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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

THE MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS OF HIGHER EDUCATED IRANIAN
IMMIGRANT WOMEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF
IRANIAN WOMEN AND INFLUENCES ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
AND WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Maryam Rostami

September, 2015

Margaret J. Weber, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Maryam T. Rostami

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the One Million Signatures Campaign of Iranian women and men who have taken a stance against gender inequality and freedom. This work is also dedicated to the women who push themselves through the defined barriers of normalcy and have overcome the fear of giving voice in advocating for gender equality and freedom in Middle East.

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One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.

—Maya Angelou, *USA Today*, 1988

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I hope I am building a legacy that, however small, allows me to honor my responsibility to give back to my global community. I anticipate doing my part to nourish more authentic and courageous educators and leaders. Throughout our global world we need leaders who advocate a holistic approach to education and who actively demonstrate their convictions. I hope to join with many others in doing my share to change education and improve the gender model, especially in "underdeveloped countries."

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study provides information on the experiences and perceptions of women who immigrated to the U.S. after the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution to pursue higher education and professional careers. The study offers new understanding of strategies used to overcome obstacles in completing academic goals in the U.S., pursuing professional careers, and negotiating balance between home-life and career. The study focused on 3 research questions:

1. How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?
2. What experiences (motivations and drives) shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how did these experiences impact their professional careers and family-life -balance decisions?
3. What strategies were utilized to support their professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations?

The study was patterned after the Giele (2008) research that used the life story method, which focused on 5 periods in the lives of study participants: childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, current life, and future plans. A semi-structured survey instrument elicited open-ended responses grouped into 4 sections: Identity, drive and motivation, relational style, and adaptive style. The data was provided by 21 women who met the selection criteria of the study and agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews.

The findings centered on the participants' need to find a meaningful balance between work- and home life. Family was a key priority of all of the respondents, an influence that mirrored Iranian society values. The women who made the choice to immigrate felt pressure to succeed in all of their endeavors. Additional findings highlighted the importance of the

participants' self-efficacy and expectations of high achievements instilled in their early years, along with their strong aspirations to excel in professional careers. Having one or more mentors and accommodations made by immediate and extended family members supported the participants in meeting their work-life balance goals. The findings can be useful to other women immigrants to the U.S. who seek work-life balance as they adhere to the traditional female roles of their home countries and adapt to the demands of professional careers in the U.S.

Chapter 1. Background of the Study

The position of women around the world has changed markedly over the last century as women increasingly participate in societies and gain equality. Socio-political movements have been a significant force for change. As women have transitioned into their expanded roles in society, their empowerment has manifested over a range of education and career endeavors (Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2001; Giele, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Scheffler, 2007; Stewart, 1993). The increased participation by women has the capacity to cause revolutionary changes in the ways people around the world perceive women and their roles, yet women continue to experience less mobility in the workplace and in education than men (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Gemelli, 2008). In order to facilitate changes in the workplace and in the lives of women who have moved outside their traditional gender roles, new strategies to motivate women have assumed crucial importance.

The goal of this research study was to explore the experiences (identity, relationship style, motivation, and adaptability) of Iranian immigrant women through an examination of factors that have impacted the life courses of a select group of women. The study data was analyzed to determine how high-achieving Iranian immigrant professional women have completed their academic programs, developed professional careers, and negotiated balance in their lives in the U.S. The ultimate goal was to learn practical strategies and innovative approaches, that is, strategies and tactics that work. The findings can benefit other global women who are attempting to balance dual roles involving their lives and professional careers.

In many countries a shift has occurred toward equal opportunity for employment and education in terms of gender, race, and age, but the pressures of some societies and cultures cause women to remain in traditional roles even when opportunities present themselves. This

holds true especially in Middle Eastern and developing countries where religious and social doctrines create a gender disparity that many women find difficult to overcome (Alksnis, Desmarais, & Curtis, 2009; Bahramitash & Efshani, 2009). During the twentieth century, the women of Iran diverged from women in other Islamic countries because of social movements that allowed women's roles to change (Ettahadieh & Bayat, 1993; Geiger, 1986; Ghazal Read, 2004). Although many women, especially those of religious backgrounds, tend to retain the traditional roles of wife and mother within the home, many others who had experienced success in careers under the former Iranian regime are now being held back in their endeavors (Borbor, 2008; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). By analyzing the outlook of women as they reflect on their lives and positions within society, it is possible to understand how individual women find satisfaction in their jobs despite the difficulties they face in combining traditional and modern ideologies.

Historical Overview of Women in Iran

When Westerners think of Iran, their immediate impressions are often stereotypes reinforced by the media due to the conflicts of the Middle East. Although Iran is an Islamic Republic, many of the rights and privileges given to women in other countries are also found in Iran (Giele, 2008; Mehdizdah, 2011). Iranian women have more freedom than women in some other Middle Eastern countries, yet limitations on women and their professional roles still remain; many of these limitations stem from long-held stigmas and traditions. To understand how women interact with different cultures after leaving Iran to live abroad, it is first important to understand the basis of their position as a result of generations upon generations of traditions and values (Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Harney, 1993; Poya, 1999). It becomes possible to understand

the rationale that causes both men and women to hold onto the traditional stereotypical roles of women that have slowed the process of change in many countries.

Many observers overlook history when they examine the way individuals are treated around the world. However, history is often the basis for the way individuals and groups interact with and regard one another. For women in Iran, a combination of ancient traditions and modern ideologies has created a unique expectation for women that must be maintained in order to interact successfully with different levels of society (Keddie, 2001; Razavi, 2006). In this light, the relatively recent change of the Iranian government into an Islamic Republic has curtailed the evolution of women's social position in Iran. Therefore, the position of women in present-day Iran has regressed to resemble women's status nearly a century ago.

Women during Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah's rule (1914-1979). Before the Islamic Revolution, Iran had rulers in the form of Shahs. Several of these leaders instituted changes that profoundly affected later generations. During the early 20th century, a number of changes in Iran led to increasing rights for women (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Saeed, 1981; Tremayne, 2006). For example, Reza Shah Pahlavi forced onto the women of Iran a drastic change that many thought bode badly for the future (Saeed, 1981). On January 8, 1936, he instituted a special decree that led to the forced unveiling of women, including those who had strong religious convictions and attempted to remain veiled (Afkhami, 2008; Bahramitash & Efsahani, 2009; Borbor, 2008; Saeed, 1981). This removal by force of one of the most iconic features of clothing for women of the Middle East had a liberating effect on women, albeit briefly (Borbor, 2008; Harney, 1993). While Reza Shah held power, women became more heavily involved in the workforce and their rights to education increased, enabling women to compete with their male counterparts (Ansari, 2003; Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Saeed, 1981).

Reza Shah was the next to the last in his family's dynasty. His son, during his reign as the last Pahlavi monarch, also made sweeping changes to the region and the lives of all citizens of the country of Iran.

Reza Shah Pahlavi era. Reza Shah Pahlavi was the ruler of the Imperial State of Persia between December, 1925 and September, 1941. After overthrowing Ahmad Shah Qajar, leader of the Qajar dynasty in 1925, he established the Pahlavi dynasty which lasted until 1979 (Beck & Nashat, 2004). Reza's legacy is quite controversial. However, some argue his leadership was a vital modernizing force (Afkhani, 2008). His reforms also demonstrated a desire for an Iran characterized by European-style educational institutions, communication networks, and elements of Westernized cultures (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009). Economically, Reza's policies created new occupations for more Iranians, especially Jews, and Reza banned photography of third world representations such as camels and other stereotypical imagery in an attempt to project a more contemporary image.

Mohammad Reza Shah's era. Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, was the King of Iran from September 1941 until February 1979 when the Iranian revolution overthrew him. As a leader, he followed in the footsteps of his father Reza Shah by introducing the White Revolution, a series of reforms geared primarily towards transforming Iran into a global power while also modernizing it through the nationalization of certain industries (Afkhani, 2008). This was an aspect of his government that led to his eventual overthrow along with his government's decisions such as recognizing Israel.

Mohammed Reza Shah made several key changes that affected the lives of women in Iran. The Shah also initiated several major transformations in Iran aimed at reducing the power of various elite groups. He ordered the seizing of massive estates and handed them over to

millions of small-scale farmers. He granted women the right to vote and allowed them to be elected to government offices (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Ghazal Read, 2004; Hoveyeda, 2003). Women were elected to the Iranian parliament, assumed positions as judges, and gained access to higher political circles (Harney, 1993; Nashat, 1980). These changes were reinforced by changes in family law that extended additional rights and protections to women in their home lives and in their marriages (Beck & Nashat, 2004). New laws were implemented to limit the basis on which a man could divorce his wife, to protect women from being married before they were legally adults, and to allow women to initiate divorce proceedings as long as they had just cause (Harney, 1993; Milani, 2012; Saeed, 1981). It is significant to note that although these changes occurred in the 1960s in Iran, similar movements giving women equal rights and protections had not yet occurred in some Western countries.

