender positions, and how they positioned themselves in relation to the gender ideologies in Iran will be discussed. How these participants' perceptions towards their lives in Iran affected their agency and gender identities will be elaborated as well.

The participants in this study were twelve Iranian immigrant women who were living in a small college town in Ohio at the time of the interviews. All of them were born and raised in Iran. The participants' native language is Persian (Farsi). They came from various regions and cities in Iran. Most of these women were graduate students pursuing their higher education in engineering, science, and the arts. Most had graduated from top-ranked State Universities in Iran. Therefore, these women belonged to the intellectual community of women who had more opportunities to be actively engaged in academic and social activities. Some of these female students were married and lived with their husbands who were also graduate students. Among these married women, four of the participants had children.

Among the participants, two of them were not students, and therefore had no access to the academic communities. They were F1 visa holders. Such visas are granted to those individuals whose husbands or parents can gain entry to the United States through getting job offers or academic admissions. Based on the United States

immigration laws, a person holding an F1 visa cannot legally work in the United States, nor open a personal bank account.

The Flower Metaphor

According to Weade and Emst (1990), metaphors are linguistic tools for expanding our visions about the experiences. To ensure confidentiality in the present study, the participants' real names were not used for reporting the findings. Instead, a name of a flower was assigned to each participant as the pseudonym. Choosing flowers for women's names in the study is metaphorical. Their femininity corresponds to the delicate nature of flowers. However, as Weade and Emst further mentioned, metaphors are selective in a sense that they only depict phenomena partially and do not represent all their characteristics. As a result, multiple metaphors are needed to capture the whole of the women participants' life experiences. The *primary subject* (women) and the *secondary subject* (flowers) as the two parts of the metaphor can only portray the partial resemblance between the term flowers and these women's actual lives, which were full of enjoyable or painful experiences, through the passage of time starting in Iran to their current positions in the United States and their perceptions about the future possibilities.

Having been aware of the limitations of using the flower metaphor, the following names were chosen and assigned to the female participants of the present study: Tulip, Rose, Sunflower, Jasmine, Orchid, Azalea, Camellia, Magnolia, Lavender, Violet, Lily, and Daffodil. Here are the biographical sketches of the flowers of Iran.

Tulip. Tulip was a 32-year-old single woman who was doing her PhD in Electrical Engineering. She came to the United States in 2012. Before coming to the

United States, she was living in Tehran with her parents and two brothers. Her older brother was married and lived in Tehran. Her younger brother was pursuing his PhD in the western United States.

I interviewed Tulip in her house. Her house was a cute studio apartment located near a river. The house was well-organized and neat. She made the best of the limited space and arranged the furniture so perfectly that the studio seemed cozy and comfortable. She greeted me warmly. Tulip and I met each other for the first time in 2013. She was a kind-hearted woman supporting her friends in hardships and pain. Her beautiful smile was something which nobody could miss. The simplicity of her appearance and clothing added to her positive image. We had the interviews over tea and some delicious homemade cake which Tulip baked herself.

As the only girl in the family, Tulip considered herself a pampered girl who was the center of her parents' attention. She grew up in a family with strong Islamic religious ties performing the Islamic rituals such as fasting and having hijab in the presence of *Namahram* (male strangers). She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Electrical Engineering from one of the top-ranked State universities in Tehran. Before coming to the United States, she had been working in a company that designed communication systems and signal processing. Tulip believed that being female in Iran was a hindrance to become independent. Although she was working and was financially independent, she could not live by herself. The traditional views towards women frowned upon girls' independency and desire to live alone. Additionally, Tulip was concerned

about her family and the society making misjudgments and false presuppositions about her desire to live separately from her parents:

I was thinking if I want to be independent and be in my own life, I cannot, I mean, the context of Iranian family is when you are a girl and you're not married you have to stay with your parents. Most girls are like this. And we're like some traditional religious family that, um, it was like something bad if you say I want to be independent and have my own home and be separated from you. There are two different contexts that they think. They think that you don't like them or they think that they are doing something bad that you want to be alone or something like this. Or some other people think that you are not a good kid or not a good girl that want to be separated with your parents.

As an engineer, Tulip believed in her capabilities. She knew she deserved more. However, her manager did not put the trust she deserved in her. Moreover, she had no hope in making any professional improvements in her career. Witnessing how her boss's company went bankrupt, she pictured herself as a future loser who like her boss could not survive without having any governmental connections or support. In her view, Iranian society expected women to be weak and needy. She decided to apply for PhD in the United States to see how women are treated in other parts of the world. She immigrated in hopes of experiencing a different life with more opportunities such as working and studying at the same time.

Violet. Violet was a 28-year-old married woman with a slim body structure. Her face reminded me of ancient Persian women with thick and black eyebrows attaching to

each other along the line of the nose. She preferred to meet me on campus. We had the interviews in one of the writing graduate laboratories in the department of linguistics. She was studying for a master's degree in linguistics at the time of the interview. Her husband was also a graduate student. Before coming to Ohio, they were in Colorado, and she got her first master's degree in English literature there. In Iran, her major was also English Literature. Violet's family was traditional and conservative. Thus, she did not have the freedom to make decisions about her life. She remembered as a teenager she used to avoid talking to men. She was a shy girl who even could not talk to her male cousins. To remove the limitation of her personal freedom, she tried to keep herself busy by studying. Later, she became interested in learning English and finally chose teaching English as her professional career. She used to work in an English language institute for many years before coming to the United States. Violet believed teaching English could help her boost her self-confidence when socializing with people.

Violet always had the desire to live abroad. However, due to the patriarchal structure of her family, she could not leave Iran alone. She finally got the opportunity by getting married to her former classmate who also intended to come to the United States:

So, now we love each other, but then I always think that why do people in Iran, like women in Iran don't have that freedom to be here just by themselves, and then always be dependent on a male person, you know.

Azalea. Azalea was a mother of two children. She was 38 years old and lived in the United States with her husband. She was a housewife, but her husband was a graduate student. She got married fifteen years ago when she was living in Iran. She had her first

child there. Despite being a full-time mother, she kindly agreed to participate in my study. She invited me to her house, and I could conduct my interviews during the two visits I had to her house. The best time for her to have the interviews was early afternoons since her baby usually slept around noon, giving her some time to do other household chores such as cooking and cleaning the house. We sat on the floor which was covered with a thick carpet and decorated with a beautiful Persian rug she brought with her from Iran. The delicious smell of Persian food boiling on the stove reminded me of home. Azalea was a good speaker. Although she was not a student and not exposed to the academic communities to have more speaking opportunities, she chose to speak English throughout the interview.

When they were in Iran, Azalea and her husband had good jobs, a nice house, and lots of facilities. It was her husband who first thought of immigrating to the United States. The fact that his sister could get an admission from one of the American universities and had the chance to work and study simultaneously motivated Azalea's husband to find a way to leave Iran. Another reason which made them decide to immigrate was the political, social and economic upheavals happening in Iran during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005 to 2013). During those years, many companies, including the company which Azalea's husband worked for, faced numerous financial difficulties and some of them had to go into liquidation. Despite all the reasons which were urging her to leave her homeland, Azalea was satisfied with her life in Iran. She was living close to her family. Moreover, she had a part-time job which she enjoyed very much.

Jasmine. Jasmine was a 33-year-old single female, studying interdisciplinary arts. She first came to the United States in 2012. Back in Iran, she studied painting at high school, and later pursued a degree in Sculpturing at Art University of Tehran. I informed her about my study via phone, and she accepted to participate in the three-phase interview. Since my house was a bit far from the campus, and it was hard for her to come to my house, she suggested to meet up in her office. Her office was located on the lower level floor of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department. The office was equipped with several computers and desks. The room was chilly and a bit dark. There were no windows opening to the outside world. The huge bookshelves on the opposite side made the room even darker and smaller.

When she was in Iran, Jasmine was very active in terms of gaining a variety of experiences in her field. For a time, she was a translator in one of the Persian arts magazines. Later, she worked as both an executive manager and an international affairs manager at some arts festivals such as Sculptor Symposium of Tehran. She was also a freelance interpreter for the international artists who used to come to visit Iran. In her last job before coming to the United States, she worked as an art gallery public manager for two years, during which she had some exhibitions of her own art works, too. She decided to come to the States mostly because the pioneer theoreticians in the field of arts were all American.

Jasmine was among the few arts students who survived the academic hardships and did not quit the program. She had to struggle to prove herself in both theoretical and practical fields of art. The art professors she took up courses with were biased towards

female students, not approving of their artistic abilities and talents. Consequently, most of Jasmine's female classmates quit the program. They either got married or chose other fields of study. Surviving in arts major was so hard for her that she finally got overwhelmed by all the gender inequalities she experienced and decided to leave Iran:

And also, as a sculptor I was not taken seriously, because there was this bias in Iran that if you are going to study sculpture, or do work as a sculptor you have to be a man, because it requires physical work. And so, our advisor, the head of our, our program -- I always remember that -- with the first day that we, we sat with the class he came in and the majority of the class were girls. We had only like four or five boys in the program. And he was like, "This is a sculpture program, what's wrong, why are you all girls?"

Apart from the academic environment, Jasmine was also unhappy with the social environment she was living in. Every day she was in fear of being caught by the morality police because of her improper hijab or the way she dressed:

Well, you know it's, it's, it's that system which polices everything. It's a system of policing ideas, policing appearances, everything. So, I was feeling very angry. I remember that I was angry all the time, because from the moment that I stepped outside of my home I faced the, um, what is it called; the, the, the, um, outfit police, or whatever that it is translated to. They, they, they stopped you and they asked you to reposition your scarf, or wear it properly, as they would say. Or you know, your uniform is too short. It's the color is too bold, it's just you have to do this, and that's; that was like a daily basis.

Rose. Rose was 28 years old. She was a PhD student in industrial engineering and came to the United States in 2013. When I asked her to be one of my research participants, she was busy with her final exams. As a result, we postponed the interviews to a later time. She accepted my invitation and came to my house for the interview. We discussed the interview questions over tea and cookies. During the interview, she tried to be informative by giving long and detailed answers to the interview questions.

Before immigrating to the United States, Rose was living with her parents and sister. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Tehran, Iran. Her parents were economically affluent; therefore, they could enjoy a happy and comfortable life. She was still a master student when she applied for PhD in the States. She did not have any job experiences before the immigration. For a while, she was teaching some courses as an internship.

Rose was partly satisfied with her position in Iran. To her, Iranian women lived in better conditions in comparison with the women in Saudi Arabia who were deprived of their basic rights such as driving and voting. However, she desired for more freedom and opportunities for Iranian women. Rose believed that in Iran there was discrimination against recruiting women applicants, and women could not enjoy having the same personal freedom as men.

Lavender. Lavender was a 26-year-old woman. Lavender's striking facial feature was her big and shiny green eyes making a perfect contrast with her thick and curly eyelashes. She always wore beautiful and colorful silk scarves she brought from Iran. At first glance, Lavender seemed to be happy, energetic, and carefree about her

surroundings. Contrary to my expectation, she was very serious during the interview. We had the interviews in my house. She preferred to speak Farsi since she thought she could not express her deepest emotions and thoughts in English.

Lavender and her family moved to Isfahan because of her father's job. She stayed there from elementary until the end of her undergraduate studies. For doing her master's degree, she moved to Tehran. Although she studied in the best engineering university in Iran, she was not satisfied with its academic quality and standards. Having gotten married she decided to immigrate to the United States with her husband.

Lavender mentioned that her husband was her main reason to immigrate to the United States since she was emotionally attached to her family. She was accepted at a PhD program when she got married. However, she was not happy with her professors, and the academic environment. They did not provide her with up-to-date equipment and facilities. Not foreseeing a bright academic future for herself in Iran, she agreed to move to the States with her husband.

Orchid. Orchid was a 24-year-old female. She was born in Tehran, Iran. She was the only child in her family. When I asked her to participate in my interviews, she preferred to meet in a coffee shop. Orchid was medium height and very athletic. The contrast between her white teeth and suntanned skin was the most distinguishable feature in her face. Her long black hair and thick brown eyebrows along with her suntanned skin make her look like Latinos.

Back in Iran, she enjoyed complete freedom in her family. She studied chemical engineering in Iran, and immediately after she graduated she moved to the United States

to pursue her master's degree. Despite her mother's disapproval, she decided to work and become independent to stand on her own feet:

And when I said that to my Mom she got so angry and pissed off, and she was like, "Well, you're looking for jobs, don't I give you enough money?" And like, she thought that she doesn't provide me enough money, so that's the reason I don't keep searching for a job. I was just like looking for something for doing, uh, for the summer, but anyway she made a big deal out of it, so I just stopped doing it then, get out of it.

As a female engineer in Iran, although Orchid was not hopeful about finding a career, she believed that gender inequality is not only limited to the Iranian society, and it is prevalent in other parts of the world. In her point of view nowhere is a utopia and even in the United States female engineers are promoted to some certain positions. Orchid's intentions to immigrate to the United States were gaining independence and finding a good job. She had always dreamed about living alone on an island so that she could prove to herself and her family that she could do anything she desired to.

Camellia. Camellia was a 31-year-old mother who lived in Ohio with her husband and three-year-old daughter. She was tall and had fair skin and short brown hair. When she came to my house to have the interviews, she brought her daughter, too. Her daughter was a cute girl speaking in half English and half Farsi. She was coloring an image in her coloring book while we were doing the interviews. We sat on my brown couch in the living room. It was a warm spring day, and the sun was shining through the windows.

Camellia did her elementary and middle school education in a private school which only registered diplomats and parliament representatives' children. There, she learned English and Arabic at a much higher level than what is normally taught at ordinary schools in Iran. However, she was not satisfied with her language improvement. Since her father was a diplomat, she and the other members of the family had to conform to the Islamic regulations that the governmental agents were required to follow. However, she rarely felt any pressures limiting her other personal choices.

When she was in the first grade of high school, she and her family moved to China. Since there were no Iranian schools there, she had to go to an American school. At first, she found it hard to adapt to the new environment and language. After two months, though, she succeeded in getting the entry to the new community. She received a diploma in English there and a year later, she and her family returned to Iran. Having been away from the educational requirements of Iranian schools, Camellia had to try hard to do well on the national university entrance exam. At university, she studied math for two years, but since she was not interested in her major, she decided to take the national exam again. This time, she chose the information technology as her major. Camellia had no official job position in Iran. She only worked as an English teacher for a while.

One year before her graduation, she got married and moved to Brazil. There, she had to learn Portuguese since the people in Brazil did not speak English. Before she could get a university admission in Brazil, her husband got a job offer from the United States and they relocated again. After four years of being in Brazil, she found it hard to speak English. As a result, when she came to the States, she attended remedial English classes

before taking part in the TOEFL test. She could finally get her master's admission. To Camellia, her knowledge of different languages (English, Portuguese, and Chinese) worked to her advantage to help her with career search in the United States.

Daffodil. Daffodil was 45 years old. She was married and had two children, a son and a daughter. She has been in the United States for almost 25 years. Before coming to Ohio, she was an accountant in a big textile company in Iran. She did not have any academic education in Iran. Instead, she took some accounting training classes for two years and then started working as an accountant. Later in Iran, she got married to her husband, who was a university professor and came to the United States.

Daffodil was the only female who witnessed the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Her firsthand experiences depicted the Iranian women's social and political statuses in those days. She explained how frustrated the situation was when all women's legal and social achievements in the previous regime were gradually taken away from them. She felt she was cheated, and thus she was looking for a way to leave Iran.

Lily. Lily was a 36-year-old woman who was married and had a newborn baby boy. She was a very calm and quiet lady who normally did not speak until she was asked questions. Her lightly tanned skin matched her straight long black hair and well-shaped black eyebrows. Her postures were mostly relaxed. When I asked her to be one of the participants, she told me that she did not feel comfortable with speaking English. Since her house was in the same building as mine, commuting and finding suitable times for the interviews were easy. She came to my house for the interviews since my interview could have disrupted her son's sleep.

Lily and her husband immigrated to the United States in 2012. Three years before coming to the United States she met her husband and got married. She has a B.A. in math and an M.A. in economics from Iran. Back in Iran, she and her husband were economically affluent. Both had good job positions. She worked as the vice president of a bank, and her husband was the financial manager of a company. She remembered how stressful their life was in Iran. They thought they deserved a better future for themselves and their children.

Sunflower. Sunflower was a 24-year-old woman with long curly hair and slim body structure. Her voice was velvety and hearty, and it matched perfectly with her sunny smile. Sunflower was studying mechanical engineering at the doctorate level. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Iran. When she was in Iran, she was outgoing and spent happy moments with her family and friends. She used to travel a lot with her friends, which in her idea was not common for many single women of her own age.

As a female in Iran, Sunflower was always the top student at school and university. However, she was not very successful in finding jobs in Iran. She remembered that for doing one of her university projects, she had to observe and work in a very famous automotive machine system company. To her surprise, she was not allowed to work there since all the staff were men and women were not allowed to enter the building. Her internship experience was also frustrating. The company she was working for was male-dominated, and as a result, she was marginalized and not taken seriously by her male colleagues. Due to her disappointment, she quit her job. During the interview,

Sunflower told that women in Iran are under various social and family pressures. Women in Iran cannot wear what they want to at work or in public places. They need either their fathers' or husbands' permissions to leave the country. If they get married, they may have limited job opportunities. However, sometimes, the opposite is true. They may not get a job because they are single. She further explained:

And also, I had a couple of friends who, uh, they were looking for a job and one of my friends who was married, uh, he -- she was looking for a job and she got a, uh, a reject from one of the companies and they said that since you are married we cannot accept you. And she said, "Why?" They said that because we want you to work late at nights. For example, uh, although the work time is; the working hour is eight o'clock, uh, eight a.m. to five p.m., but if we need you, for example at nine p.m. you cannot stay here because you are married. And there are other girls who they were single, and they don't -- they didn't let them work in some companies because they were not married. It's ridiculous. What does it have to do with marriage if I want to work somewhere.

Sunflower's intentions to immigrate to the United States were varied. For one reason, she wanted to have higher education and a good career. Having been rejected from the company she wanted to work with, she became more determined to leave Iran. Additionally, she heard her friends' stories of success outside Iran. All these reasons were strong enough to persuade her to start a new life far away from the borders of her home country.

Magnolia. Magnolia was a 30-year-old woman who was married and living with her husband. She intended to get an admission from the biomedical department. She got her bachelor's in computer engineering, and her master's in industrial engineering. She had a beautiful Roman nose, fleshy lips and light brown hair which seemed to be dyed frequently. Her slender body and fair skin added to her beauty.

She was an ambitious lady who wanted to reach all her goals in life, and she was ready to put efforts in achieving them. She eagerly accepted to take part in my study and was happy that her voice as an Iranian female would be heard. She was a brave lady, for she talked about how her participation in the riots against the current government led to her expulsion from the university ten years ago. However, the negative consequences were not limited to her expulsion. She was not given her master's degree and was unable to work or study in Iran anymore. As she narrated her story about how she was treated in Iran, she burst into tears describing her mixed feelings towards her home country as a place which she loved and hated at the same time:

It was very, uh, hard at first. You can't imagine. You have to leave all, all things that you have. You have to, um, leave your families, your friends, all your interests, (crying) but you don't have any choice because, um, at there you lose all your future. And you have to, um, you have to forget about your dreams and I didn't want it happened. Um, uh, I hope someday my country will be democratic country and people, um, people, um, can be really free to express their beliefs and political opinions.

Summary

In this chapter, the participants of the present study were introduced and their demographic information was given. They were twelve Iranian women who lived in the United States. Except two of the participants, the others were university students. One of these students was studying at an undergraduate level while the rest were graduate students. Their range of ages was between 24 to 45. In Table 1 a detailed description of the participants is presented.