The Pahlavi rulers gave rights and education to women, but this same education helped to end their dynasty when large numbers of women mobilized to participate in the Islamic Revolution (Esfandiari, 1997; Harney, 1993). In the post-Shah government, many women's rights remained although certain restrictions changed women's roles slightly within the country (Esfandiari, 1997; Haeri, 2009; Mehran, 1999). Women continued to receive education and were allowed to serve in public office (Moghissi, 1991). According to research, more young girls were educated than their male counterparts as they had higher enrollments in lower grades and continued through college admission and attendance (Borbor, 2008; Haeri, 2009; Mehran, 1999). However, while women enjoyed benefits largely unavailable to them in other countries of the region, certain restrictions were reinstated for women, causing a regression in women's rights (Haeri, 2009; Karimi, Jomehri, Asadzade, & Sohrabi, 2012).

Women's status in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1979-present). After Iran became an Islamic Republic following the Islamic Revolution, changes in options that are considered socially acceptable have created a unique dilemma for women working and living outside of the home. Although the changes made by the last two Pahlavi rulers moved women's rights forward noticeably, restrictions have made it difficult for women to exert all the rights that had been theirs for decades (Osanloo, 2008; Razavi, 2006; Saeed, 1981). The most well-known of these changes stems from Reza Shah's forced de-veiling of the religiously pious women who did not wish to shed their conservative tradition (Borbor, 2008; Osanloo, 2008; Saeed, 1981). The Iranian government reinstated the requirement for women to be covered by the hijab as mandated by law and has enforced this since its reintroduction (Karimi et al., 2012). While only a physical limitation, the hijab symbolizes the gender disparity that has existed in Iran even though the flexibility women presently have is greater than in some other Middle Eastern countries. Similarly, although education has remained open to women, several academic fields are now closed to their admission, underscoring the second-class nature of women in these fields (Bahramitash, 2007; Karimi et al., 2012; Saeed, 1981). Thus, women in Iran have rights that the government affords them, but in truth they still remain tied to the traditions and ideologies of the region.

Although Iranian women may pursue education and work in the government, they must do so with strong government oversight and restrictions. This not only affects women living in Iran, but also impacts Iranian women living in other countries who still feel family and cultural pressures to maintain the decorum that would be forced upon them in their mother country (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Sleep, 2004; Stewart, 1993; Tremayne, 2006). How do Iranian immigrant women find a balance between their work and home life when the social structure that

many have been raised in dictates that women do not necessarily have the same rights as their male counterparts? Women who know their past can understand that women's rights in Iran once appeared to be changing the role of women as a whole, but now many women must instead struggle with the pressures of tradition (Bill, 1970; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Sleep, 2004). When looking at the roles of female immigrants abroad, it is obvious that the internal struggle to conform to socially acceptable norms still plays a part in the boundaries set for women and their families (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; Stewart, 1993).

After the Islamic Revolution, Iranian immigrants in other countries tended to either embrace Islamic traditions or acculturate to the customs of their new environments. This dichotomy has created two basic groups of Iranian immigrants and, as such, two distinct approaches to gender. For those women who have not diverged from tradition nor gone against the teachings of the Islamic religion and political structure, the balance of home and work life is a simpler matter to reconcile. They simply adhere to their traditional roles as wives and mothers (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Lerum, 2004). Therefore, while these women were part of this study as well, it was important to ensure that their responses were contrasted with women who pursued education and careers outside of the home and were seeking balance with the home life they adhered to traditionally (Kian, 1997; Singer, 2004; Sleep, 2004). This research study was designed to learn how a woman's perspective on her home life and work life come together to create an overall way to live that satisfies her desire to be a fully functioning member of society while also meeting the spectrum of her needs.

Background of the Problem

Female Iranian immigrants who aspire to achieve balance between their work and family lives must first come to terms with their responsibilities to maintain a home (Coutin, 2003).

Many women around the globe are taught that their priority duties are home and family, and it is a common perception globally to treat women as if this were the case even though their work varies by culture, religion, family, and class (Alksnis et al., 2008; Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2011; Borbor, 2008; Falicov, 2007). In countries such as the U.S., even though the traditional image of women remains within the home, the need for women to work to bring in income has led to a change in contemporary family life (Alksnis et al., 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). Research on the subject has shown that even when women prefer the traditional roles of wife and mother, in many cases they must work outside the home to produce income while still maintaining their family role (Alksnis et al., 2008; Sleep, 2004). However, it has also been found that women's roles are just as easily manipulated by their work outside the home as their work adapts to make exceptions for their responsibilities within the home (Singer, 2004; Stetz, 2007). It is not a mere desire of women to find balance between home- and work-life: many women do not have the option economically to select one role over the other (Gennetian, Lopoo, & London, 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). Further research into this necessity will need to be conducted to determine whether stay-at-home women have more power than women who work outside of the home (Geiger, 1986; Gemelli, 2008; Gennetian et al., 2008).

Even when women are given full access to education and career advancement opportunities, many maintain their traditional role of homemaker (Cotter et al., 2001; Fishman, 1978). These women may consciously prefer a professional career over homemaking, but in many cases they are encouraged by societal pressures to stay in the home. Therefore, their reluctance to pursue work comes from a cultural perspective that women should not seek achievement in the workplace (Hanson & Pratt, 1991). The opportunities for education and advancement might present themselves to a woman, but she needs strong motivation to step

outside her traditional role. For female Iranian immigrants who do decide to work professionally, the barriers to success are only partially related to the need to work outside the home for economic reasons. Even if a woman is determined to work outside of the home, the pressures to retain a balance between the home and workplace add to pressures that limit success (Ghazal Read, 2004). The dynamics of these counteracting forces represent numerous facets to explore and must be examined in depth to be truly understood.

Because Iran was beginning to restrict the roles of women as early as the 1970s in accord with the Islamic Revolution, many women moved to the U.S. to find expanded opportunities. Nonetheless, they still experienced obstacles in the form of residual cultural ties. In 2002 alone, nearly 5,000 immigrants came from Iran to the U.S. in the same wave as the 24,000 that moved to the country in the 1990s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Even though their immigration allowed them opportunities that were unavailable in Iran in many cases, the societal expectations associated with their gender continued to bind these women to the traditional roles of their birth culture (Alksnis et al., 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). However, the majority of these immigrated women needed to contend with finding a balance between their traditional roles in the home and their careers (Fishman, 1978; Hanson & Pratt, 1991). These women are the focus of this research as they are the leaders of all women who immigrate from abroad. They are the leaders to model in finding a balance between home and work life. This unique group of women overcame traditional stereotypes and roles after immigrating from abroad. They achieved high levels of success in their professional lives and yet maintained a balance in their work and home lives. They have demonstrated that both roles are possible.

My Motivation to Conduct Research on the Topic

The formative years of my education began with my parents' leadership. Specifically, I was influenced by the high value my family placed on education. My parents inspired my siblings and me to excel in our education. Going back as far I can remember, my mother, especially, encouraged us to learn as much as possible and to get the best grades at school. My father often asked how my siblings and I had done on our coursework before he asked how our day had gone. Education was revered and identified as the *golden opportunity*. As I matured, I realized I wanted to make a difference with my life and achieve higher education goals. I decided not to marry early and start a family. I was fascinated with the prospect of learning, which would allow me to see the world through new lenses. I focused on education and wanted to learn about young children: how they thought and how they learned. I especially wanted to learn new ideas related to teaching and children's learning processes. My mother was not educated to the level her children would eventually achieve, but she was very forward thinking in embracing new ideas. She recognized my motivation and did everything possible to help me with my academic progress. My motivation to acquire education became indelibly etched into my identity as a person and continues later in my life as a professional educator.

My mother lived according to the traditional roles of wife and mother, yet she taught me to do whatever I needed to in order to achieve my goals. My brother reinforced my motivation just as much as my mother did. He encouraged me to study in the U.S. and not to fall in line with tradition even though the pressure was ever present in the back of my mind. I had always been fascinated by Western culture, especially the modern values and progressive education for children. Finally, I made the decision to study abroad. Over time, I decided to pursue a career in academics with a goal to help other women find a way to decide in favor of a career and to

balance their lives as they saw fit. Everyone should have the right to work for their goals, and understanding how social perception influences these attempts makes it possible to motivate and educate others to do what they desire.