Table 1

Summary of Demographic Characteristic

Participants	Age	Marital status	Children	Education	Work history
Tulip	32	Single	0	PhD student	Electrical engineer for 6 years
Rose	28	Single	0	PhD student	Private teaching
Sunflower	24	Single	0	PhD student	Internship
Jasmine	33	Single	0	PhD student	Translator, interpreter, art gallery manager
Orchid	24	Single	0	PhD student	Teaching English for a short time
Azalea	38	Married	2	Bachelor degree holder from Iran	Working in a company
Camellia	31	Married	1	Master student	No job experience
Magnolia	30	Married	0	Bachelor degree holder from Iran	No job experience
Lavender	26	Married	0	PhD student	No job experience
Violet	28	Married	0	Master student	English teacher
Lily	36	Married	1	Master student	Bank vice president
Daffodil	45	Married	2	Bachelor	Accountant

The participant women's biographies, and the family and/or social challenges they faced in Iran can depict how the society and these women's families shaped their gendered identities. Although most of these women had their families' support and approval for reaching higher academic and professional statuses, a few of these women had families in which the dominant patriarchal discourse could not penetrate. Along with the existence of the social antifeminine ideologies in the Iranian society, these women's personal choices were also restricted due to gender-biased family decisions. Although these women were constantly being pushed backwards by either their families or society, they did not stop imagining future possibilities. Their struggles to redefine their gender identities were inevitable in the slow but changing social context of Iran.

Chapter 6: The Flowers in the Wind

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to figure out how the Iranian female participants were positioned and positioned themselves in Iran's communities of practice, how their gender identity constructions and reconstructions impacted their second language learning, and in what ways their gender positions affected their agency and investment in second language learning. For analyzing the data obtained from the interviews from the twelve female participants, the poststructural feminism frameworks of community of practice in gender identity (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001), and investment in second language (Norton, 1995) were adopted.

Since within the poststructural frameworks of identity and language, identity cannot be defined without referring to one's historical and social contexts of living (Norton & Toohey, 2011), this chapter offers a detailed description of all the twelve participants' narratives regarding their gender positions back in Iran. The participants' life narratives could indicate how these women positioned themselves and were positioned in both private and social spheres of the Iranian communities. Regarding the first research question (How did the Iranian female immigrants' imagined communities and gender identities affect their investment in second language learning before coming to the United States?), their future desires and the ideal self-images they formed in their minds before coming to the States were described. Finally, the kind of investment they had in second language learning was explored in the light of the possible future statuses in the American communities of practice.

Azalea

Private sphere. Azalea's position back in Iran was in accordance with what Kian (2011) described as the accepted gender ideology for women in the contemporary society of Iran. Based on the ideologies of the new government, ideal Muslim women are those who adopt the roles of housewives and mothers. Azalea's compliance with these traditional feminine roles assigned by the patriarchal society of Iran reflected itself in her decision to sacrifice pursuing her career for the sake of her family:

I felt good there. I was okay with my position. Just I couldn't, you know, have higher education because of both, uh, it was just because of my, uh, life, my baby, my, you know, my marriage. I like to spend more time for family and then, uh, my job, you know. So, it was good. But I like to study, but I hadn't had this opportunity there.

Being a devoted wife, Azalea somehow surrendered to her husband's decision to immigrate to the States despite the strong emotional ties she established with her parents and siblings. She went on saying:

Honestly, it wasn't my decision (laughing). But, my husband didn't push me to come with him. But I never thought about that to get out of my country, and even get out of my city, and live, you know far from my family.

Social sphere. Talking about her social position in Iran, Azalea expressed her satisfaction with the part-time job she had. While she approved of the existence of several limitations imposed on Iranian women's public dress code and choice of careers, she

herself had no problem conforming to the rules and regulations in her country of residence:

Not one-hundred percent, but it was not bad, you know because of the religion in Iran women are limited, you know, but it was ok for me because I respected the law, and it was important for me to behave good and be a good citizen. And it was okay for me.

Azalea's words indicate her hidden efforts to match the ideal feminine image with the patriarchal Iranian society expects from the Iranian Muslim women. However, Azalea's husband was not controlling, and due to his agreement on her social participation she could gain access to the social communities outside home: "And it was ok okay with my husband. He always is agree with me to, you know, go and learn new things, and go outside with other people, with men, so and yeah, I was satisfied most days."

As Mouzzari and Sadeghi (2006) mentioned, in many Iranian families, heterosexual socialization is still a taboo. While in some Iranian families, boys can have free social affairs, girls are more restricted. Additionally, women are dependent on males, and males have control over the relationship. In Azalea's case, having an open-minded husband was a privilege for her. Being a conformist by her nature, she might not have been able to reach beyond the domestic masculine sovereignty if he had been conservative.

Lily

Private sphere. Unlike Azalea who sacrificed her quest for higher education for the sake of her family, Lily could enter the graduate school and had a prestigious job in

Iran. Even after she got married, she remained as socially active as she was before her marriage. She owed a huge amount of her success to her family and husband's support. She expressed her gratitude by saying:

All the people around me encouraged me to continue my education, and get a job to contribute in the society. These people had huge effects on me. My father, mother, sister, and then my husband. I got the job promotion after I got married.

Abiding by her husband's decision, she decided to start a better future outside the borders of her home country. They left the country although leaving her family behind was such a hard thing to do.

Social sphere. Unlike the constant support and motivation that she received from her family, Lily's social life experiences in the discourse of Iranian society were both positive and negative. Despite reaching a high position at a bank, her career experiences at workplace can imply the hidden masculine dominant attitudes existing in Iran. She narrated one of her life stories in which she was the victim of gender discrimination:

My job was at first temporary, and finally I could get the job after I struggled with the surrounding men after six months. One of these men was a PhD student and when he called somewhere he would introduce himself as Dr. (laughing). And the other man was studying for the PhD exam. He was promised to become the head of our unit as soon as he entered the bank. When the person who was his connection for getting a position at the bank recruited me as the vice president, they couldn't accept it and I had to fight for it for six months. The two men could not see me as the boss in a higher position than them. However, my boss

supported me. The community of my job consisted of different kinds of people.

There were some people against me, and there were some who supported me.

Lily's experience at work signifies the gap between Iranian women's educational achievements and the job opportunities which are offered to them. As Wlodek-Biernat (2010) stated, the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the compulsory hijab encouraged many traditional families to send their daughter to school and let them study and work with men. However, these female intellectuals are still suppressed by the discriminatory legal rights which do not conform to the Iranian women's social statuses of today's Iran. In Lily's case, her male colleagues could not accept Lily's superior capabilities due to the masculine supremacy in legal, social, and professional aspects of life in Iran. However, the recent improvements in Iranian women's job statuses have questioned the authoritative voice of the males in the country. Lily's colleagues were not tolerant of the change of power happening in the workforce of the bank. Not considering the qualifications that Lily held, the two males were only concerned about winning in the battle of genders.

Camellia

Private sphere. Being born in a religious family, Camellia used to conform to the restricting Islamic dress codes expected from Muslim women not only in social but also within the private domains of her family. She stated:

I remember when I was a child, my father told me to wear pants at home. So, I was always wearing pants and loose t-shirts. It seems that from childhood these kinds of thoughts forced us to wear those kinds of clothes.

Camellia believed that her present resistance to a more relaxed dress code in the States rooted in the religious teachings she received in Iran prohibiting her from exposing her naked body parts to Namahrams.

In addition to the dress code restrictions imposed on Camellia by her family, her independence was also influenced by her gender. Having obtained her high school diploma, Camellia could not continue her education in China. Her family decided to return to Iran, and they disagreed with Camellia staying on her own in a foreign country. To Camellia, being independent from her family was not achievable due to gender-related restrictions on girls in Iran.

Social sphere. Due to her father's social status as a diplomat, Camellia was expected to wear Chador (a large piece of cloth covering the whole body leaving only the face exposed) when participating in her father's colleagues' social gatherings. According to Esfandiari (1997), based on the Islamic rules of veiling, chador is considered as the *superior hijab*. Wearing Chador is then a symbolic way to show a female's agreement with the Islamic values and the political orientations of the Iranian government. Appearing in those gatherings with extreme veiling was then a way for Lily's family to indicate that their political identity matched the accepted religious ties of the Iranian government:

But when we participated in special parties or meetings held by my father's colleagues, my father used to ask me to hide my hair, and wear longer clothes. He used to ask me to wear Chador when we wanted to go to his oil company club. He always persuaded me to wear Chador by making jokes like if you wear Chador,

you can eat chicken kebab there. In order to accompany my father in these meetings held once a week, I agreed with wearing chador. However, in other places I was never told to wear Chador.

Although Camellia's family was open-minded and supportive of her academic goals, the political orientations of her father forced him to impose more restrictive dress codes on his daughter. Camellia's father's double standard view about veiling indicates that veiling is more a political tool for showing the conformity with the present regime of Iran rather than a religious preference.

Daffodil

Private sphere. Seeking independence, Daffodil decided to take up accounting courses after getting her high school diploma. Later, she could find an accounting position in a textile company. Her goals were to become independent and leave Iran. However, due to the discriminatory law of the Immigration and Passport Regulation which does not allow the girls under eighteen to leave the country without their father's permission (Kar, 2007), she could not manage to leave the country. She expressed her disappointment by saying:

When I was still a student in high school, I was thinking...gosh, I really wanted to leave someday, because women at that time couldn't leave the country unless they got married, and it was expensive, too. You should have some situation for being able to leave the country. So, I just forgot about it.

Later Daffodil met her husband, who had already moved to the United States. He asked her to marry him. Daffodil's dream of leaving Iran was finally fulfilled. She and her husband got married in Iran, and shortly afterwards moved to the United States.

Social sphere. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was a turning point in Daffodil's life. She witnessed how the new regime segregated men from women, and how women lost their voices due to the antifeminist rules of the Islamic regime of Iran:

Well, you know, at that time women don't have that much voice. I mean, at least at that time. For me, I felt like, we don't have any freedom, we don't have any voice in society, and there was a big gap between women and men. I mean you know, inequality in a way.

Daffodil further described how women were marginalized, and their social participations were frowned upon in the Islamic regime by saying:

Women always, uh, you know, were the first citizen in that country who put so much pressure and rules, and laws like covering yourself. Or even I remember at that time there was a flag issued from government that women should stay home and take care of the family. And it's supposed to be like that in Islamic country.

And there was a big gender inequality in that society.

Daffodil's experience is in line with Kian (2011) and Kar's (2007) accounts of how taking the roles of a mother and wife was introduced as the ideal image of a Muslim woman in social media and schoolbooks after the revolution. However, the regime did not indicate its antifemale policy at the time of the revolution. Daffodil explained how the regime took advantage of Iranian women's participation in the revolutionary

demonstrations for its own political benefits. In her idea, Iranian women were cheated by the regime since the regime did not fulfill any of the promises it made regarding the extension of women rights:

We were not what they were trying to make us, you know. Women had power. Women participate to change the system in the revolution of 1979. Women were the main citizens in that country that changed the system, the whole system by coming to the streets, and you know the strikes and things like that.... We wanted to have power, we had to have freedom, we had to be able to think for ourselves, we had to choose what we wanted to be...but that wasn't the case.... we were treated so much differently, as a second citizen in that country.

As Kar (2007) and Esfandiari (1997) mentioned, many women who participated in antimonarchy demonstrations were traditional and religious women whose roles were confined to nurturing and motherhood. However, after the success of the regime, every personal and social right of women was regulated according to the Sharia. Women, like Daffodil, were beaten and imprisoned for not having proper veiling.

Iranian's regime interference with Iranian citizens' lives even affected women's most private and personal decisions about their appearance and way of dressing. Through narrating her experience of being imprisoned because of putting on some makeup, Daffodil expressed her sheer frustration and disappointment with the hope of gaining any voice in the new society of Iran:

And, it was frustrating. It was frustrating, you know. Um, I remember even one time I was arrested in the street on the way going to work in the morning, because

I had makeup, little makeup on. I wear little makeup and they arrested me for the whole day, and took me to jail, you know, kept me there just because I had makeup on. So, it was frustrating. Uh, the situation was so different, you know, um, struggling in a way.

Daffodil's encounter with the Revolutionary Guards on the streets is a vivid example of the dominance of the rules of Sharia set by the Islamic regime of Iran. As Kar (2007) mentioned, these Revolutionary Guards often use violent ways to enforce the rules concerning women's compulsory veiling. The result is women's deprivation of their social and personal freedom in Iran.

Lavender

Private sphere. Like Camellia, Lavender was also raised in a religious family. However, she did not have any gender-related restrictions in her private life. Her father was a motivation for her success in her academic life, boosting her self-confidence through his constant support and admiration:

I don't have a brother. So, my father raised us no different than a boy. He always reminded us that at work and school we shouldn't behave in such a way that other people think we are female. So, to me being a woman or a man was not significant. I learned that I first should consider myself as a human being.

Social sphere. Entering the university (the first place that Iranian boys and girls receive coeducation), Lavender was troubled by the rigid lines of social classifications of women that males made based on women's appearance. She chose Chador as her veiling.

However, wearing colorful scarves and clothes underneath the Chador was uncommon and that caused Lavender face problems:

I wore scarf in Iran, something which is not accepted at universities in Iran. But because I wore chador, they didn't pick on me. Seeing that a woman is wearing colorful and chic clothes with complete hijab was unbelievable for the Iranian men. They always had this question that to which political party I belong to. In Iran, there is a line that makes people only see things as 0 or 1. If you want to be a sociable person and have fun, you shouldn't be religious and vice versa.

Lavender was approached and offended by some males at the university since she was friendly and wearing Chador, making her a paradoxical conundrum in men's eyes. As a result, she retreated into her solitude for some time and avoided any kind of interaction with the opposite sex. Lavender's experience in the social setting of the university might have stemmed from the paradox inherent in the Islamic ideology of the regime. While women were given the rights to educate and work, the whole system was repressive of women's demands for further equal rights (Kar, 2007). In such a repressive regime, any forms of neo-religious ideas such as Lavender's dress code and social behavior are new and unacceptable to the public. Lavender's chador was interpreted as her acceptance of the traditionally accepted religious norms. However, her socialization with the opposite sex was in sharp contrast with her chosen dress code. Moreover, since Iran is not a secular country, any religious act can imply political messages. Lavender's Chador worn

with the colorful scarves confused people's minds since such modern versions of Islamic behaviors had not been defined in the social context of Iran.

Magnolia

Private sphere. Magnolia's private life was free from any gender-related tensions. She was born and raised in a family which imposed no kind of religious restrictions on her. she could socialize with boys freely. Additionally, her family constantly supported her choice of academic and professional careers. When she got married, her husband was also very supportive of her and her future dreams and goals.

Social sphere. Despite her satisfaction with her personal life, Magnolia was highly pessimistic about her future in Iran. Like Daffodil, she expressed how women's rights were violated in the everyday context of the Iranian society:

Women don't have the rights that men have. For example, women cannot be a top manager, or be a president. If you work as an employee, your wage is less than a man.... The ideology about women is that they should stay home and take care of house, raise kid, and should be part of the family.

Like what many Iranian women activists (Kar, 2007; Esfandiari, 1997; Kian, 2011, Moruzzi & Sadeghi, 2006) mentioned regarding the unchangeable nature of the Islamic laws of Sharia in dealing with the women's new demands and request, Magnolia's hopes for seeing improvements in women's rights were shattered due to the traditional and antihuman definition of women's role in Iran:

Thousand years ago, which women was responsible for raising children, and obeying their husband. But now as women started to participate in society and to

study in higher degrees, everything has changed. They think that a good girl or a good woman is a good mother and good daughter, or a good wife. They don't believe that a good woman should be a good human and should have a good personality.

Not being satisfied with the political atmosphere of the society and the restrictions imposed on the Iranian women, Magnolia decided to find a way to let her voice be heard. Magnolia's decision to take part in antigovernmental riots in 2009 gave her the opportunity to be part of the crowd who protested in the streets to make their voices of opposition be heard. The movement was suppressed by the government, and Magnolia had to burden the negative consequences of participating in this opposition;

I didn't have any hope to improve my life, to achieve my goals and wishes. I was getting depressed. For me living in that situation was like a prison. I was not allowed to express my ideas and beliefs. It was so important for a person like me, who appreciates freedom, to be free...About several years ago, there was a riot in Iran, and I was part of it. Most of wanted freedom for our country, wanted to release the political prisoners. Because of this, I was rejected from the university. they didn't give me my degree. And without degree, I had no chance to find work, to continue my education. I would do it again because it's part of my beliefs.

It's in my blood.

Being marginalized in her own country, she and her husband decided to immigrate to the States. As she was expressing the hardships of leaving everything behind, she burst into tears. It was for Magnolia to leave her family and loved ones behind and start a new life

all over again in a far land. Her tears were the proof of her hidden emotions for her family and her homeland.

Violet

Private sphere. Violet's desire was to become independent from her family and get her PhD from the United States. However, due to the conservative structure of her family, she was not allowed to leave the country unless she got married:

The idea of immigrating to another country and then all by yourself being alone was kind of not accepted in my family. I saw the opportunity kind of far away; I didn't see it close to me...I thought with myself, so why do I have to, um, find a man who is willing to go to the United States and then be able to go to the United States with him. So, that was kind of a challenge I faced.

She finally met a man who was willing to leave Iran, and they both came to the United States. Violet questioned her lack of freedom in her family to make decisions about her future; however, she did not have an agentive role to instigate a change in her family's traditional perception of femininity. Finally, Violet achieved her goal by seeking a man who desired to study in the United States. Even though her ambition was not assertive within the accepted customs, she gained her goal by usurping the system to seek a mate who held her same vision.

Social sphere. By making an analogy between her family structure and the society of Iran, Violet stated that most Iranian women live in conservative social context and are positioned as secondary citizens:

So, I think that we are living in a kind of conservative community that looked at women in general as some people who are always positioned secondary in comparison to men. So, I think that showed itself in many different aspects, like finding jobs, and even in terms of how you should appear and how you should talk.

Tulip

Private sphere. Coming from a traditional and religious family, it was hard for Tulip to discuss about her desire to be independent with her family. She was worried about both her parents and other people's misjudgments about her decision:

There are two different contexts that they, they think that you don't like them or you; they think that they are doing something bad that you want to be alone or something like this. Or some other people think that you are not a good kid or not a good girl that want to be separated with your parents.

Tulip's fear about being labeled a *bad girl* by other people, and her worries for not hurting her parents' feelings made her stay in her parents' house despite her inclination towards living by herself. As she further mentioned, many of the Iranian families still frown upon letting their daughters live by themselves.

Social sphere. During the six years Tulip worked for a communication and system company, her qualifications and talents were mostly ignored by her manager. She expressed her dissatisfaction with all the gender discriminatory acts she witnessed at her workplace by saying:

As a girl, you sometimes feel that you cannot use the best of your qualifications. For example, again at work, I was working there like six years and I have some coworkers, some colleagues, men colleagues that were working less than me, like two or three years. Their salary was higher and I know that their knowledge was not better than me.

What is significant about Tulip's case is her determination and agency for changing the status quo of her workplace community. She took actions to prove to her male colleagues (and maybe herself) that she was not physically and intellectually lower than them:

You felt the discrimination between boys and girls. I was trying to avoid this. Let me give you an example. To move some stuff from places, I would always volunteer to do the work because I didn't want to show that I am weak. I went to self-defense classes to improve my ability to be stronger. Because I think, if men think that you're weak they look at you in a different way.

She thought that gaining more physical strength can help women not appear weak and vulnerable in men's eyes. She believed that Iranian women face gender inequalities due to both the governmental discriminations and their own lack of agency and sense of responsibility:

I believe that my country wants weak, spoiled girls. They somehow prevent girls to continue some field and they are doing this to make them weak.... I'm thinking that sometimes this is woman's fault. Sometimes they want to be weak because sometimes it's easy. Being weak is easy. I can show my weakness, and people do

my work. I don't like it. I'm completely against it because if you want equality you have to be as strong as them.

Orchid

Private sphere. Becoming independent from her family had always been part of Orchid's dreamlife. She imagined herself as a jungle girl living far away from her family and relatives. To her, independence was significantly important since she viewed it as a source of personal strength:

When I grew up I was like I need to immigrate to some country with no family or relative around. And if I can do that, then I can prove to myself that I'm strong, and after that I can do anything.

Social sphere. Orchid's experiences with gender inequalities in Iran's society were mainly at the university. she faced lots of problems because of the way she used to dress. She remembered that even once she was not allowed to take a test since she was wearing a uniform which was considered inappropriate based on the university dress code. She was frustrated even more when she was sexually approached by her own professor. While being shy to talk about her experience, she said in an angry voice:

And in the meeting held because of my inappropriate clothing, he said that "uh, she's a good student. She is always working hard, I know her. She's been in my classes for so long. I know she doesn't dress something that it's not like her".

Later, he told me: "I stood up for you, but you need to be more careful". And after that he said something that made me uncomfortable, you know what I am saying?

Being the victim of males' sexual harassments and having been confined to the Islamic regulations were not Orchid's only concerns. She thought that Iran's society is biased against women's employment, too. As an engineer, she believed that she could have less job opportunities than her male counterparts. In general, she did not predict a bright future for her career and life in Iran, and that became her motive to immigrate to the States.

Jasmine

Private sphere. When she was in Iran, Jasmine was totally against getting married in a traditional way (girls and boys and their families meet each other first, and then they decide to get married if the girl and boy like each other and both families' conditions and requests are met). Despite her family's disagreement, she decided to move in with her boyfriend. Her bold action resulted in her exclusion from the family for some time:

Um, and then shortly I moved in with a boyfriend, which was a radical thing for my family, for everybody in society, and as a result, um, I was isolated from my family and they didn't get in touch with me for a while. I guess for a year.

Jasmine's rebellious act depicts her agency to make her voice be heard. However, her agency conflicted with the dominant gender ideologies which the Iranian society imposes on Iranian families. Living with a boy without getting married is disgraceful for Iranian girls. Most Iranian families' reactions to the girls who want to live with their boyfriends are harsh. Similarly, Jasmine's family marginalized her for moving against the streamline gender discourse.

Social sphere. Social life was a constant struggle for Jasmine. As a girl, she had to prove her academic capabilities to her professors who did not take their female students seriously:

Well, I guess I was struggling in that regard because they didn't take me seriously, especially when you're working in a theoretical field; they don't take you seriously. And, as a sculptor I was not taken seriously, because there was this bias in Iran that if you are going to study sculpture, or do work as a sculpture, you must be a man, because it requires physical work.

Her predicaments in society were not only confined to the academic environment. On streets, she was stopped many times by the Morality Police because of her improper hijab. she found her personal territory and freedom being constantly invaded by the social restrictions against women. She talked about the feelings of anger and frustration which came over her as she became the victim of such humiliating acts:

I was angry all the time, because from the moment that I stepped outside of my home I faced the, um, what is it called, the outfit police, or whatever that it is translated to. They stopped you and they asked you to reposition your scarf, or wear it properly, as they would say. Or you know, your uniform is too short, or the color is too bold. That was like a daily basis. I had to think about which route I was going to take to my work, so that I avoid police.

Being a woman in Iran equals tolerating constant antiwoman policies in social settings.

The beauty of women is considered as a threat to men's purity. As a result, the way

women appear in public is controlled by the current regime. Any deviations from the veiling rules may result in severe punishments for the Iranian women.

Sunflower

Private sphere. As a girl looking for independence from her family, Sunflower was tired with being known not by her talents and capabilities, but by her family status. The kind of independence she was looking for was not just of financial nature. She was seeking her independence through gaining an independent identity, separate from her family. Regarding her desire to establish an independent identity, she said:

I always felt like I am all dependent on my family, and defined as a part of my family, not an independent person. Everyone was looking for, for example, uh, my address in the city, which I am in the rich part of city or in the poor part of city, or my father's job, or something like that, that they wanted to, uh, you know they wanted to see which family I'm coming from. They didn't care about me and my abilities.

Social sphere. Along with the everyday restrictions she faced in terms of dressing, Sunflower's experiences with the gender discriminations in the context of Iran became more irritating to her when she started looking for jobs. As a female engineer, she was not welcomed in the community of professionals in her field:

My first inspiration to come to the United States was the time that I said that I wanted to work with the company and they didn't accept me because I was a woman.... They did not let my ability to grow.

She was so afraid of ending up getting married and letting go of her career goals and aims that she became more decisive in immigrating to the State through applying for PhD.

Rose

Private sphere. Rose's family had always been supportive of her and her sister. Their father never restricted their social and personal freedom since they were little girls. Being a female was never a hindrance to her family's approval of her life decisions, either:

He never put pressure on us because of our sexuality. For example, I remember when I was a child, my father bought a little motorcycle for us. And nobody in the street, like boys, had such a thing. It was so interesting and even the boys were jealous of us. And you know, riding motorcycle is kind of boy thing rather than girly kind of thing. But I really enjoyed it. Our parents were always supportive and when I said to my dad I decide to immigrate, he was like: "I am going to support you financially, emotionally, and everything."

Despite all the freedom she enjoyed, Rose's quest for independence and freedom was the motivation to challenge herself by immigrating to the U.S. on her own.

Social sphere. Contrary to Rose's favorable gender position in her family, she was not fully satisfied with her social status in the society of Iran. She sought more social freedom and equity for women. She thought being a female by default implies bearing certain restrictions and difficulties:

No matter how intelligent I was or how perfect in terms of, you know, beauty, like for example a model or supermodel...it doesn't matter. You are still a girl. You

will be teased in the streets. And people allow themselves to come and say how you should look, how you should treat, how you should behave in the society.

As Rose mentioned, in Iran recruiting male employees is mostly preferred to women. Even if the women are more qualified and experienced, the employers avoid hiring them.

Rose also mentioned that the exciting religious gender biases in Iran restrict Iranian women's most personal decisions such as having intimate and sexual activities:

So, I have this kind of, oh, and other thing I want to mention is that, um, sexual activity is not the decision of a girl in our country. Mostly religious and government dictate how I should have active sexual activity. For example, it's from my point of view, it is completely personal. Nobody can dare to talk about these things. Besides that, there is culture problem. For example, a girl in our country should get married and lose her virginity otherwise it is not accepted. You can't move in with your boyfriend. You can have boyfriend and people mostly have boyfriends but they just secretly go out.

Rose's reference to women's intimate experiences in Iran indicates what Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006) referred to as the emergence of the sexual double standard. They believed that sexuality is still a masculine concept in Iranian society in which "young women find themselves caught between the conventions of feminine sexual virtue and the youth discourse of sexual freedom" (p. 26).

Participants' Gender Identities in Iran through a Feminist Lens

Having lived in Iran, the participants of the present study experienced a range of gender inequalities and discriminations in both their private and social lives. After coding

and analyzing the interview data, the emerged themes regarding the single female participants' positions in their private lives were different from the those of the married women. As a result, the findings of the single and married women' gender positions in the private spheres in Iran are shown separately.

The single women's private spheres.

Independence from home. Having been asked about their gender positions in Iran, the five single female participants (Tulip, Orchid, Jasmine, Sunflower, and Rose) first drew on how they were viewed as women in their families. The most striking theme obtained from data was the participants' urge for becoming independent from their families. Although they were highly appreciative of the support they received from their parents, they sought to break the established Iranian family norms which frown upon the separation of girls from their families unless they get married.

Living in a religious family, Tulip could not imagine herself telling her parents about her intentions for living in a separate house since she was worried about her parents and other people's misjudgments. In the same vein, Rose and Orchid sought independence from their families so that they could challenge themselves and prove that they were strong enough to handle life problems. Sunflower's wish to stand on her own feet was to distinguish her voice and identity from her family. To Sunflower, being independent from her family was more than a change in where she resided. To her, independence was defined as being known and appreciated for who she was and not for her family's social status.

The single participants' private experiences can verify the existence of the dominant Iranian family structure. As Moghissi (1991) and Moruzzi and Sadeghi (2006) mentioned, because of males' control over women's lives among most Iranian families, Iranian women became subordinated. Iranian women are economically dependent on males, and their social behaviors are scrutinized so that they do not deviate from the Islamic values "which portrayed sexual purity, obedience, and self-denial as ideal feminine virtues" (Moghissi, 1991, p.210). Due to the patriarchal structure of the Iranian families, the single participants of the study could not attain their financial and social independence. Although the girl participants held university degrees, the scarcity of good job positions for women, and their families' adherence to the accepted gender values for women made them remain dependent on their families. Among the single participants, however, only Jasmine was an agent of change. She violated the norms and pushed back against unfair gender values in her family.

Jasmine, an extreme case. Among all the unmarried participants, Jasmine was the only one who took actions against the accepted gender roles in her family. She disliked the idea of arranged marriages which her family imposed on her. Having a boyfriend and moving in with him are still frowned upon in Iranian culture. However, she was not a conformist. Despite her family's disapproval, Jasmine decided to leave her family and live with her boyfriend:

Um, and then shortly I moved in with a boyfriend, which was a radical thing for my family, for everybody in society, and as a result, um, I was isolated from my family and they didn't get in touch with me for a while. I guess for a year.

Jasmine faced the consequence of her decision. Although she was marginalized by her family, she was satisfied since she could make her rebellious voice heard. She stood against the restrictions confining her personal choice of living with the opposite sex without getting married: “I eventually broke up with that boyfriend, but I just wanted to prove that I would live the way that I thought was the right way of living, and that involved moving in with someone without getting married.”

In this research, the overwhelming majority of the single female participants' positions in their families were mainly defined by the social norms of Iran's society. Although their families were supportive, they either did not want or could not deviate from the established gender roles for women. As Moghissi (1991) mentioned the social relations in Iran still define the character of Iranian woman as the subordinate and the Iranian man as the controller. These relations are based on “women's lack of economic resource and independence and the centrality of the Islamic values in Iranian culture- which portrayed sexual purity, obedience, and self-denial as ideal feminine virtues” (p. 210). As in Jasmine's case, any acts of agency against such inequitable norms could result in female's isolation and marginalization in private life spheres. Except Jasmine, the other single women in this study did not take any initiatives against the inequitable gender values while they were living in Iran. Not being able to resist such gender inequalities, these women's agency manifested itself in their decision and attempts to leave Iran to start off hard but more promising journeys to brighter futures.

The married women's private domains.

Marriage as the realization of dreams. Like the single female participants' desire to become independent individuals, three of the married women (Violet, Camellia, and Daffodil) expressed their longing for either leaving Iran, or leaving separate from their families before they got married. However, due to the religious or conservative structure of their families, they could not live the way they wished for inside Iran. Violet's attempts of becoming separate from her family and immigrating to another country were in vain since she had a conservative family. They did not approve of her leaving Iran by herself. She expressed her disappointment about her status by saying:

I saw the opportunity kind of far away; I didn't see it close to me...I thought with myself, so why do I have to, um, find a man who is willing to go to the United States and then be able to go to the United States with him. So, that was kind of a challenge I faced.

She finally could meet a man who was willing to leave Iran, and they both came to the United States. Violet questioned her lack of freedom in her family to make decisions about her future; however, she did not have an agentive role to instigate a change in her family's perception of gender roles. Violet achieved her goal by seeking a man who desired to study in the United States as well. Even though her ambition was not assertive within the accepted customs, she gained her goal by usurping the system to seek a mate who held her same vision.

Likewise, since Camellia came from a religious family, her father did not allow her to stay in China alone. Despite her insistence on staying in China and continuing her

education there, she was forced to return to Iran with her family: “I had never been stopped from doing something I liked because I was a woman. However, when I was seventeen, I wanted to stay in China but I couldn’t. My father told me if I wanted to stay, I should get married.” Although Camellia did not mention that she got married for the sake of leaving Iran, she immigrated to Brazil and then the United States only after her marriage.

Daffodil’s obstacle to become independent before and after the Islamic revolution was different in multiple ways. To stand on her own feet, Daffodil started working as an accountant in a company after she got her high school diploma. However, when the Islamic revolution broke out in 1979, she found the social environment unbearable and frustrating. Consequently, she was looking for a way to leave the country as soon as possible. Based on the new family bill passed after the revolution, women were banned to leave the country unless they were married. However, meeting her husband, who had already been in the States, was a good opportunity for her.

Subordination or satisfaction? Lavender, Lily, and Azalea expressed their satisfaction with both their families and husbands’ constant support and encouragement. Despite the strong emotional bonds between these women and their families, Azalea, Lavender, and Lily followed their husbands’ leads in terms of making decisions about immigrating to the United States. They expressed their deep sorrows for being detached from their immediate families, mentioning their husbands as the primary motivation to immigrate. As Article 1105, Iranian Civil Code (Kar, 2007) states, husbands are considered as the heads and decision-makers in their households. Additionally, Kian-

Thiebaut (2005) mentioned that the Islamic activists in Iran look askance at women's independence, autonomy, and individuality. The sacred and harmonious marriage is the one which is based on male domination in the family. Such definitions of gender roles in the family can take the initiatives away from the married women in Iran. Consequently, women in Iran may lose their decision-making power and function as their husbands' loyal followers and companions.

In Magnolia's case, however, the idea of coming to the States was not necessarily initiated by her husband. Having been a social activist and involved in the political movements against the regime, she could not put up with the discriminatory laws against women anymore. Due to all the social limitations which banned her from having a voice, she and her husband decided to leave Iran.

The Iranian Women' Social Struggles

The family community was not the only place in which the gender roles and identities of these women were formed. The social, educational, and work settings in Iran also had influential effects on how these women were positioned, and what kind of gender identity perceptions they developed about themselves. In the following section, the female participants' social positions will be discussed under the emergent themes.

Policing society. The most apparent theme present in most of the participants' interviews was the abolishment of their most basic right to dress as they liked. The compulsory hijab which has been enforced after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 has constrained many Iranian women's personal freedom. Daffodil, who was a young girl at

the time of the Revolution, remembered that any violations from the dress code law resulted in severe punishments such as imprisonment:

And, it was frustrating. It was frustrating, you know. Um, I remember even one time I arrested in the street on the way going to work in the morning, because I had makeup, little makeup on. I wear little makeup and they arrested me for the whole day, and took me to jail, you know, kept me there just because I had makeup on. So, it was frustrating. Uh, the situation was so different, you know, um, struggling in a way.

Even after thirty-seven years from the Revolution, the Morality Police stops women who have improper hijab on streets. During the interview with Orchid, she explained how she was treated so badly in the university because of her uniform:

Some days I had exams, and like my other uniforms were all dirty, and I had like one that wasn't as long as they wanted, and they would make a deal out of it before my exam, and I would get stressed, and it was really annoying to me.

Similarly, Rose, Sunflower, and Jasmine suffered from not having the freedom to wear the types of clothes they wanted. The constant fear of confronting the Morality Police made Jasmine feel angry all the time. She was stopped and asked to reposition her scarf, or clean her lipstick and wear proper clothes: "That was like a daily basis, and I have to think about which route I was going to take to my work, so that I avoid the police. So, that was like a daily part of my life."

Conforming to the mandatory hijab was not a hindrance to those female participants who developed Islamic minds. Tulip was the only single female who did not

mention the mandatory hijab as a barrier to her self-expression. She came from a religious family, and the proper dress code in Iran harmonized with her religious beliefs. Lavender also grew up in a religious family. Although she was wearing Chador at university, the colorful clothes she used to wear under Chador was interpreted as the demonstration of a double standard:

And seeing that a woman is wearing colorful and chic clothes with complete hijab was unbelievable for the Iranian men. they always had this question that to which party you belong to, this or that? In Iran, there is a line that makes people only see things as either zero or one. If you want to be a sociable person and have fun, you shouldn't be religious.

Lavender's religious image was dubious to the opposite sex and was questioned by them. The socially accepted religious norms urged Lavender to be socially distant instead of being active. However, Lavender did not see any conflicts between being religious and sociable at the same time. Consequently, she was approached and bothered by the males at the university. They thought she was not honest about who she was and what she believed in since in their views being religious and sociable could not coexist with each other.

The policing society of Iran not only controls the way people dress and talk, but also it distorts the way that religion should be interpreted and practiced in the society. In such a context, identities are reconstructed based on the dominant power and religious structure of the society. The women in this study were devoid of having the simple right of deciding about their own appearances. Their identities were degraded by setting rules

on how these women should look, talk, and behave. Their stolen identities were policed and controlled by the rigid religious and male-dominated regulations.

The marginalized identities which were imposed on these women can be explained through the poststructural feminist approach to gender identity and language (Cameron, 1995, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ehrlich, 1997; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001; Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) mentioned, gender is no longer an individual aspect of one's identity. In fact, gender realization varies as the individual moves from one community to another. Cameron (1995, 1996) also stated that gender is the product of social negotiation of an individual with the gender discourses and norms of a particular society. Based on the concept of identity formation within communities, the female participants' subordinate gendered identities and positions in the Iranian society were largely the products of the male-dominated discourse of the Iranian social communities.

Iran, a sexist society. Having been offended by males on streets and other social settings for being a woman, Rose and Jasmine were irritated by such humiliating behaviors. Jasmine said: "And then everywhere else it was basically a very, very sexist society. you would get cat-called. You would get stopped. You would get like people rude to you, just because you were a woman."

As a victim of sexual harassment, Orchid remembered how her professor tried to sexually approach her because he was expecting Orchid to repay his help. She believed that no matter how intelligent or famous a girl is, she is still a girl, and therefore she may

be teased and mistreated by men. Being looked at as a human being and not a female was a far-reaching dream for Orchid.

Likewise, Lavender was the victim of such sexual assaults. However, in her case, she was subject to such harassments not because of applying cosmetics or wearing inappropriate clothes, but because based on the Islamic appearance she took on, men misjudged her friendliness with being a spy:

When I entered university, I encountered many good people, at the same time I came across some people who either propose friendships with me or if they were religious they proposed marriage. And I always suffered and thought that it was my fault that I can't speak with people in a way that my womanish aspect does not become apparent. I had a big challenge in my life and I talked about it with many counselors to solve the problem. Yes! Some of them were my fault. My voice, my behavior, and the fact that I should behave seriously in academic and social settings, and I shouldn't get close to people very quickly.

Lavender's self-doubt and sense of guilt about being assaulted by men can be the sign of the dominant masculine discourse in Iran. Lavender lost her gender identity and later questioned herself since the gender norms of Iran had the rigid classification in none of which she fitted in. Lavender's liveliness and social participation were against the predefined Islamic gender norms for women in Iran.

Among the married women, Camellia mentioned how uncomfortable she was when men used to gaze at her on the streets in Iran. She thought American girls take the freedom of dress code for granted since in Iran women cannot choose their clothes. Being

the everyday victim of sexual assaults was mostly mentioned by the single women of the present study. The reason may lie in the fact that married women in Iran are considered as their husbands' property. Once married, women are not accessible to other men. However, the reverse is not applicable to men. In Islam, men can take up to four legal wives (Article 942, Civil Code). Although in today's Iran legal jurisdiction taking a second wife is not easy, the existence of such discriminatory beliefs against women push them to an inferior position in the society, and give men the authority to invade their human dignity on daily basis.

Women as secondary citizens. The inferiority of women in terms of the status they hold in society is not just limited to sexually-related issues. Historically and politically speaking, after the emergence of Islam, the role of women in Iran's social affairs diminished. It was just in Reza Khan's era (beginning from 1925) which women were given limited rights to study, do sports, and become more involved in social acts. During Mohamad Reza Shah's dynasty, women's legal and social rights were more taken into consideration. In 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian women came to streets and actively participated in the demonstrations against the king of Iran. As Daffodil remembered, during the year 1979 women were considered as main citizens. They came to street and organized strikes against Shah. However, after the revolution they were drawn back from participating in the social sphere. They were treated as second-class citizens afterwards. She explained what she meant by secondary citizen as she said:

Well. The thing is, um, at that time as I said, you know, the social instruction, uh, was the way that they view woman as someone staying home, taking care of

family, and nothing more, you know. And they encourage women to do that, you know, by enforcing some, you know force in the street, and rules, and you know unfair rules to women. They try to, to encourage them to stay home as a mom, period.

Iranian women participated in the revolution hoped that they would gain more access to the power structure of the society; however, as the new government assumed political power, they were secluded in the name of religion. Magnolia, who was not given her master's degree in Iran due to her participation in the political riots against the government, confirmed Daffodil's description of the secondary position of women in Iran by saying: "I think the general ideologies about women is that they should work and they should take care of house, they should raise children, and, um, they should be part of, part of um, you know part of a family, but um its role is not very dominant." Magnolia believed that Iranian women are praised only when they adopt their traditional roles as mothers and wives. On the contrary, women are not respected by the government for who they are and what capabilities and talents they have:

And uh, it looks like, it looks like, um, about several thousand years ago which women was responsible for raising children, and obeying their husbands, but now as women started to participate in society and to study in higher. And getting higher degrees, uh, everything has changed. But the government ideas, um, never changed.