My views on the need to achieve my goals in academia motivated me to pursue a graduate degree after emigrating from Iran. While many women are unable to find a balance between their personal and professional life, I felt that by focusing on my academic goals I was following in the same vein of action as many Iranian women who succeeded abroad. With the support of my family and, most importantly, my dissertation Chairperson at Pepperdine offering me help whenever possible, I pushed myself to a new level of academic achievement and want others to be able to achieve their own desires of success as well. I have learned that it is not just the actions of a single person that make an individual successful, but instead it is how we interact with others in conjunction with our own work. If a person lacks the drive to succeed or is afraid to ask others for help, the entire attempt to succeed is hampered when it could otherwise have been helped by others including, in my case, my dissertation committee chair.

Even though I am an Iranian immigrant who has attempted to modernize the way I view the world, I have continued to feel the pressures of ambitions placed on me from childhood. The outlook I carried into this dissertation subject was unique due to my personal experiences, but these experiences impelled me to help other women to find a balance in their lives that they would find fulfilling (Fishman, 1978). Although many women maintain a home and family while they advance in their careers, attaining balance between work- and home-life is critical due to the pressures to perform both the roles of a traditional and a contemporary woman (Sinno & Killen, 2009). By analyzing first-hand accounts from other Iranian immigrants, the research undertaken for this dissertation was anticipated to show that with careful teaching and planning, it is possible

to empower women who want to achieve success to also maintain a stable work-life and a satisfying home-life.

As I look back on my own professional development and career path, I can see how I have evolved from a new immigrant and student to my position as an assistant professor in a community college and mentor-leader for young and underserved students. I have evolved from the child and strong woman who needed an advocate abroad to my role as a mentor and advocate for my students and for other women. I recognize the experiences that enriched my learning by contributing to my world consciousness, and I honor my cultural identity as a powerful strength based on my family values. I have recruited students from high school in an attempt to empower them to succeed in their dreams and have pushed graduate students to maintain discipline even when they feel their work is at its end. Working with individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, I have experienced the greatest gift an educator can receive: the visible recognition of another's decision to make a change in their educational path. Some of my own students have explained that my success as an immigrant, an individual who struggled to achieve her goals, inspired them and made them feel they could do it too. My goal through this dissertation research was to help others who are struggling to succeed in a new environment. I have heard so many stories of women who emigrated from Iran to the U.S. and achieved success, but I have also heard about those who failed or were unable to overcome social pressures. It was hoped that the findings from this study would encourage global women to use their voices to tell their own stories of challenges and successes in overcoming obstacles in a new home setting. Hearing individual women's leadership voices creates opportunities to develop a collective women's leadership voice through modeling, mentoring, adapting strategies, and achieving success in professional fields while balancing work and family responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite research in related areas, research to understand the factors, obstacles, and strategies involved in helping immigrant women from role-restricted countries manage their careers and family needs is sparse. The issues addressed in this research can provide help in filling the void in understanding the perception of Iranian women who came from Iran to the U.S. after the Islamic Revolution to achieve their educational goals and careers. These women searched for personal freedom, education, and career opportunities. Iranian immigrant women sought freedom, education, individual rights, professional careers, a wide range of choices, and personal autonomy in their new home as they established a new life in the U.S. They came to this country and many achieved all these opportunities. They succeeded in academia, advanced in their professional careers, and satisfied their traditional family obligations. This study probed into the factors, obstacles, and strategies involved in helping these women succeed.

Women's roles around the globe are diverse, but for those women who want to make their way in endeavors outside the home it is important to understand the barriers they face (Sleep, 2004; Stewart, 1993). The best way to empower an individual to overcome barriers is to create a set of tools to stimulate their desire for achievement and to motivate them. These tools can be derived through learning from the strategies that have worked for others. Even though social perception might limit a woman's ability to work in some fields, if she works hard enough, it is possible to achieve almost anything in the fields that are viable both in Iran and abroad (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Razavi, 2006; Saeed, 1981). In working with Iranian women, it is important to build strategies based upon their own perceptions of self to maintain focus on their educational goals, their professional careers, and the balance they desire to achieve in their lives.

To develop motivational techniques and strategies for achievement in both academia and the workplace, it is important to understand the role of women in Iran and abroad, and in particular, the ways successful women maintain a balance between the responsibilities of home life and those of a professional career (Geiger, 1986; Giele, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Naber, 2006; Razavi, 2006; Saeed, 1981). For recent immigrants, the situation is often different from that of women who have lived in a region for an extended period, as their perceptions of cultural norms are often different (Giele, 2008; Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Lerum, 2004; Mehran, 1999; Naber, 2006). By researching the perspectives of a group of Iranian women, the goal was to determine the factors that have been most important in maintaining balance in women's lives while fulfilling the requirements of all their perceived roles.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Iranian immigrant women living in Los Angeles balance their work- and home-lives. The research of this study drew from the reported experiences of a sample of highly educated and professional Iranian immigrant women living in Los Angeles who aspired to achieve higher education and professional careers along with balancing professional and family obligations. From an advocacy perspective, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate ways in which Iranian immigrant women have overcome many challenges and obstacles to achieve higher education and pursue professional careers while maintaining their traditional commitments to family obligations. This exploratory study involved phenomenological, narrative life stories using interviews to elicit Iranian immigrant women leaders' strategies and practical techniques for achieving professional goals and managing work-life balance (Giele, 2008). The researcher interviewed each participant individually utilizing a modified version of the narrative life-story framework (Giele, 2008).

Research Questions

The research data in this inquiry was collected from answers to a number of questions that led to understanding the implications of social pressures and stigmas for Iranian immigrant women (Geiger, 1986; Giele, 2008; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). In an effort to determine how women are either empowered or hindered by their own feelings, it was the goal of this researcher to answer the following questions in as much detail as possible through qualitative inquiry employing the life-story method:

1. How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?
2. What experiences (motivations and drives) shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how did these experiences impact their professional careers and family-life -balance decisions?
3. What strategies were utilized to support their professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations?

Research Design

Use of the life story/life history method. It has long been said that we are the sum of all of our experiences, relationships, and knowledge. In this light, a woman's life story is intrinsically linked to her perception of self and those around her. In using the life-story method for this research, the study was qualitative in nature and focused on the nuances of a person's way of thinking and feeling toward work- and home-life (Giele, 2008; Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Nelson, 2010; Singer, 2004). Because most people's actions are based on their perceptions and their own learned responses to stimuli, the retelling of stories can shed light on the way people feel about a subject even if they are not consciously aware of the origin of their feelings. In

working with female immigrants from Iran, this approach also allows the research to be conducted to shed light on experiences determined by pressures from the homeland versus experiences in a new country (Geiger, 1986; Giele, 2008; Naber, 2006; Singer, 2004).

The life-history method is useful in qualitative studies because it facilitates analysis of an individual's past within the context of the overall group. Because stories present the details surrounding an event or group of events, one can learn the perspective of those individuals involved in them instead of relying on just the facts about what occurred (Giele, 2008; Hagemaster, 1992; Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Singer, 2004). By using the life-history method of examination, the researcher was able to delve into the psyche of these women and explore how culture had impacted their feelings, perceptions, and behaviors.

Lessons learned. The primary aim of this study was to examine how the selected women have overcome obstacles and challenges they faced in their personal and professional lives to achieve work-life balance.

Secondarily, the study analyzed the roles of self-efficacy, family values, and ethnic culture. Achieving higher education aspirations along with balancing family responsibilities and professional career advancement was emphasized. Finally, the inquiry extended to the strategies and mentoring approaches these professional Iranian women have utilized to achieve their higher education goals along with maintaining family responsibilities and career obligations. The findings from this study can help women from different cultures seek support in achieving their own educational goals and balancing dual obligations.