As Daffodil and Magnolia mentioned, the power structure of today's Iran has tried to marginalize women by encouraging them to stay home. The Islamic regime's

historical memory proved that Iranian women's voices were powerful and influential in overthrowing the previous regime. Henceforth, the Islamic government of Iran try to curtail women's freedom so that women cannot get access to social and political communities. Despite the regime's suppressive rules against women, they still strive for equality.

Although the social conditions have never been in favor of them, Iranian women struggled hard for gaining equal rights in the current political situation of Iran. The women in this study were of no exceptions. Most of them were victims of gender inequalities in educational and workplace settings. Living in the social context of Iran was a site of struggle for many of them. Some of them were not recruited for jobs and had to fight for getting promotions they deserved just because they were women. However, they tried not to give up their hopes for achieving equal statuses. For instance, studying in an art major in Iran was a constant struggle for Jasmine. She had to prove herself to her male professors who were mostly biased against women's artistic talents and abilities: "It is hard to survive in the arts altogether, I mean, generally everywhere you go. But in Iran it is double-hard, because they expect you to, um, prove yourself and then I wrestled, wrestled with that." Jasmine attempted hard to pass her voice through the harsh walls of masculine dominance in her field. She struggled to be seen and taken seriously in academia. Orchid also mentioned that one year her university did not accept any female master students just because no boy could get the minimum average that the university required. Since only girls' averages were above the minimum, the university authorities decided not to accept any women that year!

Educational settings are not the only sites in Iran where masculine discourse is dominant. The job prospects are also few for Iranian women. During the interviews with the informants, some of them pointed out that they experienced various kinds of gender discrimination and biases in their workplaces. Tulip, who worked in a company for six years before coming to the United States, thought that the reason for which women are banned from getting into certain fields by the government is to promote the wrong mentality that women are weak. She believed that equality occurs only when women themselves believe that they are not physically or mentally weaker than men. In her workplace, Tulip witnessed how her male colleagues got higher salaries although they were not more qualified than her. She mentioned: “Um, I was good at work at the time unless my manager didn’t believe in me, but I was confident about my work.” Like Jasmine, Tulip also tried to struggle to make her voice be heard. To achieve this goal, she took up self-defense classes; and despite her slim body structure, she was always the first one who volunteered to move the heavy stuff around the office just to prove that she was not physically weaker than men.

Sunflower’s attempts to get a job in the company she would like to work for was all in vain since she was a woman. After being turned down, Sunflower became more determined to immigrate abroad. Rose also confirmed these gender biases that exist in Iran in terms of less job opportunities opened for women. She made the comparison by saying: “But back to Iran, it’s completely vice versa. If you, if a company has two applicants, girl and boy, and exactly same situation CV and background, everything was same. Uh, I’m pretty sure that the boy will be the winner of this competition.”

As an engineer, Orchid was also not hopeful about finding a good job in Iran as easily as men, either. In fact, that was one of her main motives to leave Iran. Coping with such gender biases in Iran calls for men's cooperation and support. Lily's case was of a different type. She was lucky since her manager was solicitous about Lily's welfare. He put complete trust in her. Although she was not approved by her other male colleagues, she struggled hard to get a promotion and became the co-manager of the bank. Influenced by her own experience, Lily believed that being a woman in Iran cannot be an obstacle anymore if the authorities back women's progress in Iran. Contrary to the other participants, Azalea was quite satisfied with her position at her workplace. She took a part-time job so that she could spend most of her time with her family.

Based on the interpretation of the narratives, the participants' social, academic, and professional positions in Iran are dependent on males' attitudes towards women's access to the power structure in Iranian society. Although Iranian women have the legal right to study and work outside, according to Articles 1115 and 1117, the Civil Code (Kar, 2007) men (fathers and husbands) are the heads of the households and can prohibit their wives from employment. In Iran, masculine dominance is asserted over women's freedom of choice. If a female is born in a traditional and patriarchal family, she can hardly set herself free from the unshakable and anti-feminist family structure as all the participants have indicated.

Additionally, Iranian women are easy targets for social and educational discriminations and sexual harassments. As many Iranian feminist activists (Esfandiari, 1997; Halper, 2005; Kar, 2007; Kian-Thiebaut, 2005; Moruzzi & Sadeghi, 2006)

mentioned, Iranian women are rarely supported by the legal and political institutions in Iran. This lack of support from the legal systems can degrade women to be treated as secondary-citizens and succumb them to marginalization. The traditional and religious discourse of the Iranian society can take Iranian women's voices away and dictate to them what to wear, how to behave, and what to do.

Unbearable Masculine Dominance, yet Iranian Women Achieve Success

Iran as a country in which Islam has been the official religion since the Islamic conquest of Persia (637-651), has embraced the masculine-dominated doctrine of Islam. During the ruling of the Islamic dynasties which follow the Sasanian Empire, women's social and political roles were diminished. Women's participation in social acts was prohibited, and they were constrained within the walls of their homes.

The social women's positioning in Iran's present context is of a paradoxical nature. While women have access to public education to its highest levels, they still suffer from inequalities in terms of job opportunities and legal law protection (Kian-Thiebaut, 2005; Moruzzi & Sadeghi, 2006). The regimes' Islamic ideology towards women's studying and working outside homes changed as the result of Iran's involvement in the eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988). Before the beginning of the war, women were encouraged to stay home and adopt the traditional roles of mothers and wives. However, as the war broke out, Iranian males were sent to the front, and Iranian women became their families' breadwinners. Additionally, there was also an urgent need of doctors and teachers during the time of the war. Consequently, more women got access to higher education to fill the job vacancies that used to be filled by men (Halper, 2005).

Although women were given the freedom to study, their legal and civil rights went through few modifications and improvements. The Iranian women who could get the high level of education could not bear the civil and family inequalities existing in the legal system of Iran. They started various women movements aiming at regaining all the civil rights women enjoyed before the revolution and attaining more gender freedom. along with the women activists, Iranian women tried to push back the gender inequalities by challenging the Iran's male-dominated ideology through increasing their social participation (Halper, 2005; Kian-Thiebaut, 2005; Moruzzi & Sadeghi, 2006).

Likewise, the female participants of the present study strived to reach high social statuses by studying at universities, working outside home, and participating in everyday social activities. These women were lucky since they grew up in close-knit families that constantly encouraged their educational and social achievements. There are still many Iranian women who are deprived of getting any or higher education due to the patriarchal structure of their families. In one sense, receiving higher education and getting job opportunities function as a semiopened gateway for Iranian women to break and penetrate the power structure of Iranian society to some extent. Although such opportunities are more abundant for Iranian women these days, the masculine rules and regulations still cloud these women's partial freedom.

The unfair gender regulations and ideologies in Iran against women was something which all the female participants agreed on. However, the significance of such gender discriminations was different among these women. To some of them, certain gender limitations were more aggravating than others. Through the process of analyzing

the data, the single women's perceptions of their gender roles and positions in Iranian society indicated somehow different gender constraints than the married women.

Iran is a society based on gender discrimination. Women in Iran do not enjoy equal social, economic, and legal rights. Gender inequality is prevalent in Iranian women's everyday lives. In the present study both single and married women were dissatisfied with the positions of women in Iran. While the single participants were dissatisfied with their prior positions in the educational settings and workplaces in Iran, some of the married women (Lily, Camellia, and Lavender) were still hopeful about the future of Iranian women. During the interviews, they mentioned the educational and social improvements Iranian women have had within the last one hundred years. The changing context of Iran in terms of women rights cherished the hope in the participants about the possibility of achieving more and more gender equality. Camellia mentioned in the interview: "You know nowadays the situation has improved a lot. In Iran now, if a married woman wants to study too, she can be as successful as I am. Many of my friends in Iran are studying PhD, or Postdoc. Fortunately, women are not banned from studying."

Similarly, in Lavender's view, women's attempts to break the glass ceilings were promising; however, she was still dubious about the complete eradication of inequalities against women in Iran: "However, conditions are changing now. Although they could enter universities and the society, they could break their walls a little. But still if a woman is with an Iranian man, she will definitely have some sort of limitations." However, the image of an Iranian woman was not always a progressive one in other participants' points of view.

Immigration: A Gateway to New Identities

The structure of Iranian society did not allow the women of the study to become independent individuals. The religious and unequal gender discourses in Iran frowned upon giving such freedom to women in Iran. Even the most open-minded parents can hardly bear the opposition of antifemale rules which dominate the discourse of the Iranian society. Among the single women, Jasmine was the only one who had the courage to make her voice be heard by her family. She deviated from the cultural norms and became marginalized in the end. The other single women, however, conformed to their family and society accepted gender norms. Although they accepted the norms, they were not contented with their image as girls since the society and family imposed constraints on reaching the level of freedom they wished for. They immigrated to the United States in hope of attaining their educational and professional goals. Moreover, they regarded immigration as a bridge connecting them to new realms of self-discovery and self-reconstruction.

In responding to the power structure of the masculine-oriented society of Iran which overshadowed their private lives, three of the female participants (Daffodil, Violet, and Camellia) resorted to marriage as the gateway to become independent from their families and leave the country. Daffodil could not leave Iran since she was under eighteen and according to the Iran Civil Code, women under eighteen cannot travel without their male guardians. Violet's conservative family did not approve of her leaving Iran unless she got married. Camellia's father did not allow his daughter to live abroad on her own, either. Getting married was then a gateway to reach their dream of living

abroad. Azalea was the only married woman who was completely satisfied with her life in Iran, and had no dream of having the experience of living in a new context. She did not continue her education since she took up the role of a dedicated mother and wife.

When the women of the study decided to immigrate (either at their own will or because of their husbands' wills) to the United States, all the desires and wishes they formed in their minds regarding their future images of who they would like to be in the new context formed their imagined (gender) identities. According to Norton (1995), imagined identity is as legitimate as the real identity since the future possibilities which one can foresee in the new context may lead in investment in the language spoken in the target culture. Consequently, the participants' imagined communities and gendered identities through which the future possibilities are manifested are presented in the following section.

Imagined Community

Academic community and identity. The Iranian female participants' positioning in their families and the society of Iran could pave the way for the researcher to understand what future images these women formed in their minds before coming to the United States. The concerns that they had in Iran became their motives for the types of gender identities they desired to adopt, and the communities they sought to participate in. As a result, their imagined communities and identities can be realized more accurately in the light of their past positions in Iran.

Since most of the participants in this study were graduate students, the immediate community which they wished to be part of was the academic community. Many of these

women who came to the United States were graduate students. As a result, most of them formed a kind of impregnable certainty that they would be academically and professionally successful in the new environment. Rose described her self-image as a successful academician by saying:

Yeah, the tribune and there is a big screen behind me and I wear a really nice suit and there are a huge audience there in the dark and all the light is on me. And I'm presenting my research and there is a big board, like made like a check, and I read a check like, for example, one million dollars, big things. And because of my research and I'm presenting my research. I'm the, a person, like for example the president of my university came and get me that check. This is what I appreciate myself, what I need to be one day. This is my imagination.

In the same way, in her imagination Orchid also wanted to be so successful that various companies would offer her top-ranked jobs. Jasmine also wished to be part of the academic communities related to her major. She was certain about her success in her field because her full command of English gave her this power to think that she could acquire a very good social status. Tulip also imagined herself discussing new topics with technological gurus in English.

The other female graduate students in this study also pictured themselves as successful individuals in academia. Lily's first thought of membership in a community in the States was the student and work communities. She imagined herself socializing with many Americans classmates. She was also hopeful that by doing an internship she could enter the job community she had always longed for. When she was in Iran, Lavender

mostly dreamed about being a member of American academic groups and taking part in different conferences.

Being a member of an academic community signified creating a link to bigger social communities in Camellia, Violet, and Sunflower's points of view. Camellia saw the academia as a place to expand her socialization and communication at higher levels: "I always thought that if I have higher education, I can have friends from a similar level. Even I can expand any communication with professors. So, I looked at being in academia to improve my social interactions." In the same vein, Violet's interest in knowing about various cultures and making friends with the people coming from other countries was more important to her than just being part of the academia. Sunflower dreamed of participating in study groups since she did not want to become isolated. She thought of participation in those groups as a way to establish more personal communications and have more fun with her classmates and coworkers.

Participating in academia and achieving higher education played a critical role in most of the female participants' lives. Their emphasis on learning and getting higher academic degrees is rooted in the role education plays in Iranian culture. As Sadeghi (2008) mentioned, in Iranian culture education is interpreted as a cultural and social capital. Like the women in Sadeghi's study who valued the role of learning and education in shaping their social identities, the participants of the present study also assigned a prominent place for education while constructing their imagined identities and communities.

Communities for socialization. The imagined communities for those women (Daffodil, Magnolia, and Azalea) who were not students at the University was of a different kind. Before Daffodil's immigration to the United States thirty-five years ago, she was hopeful that she could find a small community of Iranian couples. Since she did not know any English, she only imagined herself communicating with her fellow Iranians. Magnolia, whose husband was a graduate student, had decided to indulge in her passion for music, dancing, and arts. She intended to work voluntarily for some animal and environment protection organizations. Azalea's desired intention was to have opportunities to socialize with American people as she was picturing herself in the context of the United States.

Imagined Gender Identity

Elevated academic and professional identity. All female participants except Daffodil were imagining themselves in better academic and job positions in the United States. The academic achievements were specifically paramount to single female participants. Their talents and abilities were mostly ignored in Iran because of their gender. For this reason, they were in hope of seeking more equality and recognition in the new context. Rose's dominant image of herself in the United States was in academia:

I'm going to describe like a painting that I have in my mind. I am standing behind a tribune and there is a big screen behind me and I wear a nice suit and there are huge audience there in the dark and all the light is on me. And I am presenting my research and there is a big board, like made like a check. And I read the check and it is one million dollars because of my research...

In the same fashion, Jasmine was thinking about how she could improve her academic status in the target culture:

I thought that I am going to go there, and I will be a star. I thought that I would show the world what I am made of. I can do the best job in my field. I can speak of a good degree of English. And I will totally posit myself in a very good status, social status.

Achieving higher education and career goals were also the married women' most desirable possibilities which they foresaw. Lily was eager to get access to more up-to-date information regarding her financial management field:

I was so sad that why I couldn't do better works. Or why weren't these ideas welcomed by management team? And I saw that these were valued a lot in other countries. For example, I really liked and like to work in a bank in here and have these experiences, become more engaged and learn more, and use my abilities in statistics and programing more and improve my abilities as much as possible.

This was my main reason.

Lavender, who was a PhD student at the best technical University in Iran, was also not hopeful about her academic and professional future in Iran. Consequently, she decided to leave her education and come to the States with her husband: "At that time, I went to Tehran to study PhD. I couldn't find what I was looking for. There were no ideal professors, no material, equipment, nothing. I had no academic future in that university. Since I wanted to progress I decided to immigrate".

Freedom from gendered-restricted limitations. Another important theme which was among all these women' expressions of their desired gendered identities was to live devoid of any gender-biased restrictions and judgments. Not having the freedom of wearing and doing the activities they liked made these women wish for regaining their lost identities and personal choices. Rose expressed the excitement she developed within herself for doing all the activities she could not do in Iran. She wished to become a cheerleader and take part in dancing classes. Violet also pictured herself as a woman who can choose and wear her clothes freely:

I remember something when I was in Iran and I was coming here, I remember like one afternoon I went to buy a little few things like clothing. And I bought kind of this half shorts, and then when I came back I told my mom this is what I am going to wear when I first step into America.

However, she expressed that as an oriental man's wife she still had to conform to certain dress restrictions. To Azalea, living outside Iran would provide her with the freedom to do simple activities which Iranian women are deprived of doing inside Iran:

I thought there is more opportunity for me because there is different thing you can try that you cannot try in Iran because of your gender like you know, go for jogging. You like to go jogging outside, but you cannot. You can, but you know it is kind of weird and you might be not comfortable because of the people and their beliefs...you cannot come outside without the scarf and enjoy the weather...something like this.

Seeking gender-free identities. Having been treated as secondary and subordinate citizens due to their gender, the participants expressed their desires to be looked at as human beings devoid of their gender. The gender-based discourse in Iran took away many social and personal opportunities from these women. As a result, their ideal position was living in a gender-neutral society. For instance, Jasmine hoped that in the new context, she would be respected and recognized for her abilities and merits: “at first I thought I would be respected, and I would be realized for my abilities. I would be in a better situation not based on my gender, but based on my merits.” Sunflower did not want to be looked as a woman in her future social encounters, either: “I always dreamed about good relationship with class, that no one looked at me as a woman, just as their classmates, or as a coworker, or something like that.” Likewise, Lavender wished to achieve more equal status and freedom in the United States: “I hoped to have more freedom in the United States Not only having the freedom of speech and dress code, but also having the benefit of being looked at as a human”.

Hijab and Bold Identities

Hoping to gain a better image in the new culture sometimes creates conflicts in immigrants’ minds regarding whether they need to abandon their previous life styles and beliefs to gain full socialization and participation in the new environment or not. The fact that in Islam women are expected to cover their hair, and avoid physical contacts with Namahram made Tulip and Lavender worried about how they would be viewed and judged in the American context.

Before coming to the United States, Tulip was concerned about having her hijab in the United States. She finally decided to put away her hijab since she did not want to let people judge her based on her appearance. Due to the widespread anti-Islamic thoughts in the western world, Tulip was anxious that her hijab would classify her as a dangerous person in America. She said: “I wanted to be judged as a student, as an engineer, but not as a Muslim.” To her, religion was a personal matter, and she did not want to make it bold.

Lavender’s concerns were also of the same nature. She did not expect to establish good relationships with Americans due to her hijab. However, unlike Tulip, she did not abandon veiling. Their decision to live in a small college town was partly due to their concerns about being away from any potential misjudgments and marginalization that Lavender’s religious ties could cause:

If I were in another city, there would be some people who don’t like my dressing or Muslim people. Although I respect their ideas, I would definitely have lots of problems and could be very isolated, and maybe I couldn’t learn the language. but fortunately, my husband knew about these things and one of the reasons we came here was that I would be comfortable.

The fear of marginalization by Americans influenced the decisions both Tulip and Lavender made before coming to the States. While Tulip abandoned her religious practice to harmonize with the new environment, Lavender did not let go of her beliefs. Instead, she tried to minimize the possibility of becoming marginalized by coming to a more friendly and diverse environment like a college town.

Imagined Communities and Gendered Identities and Language Investment

Huge investment in language learning for the tests. To understand how the twelve women' imagined communities and gendered identities affected their language learning trajectories before coming to the United States, these women were first interviewed about their English language backgrounds to see how their investment in language learning was affected by their imagined identities and communities before coming to the States.

Except Daffodil, all the other women of the study used to take extracurricular English language courses before entering universities in Iran. As Norton (2015) stated, going to extracurricular language classes to learn English is very popular among the youths in Iran. For one reason "students are invested in the language practices of the ELI classrooms because these practices differ greatly from those in public schools" (p. 385). Moreover, Iranian students invest in learning English for various reasons, ranging from finding information on Internet to living abroad. As a result, knowledge of English is considered as a capital for many families.

Unfortunately, Iran is a foreign language learning context in which English is only spoken in English language classrooms. The educational system in Iran does not put much emphasis on teaching students the communicative aspects of the English language, either. Students start studying English from middle-school through high school. However, the English textbooks mostly focus on the language elements (grammar and vocabulary) rather than language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Consequently, with the limited knowledge of English which students acquire during the

school years, they cannot take part in international English language proficiency tests such as IELTS and TOEFL. They need to attend private English classes to get the required score on these tests for immigration and university admission purposes.

Some of the participants mentioned their family's insistence as the reason for taking up English classes. Orchid remembered how her mother forced her to go to English classes because she thought learning English was a necessity for her child. Rose also appreciated the fact that Iranian parents encourage their children to attend these extra language classes. Among all the twelve participants, Daffodil was the only female who did not attend any English classes when she was in Iran. Her knowledge of English was only limited to what she had learned (mainly grammar) during high school.