It is important to explore how Iranian immigrant women professionals with higher education created practical strategies and techniques to overcome barriers. Having mentoring relationships for Iranian immigrant women may prove essential for women immigrants, for

example. Studies have shown that having a mentor increases the chances of succeeding in reaching higher education goals, professional advancement, career mobility, and work satisfaction. Further, this study addressed the success strategies, mentoring approaches, and practical paths used by Iranian immigrant professionals. Lessons learned that can be drawn from the research findings can help other women achieve academically and manage a family while working as a professional. The results provided by analysis of the qualitative data can help to empower and advocate for other women around the globe to succeed in their academic goals and career development along with improving their ability to balance family responsibilities and work. In essence, women can learn and achieve how to be effective, innovative, and resilient leaders, while balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Significance of the Study

For years, the West's impression of Middle Eastern women has been developed through movies and television that simplistically perpetuated stereotypes (Tohidi, 1991). In a country where women's lives are worth half of men's, women in Iran have risked torture, imprisonment, rape, and execution to fight for human rights and democracy for over 100 years. Although Iranian women played a significant role in the success of Iran's social movement, they were often denied rights extended to men (Afkhami, 2008). As a result of Iran's Islamic revolution, many Iranian women immigrated with their families to the U.S. for a life that offered more opportunities and choices, and many female Iranian immigrants have been eager to take advantage of new opportunities such as personal freedom, education, and a career in the U.S. On the other hand, in their new homes they confronted new challenges involving adjustment to cultural, social, and political conditions. Exploring the stories of these immigrant women can provide a pathway for others and encourage additional research in this area in the future. The

main focus of this study was to fill a void in the presently nonexistent body of knowledge about immigrant women's leadership accomplishments, their strategies, and the mentoring styles that assisted them in achieving their academic goals, getting a professional-level job and balancing their traditional family and cultural responsibilities with their careers in a new home country. Equally important, the research findings reflected the views of the women participants with different experiences and understandings of their academic success, professional advancement, and work-life balance. The findings can provide guidance and perspective for empowering and inspiring other women around in the globe.

A review of the literature included immigrant women's struggles, challenges, self-motivations, and desires to achieve higher education while nourishing and maintaining their families and cultural values. Many subjects have received scant attention in the literature, including coverage of women and their daily life experiences (or the distortion of those experiences), the various after-immigration choices and lives of men and women, and the conduct of family life. This dissertation study provided an opportunity to re-examine and reformulate theories related to balancing immigrant women's education, career and family-lives.

Further, the findings from this study could be useful in informing policy and decision makers as they develop models for women's leadership and balancing of women's dual obligations. Developing leadership programs and policies pertaining to immigrant women could facilitate gender equality, which can extend to the homelands of immigrants. At this dissertation research was conducted no existing literature was available that pertained to the specific research topic.

This study explored the impact of the life experiences of high-achieving women immigrants from Iran and learned how those factors impacted their ability to achieve balance and

satisfaction in their personal and professional lives. This research incorporated new thinking and understanding based on the historical and cultural impact of achieving higher education and balancing cultural, family, and work obligations from an Iranian viewpoint, thus contributing significant knowledge leading to future research regarding reaching higher education attainment and work-life balance in diverse families from different cultures.

Limitations of the Study

The following are the limitations of the study:

1. Due to constraints of this study project and the time-consuming nature of qualitative research, the sample size of 21 participants was relatively small. Therefore the findings of this study are not generalizable.
2. The presumption was made that the respondents would be honest in responding to the interview questions. This presumption is considered to be valid because the purpose of the interviews was to request highly educated, professional women who came to the U.S. as immigrants to share their experiences in achieving their academic education, careers and meeting family obligations.
3. Due to the time limitations, all interviews were conducted over the period of a few months.
4. The study was limited geographically to the Los Angeles area where the researcher resided at the time of the study.
5. Only one researcher conducted the interviews.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for this study:

- Balance: Meeting and fulfilling the demand within one's own personal and professional life in alignment with one's needs, values, priorities, and demands placed on them.
- Culture: The learned beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and traditions that are common to a group of people.
- Identity: Self- and external perceptions associated with a person's location in time, space, and cultural environment as being different versus conventional (Giele, 2008).
- Iranian immigrants: People originating in Iran, across all ethnicities and religions,
- Immigrant: An individual admitted to the U.S. as a lawful permanent resident according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).
- Islamic Revolution: The movement that led to the overthrow of the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi regime that replaced him with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Keddie, 2001).
- Leader: An Iranian immigrant woman who has achieved higher education and is employed in a leadership position in the fields of education, science, or medicine with at least a Master's degree with upward mobility.
- Mentor: An influential person who significantly helps and supports others in reaching their academic goals.
- Motivation: A desire to take action and achieve a goal.
- Pahlavi Dynasty: The ruling family of Iran from 1925 to 1979. The first king of this dynasty was known Reza Shah Pahlavi. In 1941, he was forced to resign the throne. His son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was King of Iran until the Islamic revolution in 1979.
- Personal barriers: Obstacles which an individual needs to overcome.

- Shah: The Iranian title of a King.
- Sharia law: Islamic law addressing “marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, contracts crimes, and sexuality as interpreted through the Koran” (Moghissi, 1991, p. 38).
- Work-life balance: The appropriate amount of time spent between professional and personal efforts as to achieve satisfaction (Giele, 2008).

Chapter 2. Literature Review

New Challenges and Reasons to be Optimistic for Iranian Women

For immigrant women from Iran, the issue of creating a stable work-life and family balance is often perplexing because they need to fulfill traditional roles within the home while striving to meet aspirations of success in the workplace and in the community (Cotter et al., 2001; Giele, 2008; Scheffler, 2007). Because women who have immigrated into the U.S. from Iran continue to hold allegiance to their traditional roles espoused by the Iranian Islamic Republic, it is often difficult for them to identify and pursue paths to success (Scheffler, 2007). An abundance of research is available on the ways in which immigrant women adapt to society. However, it is important to fill a void in the research that could increase immigrant women's awareness of the most successful strategies for finding work- and home balance (Hondagneu-Sotelo, & Raj, 2004; Scheffler, 2007). This chapter explores the literature that addresses ways in which successful immigrant women have succeeded in the workplace and in the community while achieving work-life and family balance.

As female immigrants move to the U.S., the career success to which they aspire must be planned to ensure that their personal and professional lives fit together to facilitate balance (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). When studying women who have overcome obstacles and have been successful, it was desirable to see how they overcame their obstacles and developed strategies to succeed in higher education and achieve in their professional jobs while balancing work and family obligations (Giele, 2008). With the number of cultural barriers that must be overcome, more often than not difficulties would persist without help from others. In this light, this research focused on the lives of successful Iranian female immigrants (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). By analyzing the history of these women and the obstacles they faced in the U.S., and then by

showing the benefits that can be received by other women if they receive the benefits of mentoring, the results of the study can be valuable (Gemelli, 2008). Programs such as mentoring and associated assistance can assist women in living their own lives and succeeding in any endeavor while still maintaining a work- and home-life balance (Gemelli, 2008).

In addition to the obstacles women need to overcome when they move to the U.S., it is also important to consider those factors that had the greatest impact on their aspirations and the formation of their goals. Although the culture of Iran is not the most Western in its view of women, the political changes at the end of the reign of the Shahs set women on a new path within Iranian society (Elder & Giele, 2009). Earlier societal sanctions that encouraged women to have careers reinforced the desire in some women to excel in an occupation outside the traditional roles delegated to women within the society, in particular the roles of wife and mother. By examining the myriad factors that have given these immigrant women the ability to think ahead and work for their goals outside of the home, it was possible to understand the ways in which the role of women has changed and will continue to change in the current generation. Even though a number of forces work against these changes in society, factors such as familial support and educational resources have allowed women to move outside the home with great success, and in new countries the desire is even more pronounced (Stewart, 1993).

This chapter summarizes the preexisting literature and research that has been conducted on this subject and then relates it to the way new immigrant women attempt to balance their roles in their own lives (Alksnis et al., 2008). The research surveyed included historical information, difficulties faced once in the U.S., the effects of a new wave of immigration, ways to adapt, changing gender roles, work-life balance, values of the women, strategies for success, and support programs (Alksnis et al., 2008; Bahramitash & Efshani, 2009). Combining all of this

information into a single, coherent literature review and analysis provided a foundation on which future work on the subject may be pursued, including the transitional challenges of Iranian women in the U.S. (Geiger, 1986). Further insights into obstacles these immigrated women faced can be helpful to other female immigrants to the U.S. more easily come to terms with ways to balance their work and home lives effectively (Alksnis et al., 2008).

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter drew on literature and research which investigated the subject of successful female U.S. immigrants from Iran and how they have found balance between their work and family lives. Beginning with the changing role of women in Iranian society over the past history and its impact on cultural and social views of women, the chapter then transitions to immigration statistics and information (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Geiger, 1986; Ghazal Read, 2004). Following the exploration of societal changes that led to an exodus of women from Iran the chapter examines strategies these women adopted to navigate cultural barriers in their new country (Borbor, 2008; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Subsequently, the chapter reviews the current situation regarding immigration into the U.S., including reflection on how these women integrated their own goals within their new roles in society. Further, by incorporating adaptive strategies and the theoretical framework of the life-course model, the ways in which women and their values can both find balance with economic success is presented (Giele, 2008; Harney, 1993; Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Finally, an examination of mentoring programs and similar support structures that empower women shows that satisfaction in both the work environment and home life can be achieved. The literature review shed light on all areas that affect the success of immigrating women. The existing literature holds clues for changes that can be made and new programs that can be instituted in the future (Giele, 2008).