Violet, Jasmine, and Camellia's language learning trajectories were of a different kind, though. Violet's deep interest in transcribing the Latin alphabets from childhood developed an interest in learning languages in her. She later chose English as her university major and taught English to nonnative speakers in Iran. Likewise, Jasmine's interest in English was developed in childhood. To Jasmine, English was a gate to another world which seemed fascinating to her:

And this world for me was not just speaking English. It was, it was the world of pop music, rock music, um, songs that I couldn't understand but they sounded interesting, and I loved to listen to them and danced to them. So, whenever I was tired of my surroundings, I would just switch to English.

For Jasmine, English was a refuge against all the social pressures of the outside world. She found English as a means of communicating with many other people while she was

isolated from her own society. Norton's (2015) study indicates that English and going to language classes in Iran is a relaxation and fun activity which help Iranian students (especially girls) to forget their hardships and life difficulties.

Camellia's major language learning occurred in a second language context. When she was in China, all her school courses were in English. Consequently, she had to learn the language to understand the subjects at school. Later, when she and her husband moved to Brazil, she felt the need to learn Portuguese since she was pregnant and had to communicate with doctors and nurses there.

The participants' investment in language learning before coming to the United States was closely related to the goals and intentions for which they wanted to leave the country. Among the twelve participants, those who intended to continue their graduate studies in the United States invested in English to the degree that they could get the required score on TOEFL and GRE tests for getting the admissions to American universities. Jasmine and Violet, however, did not invest in language learning since they were confident about their mastery over the English language.

Minor investment in learning spoken language and communication. While the participants' main investment in language learning was getting good scores on language tests, the idea of coming to a new context encouraged them to think beyond learning English for gaining admission to university. Sunflower, for instance, regarded reaching her desired image of being an academically and socially successful female as an inspiration to go through the hard process of language learning. Orchid tried to familiarize herself with American culture and how life is like in the States by watching

lots of TV shows. For a short period of time Tulip attended pronunciation classes when she found that she was coming to the United States.

Azalea's little investment in learning English was due to her preoccupation with gender responsibilities as a mother and wife not. When she found out that her husband got the admission from the University, she started learning basic communication and survival language skills for interacting with other people for simple social purposes. Having no specific educational goal to achieve, Azalea did not feel the urge to invest in language learning seriously.

No language investment. Daffodil, who did not have to take TOEFL or GRE, showed no investment in language learning. Daffodil's noninvestment in language learning was due to her initial dependency on her husband's language skills. She was socially and financially dependent on her husband when she first moved to the United States. Her husband's support assured her that she would not need to learn English immediately.

In general, the female students' investment in written rather than spoken language learning reflects their immediate priority of academic success over the social one. The imagined identities of being successful students and participate in academic environments in the United States were superior to other images in their minds and that made them invest mostly in language learning for the sake of getting the required score on language proficiency tests. Few of the women, however, tried to improve their communicative language skills. It was only Daffodil who did not invest in any sort of language learning before coming to the States. Having her husband's company, Daffodil was not concerned

about learning English. Additionally, Daffodil's imagined community was based on her desire to interact with the Iranian people in the new place. As a result, she did not attempt to learn any language for social communication, either.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, first the private and social atmospheres where the women participants' gendered identities were constructed and shaped were introduced. As it was revealed through these women's interviews, the prevalent antifeminine discourse of the Iranian society restricted these women's personal choices and social opportunities. Due to such limitations, these women's agencies could not alter the gender-related status quo in the society. Having the opportunities to leave Iran, these women found immigration as a gateway to forge their ideal identities.

To the women in this study the idea of immigration was the reason for forming imagined and ideal (gendered) identities in their minds. The possible transition from the male-dominated discourse of Iran to a more gender-equal context persuaded them to invest time in learning the form of the language they would need to gain the entry to the new land. The participants' investments in language learning for the test can therefore be explained through the kind of identities and communities they imagined for themselves. Since most of the women wished to get the membership of the academic communities, they invested in learning the form of language they needed to gain admission to American universities.

The participants' language investment before coming to the United States reflects Norton's (2001) explanation on the relationship between language learners' imagined

identities and investment in language learning as she argued that “a learner’s imagined community invites an imagined identity, a learner’s investment in the target language must be understood within that context” (p. 166). As a result, language learners’ imagined identities and communities are as valid as the real identities that language learners have already established and the communities of practice which learners participate. Therefore, the realization of learners’ identities “must be understood not only in terms of our investment in the real word but also in terms of investment in possible worlds” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 248).

In the next chapter, the results obtained from the female participants’ imagined identities and imagined communities are compared with the actual realities of the communities of practice they participate in. The process of these women’ reconstruction of their (gender)identities, their participations or nonparticipations in the communities of practice, and the effects of their current positions in the new context on their language investment are discussed in the following chapter. The results aimed at capturing the relationship between the women’ imagined worlds and the actual realities of the world, and whether these women gained full membership in the target communities and better gender and social positions after their immigration to the United States.

Chapter 7: The Present Challenges

Introduction

The female participants' life challenges were not only significant in their native land, Iran. Most of these women's stories represent a constant struggle against either the gender or racial inequalities they faced in Iran or the United States. Although the participants' positions in their private and social lives in Iran was varied and diverse, almost all of them were affected by the prevalent discriminatory gender discourse against women in Iran. Their immigration to the United States was in hope of building new lives free from the restrictions imposed on them in their own country. And for most of them, their acquisition of English would play a role in their success in their new country.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) stated, moving to a new context is not bereft of new challenges and hardships. As individuals enter new communities, their identities are negotiated through communication with the old-timers. It is during this process of negotiation of meanings that individuals take new strategies to either make their voices be heard or resist the dominant discourse of the target culture. The acts of participation and nonparticipation are then acts of identity reconstructions which immigrants can take to redefine or maintain their identities. The women of the present study also displayed an array of gendered identity reconstructions as both their gendered and imagined identities were negotiated in the everyday realities of the American communities of practice. Their participation and nonparticipation in those communities were not always the voluntary choices they made in the new environment. Not only was their access to the dominant discourse of the American communities dependent on their willingness but it also

reflected the native speakers' agencies. These participants' language learning trajectories were then a reflection of their negotiated gendered identities.

The theoretical frameworks of feminist poststructuralism of language and gender (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001), agency (Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Piller, 2001), and investment in second language (Norton, 1995) were used to address the research questions of the study. The analyses of the participants' responses provided insights into understanding: (a) How do these women view their positions as Iranian immigrant women in the current communities of practice in the United States? (b) Do the imagined communities they formed before coming to the United States match the realities of the current communities of practice? And (c) In what ways do these women's past and present perceptions of being a woman affected their imagined communities, adoption of agentive roles for participation or nonparticipation in the United States communities of practice, and investment in second language learning?

Gender Identity Reconstruction in American Communities of Practice

Drawing on the theoretical framework of communities of practice in defining gender and identity, the current study investigated the women's present (gender) identities in American communities of practice. As the emergent themes obtained from the data indicate, these Iranian immigrant women's hopes to achieve more legal and social gender equality were fulfilled in the new context. Additionally, the findings from the interviews show that their access to the local and academic American communities was gendered. Finally, while the participants who were proficient language speakers reported their Iranian nationality and immigrant statuses as the only hindrance to gain full membership

in native speakers' communities of practice, the less proficient ones believed that language is the only tool they need to increase their participation.

Elevated gender positioning.

Gender freedom and support. A salient theme which emerged from most of the participants' narratives was becoming free of many limitations imposed on them due to the male-dominated gender ideologies in Iran. They were no longer confined by the Iranian government mandatory hijab policy, nor were punished or fined due to their clothes or appearance. Their personal freedom was no longer affected by the gender discriminatory acts which used to marginalize their social participation in their home country. In describing her view about living in the United States, Tulip stated: "You have freedom. You can do whatever you want. You can be single, you can be a lesbian. You can marry several times. I mean, you are free to do whatever you want. You can study, or work". Similarly, Daffodil, Camellia, Violet, and Azalea believed that women enjoy more personal and social freedom in the United States than in Iran.

Comparing their lives in Iran and the United States, Lavender, Jasmine, Magnolia, and Orchid thought they enjoyed more legal rights in the United States. These women believed that while the rules and laws in Iran privilege men, in the United States legal rules are supportive of women and not against them. They felt more secure under the protection of the regulations which support women both in private and public spheres. Lavender discussed how American women are more privileged in this regard by saying:

There are some limitations in our country regarding the women's social positions, working, hijab, or the freedom of speech for women. Or like in a very

small society like in a private family, there may be instances of husband or father dominance. Here these things are less, and even the laws are in favor of women.

In the same vein, Jasmine further mentioned that although molestation is common everywhere in the world, in the United States she was assured that she would be supported by antisexual harassment laws. Orchid stated that claiming rights in the United States is easy for women since women are not marginalized: "You can go and say like I need a lawyer, and the university can provide it for you, and you can talk loud and get what was your right." Finally, Magnolia believed that there are many governmental agencies and organizations in the United States which support women's legal and social rights in the society.

More gender opportunities and equality. Most of the female students of the present study believed that they had access to more academic and career opportunities in the United States than in Iran. They felt more respected and trusted in the professional communities of the university. Based on their narratives, the participants even gained more respect and opportunities due to being female. Sunflower described her feelings in the academic environment by saying: "Everyone respects me because I am a woman or no one rejects me for doing something because I am a woman. Everyone trusts me as much as I was a man." Similarly, Orchid believed that gender equality in the United States is more than in Iran. Tulip expressed how her gender identity was enacted positively since unlike Iran her femininity was not an obstacle to her success. Violet also thought that women in the United States can seize more opportunities since they can be heard and seen more than women in Iran. Lily mentioned that while women in Iran are

not allowed to study and work in some certain fields, women in the United States enjoy more equal professional and academic opportunities.

In Lavender and Jasmine and Rose's points of view, being a female can even be more beneficial in the context of the United States. Lavender explained the benefit of being a female by stating: "From the academic perspective, women are more valued here. Even being a woman is beneficial since you are considered as minority. An international woman's salary in academia is higher, and more places want to recruit her." Jasmine also mentioned that being an international female is professionally more beneficial since they receive more financial and social support from the government. As a female in the American context, Rose also thought that she would find more professional and social opportunities after her graduation.

Although the women of this study gained more respect, support, and professional opportunities in the discourse of American communities, their access to the communities of practice was not a mere gendered act. As Pavlenko (2001) mentioned, in bilingual and multilingual contexts, it is not only the gender ideologies which are questioned in the individuals' narratives, "but the ideologies of 'gender and X'" (p. 141) in which X can be ethnicity, culture, race, or language. As a result, the investigation of individuals' subjectivity in communities cannot be only based on their gender. Other social constructs such as one's race, language, and ethnicity are essential in the study of identity negotiation. To capture a more comprehensive picture of the women's identity changes in the new context, their gendered positions were studied along with the effects of the other social constructs (ethnicity and language) on their identities. Accessing American

communities of practice was a useful framework since it captures the individuals' identities and learning trajectories as social practices.

Getting Access to Communities of Practice: An Oasis or a Mirage?

From the poststructural perspective, identity is constructed in practice (Wenger, 1998). It is through the participation in communities that individuals define and redefine their self-images. Moreover, based on the theory of situated learning proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) participation is the heart of learning. Based on this theory, Learning is the result of moving away from peripherality towards gaining full-membership in communities of practice. Learning is then acquired through social practice, and from this standpoint, it equates identity construction.

Getting access to new communities of practice can become more challenging when one of the interlocutors is a new comer in the target culture. As Wenger (1998) mentioned, participation in communities of practice is a process which moves the interlocutor from the peripheral position to accessing full membership. Reaching the full participation, however, is not a one-way social process but a shared field for both the speaker and the listener to negotiate their ideas and emotions. Any acts of avoidance on the part of the old-timers may lead to the marginalization of the new comers. In a similar fashion, if the new comers do not occupy agentive roles, they may lose their opportunities to reach the full membership of the new community. As interlocutors interact, identity is reconstructed and learning takes place. Without agentive acts and communication no learning and identity formation can be achieved.

Although being placed in more equal and privileged gender positions in the new environment, the participants of the present study faced marginalization in both academic and social communities of practice in the United States. Their seclusions from these communities had various reasons including being labeled as immigrants, lack of proficiency in language, and not acting agentively.

Participation and realities.

Language, a tool for the realization of the power structure. The most instances of marginalization were reported by those women who had a good command of the spoken English. Contrary to some of the poststructural researchers of language and gender studies (Norton, 1995, Vitanova, 2005) presumed that knowing the language of the target culture is the only facilitating tool for gaining the entry to the target communities. In Vitanova's (2005) study, all the four East European couples in the United States expressed "the awareness of language as a central positioning factor" (p.157) in the new environment. The six women's insistence on language learning as an empowering act in Norton's (1995) study reflects that "they strongly believed that command of the English language would rid them of the immigrant label and help them obtain the opportunities for which they had come to Canada" (p. 177). However, in the present study the analyses of the linguistically fluent interviewees' perceptions regarding the role of language in gaining access to the American communities yielded some opposite results:

Jasmine, who was the most proficient language user among the other participants, expressed how she faced failure in trying to gain the membership of American social communities outside academia:

Um, I started mingling and socializing when I arrived here. But then something that I realized, and I still don't know if that thing that I felt is exclusive to here or something that I would experience everywhere else in the States, but I felt that I was being kept at the arm's length, meaning that I felt like I was at a party and people were nice, but nobody would really hang out with me. Nobody would really have a real conversation with me.... everybody is really kind and nice, but I think deep down they are just afraid of having a real conversation with someone who is a foreigner.

Jasmine further mentioned that all her attempts to socialize more with Americans were in vain. To her, gaining entry to the American world was a difficult process which knowing the language could not accelerate it. In the same vein, Violet, who was a linguistics student, stated that although she had a good command of English, what matters to the native speakers was her immigrant status: "sometimes even if you speak English just like those native speakers, they still look at you as an immigrant with a totally different culture." Violet believed that there was always a hidden power structure that reminded her of her immigrant identity.

Being in a relationship with an American boy, Orchid still suffered from being looked at an outsider. She explained how she felt as an international accompanying her boyfriend in American gatherings: "like I'm not one of them. No joking! I'm not one of

them; it's so obvious. Like, okay, I am lower than them because I'm not American. No matter what you do, you will always get that.”

As Jasmine, Violet, and Orchid's narratives indicate, the knowledge of the target language and their agentive acts could not grant them the full membership of the local American communities. Instead, by demonstrating more language proficiency, these women could reach the hidden levels of the antiimmigrant discourse in the United States. The results obtained from the analysis of the data indicates that language is not a necessarily effective tool for bridging the gap between the immigrants and the insiders. The obstructive factor which hinders these women to reach to their desired levels of socialization in the context of their lives was their nationality and being immigrants. These results are congruent with Hojati (2009), Messing (2011), and Sadeghi's (2007) studies on the racialized Iranian female graduate students' voices in some English-speaking countries. The participants of these studies also reported the hardships and the social discriminations they faced due to their Muslim and immigrant identities in the target societies.

Iranian nationality as a great hindrance. Coming from a country in the Middle East is mostly associated with the concepts of war and terrorism in the western world. Iran is among the countries accused of being involved in terrorism since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Iran and the United States broke off their diplomatic relations after the United States embassy in Tehran was taken over by the radical Muslim Followers of Khomeini's Line in 1979. The diplomatic tensions and the hostilities between the

governments of the two countries can account for why some of the citizens of these two countries perceive each other as enemies.

All the female participants except Azalea and Magnolia confirmed that they faced some sort of discriminations due to their nationality. The reason behind Azalea and Magnolia's racist-free nature of their experiences can be explained through the concept of community of practice on identity formation. As this theory emphasizes, identity is a social practice and negotiation of meanings take place in social settings. Consequently, Azalea and Magnolia's intact identities can be due to their nonparticipation in academic and social organizations on a regular basis. However, the other participants' involvement in academic environments exposed them to the discursive realities and practices of American communities.

The women's socialization accounts in the United States are of both immigrant-friendly and hostile nature. Lily's experiences with Americans were mostly positive. Her American advisor was supportive of her. However, during the interview she mentioned that Americans were not willing to let her into their private territories. She did not put the blame on them. Instead, she expressed her sympathy by stating: "Maybe they are not comfortable with an international". Her nationality was also an obstacle to her professional and career life, too. When she finished her masters's degree, she was never offered any internship positions:

However, the major I studied last year gave me the internship opportunity. But, it's really hard for an international to find internships. Being an international did not have a positive effect for me. When I applied for the internship, as soon as

they see I am an international, they did not even reply. And I didn't see anyone around who could get internships except those who were Americans.

When asked about her life in the United States, Camellia first talked about how she could succeed in getting access to a community of mothers in the college town. The process was not an easy one; however, she finally became comfortable with socializing with the community of mothers. In a sense, as Lave and Wenger (1991) mentioned, Camellia's legitimate peripheral participation was an empowering act since in the end she could gain the full membership of that specific community.

In a contrary experience, Camellia referred to a Facebook page containing antiinternational student comments written by some Americans. She elaborated on the content of the page by saying: "There was one page on Facebook saying that why they give funding to internationals and not Americans. They think their social facilities are shared with the people who shouldn't be in their country". Becoming subdued and secluded in one of her classes, Camellia narrated her account of being racially victimized: "In a group work, there was an American who didn't respond to our hellos. But, he was only talking during our group work activities... Well, he did not like internationals...". In her work setting Camellia's nationality had also problematic since being an Iranian was mostly associated with political terror and danger in Americans' minds:

In my job, I really like to work on security systems. And all my professors laugh and say you are Iranian and you want to work on the security system. They were surprised by that. Even one of them told that your husband works on nuclear stuff and now you want to work on security. So being an Iranian had a role in forming

such thoughts. Being Iranian matters and not being an Iranian woman. When you say, you are Iranian, it has a meaning behind it. and it is just because of the relations between Iran and the United States government. All of them know about the history and significant background of Iran, but relations between these two countries during Ahmadinejad's presidency caused many of these challenges.

Like Camellia, Lavender's academic life was not devoid of tensions. As a Teaching Assistant, she was assigned to teach an undergraduate class for some semesters. Despite being excited about the authentic experience of communicating with Americans, her students were not tolerant of her differences:

In the first few terms as a TA with undergrads, oh God! Their way of talking is much different.... Their behavior was not very good and I was not as comfortable as I am in the lab with my friends.

Except the unpleasant teaching experience, Lavender felt welcomed by the American society although she thought her appearance (wearing hijab) could be strange to many American people in other parts of the United States: "Maybe because here is a college town. Maybe if we were in a town that all of them were Americans and we were internationals, they would reject us".

Daffodil's view about Americans' unfamiliarity with the Iranian culture was in line with Lily's accounts. Daffodil, who had been living in the United States for at least thirty years, believed that one's nationality is an important factor in gaining full membership in American communities: "If their view is not very positive, it will definitely affect their relationships with the immigrants." To her, the process of

socializing with the native speakers was not an easy one, either. As she further explained, it took her some time and effort for her American friend to trust her as an international.

As the treasurer and president of the Iranian Student Association, part of Tulip's responsibility was to participate in various community events on campus. However, she was not very successful in accessing American communities. In addition to not having adequate linguistic repertoire to communicate efficiently, Tulip was socially detached from the American group members. She explained the reason by saying:

I mean for Women's Association, it is difficult to understand them because they are all native and you know, I feel like entering the girls' community over here, at least in my university, I mean native girls community. Entering them is very difficult because they have their own concerns, they have their own friends, and they don't seek new friends. Especially when you are an international student and you cannot communicate well...for them it doesn't matter if I were there or not.

Due to being an international, Tulip was not seen and heard by the other members. She could not voice her concerns since they differed from the other members'. Being left out in the group, Tulip decided not to attend any American gatherings.

Sunflower's experience of being Iranian and immigrant was of a different kind. She was annoyed by the way her American colleagues treated her as a minority whom they could feel pity for: "They know that we are coming from bad conditions as a woman. We had a bad and hard position in our country and I think they just feel like they are giving us heaven. Why? It is not true!". Further in her narrative, Sunflower described how she was exploited at her lab since she was an international coming from Iran:

In our lab, I am working from 8am to 5 pm. The employment in the university only expects us to work twenty hours per week, right? So, we are actually working more than two times amount of what we are supposed to work. So, whenever I nag about this, other people say that you are here, you should be happy just for being here. I say okay, I have the same rights that they can have. Because I am coming from developing country, it doesn't mean you can take advantage of me. If there was an American in my position, they do not tolerate this, but because I do not have anywhere to go, I do not have any other choices.

Sunflower's remarks on her disadvantageous position due to her Iranian nationality is analogous to Hojati (2009) and Messing's (2011) accounts of the Iranian immigrant women graduate students' *oriental* positions in Canada. As the Euro-American interpretation of orientalism defines, the women coming from Iran after the 1979 Revolution are backward, uneducated and victims of male domination. Such women are therefore expected to be thankful for and satisfied with any positions which the Western World offers them. Additionally, Sunflower believed that some Americans see the international students as threats to their social welfare: "They do not like internationals because they think of us as someone who is stealing their money, we are stealing their job positions, or they say their son or daughter does not have jobs, but we have".

To Jasmine, being a female and an immigrant sometimes puts one in a disadvantageous situation since he or she is not taken seriously by community insiders. She narrated one of her personal experiences in which she was ignored by her landlord:

Rental companies never take you seriously. They think you come from an underprivileged country then you should be able to put up with anything. So, they assume you are okay with less of better situations than most of the Americans. I tried to tell my landlord that I have no heating. And their response was like oh we will take care of that later. So, later I was convinced that it had to do with me being an immigrant woman since if I were an American woman, I would know my rights. Later I called them and said hey I know my rights, and they immediately responded.

Having a personal experience of being marginalized, Rose was intimidated by being ignored in the grocery store due to her foreign and immigrant identity:

When I am in Walmart and I am talking to cashier and I say, okay I want to have a kind of polite conversation and I ask how are you? How's your life? I realized that they are kind of reluctant to answer me or being involved in the conversation because I am international.

Rose further narrated how her second-generation immigrant classmate's nationality and hijab put her in a marginalized position even though she was a native speaker of English.

Rose recounted the story as the following:

she's Arabic, I guess, but she is a second generation and she's a native speaker.

She does not have any accent, she's a native speaker. But I can tell you that she has some issues and there was a guy in the class, asked me do you know where is she from? What is she wearing? I don't understand! She seems native, so why is

she wearing hijab...you know the contrast between her accent and her appearance was weird.

Having been involved in both academic and social communities, the female graduate students were exposed to racism and discriminations more than those who were not involved in academia. Since all these women were living in a college town, the female housewives lost the chance of participating in the academia, which was the only major source of social interaction in that town. Consequently, to these women living in the United States was perceived differently.

Nonparticipation and fantasies.

Language as the only barrier. For Magnolia and Azalea living in the United States was devoid of any discriminatory acts or misbehaviors to immigrants. None of these women were university students. To them, the only barrier to communication with native speakers was their lack of language proficiency. Magnolia stated: “I think anyone from anywhere comes and communicates with the people here. I don’t know, I don’t think it’s related to my nationality”. To her, not having sufficient language proficiency was the only obstacle on her way to communicate with native speakers. Moreover, due to her lack of socialization, Magnolia’s perception of American society was idealistic. She said: “They are great. They are honest, nice, friendly. They like to help you. it’s amazing! It’s great. I would like to have them as my guests and friends”. Not being engaged in any academic and lengthy conversations with the target culture community members, Magnolia could not perceive the realities of the discourse of marginalization in the United States.

In the same fashion, Azalea was also appreciative of American's friendliness and support. She had never been a member of any organizations except doing some limited voluntary work at the Women's Center at university. Her experiences with Americans had also been very positive. She described them as the following:

I found Americans very welcoming, and very helpful. I like them very much.

They are even kinder than I thought about them. They respect you. They don't bother you at all... when I talked with my family in Iran I always tell them you can't imagine how American people are very friendly.

However, Azalea's flawless image of the U.S as an immigrant-friendly country was shattered by her American friends when they told her that not all Americans are friendly and welcoming, and in other parts of the United States people may be intolerant of immigrants. Like Magnolia, Azalea believed that gaining the fluency in English could help her gain the membership of American communities.

The Flowers in the New Soil

The second research question guiding this study aimed at investigating the women's current social and academic positions in the United States. In general, the women's accounts reveal that their gendered positions boosted in the context of the United States. They gained more personal freedom and security and were more content with their gendered identities. However, the new context was not always welcoming to these women. Being labeled as immigrant, international and Iranian brought about some other restrictions within both the academic and social spheres. Instances of marginalization and avoidance occurred as the more proficient language speakers tried to access the

communities of practice in the context of the target culture. Language was then an awareness raising rather than a facilitating tool indicating the more proficient language users the absence of discourse of privilege for the Iranian immigrants.

As Wenger (1998) mentioned, identity is defined through learning. As individuals learn, changes occur in their perceptions of who they are in relation with the other people around them. This definition is congruent with the results of the present study. Those participants (Orchid, Jasmine, and Violet) who had a good command of English went through the most identity reconstruction in the sense that they realized that they could hardly get the full membership of the communities that they engaged in. These three women were the ones who were marginalized more than the other participants of the study. Their fluency in English was not an efficient tool to gain them more access to the social spheres. On the contrary, they realized the discourse of marginalization. Their new images of marginalized women became the source of their identity reconstruction. They were isolated and marginalized in the new context not because they could not speak the target language well, but because their identities as immigrants and Iranian were questioned by the native speakers.

The other interviewees were somehow placed in disadvantageous situations as the result of carrying the label of foreigner. They underwent both negative and positive experiences as international students in American communities. The only two participants (Magnolia and Azalea) whose language learning and social participation were limited did not go through any major changes in their identities as the newcomers in the United States. As a result, the more language knowledge is not necessarily considered

as a tool for attaining the membership of the new communities of practice, but it can be a source of revelation about the social realities and power structure of the target society.

Realities vs. Imagination

The results obtained for capturing any discrepancies between the participants' imagined communities and the realities of the American communities of practice (the third research question) were of various nature ranging from an indication of a complete match to showing no similarity between the two kinds of communities these women imagined and experienced in their real lives. The central theme that emerged out of the data pertaining to this research question indicated the women' different levels of access to the communities of practice, which in some cases were contrary to their expectations and imaginations.

Peripherality or marginality: Gaining or being denied? In their book, *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*, Lave and Wenger's (1991) proposed concept of legitimate peripheral participation explains the process through which newcomers can gain experience in the practices of the target communities. They defined this process as gradual, starting with peripheral participation and gradually gaining the full membership. However, Lave and Wenger believed that some certain social arrangements can hinder or facilitate the new comers' movement to reach the position of having the full participation. The analysis of most of the current study participants' narratives indicated mismatches between their imagined communities and the realities of the communities of practice. Their nonparticipation in the communities were then analyzed based on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation.

Back in Iran, Jasmine did not imagine that her foreignness could make her chances of socialization with native speakers so slim. As many other Iranians in Iran, she used to picture the United States as a perfect utopia full of equal opportunities for everyone. She expressed her suppressed hopes by saying:

I had this kind of exaggerated kind of utopian idea that a lot of people in Iran have from living in the States.... I knew it was not going to be that easy to live in the States, but honestly, I didn't expect this, either. So once the excitement of being in another country wore off I started realizing that wow! So, this is how it works. It took me a while and I am still self-conscious about me being from another country here. Not in academia that much, but once I step outside, I can feel that I'm being looked at, that the people are not quite comfortable with me around because I don't look conventionally white or anything. So, no I didn't expect that.

On the other end of the spectrum, Magnolia's image of the United States as the land of opportunities remained intact after living in the States. Having based her imagination on her friends' stories of success in the United States, Magnolia described no mismatch between her desired image of living in the United States and her current position and life conditions. Her perception of living in the idealized world can be explained by her current lack of linguistic and social access to the realities of the society in which she lived. Since she was not involved in any formal communication with the target culture insiders, she had never been a victim of racist behaviors.

To Camellia also the United States represented the context in which her dreams of getting into graduate school and finding a career came true. Before immigrating to the

United States, Camellia and her husband were in Brazil. Due to her pregnancy, she could not take up any full-time study. However, she could get a master's admission in the United States. Camellia's intention to continue her studies could pave the way for her further desire to expand her academic and social interactions:

Since my goal was to study, I always thought that if I have higher education, I can find friends from a similar level. Even I can expand my communication with professors. So, I looked at being in academia to improve my social interactions. Although I am a master student many of the professors proposed me to have family relationships. One of my close friends here is my first English teacher. We are in contact with each other every day. When our class ended, she herself asked me to have family gatherings, too. One of the IT professors also likes that my husband is educated and the fact that I like my studies. We go to his house and he supports us. And what I thought came true. Through studying I could improve my social relationships too and that was important for me.

Watching American TV shows back in Iran, Orchid's imagined self-image as a girl living in an island alone and enjoying her solitude did not prove correct. She thought she would be stronger and tougher than who she turned into in the United States: "I thought I am going to be tougher, but I'm not. So, like if I compare myself to what I thought before, I'm not accomplishing what I thought I could". Before coming to the States, Orchid did not necessarily think about participation in any communities since achieving her academic and professional ambitions was her priority. Contrary to her

expectation, she abandoned most of her ambitions due to the emotional traumas and the loneliness she experienced in the new place.

Before coming to the United States, Lavender was worried about how she would be accepted in the American communities. Since she made up her mind to keep her hijab when coming here, she deliberately chose Ohio in order not be isolated and marginalized as a Muslim woman. In the small college town which she and her husband lived, she had not encountered any major problems regarding her hijab. She believed that if she had lived somewhere else in the States, she would have been the target of racism. From the academic perspective, she was also content with the educational level of the university and her major.

Lily's imagined communities in which she desired to participate were academic and social American communities. However, her expectations of meeting American classmates and socializing with them were not met. She stated:

I didn't expect to see many internationals when I enter an American university. There were only three Americans in my program! and this was in contrast with my expectation. I thought I would be in contact with many Americans and they would help me improve my language. But unfortunately, it didn't happen. Even I couldn't communicate with the internationals since I was under the pressure because of my courses.... later I thought that because of the program I chose I could find an internship and enter the job community; however, that didn't happen either.

Sunflower could not satisfy her desire to mingle with American people around her since she could expand her relationship with native speakers to deeper levels. Most of her conversations with her American colleagues did not go beyond simple greetings.

Consequently, Sunflower felt isolated and detached from the social environment. Back in Iran; however, she dreamed about a quiet different situation: “I always liked to participate in a lot of research and study groups far from my main projects or my dissertation. I liked to participate in some fun part of science with native and international people.”

Having been amid the revolutionary and post-revolutionary days of Iran, Daffodil was not concerned about anything more important than finding a way to leave Iran. She was only hopeful that she could find some other Iranians to socialize with. However, there were no Iranians around in that small college town, and she had a hard time adjusting to the new culture. Her limited knowledge of English was another barrier to socializing with native speakers.

During the interview, Rose debunked the myths of team-working and socializing that many Iranians created in their minds about living in the United States. Based on what she used to hear, Rose’s imagined community was participating in various academic and professional team-work projects: “I thought maybe because I have always heard that one of the advantages of progress in the United States in comparison to Iran is that they are really focusing on team working.” Contrary to her expectation, she had never been involved in any brainstorming and group work activities in her department. She further talked about the extreme loneliness she experienced, and how the utopian image of living in the United States she dreamed of was shattered:

When I was in Iran and whenever I talked to my friends who went abroad, the only thing they suffered was loneliness. However, by looking at their pictures on Facebook or Instagram, I thought okay, these girls are so spoiled. It's not like that. They are having a lot of fun, and they post fun pictures, partying in bars, you know. With boys, American people. You know how people in the Third World imagine. America image from inside the third world is something completely different than we you live in America.

Having been unsuccessful in being in the close circle of her American classmates in her previous university, Violet had never taught making friends with native speakers could have been hard. She later learnt by experience that gaining the full membership of American communities is not easily attainable. During the interview, she compared her current classroom community with the previous one:

.... For me they were kind of indifferent in their friendship, kind of cold. So, like in Colorado, it was like the last session. After the class, like they didn't even say goodbye to each other, or like this was really nice to be with you for these two years. It sounded like to me it's because they were all Americans and I was the only international student...

membership in any specific community. However, even in the academic environment she could not gain many opportunities to socialize with her colleagues, staff members, and even her advisor. Unlike the United States, she could establish socially deeper relationships with the people around her both at work and university:

So, he is a very kind man but he just think that this is a student, and I have to talk about work here and nothing more. So, this keeps me away from talking about some other stuff with him or anybody else in the department. If I go to the office to talk to the administrator, I talk about the issue that I have to. I can't socialize to say, "Okay, how are you?" I don't know about her family or his family to ask because we never socialize in this way. And this is the same with my advisor. I am saying these people because these are the most important during my everyday work, every day at my life. And I just mean, maybe back home when I was going to my advisor and talk to him he was just talking half an hour about work and an hour about himself, about me, weather, society, politics, about everything. But over here we just talk about the work and that's it.

The women's narratives can be analyzed through Norton's (2001) interpretation of nonparticipation as "an act of resistance from a position of marginality" (p. 165). Drawing on Wenger's (1998) modes of belonging (engagement, imagination, and alignment), Norton legitimized her participants' imagined communities as platforms for further possible acts of engagement. However, Felicia and Katrina's (Norton's study participants) nonparticipations were due to being labeled as immigrants and ignored by their ESL teachers. Their withdrawal from their ESL classes was then a resistance to marginalization. Like Norton's participants, most of the women's imagined communities in the present study were not realized in the everyday practices of the American communities they were engaged in. Having formed images of reciprocal socialization with the old-timers, these women were not accepted in the inner circle of the insiders'

friends and acquaintances. Having lost their hope to access the communities due to reasons such as being labeled as internationals or ignored, their agency to establish social communication decreased. Their acts of avoidance and withdrawal were then the sign of their marginalization and not peripheral positions.

Gendered expectations vs. gender myths. To Rose, Azalea, Lavender, and Jasmine being in the United states still imposed some restriction on women which they did not expect to experience. As Azalea mentioned, women need to be careful everywhere in the world, and the idea of the existence of gender equality and security is a myth: “I think for women or girls that want to work in like bars or restaurants, especially after midnight, you know it’s not one hundred percent secure”. Rose’s expectation of women’ security in the United States did not match what she used to imagine before. She referred to the existence of sexual harassments by saying:

Here, I understood still there is some limitations. We have some police alerts about sexual assaults. So, here still has such things. And please don’t forget that we are living in a really small town, college town kind of residential area. I’ve heard that people living in big cities like New York or Chicago have more problems...there is a really famous movement that was on Facebook which was called ten hours walking in New York streets. It was a girl walking in the New York streets and got insults about her appearance. People were saying: how are you doing? Or stuff like that.

Similarly, the realities of her present life were not completely in line with Jasmine’s previous expectations. She mentioned that she was cat-called on streets,

something which she did not expect to experience in a developed country like the United States. In her academic environment, Lavender referred to women' better academic statuses while she also questioned the propagandized notion of female importance in academia in the United States:

There was a professor here who always get female students because he believed that having a female student brings good credit for the university. He instead on having a female in the pictures. Part of it is a show, but I think they worked on that more than us in Iran.

Language and Gender

Gendered access to the linguistic resources. As Pillar and Pavlenko (2001)) mentioned, the studies of gender as a social process indicate that having access to the linguistic resources of the communities of practice can also be gendered. The gender inequalities and gatekeeping practices may hinder women' participation in the linguistic communities. During the interview, Camellia mentioned that although being a woman did not affect her desire to practice English, choosing to communicate with other nationalities was not always within her power. Due to her husband's preference to socialize with Farsi speakers, she lost her chances to socialize more with Americans:

since I am married and my husband is Iranian, most of my communication is in Farsi. If I were single and in a dorm, I would communicate with foreigners more. It's my husband who wants to communicate with Iranians more. So, my family affects my relationships. For example, on weekends I want to hang out with American friends and my husband does not want it. So before coming here I was

thinking about communicating with Americans more, but now I see it's not possible for me.

Religious practices and the dress codes of Muslim women can also be a hindrance to their access to the linguistic resources. Having hijab and being an immigrant female were Lavender's main concerns before moving to the States:

For me, being a woman, being an immigrant, and having the kinds of clothes I wear, I felt shy. And this had negative effects on my language learning. but the presence of my husband next to me made me feel more confident and I saw that he was not shy when he made mistakes. I learned I shouldn't give up.

Lily's married life was also a hindrance to having more chances to practice English. Spending much of her time with her husband and his baby speaking Farsi, she had no time to invest in language learning. Since her family was her priority in the United States, Azalea could not fulfill her dream of getting higher education at the university: "If you want to improve your English, you need to communicate. I would like to be outside to be with people, but you know there are limitations for someone like me with a baby, a child, and a husband". As Pillar and Pavlenko (2001) stated, women's traditional statuses mothers and housekeepers may lead to complete immobility and nonparticipation.

On the other side, based on Lily and Camellia's narratives being a mother had a facilitating role in their second language learning trajectories. Juggling motherhood with her demanding academic career, Lily believed that becoming a mother gave her the motivation to socialize with her baby's doctors and therefore improve her English: "Becoming a mother forced me to speak to my doctor. Before going to see the doctor, I

searched what I was going to say. I read American mothers' comments on Facebook which helped me learn lots of expressions." Similarly, Camellia acknowledged the role of her daughter in her language improvement:

I learned most of the informal language because of my daughter. Her books and songs helped me learn the colloquial language and I liked it because I wanted to learn more informal language. Also, I was in contact with her school so I could learn English

More male linguistic resources. Being female does not always put female language learners in disadvantageous positions (Pillar & Pavlenko, 2001). Unlike some of the married women whose traditional roles as mothers and wives limited their access to the linguistic resources, to the single participants (Rose, Sunflower, Orchid, and Violet) of the study, their gender was a facilitator of interaction with male native speakers.

Political reasons. Rose described how being a female gave her more chances to hold conversations with boys since female immigrants are considered less politically dangerous than their males in the American antiimmigrant discourse. She stated: "As a girl you have more opportunities because girls are less probable to be a danger, to be a potential danger and hazard for native conservative people".

In Orchid's point of view, being a female could give her more opportunities to talk to the native speakers than being a male. She found the reason rooted in the political conflicts between the two governments of Iran and the United States: "I guess being a

woman is better. It's harder for men. For a woman, it's like it's not her fault. That's how they think. But for men it's like he's one of them. He can be a political spy".

Sexism is still present. Being failed to get access to university girls' communities, Tulip found American men more willing to engage in communication with her. She said: "American girls have their own concerns and their own friends. They don't seek any more friends, especially when they know you are an international". She further mentioned that she found talking to boys easier than girls: "I am more comfortable with boys to talk than girls. Maybe, opposite sex respect more. When you talk to a boy, he listens to you. But girls don't. they don't care". Tulip's experience in establishing more communication with male native speakers is in line with Moon's (2000) results which indicate Asian female immigrants and students coming to the United States have more meaningful interactions with American males.

To Orchid, male native speakers were more patient with girls' linguistic mistakes and as a result they could be better linguistic resources:

You can have chances to talk to guys more, and if you talk to them your English will improve. They don't mind explaining little stuff to you because they think: 'Oh, that's so cute, she doesn't know that!'. But for a girl, they are like: "Oh, God! She doesn't know that. How stupid!".

Due to the rejection of her communication requests by American girls, Sunflower, who had a personal preference to socialize with women, was linguistically marginalized:

In my department, in my class, no girl, no woman that I want to communicate with her, or get along with her. There are couple of boys. They are very nice and

they offered to travel with each other, but I rejected all of them, and they didn't offer me anymore.

In addition to gaining awareness about the existence of various forms of sexual harassment (catcalling, raping, etc.) through their exposure to the new context, the single women's accounts of boys' willingness to have verbal communication with them indicate that sexism is a fact they cannot deny its existence in more gender-equal contexts such as the United States. Although as single girls they had more access to the linguistic resources around them, they may not have been given such communication opportunities if they had been international boys.

Agency and Investment in Second Language Learning

The female participants' investment in second language learning could not only be interpreted through the lens of the old-timers' agencies and the existence of dominant power discourse of the target culture. Along with the importance of the being welcomed in the communities of practice, the individuals' agentive acts have also significant roles in their access to the linguistic repertoires and investment in second language learning. Agency and investment are then two interrelated social constructs which are mutually dependent on each other. Based on Norton's (1995) work, with the new usage of the term investment instead of motivation, language learning can be viewed as a social process through which language learners have agentive powers to act upon or resist the power structures in the communities of practice.