When learning about the immigration of women into new countries, research indicated that the majority of reasons women immigrate stems from a desire to make a change in their lives and in the lives of their families. However, it is not an uncommon phenomenon for women to immigrate solely because of a desire to make a change in the state of their living. At the same time, though, their decisions tend to stem from either persecution or feelings of oppression in their homes or work-lives (Alksnis et al., 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). The transition to a new country often carries hardships and problems, but those women who make the transition successfully hold the promise of empowering other women to follow in their footsteps (Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Women who seek to make a change in their lives have a better chance of doing so if they move abroad. Examination of the historical changes of women's roles in society, and the ways in which oppression of women and gender identity have isolated them, and then comparing their roles from society to society has shown that disparity of opportunity encourages emigration (Kian, 1997; Singer, 2004; Sleep, 2004). Further, the intent of the author was to review other research findings relevant to leadership empowerment of women, working conditions abroad, and strategies employed by successful women as a means of helping those who desire to make a change to do so for themselves (Alksnis et al., 2008; Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009; Borbor, 2008; Falicov, 2007).

Historical Background

The role of women in Reza Shah's era (1925-1941). After the transition from the Imperial State of Persia to the Republic of Iran, Reza Shah came to power and established the Pahlavi dynasty, which brought sweeping changes to Iran. The position of Shah, previously held by Ahmad Shah Qajar, remained within the Pahlavi family until the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Beck & Nashat, 2004; Tremayne, 2006). Reza played a major role in shaping the social,

political, and economic environment of Iran by initiating major reforms, which ultimately allowed for the modern state of Iran (Saeed, 1981). In particular, unlike earlier leaders in the region, Reza Shah saw the benefits of expanding the role of women in society to emulate Western countries of the world (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Tremayne, 2006). Before he came to power, women were kept in very traditional roles, but by implementing broad changes that affected the roles of women, including economic reform and allowing women access to education and careers, for example, Reza Shah pushed Iran into the modern world. These reforms set up a chain of events that allowed women a new place in society (Saeed, 1981; Tremayne, 2006). However, Reza's legacy is quite controversial; some factions argue that his leadership and input were a vital modernizing force for the country whose prominence in international matters had dramatically declined throughout Qajar's reign (Afkhami, 2008). Other factions argue that Reza's reign was dictatorial, especially due to his failure to modernize the massive peasant population that ultimately instigated the Iranian Revolution. Instead, Reza had focused on gender reform to appear modern (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009).

Reza Shah's reform and the role of women. Reza Shah's reforms demonstrated a yearning for an Iran devoid of ethnic differences, nomadic uprisings and clerical influence. However, his reforms also demonstrated a striving for an Iran characterized by European-style educational institutions, communication networks, Westernized women working outside the home, and modern economic structures (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009). Of all his changes related to the role of women, the forced deveiling is one of his most controversial acts. During the Women's Awakening (1936-1941), Reza Shah supported the elimination of the Islamic veil as advocates argued that the veil prevented the contribution of women to the country's progress (Afkami, 2008; Ansari, 2003). It was the veil, as Reza Shah and his supporters believed, that

isolated the male and female genders, and by removing this barrier equal opportunity could be attained (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009). The reason this ended up being one of the most controversial of his reforms was that in promoting this new way of thinking about gender, he forced the veil to be removed even from the most devout of Muslim women (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Saeed, 1981; Tremayne, 2006). His disregard for the religious tenets much of the population held to be important caused his reforms and his attempts to modernize to be less popular than they could have been otherwise (Saeed, 1981; Tremayne, 2006).

The last change of Reza Shah to modernize Iran came in the form of banning stereotypical imagery. During his reign Reza Shah banned photography of such iconic imagery as camels and the wearing of clerical attire in favor of Western-style clothes (Afkami, 2008). His goal was to remove the stereotypes of the people of Iran as being anything less than equal to their European counterparts. In his attempt to Westernize he wanted to remove those images that could be associated with the past (Saeed, 1981). It was not just his changes to the role of women that made Reza Shah controversial, but also his approach to change that caused such a stir (Harney, 1993, Borbor, 2008). There was no deliberation or attempt at consensus. Although he made opportunities for some members of society, he did little to help the population that would eventually fund the Islamic Revolution.

Gender reform/modernization toward education, gender policies, and employment under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979). Following the rule of his father, Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi came to power (Saeed, 1981). Under his rule, Iranian women saw new freedoms as he continued his father's attempts to Westernize until he was overthrown by the Iranian Revolution in February, 1979. While in leadership, Mohammad followed in the footsteps of Reza Shah by introducing the Revolution, a sequence of social,

economic, and political reforms (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Ghazal Read, 2004; Hoveyeda, 2003). These reforms were geared primarily toward transforming Iran into a global power and modernizing the country through the nationalization of certain industries (Afkhani, 2008). Mohammad also sought to grant women suffrage in order to ensure that women enjoyed the same amount of freedom as Iranian men and equal access within the government to rights as well as duties to the state. As was the case with other Western countries that had already granted women the right to vote, Mohammad Reza Shah followed this trend as a pivotal step in changing the rights of women within the country, and this shows the extremes he was willing to adopt to institute change (Hoveyeda, 2003; Saeed, 1981). However, as with the forced changes in both the role of women and in secularization, Mohammad Reza Shah slowly lost the backing of the Iranian working class and the Shi'a clergy (Afkhani, 2008). He was willing to do whatever it took to make a significant change, but as a result lost the support of fundamentalist groups whose views differed greatly from his own on what was best for the country (Ghazal Read, 2004; Hoveyeda, 2003).

In addition to extending suffrage to women, Mohammad also enhanced workers' participation in factories through measures such as shares (Afkhani, 2008; Milani, 2012). Women were allowed to work in factories and as a result, they were able to take ownership of their working environment for the first time in recent history. Whereas many women had a desire to work in the new economic environment, access to education tended to be lacking because of problems of access to schools. As a result, the Shah improved the education system by establishing new elementary schools, as well as literacy courses, particularly in remote villages and also created the government provision of free nourishment for school-going children (Beck & Nashat, 2004; Hoveyeda, 2003; Saeed, 1981). Under Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, the level

of education across the country of Iran for women, and to a lesser extent men as they had higher levels of access before, rose to unprecedented levels. As a result of the amicable relations with Western countries, many Iranian students traveled to foreign countries for further studies (Hoveyeda, 2003, Milani, 2012). This cultural exchange helped to create a basis for the emigration of women decades later when the Islamic Revolution's effects on the role of women became apparent (Nashat, 1980). Those women who had experienced life before the shift, both inside of Iran and out, could call upon their own experiences abroad to determine whether they wanted to make such a change in their lives.

On the changing status of women during Mohammad Reza Shah's dynasty.

Mohammad Reza Shah published numerous books both during his kingship and after his abdication. These include, among others, *Mission for my Country* (1960), *The White Revolution* (1967), *Answer to History* (1980) and *The Shah's Story* (1980). *The White Revolution* is by far one of Mohammad's most controversial books because it supports the implementation of women's rights (Nashat, 1980; Saeed, 1981). During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, the government endorsed women's rights against polygamy, segregation in education and the general public society, as well as child marriage. However, self-regulating feminist political factions were dissolved and incorporated into a state-developed institution that managed a number of paternalistic standpoints (Milani, 2012; Saeed, 1981). This change gave the feminist movement government backing and support of the regime in power. It incorporated all of the women's rights advocates, giving them unity, and it also provided them with additional access to resources (Afkami, 2008). In spite of massive opposition the Iranian feminist movement under the leadership of prominent activists, such as Fatemah Sayyeh, attained profound advancements during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah and the government backing (Beck & Nashat, 2004).

Although some groups in the general public condemned these movements, the feminists gained a voice and power they had never held before.

During most of, Mohammad Reza Shah's leadership, and even in prior time, private-focused family law was quite restrictive. To give women additional power against traditional gender roles, Mohammad Reza Shah's movement called for changes in the rights of women in the home and in the workplace (Harney, 1993; Milani, 2012; Saeed, 1981). The Family Protection Laws of 1967 and 1975 were enacted to reform the laws and dispel restrictive policies. Women now had the legal authority to undertake various professions previously limited to Iranian males (Beck & Nashat, 2004). Women gained prominent positions such as judges, ministers, and ambassadors (Haeri, 2009; Milani, 2012). Even after the Islamic Revolution, the rise to power of a number of strategically placed women emphasized the desire of women in Iran to continue to make a difference in the political and business environment of the region.

During Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, women made great strides toward equal rights and gender equality under the government. Women were granted additional rights with regard to marriage and their personal lives, as well as sanction to enter government service in highly placed positions (Saeed, 1981). Although both Mohammad Reza Shah and his father had been controversial in their methods, the changes that occurred in less than a century included suffrage rights, equal access to education, and new work opportunities (Beck & Nashat, 2004). As women became productive and active members of society and the economy, their experience with equality later sparked emigration by many women (Ettahadieh & Bayat, 1993; Ghazal Read, 2004). Even though many of the changes regarding women were deemed useful, the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah ended when the supporters of the Islamic Revolution took control of the government and deposed the Pahlavi dynasty (Esfandiari, 1997; Haeri, 2009; Mehran, 1999).

The change in the status of women in Iran during the Islamic Revolution (1979-present). The Islamic Revolution, also referred to as the Iranian Revolution, involved the abdication of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and his government along with its replacement with the Iranian Islamic Republic. Although a myriad of factors led to the revolution, the role of women changed once again in the wake the regime change (Afkami, 2008; Milani, 2012; Saeed, 1981). The role of women in public life had been an important political and social topic in Iran during the reigns of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah, and the controversy over women gained added prominence during and following the 1979 Islamic Revolution (White & Rogers, 2000). The reintroduction of Islamic law and social mores clashed with modernist reforms, offering women new opportunities in some aspects of society, but also brought back restrictions that reverted to the period before the time of Reza Shah (Osanloo, 2008; Razavi, 2006; Saeed, 1981). The reinstated restrictions prompted many Iranian women to emigrate from the country to a new environment where they would enjoy freedoms related to gender rights and roles (Hoveyeda, 2003; Saeed, 1981).

Major changes in female employment followed the Revolution and have been scrutinized, condemned, and praised by different factions of Iranian society. Women still had the right to work in many fields, but certain fields of employment once again were closed to women (Osanloo, 2008; Razavi, 2006). Women were required to wear heavier clothing and were not allowed to advance as easily. However, the true impact of these changes is debated. Scholars, such as Bahramitash (2007), have argued that the Revolution negatively impacted female engagement within the labor market. In contrast, others claim that certain elements of Islamization, for instance, gender segregation in schools, enhance achievement in female mobilization, education, and engagement in the public arena (Bahramitash, 2007; White &

Rogers, 2000). The introduction of Islamic tenets into the daily lives of Iranians, however, led to an environment that was agreeable to a majority of the population, which primarily consists of culturally conservative individuals.

Women's participation in social, economic, and political roles within Iranian society has been affected by the introduction of the Islamic Revolution, but inconsistently affected. During the transition, Imam Khomeini granted women political powers by encouraging their participation in public affairs and gave women a chance to make their mark on the new government (Bahramitash, 2007). Women continued to have the right to vote and participate in public matters without the need to seek male approval. The reintroduction of many previously held stereotypes about the role of women in society, though, encouraged women to adhere to their traditional roles of family and honor (Borbor, 2008; Osanloo, 2008). One exemplary role model was Zainab, Prophet Mohammad's granddaughter, who confronted an Umayyad Caliph concerning the killing of her brother Hussein (Narjes, 2011). Zainab and her mother were exalted as role models due to their modesty, loyalty and fearlessness against injustice. This mixture of women in traditional roles conflicting with modern roles of women in society created inconsistency and complexity (Karimi et al., 2012). Instead of espousing a single ideology of what constitutes an ideal female role model, the Islamic Revolution focused on reconciliation of traditional values with liberties that had been given during the reign of the Shahs. The disputes over gender both united and isolated various groups within Iranian society. As a result, gender roles remain a prominent subject of discourse.

Immigration, Opportunities, and Iranian Islamic Revolution

Large emigrations often occur when people are dissatisfied with their living conditions. Moving to an area where opportunities await prompts many to move (Alksnis et al, 2008; Bahramitash, 2007). The different reasons for moving depend on the region they move from in terms of social, cultural, economic, and even governmental factors (Geiger, 1986; Giele, 2008; Naber, 2006; Singer, 2004). The winds of change that swept through Iran during the Islamic Revolution caused many people to leave their homeland in search of opportunities abroad where they could live in an environment that seemed more hospitable (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; Milani, 2012; Stewart, 1993). For women in particular, the desire to break out of the traditional gender roles that were slowly returning to Iranian society led a large number to emigrate to the U.S. and Europe. However, it is important to note that although the focus of this research is on women in the U.S. from Iran, the exodus of women is not isolated to a single country (Borbor, 2008). Women and families from the Middle East moved to distant shores to find a better future (Stewart, 1993). By focusing on Iran, it is possible to see that changes in the social and political environment spurred the large emigration from Iran.

For women from the Middle East and, in the case of this study, Iran, women had a changing role in society (Tohidi, 1991). Some of these changes moved the status of women closer to the status of their male counterparts, but many of the earlier modifications to laws and regulations within the country were then countermanded or amended during later political movements (Esfandiari, 1997; Ettihadieh & Bayat, 1993). To understand women who have moved from the Middle East to the U.S. and have been successful in their transitions, it is important to understand the role of women in Iran and how this has caused an exodus of this group (Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Women that transition to a new life and new role within society,

require diligence of mind and strength of character as evidenced by the women who have been successful in their efforts. However, the cultural norms one has grown up with still reside in the minds and psyches of emigrated women. Understanding of the ideologies that have limited women in Iran can help with the transition (Cotter et al., 2001; Fishman, 1978).

Employment for women and quality of life for Iranian immigrant women. One of the stated goals of the Islamic Revolution was to give women equal access to economic and social opportunity, but the new leadership has not produced this equity for the younger generation (Hoveyeda, 2003). In fact, Iran's age demographics hinder the possibility of a truly equitable state. Iran is a country of roughly 72 million people but at least two-thirds of this population is below the age of 30 (Poya, 1999). The human resource possibilities for the country are extraordinary, but the disparity in ages does not favor socioeconomic progress. Although the majority of the population is relatively young, opportunities for advancement within businesses and the government of Iran are relatively few because of the limited number of employment vacancies that need to be filled at any given time (Bahramitash, 2007). Additionally, young people do not perceive the changes brought about by the Islamic Revolution as positive because they work with little possibility of career advancement. For young women, this is especially important because their advancement is more complex, being compounded by the denial of political and cultural freedoms that were part of Iranian society before the changes that were instituted after the fall of the Shah's regime (Karimi et al., 2012; Saeed, 1981). When considering quality of life when an individual chooses emigration, these factors are weighed, and they reinforce the desire to move to a region of the world where opportunities are more abundant.

Quality of life may be measured in material well-being, security, political stability, community life, job security, family life, gender equality, and political freedom (“The Economist,” n.d.). Iran ranked 88th out of 111 countries in terms of quality of life according to *The Economist’s* report for 2005. This index is based on information pulled from the CIA, the U.S. Census Bureau, U.N. information archives, and the Euromonitor (“The Economist,” n.d.). Among developed countries, as reported in 2005, Iran was in the bottom fifth on quality of life, highlighting the difficulties of attaining high quality of living in the region (“The Economist,” n.d.).

Amidst the turmoil of the Iranian Revolution, an estimated 2 million Iranians left the country between 1978 and 1979 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The majority of these emigrants were women due to the perception that changes which had begun during the transition were less than beneficial for the female population (Bill, 1970; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). A number of economic incentives helped drive this mass emigration as Iranian women realized that their prospects of achieving additional wealth abroad were much higher than within Iran (Esfandiari, 1997). Again, due to restrictions on employment practices, women in the Middle East have even fewer possibilities for advancement than their male counterparts (Afkami, 2008; Hoveyeda, 2003).

Drastic move for freedom in the community. In addition to the economic disadvantages that have driven Middle Eastern women to the U.S., political and legal situations in their countries often contribute to the decision to emigrate (Bahramitash, 2007). The new regime in Iran began to impose changes affecting women, which reduced political mobility and independent movement within society (Mehdizadeh, 2011). Women became concerned that the Shah’s earlier policies that allowed women to become heads of house, gain extra rights within

the home, and hold ownership as citizens would be retracted (Bill, 1970; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). When emigrating from Iran, the lighter travel restrictions enabled Iranian women to go into exile alone, albeit with little support (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Women of Iran began their own emigration patterns without their male family members, but they were able to set up their own lives abroad (Tohidi, 1991). Nonetheless, these women retained loyalty to their culture (Mehdizadeh, 2011; Milani, 2012).