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) applied the theory of community of practice in SLL contexts to understand language learners and their identities. They analyzed language

learners' different levels of participation in the communities of practice based on their agency and investment in language learning. Based on the premises of activity theory, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) stated that learning happens if learners' motives, desires, and intentions are taken into consideration. Moreover, activity or practice is a distributed process that depends both on learners' agency and the other agencies. The relations between these agencies are sometimes conflictive and full of tensions. Hence, language learner's agency or identity should be viewed as a coconstructed phenomenon. Learners' identities are first shaped based on the goals they have for learning a foreign language. However, their agencies are dynamic and may deteriorate due to lack of acceptance by the host community. The coconstructed nature of agency affects not only learners' identities but also their language learning trajectories.

The interviewees' narratives indicated the conscious choices they made, and the kind of agentive roles they took to get the memberships of the target communities. However, not all the agentive acts lead to these women's empowerment. Since agency is a coconstructed phenomenon, some of the participants' agencies were resisted in the discourse of power. The participants' language investment was then a manifestation of their success in gaining empowered statuses in the target communities.

No agency, no investment: Resorting to the Iranian identity. Among the twelve interviewees, Rose, Sunflower, Tulip, and Lily had the least agency and language investment. Trying to maintain her Iranian identity and getting away from the hardships of being an immigrant, Rose tried to keep her cultural bounds with the Iranians and took refuge in their company. She stated: "when your friend calls you and asks you for a

company in a bar it's not your type...American parties are kind of boring for me. Iranian parties are fancy, a lot of food and good conversation". Because of her resistance to socially participate in the new environment, Rose lost most of the opportunities to learn the language. She described her language improvement by saying: "I guess I not only improved but also have some move backs I guess". Her resistance to become assimilated in the new culture finally resulted in losing her voice: "sometimes I feel isolated because of my English, that my language is not that much good, so I feel let's not talk today. Let's be calmer down." As MacKay and Wong (1996) concluded, an individual's agency is a personal choice, and investment in language learning can be highly selective. Roses' intentional decision to remain in the periphery and her noninvestment in language learning was legitimate "since the identity made possible by proficiency in the target language is not the only available, other identities may already provide sufficient satisfaction to the learner at a given stage" (p. 604).

Since much of Sunflower's communication was in Farsi, she did not feel the need to invest in learning English. Not gaining access to the female native speakers' communities, Sunflower had to mingle with her Iranian friends. Consequently, she lost the language knowledge she acquired in Iran:

I didn't learn anything more than what I knew in Iran. Even, I think even during the one year that I was teaching class in Iran my language improved a lot, but now I don't think living here had an effect the same as the effect on me as the class.

Tulip's lack of language improvement was also due to her limited chance of socialization and lack of agency on her part. She explained how she had little quality time

with native speakers since as a graduate student she was always working alone in her office. Her socialization with her American native friends was mostly limited to short greetings and conversations. Unlike her socialization patterns with Americans, Tulip's cultural similarities with her other Iranian fellow citizens gave her a piece of mind in communicating with them. During the interview, she explained that her lack of agency was due to her fear of being rejected by English native speakers:

We see each other in the department, at the street or other places. We just greet, not go further. Maybe it's my problem because I never offer them to sit and have coffee because I thought they might say no.

Lily's disappointment with not gaining access to her imagined community (doing an internship) due to having Iranian nationality as well as being occupied with her intense class schedules at the university took the potential opportunities to practice English away. She believed that socialization at work settings could have given her the best chance to practice English:

Imagine if you want to work somewhere you have to describe things. It is not like class that professor comes and teaches and then you need to submit your assignment. At work, you should communicate with some people and even with some offices. And it's from morning to the afternoon. It's constant. In such social settings one can improve her language much faster than in academic settings although you learn more in academic settings.

Sunflower, Tulip, and Lily's lack of investment in English resulted from their rejection by the communities of practice due to their Iranian and immigrant identity.

Although these three participants sought full participation, their expression of willingness did not bring about more agentive responsibilities. As Miller's (2010) study indicates, the Chinese small business owner immigrants' description of themselves as responsible individuals did not lead to their empowerment in an English-speaking context. The results show that these immigrants were more agentive in running their business than pursuing learning English. The fact that the participants in Miller's study were engaged in simple and repetitive English language exchanges (like greeting) is the proof to their adaptation of nonagentive identities. Similarly, identifying the participants of the current study as agents is dubious since their language use was only limited to simple and brief conversations in English.

Language as the only barrier: Maximum investment. On the other side of the continuum, the four participants (Lavender, Daffodil, Magnolia, and Camellia) reported considerable language improvement. They were describing their efforts in making social connections with the native speakers around them. For reaching their goals, these women found the role of knowing the target language influential.

Lavender believed that the English-speaking environment provided the internationals with lots of opportunities to practice the language: "I realized there are many free classes to go and learn English. Everything is ready and we should just take an action to learn". Lavender further mentioned that she could improve her language through socializing with native speakers since socialization is the heart of learning any language: "I learned that I should speak up if I want to learn English. Language is learned when two people communicate".

Mentioning the importance of fluency in English as the means to connect with the English native speakers, Daffodil accepted full responsibility for language learning and mentioned that second language learners need to take agentive roles: “You know, you have to expose yourself in the society, and find friends, and put yourself in there and get out of your comfort zone to learn things”. Her language learning trajectory indicates her agency and investment in learning English. When she first came to the States, she could barely speak English. However, by getting into American gatherings and academic communities at university, she gradually became comfortable with expressing herself in the second language.

Although Magnolia was not a graduate student at the time of the interview, she was so agentive since she did not want to become marginalized and isolated in the United States. Consequently, she decided to audit classes, do self-studies, and practice English with her husband at home. Not wanting to lose her voice in the new context, Magnolia was firm in her intention to learn English:

If I limited myself just because of my language I might lose my activities. I didn't want to be like this. My husband says he doesn't like me to express my opinions because nobody asks me. But I talk, talk, talk. I like talking, and I love to express my ideas.

Camellia's high investment in language learning resulted from her persistence in agentive act of socializing with the people around her: “I'm a kind of person who asks questions and communicate with people. At first I was afraid. I thought I could not understand what they say. But now if I don't understand I ask them”.

Language proficiency and self-doubt. Contrary to the researcher's expectations, no language improvement was reported by those participants who had already been fluent in English. Instead, they felt that their confidence in speaking English was shaken by the fear of being judged by the English native speakers. The two cases (Jasmine and Orchid) expressed feelings of self-doubt and intimidation as the main reasons for the deterioration of their proficiency in English during the first few months of their arrival to the United States. Jasmine stated:

Honestly, I feel like I am stuck in this space between my native language and English, and it's just getting worse... Well, to be honest, when I first arrived here, and, and I arrived here, as I said, as a person who already spoke English. I was, but I was very intimidated.... I guess it all starts from the language barriers. Um, I thought if I would speak in my most, um, American accent when I arrived here I would probably be just fine. I opened my mouth and nobody understood a word of what I was saying, and I couldn't believe that was happening to me. I was so intimidated that I wouldn't even speak on the phone for a long time. Even right now I feel uncomfortable speaking on the phone with an American person.... Or at a financial institution like a bank, or someone or anything that has to do with paperwork I feel super nervous, and I feel stupid. I feel like I am absolutely stupid. My mind stops working.

Her complete confidence in her linguistic abilities in Iran gave its place to a constant process of self-questioning and self-doubt. However, being in Fine Arts graduate program helped her boost her confidence: "This program really helped me since you are

expected not only to lead the discussions, but also to ask questions and be critical towards other people's comments that really boosts your confidence".

similarly, Orchid was dubious of her linguistic capabilities during the first few months of her arrival to the States to the degree that meeting her American boyfriend and his family made her more conscious of her linguistic mistakes and therefore more reluctant to speak English:

And whenever we go to see Tyler's family, I can't speak English. and he is always laughing and saying whenever we go to meet my family, your English decreases so badly. I feel like there is a lot of pressure on me in there. I cannot find words. And I'm so horrible when I'm with them.

However, as the time passed, she grew more confident in her language skills: "After a while, after I was with my boyfriend more, I started talking and became more fluent".

Jasmine and Orchid's emotional distress in the new context can be explained by what Vitanova (2004) referred to as *emotional discourse*: "As foreigners move across geographic and linguistic boundaries, they cross emotional borders as well" (p. 267). When the immigrants find that they cannot have full participation in communities of practice due to linguistic reasons they may show signs of distress and self-doubt. As Vitanova further claimed, women feel more vulnerable in face of having low second language skills. Although the women in her study were recognized as better language users by their partners, they were more afraid and ashamed of making linguistic mistakes. Similarly, in the present study, while Jasmine and Orchid considered themselves as proficient language users in Iran, their fears and instances of communication break downs

with native speakers (Jasmine's linguistic problems on the phone and in the bank) triggered in them feelings of self-doubt.

The analysis of the women's narratives on their agency and language investment confirm both the coconstructed nature of agency and the direct relationship between one's agency and investment in second language learning. Rose, Sunflower, Tulip, and Lily's nonagentive acts and lack of investment in second language learning can be partially realized in the failure of their initial attempts to break the power relations in American discourse and removing the labels of foreignness from their identities. Like Norton's (2001) participants, the nonrealization of their imagined identities led to their noninvestment in improving their language skills. However, unlike Marjan in Ebtekar's (2012) study, whose disadvantage status faded away after her confrontation with her manager, these women's perceived subordinate identities did not encourage them to take actions and be agents of change. Instead, though taking acts of resistance and marinating their national identities, they secured their identities from being marginalized.

For those participants who were not socially involved in the communities of practice in the college town, language was the only key to open the gate to the native speakers' world. These women's perceptions regarding the significant role of language in accessing the social capital is congruent with the Vitanova's (2005) study participant's views about the recognition of language as a prerequisite for authorizing their voices to other language users.

The more proficient language users' self-doubt in their linguistic abilities affected their agency to socialize with the native speakers. Their fear of being judged and laughed

at by the insiders was not part of their imagined identities. Their images of being successful and proficient language users and individuals were tarnished as their imagined linguistic privilege could not save them from being categorized as foreigners and immigrants.

Summary

The interviewees' narratives of their present positions in the communities of practice in the college town in the United States revealed the challenges they faced as they tried to move through the continuum of Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation. Having formed images of themselves as free women holding no marginalized positions, these women encountered some new forms of marginalization as their immigrant and Iranian identities were not welcomed by some old-timers. Among some of the participants, lack of access to the linguistic recourses, which was the result of their nonagentive identities along with the existence of power structures, decreased their investment in language learning trajectories.

Chapter 8: Future Blossoms

Introduction

The Iranian women's past and present life stories and experiences can function as the building blocks of their future imagined positions and the communities in which they intend to gain the membership. These participants present perceptions about their positions as Iranian immigrant women in the future can provide increasingly more realistic foundations for the types of identities they can forge, since they based their imaginations on the real-life experiences they had accumulated since they moved to the United States. Through these self-reflective interviews, the participants expressed a need for further language investment. They also expressed their hopes for the day that they would no longer be labeled as immigrants.

While talking about their future imagined communities in the United States, all the participants of the study believed that they need more investment in learning English to gain entry to larger professional communities. Their improved statuses in the United States compared to their previous gendered positions in their home country was the inspiration behind their future intention to invest more in language learning. As Norton (1995) mentioned, foreseeing future possibilities and membership in the target communities of practice encourage language learners to form imagined communities and identities in their minds. Imagination can then be the source of language investment.

The difference between the imagined communities and identities these women formed before coming to the States and the ones they imagined after moving to the United States is that the latter imagined communities and identities were more realistic;

they were based on experiences they had in the United States. Findings drawn from the interviews suggested a set of themes about their future images of themselves in the United States. Each of these themes is explored in the following sections.

Life-long Investment in Language Learning

All the participants confirmed the need to invest more time and efforts in increasing their language proficiency and skills. Finding the language as one of the important barriers in their present lives, these women became aware of the significant role language fluency can play in creating new career and social opportunities.

In Camellia's view, language learning was an endless process requiring extensive investment and effort to acquire complete proficiency: "During our talk in Farsi, I sometimes asked myself what these words mean. So, if I still have linguistic questions about my mother tongue, then it's normal not to know all the word in English". Camellia was hopeful that her educational background and advanced language proficiency could elevate her immigrant position in future:

I think since the United States has accepted many immigrants, the immigrants' rights are clearly defined. So, I don't have to fight for proving myself. I can be hopeful that I will have the future I deserve based on my abilities. Of course, there are some positions which are not available for internationals and they only accept citizens, but still there are ways to reach your goals.

To Lily, language also played a crucial role in her possible future achievements. She intended to improve her oral communication and pronunciation by participating in some group studies. To Lavender, finding a good job in the United States depended on

her investment in more language learning. In her idea, investment in language learning was an investment in forging a stronger identity: “If I improve my language, my self-confidence may boost...The limitations which prevent me from communicating with people will be gone. When the language obstacle is removed, one is more courageous to participate in more activities”.

As a future potential counselor, Daffodil believed that she could be empowered if she became a fluent speaker on her academic jargon: “Well, I know someday I definitely will be fluent, and definitely I am going to have more power, you know in terms of my profession”.

Understanding the significant role of language in socialization, Magnolia decided to invest more in language learning. She and her husband’s decision to live in the States could be challenging. As a result, she found investment in language as necessary.

To Sunflower, language is the gateway to all her future desires. She planned to become a faculty member, and she knew that reaching this goal requires great oral communication: “There is an Iranian faculty woman in our department, and when I compare her with myself, I see that how much I need to learn English since I want to become a faculty member. If I want to teach grads, I cannot say I don’t understand, that’s a disaster.” Like other participants, Azalea also wanted to invest more in improving her language skills to become more fluent.

For more proficient language users, investment in language would be more selective. They had plans to improve those linguistic features and skills which were problematic to them. To attain her dream of being known in her major, Jasmine expressed

her full confidence in her fluency in English; however, she mentioned that she needed to know more about academic writing and collocations. Orchid's imagined investment in language learning would include socializing more with native speakers, and watching current TV shows and movies. In her view, such strategies could help her master colloquial language. As an advanced language user, Violet's only desire was to have more native-like pronunciation.

Stable Professional and Academic Status to Downsize Immigrant-related Issues

Another significant theme also emerged from the participants' narratives regarding their future perceptions about living in the United States; They were concerned about the effects of their immigrants identities on their future professional lives. Lily highlighted the necessity of finding a job to secure her life in the United States as an immigrant:

It's very important for me as an immigrant, to find a job. And this an obstacle for everyone. All the students here add more and more to their resumes so that they will have more opportunities. But all of us are worried that being an Iranian and an international my cause them problems. Why? Because the company which hires us should sponsor us and apply for a green card for us, and most of them don't do it when they see we are from Iran.

Lavender's imagined identity as a successful female was based on her desire to depict a more positive image of Muslim Iranian women to the American society: "My dream is that one day I can show that not all Muslim women are bad and they can even be successful".

Dreaming of entering larger academic and social communities, Jasmine thought of moving to a bigger city. She believed that in the larger community, she could present her capabilities fully. She also wished that in the near future the United States would become a cosmopolitan community in which immigrants' roles would become as influential as Americans.

To Tulip, becoming highly specialized in a field was a way to remove the possible limitations which her nationality imposed on her: "I think in higher levels of engineering I think your nationality doesn't matter because my previous advisor, who was from Venezuela, is the highest paid professor here and she has many students". Tulip believed that knowing more academic English related to her major could pave the way for transferring her ideas across different academic and professional communities.

During the interview, Rose expressed her concern about finding a career in the United States. She thought that finding a good job requires lots of academic success and publications. Additionally, she was hopeful that she could improve her language abilities along with gaining more academic achievements.

To Daffodil, along with lack of language knowledge another potential barrier to her success could be the political conflicts and the persistent negative attitudes toward Iranians: "Iran and America don't have a good relationship. Most Americas do not know anything. They see us as terrorists, extremist Islamic people. But that's not who we are. That could in anytime prevent you to get into social settings".

Finding a good position was critical to Orchid since she saw it as the only way to get closer to the American communities: "workplace is not like university. you are

always communicating with other people and most of them are natives. Then, you can be close to what your last question was, belonging to the context”.

Although during the previous interviews Magnolia narrated her experiences with Americans as all positive, she was dubious about receiving the same positive reactions in larger American communities: “Some American’s view on Iranian people is negative. They know Iran does not have good reputation because they think that some Iranians may support terrorism, but I have to say that the government is different from the nation”.

As a mother of two small children, Azalea was hopeful to get the chance to continue her education in near future and then start working: “I know for sure that I don’t want to stay home for all my life”. However, her life depended on her husband’s status. She could only think of staying in the United States if her husband could get a job.

Finding a suitable job was also an issue for Violet. She explained that how having the American citizenship could affect her life: “One of my goals is to get my American citizenship. I don’t know how that would make a difference in the way I am received by different communities, but at least it gives me a piece of mind”.

Iran, Changing for the Better?

The women’s perceptions of the possibilities that future may offer them signifies their hopes and positive attitudes towards immigration. Although these women did not foresee moving along the paths of success would be easy, they were positive that their current investment in obtaining higher linguistic and academic qualifications could pave their ways towards better social statuses in the broader target communities of practice. Since these women’s perceptions only pertained to their future lives in the United States,

the question of whether they would find Iran a better place to live in near or far future remains unanswered. Change is inevitable; however, as these women's limited agencies to change the unequal legal and social gender roles indicated, the change for building a gender-equal society will be a lengthy process. Creating such an egalitarian society requires more unity, efforts, and agencies on all Iranian women and men's part. While immigration can only be a short-term and personal solution to this problem, staying in Iran to make the changes happen may bring about a more promising future for all the women of the country.

Summary

By being asked to reflect on their future possibilities in the United States, the Iranian women in this study mentioned their wishes to gain full membership of the large-scale American society through building stable professional careers. To achieve their goals, these women stressed the need for more language investment. Additionally, they hoped that their future assimilation in the American community would decrease the negative consequences of being recognized as immigrants coming from Iran. Rose, Azalea, Lavender, and Jasmine mentioned some gendered myths they cultivated in their minds back in Iran. After living in the United States for some time, it became clear to these women that women in the United States also suffer from gender insecurities and inequalities.

Chapter 9: Discussion

Introduction

The discussion chapter aims at summarizing the results briefly and answering the research questions based on the emergent themes obtained after coding the raw data. A narrative qualitative case study was undertaken to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the Iranian immigrant women' imagined communities and gender identities affect their investment in second language learning before coming to the United States?
2. How do these women view their positions as Iranian immigrant women in the current communities of practice in the United States?
3. Do the imagined communities they formed before coming to the United States match the realities of the current communities of practice?
4. In what ways do these women's present perceptions of being a woman affected their adoption of agentive roles for participation or nonparticipation in the American communities of practice, and investment in second language learning?
5. How do these women's present imagined communities and gender identities shape their decisions about future participation in the American communities of practice and investment in second language learning?

For answering the research questions of the present study, the twelve women participants' interviews were transcribed and coded, and the emergent themes were used

to answer the research questions. In the following sections, the results pertaining to each research question are summarized and presented more briefly, the educational implications of the findings are discussed along with presenting any consistencies or inconsistencies with the literature review and the theoretical positions in the study. Finally, the implications and recommendations for further research are introduced.

Summary of the Findings

Regarding the first research question, for those of the female participants who intended to pursue graduate degrees in the United States, the investment in learning English in Iran was mainly geared towards gaining academic admissions to the American universities. Rose, Sunflower, Tulip, Lavender, Camellia, and Lily, who were not proficient English language speakers, had more investment in learning English to acquire good scores on the international English language proficiency test (TOEFL) and the test for graduate school admission (GRE) rather than focusing on the communicative language skills. Their approach to learn the language for the test was in line with the type of imagined communities they formed in their minds before coming to the United States. Back in Iran, these women were mainly concerned about entering academia. As a result, their imagined identities as successful professionals in their own majors did not make them prioritize learning the communicative language skills. For these participants, language was a tool through which they could gain the membership of the educational communities in the United States.