New Iranian Women Immigrants and Education in a New Home

The desire to emigrate has not just been based on the need to find new methods of employment. Education, also, has played a crucial role in the decision of many women to emigrate abroad. As the roles of women began to change and the home life became the prevalent role that Iranian society sanctioned, accessing educational opportunities became a stronger motivation for women to emigrate (Milani, 2012). As recently as 2012, 36 Iranian universities barred women from 77 academic fields, including engineering, accounting, education, counseling, and chemistry. The Iranian government's silence on educational restrictions on women, including quota systems coupled with a separation of the genders during studies, has increasingly isolated women who have attempted to pursue education. These restrictions that reflect growing conservative influences in education intensify the discontent among young women (Milani, 2012). The shift has moved in the direction of conservatism (Saeed, 1981).

As shown in the gender discrimination of universities in Iran, social justice is a growing concern in the region. In particular, Shariah law, predominant in the Middle Eastern region, also pressures women to migrate (Esfandiari, 1997, Mehdizadeh, 2011). Shariah law strips away all aspects of gender equality by bestowing on men greater control over women. Government enforcement of this doctrine makes the role of women even more tumultuous (Esfandiari, 1997).

Women have no way to fight back against injustice, and therefore migration to the U.S. provides Middle Eastern women with an opportunity to take charge of their lives. By emigrating, women are able to regain some of the power stripped from them by Shariah law and make their own paths (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; Stewart, 1993).

In Iran women are restricted now more than in recent decades (Milani, 2012), particularly, regarding the legal and political freedoms. During the reign of the Shahs advocacy on behalf of women increased along with a push for equal power in the government. In recent years women's participation in Iranian politics has remained quite minimal (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). The same restrictions and limitations placed on women by the Islamic government make these roles difficult for women to fill. In some cases, it is even deemed better for society to keep women outside of the political arena. Women who do have a goal of entering into the political system face difficult restrictions, which encourage them to emigrate (Carlson & Kacmar, 2000; Milani, 2012).

The influence of family and emigration. Family is an important factor to take into consideration when analyzing the people of Iran and the reasons for emigrating to another country. Because the family structure is very strong, it is not surprising that many of the legal and political issues surrounding gender in the country are reflected in changes in the home and family life (Afkhami, 2008). Even though women are allowed many privileges inside and out of the home in Iran, which is a key difference from other countries in the Middle East where women have fewer rights, restrictions are still in force (Ansari, 2003; Saeed, 1981). Women are considered to be the caretakers of the home. Even women who attempt to have a career must conform to the traditional role of a woman within the home to avoid feeling the scrutiny of the community. The family is a strong support mechanism within the country of Iran, but it is also

isolating, which leads some women to consider emigrating (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Saeed, 1981).

The cultural and legal norms governing family and community structures in Iran are deeply rooted in religious and historical perspectives that call for the separation of responsibilities based on gender (Beck & Nashat, 2004). Along these lines, the roles of males in society are seen as complementary to the roles of women including the duties within the home, roles within the government, and in business relations. For instance, the traditional female role is as wife, mother, and homemaker whereas men are expected to provide sustenance and protection for the family (Geiger, 1996; Gennetian et al., 2008).

As independent immigrants, women experience both sociological and psychological stresses (Milani, 2012). Iranian and Middle Eastern women have emigrated from the region in an effort to escape the changing winds of society (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Milani, 2012; Sleep, 2004). Because large groups of women left Iran and many countries in the Middle East in the late twentieth century in an effort to find social equality, even though their ties remain strong to their culture, the desire to better their lives was more important. For women to suddenly turn away from their life path in order to emigrate and make a change emphasizes their strong motivation (Milani, 2012).

The new wave of Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. Most women and their families that moved abroad did so to seek a benefit in another country outside of Iran. Since Iran was beginning to restrict the roles of women as early as the 1970s in response to the Islamic Revolution, many women chose to move to the U.S. to find opportunities, but often found obstacles in the form of residual cultural ties (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009; Fishman, 1978).

Migration of Iranian women occurred in numerous waves. The initial wave immediately followed the revolution as most women who supported the monarchial system decried the application of Islamic law. The second wave came following the Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988 as more women fled Iran to the U.S. to protect their families from the horror brought by war. (Fishman, 1978; Saeed, 1981). Another wave came as women experienced increased injustices and inequalities. This gradually impelled many educated Muslim women to leave their home country (Mehdizadeh, 2011). In 1996 when Mohammad Khatami became president, people expected him to fulfill his promises regarding reforming and liberalizing the country (Milani, 2012). When this failed and the expected changes did not take place, more women migrated to the U.S. in search of freedom from the restrictive policies of Khatami's administration.

In 2002 alone, nearly 5,000 immigrants came from Iran to the U.S. following the same wave as the 24,000 that moved to the country in the 1990s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). These new countries offered them opportunities that would otherwise have been closed to them, but the gender disparity still pushed many of these immigrants into the traditional roles of their own cultures (Alksnis et al., 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). The majority of these women had to find a balance between their traditional roles in the home and their career aspirations (Fishman, 1978; Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Women who faced this dual-role balancing challenge are the focus of this research as they are the leaders of all women who immigrated from abroad, and they are the group to model in finding a balance between home- and work-life. By achieving success in academia, careers, and home lives, this unique group of women has shown that both roles are possible.

In countries such as the U.S., where the traditional image of women continues to remain within the home, many women need to work to produce income (Alksnis et al., 2008; White & Rogers, 2000). Research has shown that even when women prefer the traditional role of wife and mother, in many cases they must work outside the home and still fulfill their family role (Alksnis et al., 2008; Sleep, 2004). However, women's roles are often adapted in their work outside the home to accommodate their obligations within the home (Singer, 2004; Stetz, 2007). By analyzing how women have come to terms with their roles after emigrating out of Iran, it is clear that a number of changes have helped them succeed. A number of regions have gained a relatively high number of immigrants (Tohidi, 1991). Comparing the census data related to immigration throughout the U.S. shows it is not a single trend that stands out, but instead a number of factors that have attracted women and have helped them to transition successfully in their new country (Giele, 2008; Milani, 2012).

New home for Immigrant Iranian women. In recent years, a new wave of immigration of female immigrants from Iran has transpired. It is clear that the Islamic Revolution started the movement of a number of people out of the country of Iran, but this trend has perpetuated through the quarter century following the shift in the government of Iran (Afkhani, 2008; Falicov, 2007; Gemelli, 2008). In recent immigrations many Iranian women making the move to the U.S. have settled across the country (Mehran, 1999; Falicov, 2007). To understand the ways in which Iranian women have been successful in new communities, it is important to understand the migration patterns of these women (Razavi, 2006).

In transitioning to their new lives, it is interesting to note that the immigration behavior pattern is not what one might expect based on the culture of the Iranian people. In the paper presented by Farah Gilanshah titled *The Life Experience of Middle Eastern Immigrant Women to*

the United States: The Case of Iranian Women in Minnesota, Gilanshah (2011) pointed out that Iranians are not an immigrant culture by nature. While some cultures around the world are more apt to take on immigration with more fervor, as in the spirit of wanderlust, for Iranian women the change would not have been as commonplace had it not been for changes in their culture (Poya, 1999). In particular, this is because Iranians as whole tend to have strong ties to family and friends and because women play an important role in carrying traditions from one generation to the next (Gilanshah, 2011; Osanloo, 2008). Women are also central to a number of social dynamics as they are often in charge of the arrangements for social gatherings, cooking, entertaining, and socializing with others (Gilanshah, 2011). Women have not always been central to the public sphere in Iran, but the traditional role of women in a community does carry its own unique problems (Gemelli, 2008). As a result, it is not surprising that research has shown new communities of immigrants to be centered around social structures similar to those in Iran (Nashat, 1980; Moghissi, 1991).

Motive for higher education and professional development in a land of opportunity.

Following the Iranian Revolution, a large number of immigrants from Iran have entered the U.S. forming new communities as new immigrants continue to move. According to surveys and census data collected in 2010, 1 to 1.5 million Iranian-Americans live in the U.S. with the largest concentration, about 720,000 people, living around Los Angeles. Other large communities of Iranian immigrants have settled in New York; New Jersey; Washington, D.C.; Seattle, Washington; and Houston, Texas (Tohidi, 1991). In Los Angeles alone, surveys completed in 2012 showed that Iranian communities tended to grow together even though the immigrants all moved for different reasons. Even though Iranians had the drive to move to new countries, it was

common for certain groups to remain together and create new communities for comfort and support (Tohidi, 1991).