In case of Jasmine, Violet, and Orchid, language had a far more significant role in shaping their imagined identities and communities. While, for the other participants,

language was a facilitator for the realization of their imagined identities as graduate students, for these three women, language was the building blocks of their identities back in Iran. As Jasmine's case indicated, her knowledge of English was a refuge, protecting her against all the gender discriminations she suffered from in Iran. English also gave Orchid an empowered identity, shaping images of her living alone in a jungle. Violet's proficiency in English before she immigrated to the United States gave her a chance to become a language teacher and therefore independent from her family.

Azalea, Magnolia, and Daffodil had no investment in language learning since their immediate imagined communities were neither academic nor social. They came to the United States as their husbands' dependents; consequently, they did not have to take part in any language tests. Additionally, since these women's legal statuses were dependent on the husbands, they were not concerned about making any specific social or academic interactions in English.

The findings of the study pertaining to the first research question indicate that the Iranian women's investment in second language learning was highly dependent on their imagined communities and the type of identities they were hoping to establish in the target context. Since most of these women intended to move to the United States through getting admissions from American universities, they had to meet the language requirement set by the university.

The second research question aimed at presenting the participants' current statuses in the American communities of practice. By drawing on the women's narratives in the first phase of the interviews (their lives in Iran), it was revealed that although these

women' gendered identities were elevated both socially and academically in the United States, some of them faced other forms of marginalization in the new context. The more proficient language users reported instances of being racialized due to their Iranian and immigrant identities.

Regarding the third research question, the inconsistencies between the two types of communities (imagined and real-life) were mostly apparent among the female graduate students. These participants' narratives indicated that they did not get many of the social opportunities which they expected to find in the United States to communicate with the native speakers. For instance, Rose expectation of team-working was not fulfilled during her academic studies in the United States. Before coming to Iran, Lily had imagined herself socializing with her American classmates. However, there were few American students in her class. Violet's experience was also in contrast with her expectation. Despite her high proficiency in English, she could not establish close relationships with her American classmates in the university where she earned her first master's degree from. Jasmine was also critical of her racialized identity since she was mostly avoided by the native speakers because of her Iranian and immigrant identity. Additionally, some of the women' narratives revealed weak alignments between their imagined gendered and their current gender identities. Jasmine envisaged the United States as a completely secure place for women. However, she was disturbed and catcalled by men. Rose mentioned that even in the small college town where she lived there were police alerts warning female students not to walk alone late at night. She further explained that instances of sexual harassments could be even more prevalent in bigger cities.

The fourth research question probes into the role of these women's positions in the American communities in shaping their agency and investment in second language learning. Some of the graduate female students' nonparticipation in communities of practice and maintaining their national identities were due to both their nonagentive identities in addition to feelings of being racially marginalized. Rose, Tulip, and Sunflower were among those women whose sense of loneliness in the English-speaking environments made them resort to culturally familiar Iranian gatherings. As the result of their nonagency in moving from periphery to full participation, they did not invest in second language learning. On the opposite end of the continuum, those participants who were not socially active believed that language was the only barrier to gain the full membership in the communities of practice. Among the proficient language users though neither the knowledge of language nor their agency facilitated their access to the communities of English native speakers.

Regarding the last research question, the third part of the interview aimed at eliciting these women's imagined perceptions regarding the potential possibilities and positions they might achieve in the future. Almost all the women mentioned the necessity of improving their linguistic abilities and communication skills to handle more sophisticated conversations at work. Moreover, they were all hoping that by gaining higher social and professional statuses in the United States, the negative consequences of their immigrant identities would be decreased to its minimum.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate a group of Iranian women' perceptions of their (gendered) identity transformations and language learning trajectories back in Iran and in the United States. The findings of the study were analyzed based on the theoretical frameworks of communities of practice, imagined communities, agency, and investment in second language learning. In the following paragraphs the findings of the study are related to the current backlash against immigrants, especially those coming from the Middle East. The Iranian women of the present study can give the opportunity to discover the racism and sexism, their effects on these women's linguistic access, and how they manifested in these women's life experiences. Furthermore, the results are integrated with the theoretical lens of agency as a coconstructed phenomenon and the literature findings pertaining it. Finally, any consistencies or inconsistencies with the literature are cited.

Racism, sexism, and Iranian nationality. The current political situations in the world is not depicting a promising future for the immigrants coming from the underprivileged or Islamic societies. Islamophobia, which reached its peak after September 11 attacks, is now more apparent than before among not only the American politicians of the new government, but also white ordinary people living in the United States.

Iran, as a country ruled by the Islamic doctrine and a thirty-eight-year background of political hostility with the American government, has been marginalized in global economy and not included in the global society. However, many Iranian citizens are not

the supporters of the current suppressive and antihumanistic regime. Those Iranians who take refuge in other countries are the victims of their own government's viciousness. These immigrants, being hopeless about seeing any improvements in the economic and social conditions of their own country, usually seek for satisfying their suppressed desires in a foreign land. The possible future images of having better lives far away from their homelands encourage them to go through sometimes intolerable levels of hardship to gain the entry into the Western world. While they reach certain freedom and equality in new settings, these immigrants are sometimes marginalized due to the negative political atmosphere against Iranian Muslims. The case with Iranian women, immigrating alone or with their husbands, can be more complicated since they may also go through some gender identity transformations.

As the literature suggests (Norton, 1995; Pavlenko, 2000; Vitanova, 2005) not knowing the language of the target community seems to be the main hindrance to their success and fulfillment of their dreams. However, the women participants' stories revealed new findings. Those women who were weak speakers of English had limited social interactions. Consequently, they had much less chances to socialize and learn the language. They were mostly impressed by the native speakers' behavioral strategies and politeness.

On the other hand, the more proficient women language speakers were the ones who could notice the hidden layers of racism in the American society. They were marginalized in the academic and social settings due to their Iranian nationality and Islamic backgrounds. Some were looked as backward and veiled women who could

manage to leave Iran to live in a much better place. As a result, the type of gendered identities these women had in Iran were mostly ignored or misinterpreted. Knowing that most of these women came to the United States to pursue graduate degrees in engineering either gave native speakers a sense of awe or disbelief. The sexist look to these women as victims of a patriarchal society was not the only type of sexism manifested in discourse. Men's willingness to talk to the unmarried women was also an instance of sexism which these women had already experienced in their home country, Iran. The language is then a tool to realize the racist and sexual abuses that immigrant women may experience.

Agency and identity. Based on the poststructural theory of community of practice, learning and identity are viewed as interrelated social practices. As a result, they are not fixed entities, and cannot be studied separately. Any changes in learners' identities can have impacts on their learning trajectories. Based on this theory, communities are sites of struggle in which individuals perform acts of participation and nonparticipation. Although in initial stages nonparticipation is a prerequisite for periphery and gaining full membership, its continuation may lead to instances of marginalization (Wenger, 1991). The Iranian women of the current study acts of participation and nonparticipation in the host communities of practice were indicative of the types of agentive acts both these women and the native speakers took. In discussing the participants' access to the linguistic communities, it is then essential to consider agency from its poststructuralist perspective.

In gaining memberships in communities, agency as a coconstructed phenomenon can account for identity and language learning based on both learners and the other

interlocutors' agencies. Language learning then does not only happen if the learners' attempts, motives, intentions, and desires are taken into consideration by the old-timers of the communities. Agency also includes the learners' acting upon their environments to move from periphery to full participation are hindered by the host communities (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Based on the concept of agency, the Iranian women' failure and nonparticipation were not always the result of marginalization by the host community, but were their selective choices to confirm their own national identities rather than staying on the periphery. The results obtained for some of these women' acts of nonparticipation are consistent with MacKay and Wong (1996) and Miller (2010) and Ebtekar's (2012, 2014) studies.

As MacKay and Wong's (1996) study indicates, agency is a personal choice, and investment in language learning can be highly selective. Rose's desire to maintain her Iranian community membership encouraged them to retain her Iranian identity rather than socializing with the native speakers. Additionally, Ebtekar's (2014) Iranian women retained their own national identity as a strategy to overcome feelings of marginalization.

The interpretation of agency by Miller (2010), which distinguishes between being responsible for one's position versus adopting agentive actions, were in line with the interpretation of some of the women' agency in the current study. As the participants in Miller's study did not go further simple and repetitive English language exchanges, some of the women' nonparticipation was to their lack of agency and holding simple and brief conversations in English.

Regarding the relationship between gender and positioning, Ebtekar's (2014) findings indicate that the women of her study prioritized their gendered roles and responsibilities as mothers or wives over their social and educational participation. In the same vein, the Iranian participants of the present study, who were mothers, prioritized their husbands and children's needs and preferences over their own interests and imagined identities. Additionally, the results of the study indicated that women had more access to male linguistic resources, and they were mostly avoided by the English native speaker women. These results are congruent with Moon's (2000) results showing Asian female immigrants and students coming to the United States have more meaningful interactions with American males.

Some of the women's nonagentive acts and lack of investment in second language learning can be explained in the light of the imagined identities due to their immigrant and Iranian statuses. The subordinate position of Iranians in the social context was also mentioned by Hojati (2009), Messing (2011), and Sadeghi (2007). In these studies, the Iranian women's positions were defined politically, and they were viewed as veiled, backward, and victims of male atrocities and dominance. Due to such racialized positions, these women avoided participation in communities which in turn led to noninvestment in second language learning. Likewise, Norton's (2001) participants' nonrealization of their imagined identities led to their noninvestment in improving their language skills.

Point of Inconsistency

As the literature related to identity and language learning shows, language proficiency is considered as an empowering tool helping immigrants gain the full membership and access the social capital of the host communities (Norton, 1995; Pavlenko, 2001; Vitanova, 2005). However, the findings of the current study refute the assumption that having high proficiency in the language of the target culture can lead to one's empowerment and access to the communities of practice of that society. As the findings indicate, Orchid, Jasmine, and Violet were the women who experienced marginalization the most. On the contrary, only the participants with low level of language skills reported complete satisfaction with socializing with the old-timers. Such an inconsistency may be due to the role of language in expressing individuals' ideas and feelings. As the advanced language users in the study, who were confident in their linguistic abilities, made attempts to gain the memberships in host communities, they had the opportunities to be engaged in longer conversations with the native speakers and therefore realized the hidden marginalization against their Iranian and immigrant identities. These groups were marginalized due to having the linguistic capabilities uncovering the antiimmigrant discourse of the American communities of practice. On the other hand, the language beginners did not have many chances to negotiate their positions with the old-timers, and as the result were ignorant of the realities of the relation dynamics in the host community.

Implications

As the findings of the present study reveal, immigrants' marginal positions in the target societies can have detrimental effects on the construction of their identities, legitimizing their agentive voices, and their learning trajectories. Consequently, based on the outcomes of the current study, several social and educational implications arise:

Second language educators and learners. In response to their language students' language needs required for the immigration purposes, the language instructors should:

1. Consider that most immigrants have little knowledge of the social dynamics of the target society. As a result, language education settings are the places in which language educators can enlighten the prospective immigrants' not only linguistic but also intercultural communication problems that they may face in the new settings. Providing the immigrant language learners with these realistic images, showing that the knowledge of the target language is not always the ticket to becoming American, can prevent them from developing feelings of frustration. Language educators need to raise their students' awareness of the significance of intersectionality of language, race, nationality, and gender in gaining full membership of the host society.
2. Familiarize their students with the current political and social climate in the world and in the target culture. Due to the current tensions between the Iranian government and most western countries (the travel ban on citizens of six Muslim-majority countries, including Iran), Iranians now face tougher entry

into the United States. The existence of such discriminatory rules against these nations can raise more racist voices and acts become louder and apparent inside the host communities. consequently, the future immigrant language learners need to consider and predict any potential pitfalls such an adverse political situation can bring about in the new context.

3. The Iranian language learners need to know that the path to full participation in the Western world is not an easy one; it requires their agencies to speak up and make their identities as successful women visible. They need to make the world acknowledge their ignorance in misinterpreting the Iranian women's statuses in Iran. The developed countries should be informed that Iranian women are not backward. On the contrary, they are constantly involved in opposition movements against the patriarchal discourse of Iran, and have achieved some success in pushing back the wall of gender inequality.

Target culture educators and curriculum developers. The role of the educational members of the host community in fostering immigrant students' learning is paramount. These educators and curriculum developers should:

1. This study can be an eye-opening piece, enabling the educators and people from other professions look more closely at the neglected immigrant communities around them. These immigrants need to be seen and heard. However, most immigrants are misjudged due to the distorted images the target community's social media represent to the public. In this regard, such narrative studies which depict immigrants' real life experiences along with the

educators' unbiased perceptions towards immigrant communities can build the blocks for creating more immigrant-friendly atmosphere in all over the world.

2. Besides the kind of awareness Iranian immigrant women can gain before coming to the United States, the establishment of some specific support groups in the new context can be helpful to guide these women work towards the academic and social goals which may not be achieved just by the women themselves. Such support groups can be either Iranian who came to the United States earlier, or they can be organized and sponsored by American governmental or educational institutions. These organizations can inform the new immigrants about the required linguistic and social tools which each specific ethnic and racial immigrant community need to be equipped with to be more successful individuals in the new communities of practice. Furthermore, as members of such support groups, immigrant women maintain their agencies since they do not feel insecure and unsafe in a foreign context. This way, they can become certain that their opposition voices can be heard and responded.
3. Iranian immigrant women, coming from a land in which women used to enjoy the most privileged rights, are not deprived of many legal, social, and personal rights in the new regime ruling their country, Iran. Despite all the existing gender inequalities, they could survive and become successful in their academic and professional careers. They come to the United States to add to their achievement and accomplish the goals they could not attain in their

homeland. As a result, they should not be looked as needy, backward, and victims of male dominance. They were brave women who took the initiatives to make a change in their lives. Instead of being ignored and looked down, these women deserve to be noticed, cherished and praised as successful individuals.

4. The Iranian immigrant women's struggles in the American setting can serve as a warning to the American society to avoid the social stigma attached to the immigration of Muslim and other ethnic and religious communities to the United States. As the theory of communities of practice indicates, learning is the result of the balance between the opposing meanings that individuals negotiate through interaction with each other. The current antiimmigrant atmosphere in the United States, however, discourages establishing cultural dialogues between the immigrants and the white American people. Such a breakdown in communication can result in dogmatism and racial prejudices among the nations. Lack of dialogue only brings about more hostility and ignorance instead of creativity, openness, learning, and prosperity. To avoid such situations in educational settings, immigrant students should be recognized as capable learners whose background knowledge is as worthy as the students of the host community.
5. The educational curriculum developers should implement international and global perspectives in preparing courses for future teachers. As these global perspectives pertain to all the educational contexts, the inclusion of a course

containing information for the future teachers' awareness of immigrants' special needs, can be helpful.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research on language and (gender)identity encompasses a wide range of topics and can be carried out based on various theoretical frameworks. To the researcher's knowledge, the current study is a pioneer in its comprehensiveness of the application of the poststructural feminist theories of imagined community, community of practice, agency, and investment in second language learning on a group of Iranian immigrant women in the United States. Due to the significance of such studies in the hateful political climate between the Muslim and Western worlds, conducting more research on similar topics can make both the immigrants and the host community members' voices be heard. A few of the recommended studies could be:

1. The findings of the current study are based on a series of three interviews taken from the participants during a one-week period. More longitudinal studies can be carried out to capture the participants' detailed linguistic changes and identity transformations.
2. The women in this study lived in a small college town in the state of Ohio. Similar studies can be conducted in bigger cities of the United States to investigate the types of linguistic and social opportunities that participants may have in bigger communities.
3. All the participants of this study were women. Another research with both male and female participants can be carried out to highlight the effects of

gender differences in the face of marginalization and second language learning.

4. Similar studies can focus on different immigrant ethnic groups living in other host countries.
5. Another study can incorporate narratives taken from participants' host community friends, academic advisors, colleagues, managers, etc. to compare their perceptions and pinpoint the problematic areas in which communication would break down.

The research on identity and second language learning is vast and can be based on various theoretical lenses. The current study with its focus on poststructural frameworks of community of practice and gendered identity displayed the lived experiences of a group of Iranian immigrant women in the United States. These women's stories of constant struggle with various unequal gender and antiimmigrant discourses in their homeland and the United States can be enlightening for educators in general and ESL researchers and practitioners, in particular. It is hoped that the study can be used as a reference to make the Iranian culture and women's uniqueness and capabilities known to a world which is now suffering from xenophobia, racism, sexism, and racial and gender discriminations. Additionally, the researcher hopes that in a near future all the men and women immigrants, including those coming from the Middle East, will be more welcomed, recognized, and appreciated the way they deserve in the host communities.

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Appendix A: Past (First Interview)

Themes: imagined community, imagined identity, investment, gender positioning

1. Please tell me a bit about yourself and describe what your life was like before you immigrated to the United States. (general) (question 1)
2. How were you positioned as a woman in Iran? Did your views about being a woman match the accepted gender ideologies in Iran? (Pavlenko, 2001) (question 1)
3. Why did you as a woman decide to immigrate to the United States? (Norton, 1993) (question 1)
4. Did you know any English before you came to the United States? If yes, how much English did you know and how did you learn it? (Norton, 1993) (question 1)
5. What were your intentions for learning English in Iran? (Trentman, 2013) (question 1)
6. When you were thinking about coming to the United States, in what linguistic and social American communities did you desire to participate? (AlHarthi, 2014) (question 1)
7. What images of yourself as a woman in the United States did you form in your mind that encouraged you to learn English? (Al Harthi, 2014) (question 1)
8. Did these future images about being a woman in the United States encourage you to learn English in Iran? (Norton, 1993) (question 1)

Appendix B: Present (Second Interview)

Themes: language and participation/ non-participation, language and gender identity

1. How are your current relationships with native speakers being influenced by your former professional and social positions as a woman in Iran? (Norton, 1995) (question 2)
2. Do you agree or disagree that the United States is a good country for women to immigrate? (Norton, 1993). Did you use to think about your life in the United States in a similar way? (question 2)
3. How much have you been successful as a woman in gaining access to the social networks in the United States? What was the procedure? Was it easy? (Norton, 1993) (question 4)
4. How has your English improved since you came here? (Norton, 1993) (question 4)
5. Do you speak English at social settings? Or do you prefer to keep silent? (Norton, 1993) (question 4)
6. How have your experiences as an immigrant woman been with Americans? (Norton, 1993) (question 2)
7. How is your life in the United States different from your life in Iran? (question 3)
8. How does your position as an immigrant woman in the United States help you with practicing English with native speakers? (Song, 2012) (Norton, 1993) (question 4)

9. Do your preconceptions about the opportunities to speak English in the United States match the chances you have right now? If no, how do you respond to the social structures which takes the choices away from you as a woman? How much do you think being a woman affect having or losing such linguistic chances? (Norton, 1993) (question 4)
10. Do you think you belong to the context of the United States? (Vitanova, 2004) (question 2)
11. Are you comfortable with Americans in the L2? Can you describe one of your linguistic experiences in English that you were not comfortable with? (Vitanova, 2004) (question 4)
12. How do you think Americans behave towards you as an Iranian immigrant woman? (Vitanova, 2004) (question 2)
13. What your life in the United States would be if you were a native speaker of English? (Vitanova, 2004) (Norton, 1993) (question 4)
14. How is being a woman in the United States different from Iran? (Pavlenko, 2001) (question 3)
15. Do you think you should abandon your traditional roles as a woman in order to be a member of social, academic, and linguistic communities of Americans? (Pavlenko, 2001) (question 4)
16. When/ with whom do you feel comfortable using English and when/ with whom do you feel uncomfortable? (Norton, 1993) (Pavlenko, 2001) (question 4)

17. Does your social and academic participation as a woman help you learn English? (Pavlenko, 2001) (question 4)

Appendix C: Future (Third Interview)

1. Based on the linguistic experiences you have had so far; do you think you will need to know more English for being a successful woman in the context of the United States? (question 5)
2. How do you foresee your status as an immigrant woman in the United States based on your present position? (question 5)
3. Do you think your current position as an Iranian immigrant woman is appropriate for gaining the membership of future communities of practice in the United States? (question 5)



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