The causes behind this mass immigration, especially regarding women, are important because the appeal of moving to a new country is not something which is part of Iranian culture as previously described. It was a combination of both push and pull factors that compelled Iranian women to choose to immigrate to the U.S. in the first place (Narjes, 2011). Political and economic conflicts were push factors. The pull factors represent moving to secure jobs and better opportunities. For women in particular both push and pull factors had motivating influence. Women were moved by opportunity for advancement and a desire to make a change in their own lives. They were willing to sacrifice their home life and their country (Narjes, 2011). Additionally, the social structure and ties to family suggest that women in Middle Eastern Muslim societies would rarely emigrate alone, yet many Iranian women did go into exile alone. In addition to the push and pull forces pertaining to emigration from Iran to the U.S., it is important to examine specific factors that accelerated this movement (Gilanshah, 2011).

Desire for higher education and professional careers in a new home. Since the Iranian Revolution led to a tightening of educational policies in Iran for women, further reinforced by recent changes that caused limitations on enrollment in a number of subjects, education was a major pull factor. In the U.S. no limitation is present to dictate acceptable subjects for women in pursuing college degrees, and women are encouraged to pursue their aspirations (Moghissi, 1991). For many of the top tier universities in Iran, female students actually outnumber their male counterparts by significant amounts. Even though opportunities appear to exist, many women recognize that societal pressures hinder their career progress in certain fields. Women in Iran have been drawn toward emigration to prepare for careers that are no longer considered

appropriate within Iranian culture (Moghissi, 1991). It is important to note that while some Iranian women permanently immigrate to the U.S. because of educational opportunities, student statistics are skewed (Falcovi, 2007). Census data often counts only those who entered the country as immigrants, leaving out the large numbers of people entering officially as non-immigrants, including students and visitors. The numbers are statistically skewed because women are not necessarily counted in the census if they came to the U.S. to attend school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Labor market development for women. While women in Iran are allowed to work in certain professions outside the home, their professional development is limited because of government and societal regulation of the jobs that are deemed appropriate (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1988). The Islamic Revolution occurred before one of the biggest economic boom cycles in the history of the U.S., and the increase in employment opportunities caused immigrants from around the globe to move into the country (Bahramitash, 2007). Iranian immigrants were no different as they moved in search of new work opportunities, moving either with their families or on their own (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1988). While education caused younger women to move to the U.S., it was the prospect of employment that drew families as well as independent women who wanted to succeed in a position outside of the home.

Immigrant Iranian women in the U.S. were studied in regard to their work habits and how they fared in different sectors of employment in comparison to other groups in the country. According to a study by Sabagh and Bozorgmehr (1988), Iranian immigrants tended to be self-employed more often than other groups. Further, this study revealed a higher incidence of self-employment among Iranian immigrants than among Korean Americans, an immigrant group reputed to have one of the highest rates of entrepreneurship (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1988).

According to the study findings, Iranian immigrants were not only more likely to be self-employed in the U.S., but they were found to have a better relationship with the community as a result (Sabagh & Bozorgmehr, 1988). For women, the desire to be employed outside of the home, coupled with the need to be independent, created a significant pull factor for those individuals who would make the move to the U.S.

A woman's desire to improve her position in society is reinforced by the changing employment practices, especially those that affect in the younger generation. Although the Islamic Revolution created a power shift in the realm of employment, a number of employers still do not allow equality for women. Despite the promised new opportunities for everyone in society, this has not come to fruition. Instead, Iran is typified by strict barriers in social situations and division by socioeconomic classes (Borbor, 2008). It is the children of those who were coming of age at the time of the revolution that feel the greatest need to move abroad for economic opportunities. Both genders are moving abroad in the most recent wave of immigration, whereas the movement of women is presently more pronounced than in past generations (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

The influence of freedom and autonomy. Within the communities where immigrants settled, ethnic sub-communities have become extremely important, especially for women. These sub-communities reinforce the role of the woman within the traditional society while also allowing them to adapt to their roles in their new home (Karimi et al., 2012). These sub-communities arise when people must work together to protect themselves against others in the community who might be wary of their presence as they are not of similar origins. The ethnic communities serve several purposes: (a) provide a support system as needed; (b) promote gatherings to celebrate festive and cultural traditions; (c) offer opportunity to meet and find a

marriage partner; and (d) encourage sharing dinner table discussions and religious or political activities. Women have a means of socializing within their own community as well as with those of different origins, which helps in finding a balance between their personal lives and their aspirations (Haeri, 2009; Keddie, 2001).

Regardless of gender, the U.S. provides opportunities for all races, ethnic groups, cultures, and educational backgrounds (Hoveyda, 2003). Freedom of gender roles has drawn people to the U.S. (Ghazal Read, 2004). Even though gender roles are still evident in the modern American society, they are not as controlled by government practices and social movements as in Iran and the Middle East (Geiger, 1986; Falicov, 2007). Traditional gender roles are also undergoing transition in the U.S. as men may become stay-at-home fathers while women work (Cotter et al., 2001). The less restrictive gender roles are making the society more accepting of differences as a result (Bahramitash, 2007; Karimi et al., 2012).

Political, social, and cultural inequalities caused a surge in the desire of many people in Iran to move, but it was the restrictions on individual rights for women that had the greatest impact on arguments to make the move (Bill, 1970). In Iran women are still kept under a tight rein in their traditional roles, although a veiled attempt is made to appear as though women are considered equal (Borbor, 2008; Milani, 2012).

In addition to the cultural shift in the rights of women, freedom of religion provides a compelling reason for many immigrants to move from Iran and the Middle East (Saeed, 1981). People of Jewish descent are considered a religious minority in many Middle Eastern countries, and have moved to the U.S. and Europe to be free of religious persecution (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). This motivation is analogous in many ways to that of women, as women and people of Jewish descent have both been in precarious situations in Iran. By 1987, an estimated 55,000

Iranian Jews had received permission to emigrate and by 1992, 35,000 of those potential immigrants had settled in Los Angeles, New York City, and in Europe (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

In the U.S., women have the freedom and autonomy to do as they please and this creates a strong draw for women living abroad. Many Iranian sub-communities include Iranian marketplaces, restaurants, Mosques, political organizations, centers for activities and festive events, local newspaper, and a variety of TV and radio stations, where women can interact freely. In this light, it is not just the role of women that has changed under this new system, but instead it is the way they interact with their own culture in conjunction with the freedoms they enjoy. America is termed the land of the free, and for female Immigrants from Iran their change in social status fits this description (Bahramitash, 2007; Karimi et al., 2012). Even though life in the U.S. presents its own particular obstacles to overcome for women, these are drastically different from the restrictions they confronted within Iran. In the U.S., women are challenged to navigate their freedom while maintaining their traditions in conjunction with their new roles (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

A New Home and Immigrant Experiences in the U.S.

Challenges and obstacles. Women immigrants to the U.S. face certain unique challenges. The need to master the language is fairly straightforward but involves the issue of communication as a whole (Falicov, 2007). Moving to a country with little knowledge of a new language can be intimidating (Hongdagnau-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Nelson, 2010; Stewart, 1993). Language barriers have delayed the success of many women in education and in the work environment. By taking steps to learn to communicate in English, as well as in other predominant languages in the U.S., such as Spanish, Iranian women have been able to

successfully pursue their aspirations (Hongdagnau-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Nelson, 2010). The U.S., on one hand, welcomes all immigrants but barriers are present that many immigrants do not realize exist. The process styles of communication vary among different cultures which can also cause problems (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Communication styles are linked to the way people interact. For example, directness of communication in many cultures is preferred but this style contrasts with respect for privacy and protection of information in other cultures (Alksnis et al, 2008; Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

Communication barriers based on culture make it difficult for many women to adapt quickly to their lives in the U.S. Further, women are taught to communicate far differently from their male counterparts in Iran (Tohidi, 1991). Iranian communication tends toward deference to the males as men typically hold the dominant power in a room (Hongdagnau-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Stewart, 1993). By contrast, in the U.S. it is more common for women to take control of the conversation. Communication in the U.S. is more straightforward and the genders are at parity with one another (Gilanshah, 2011). The need to adapt to this style of communication is difficult for many people who immigrate into the U.S. For women from Iran the adjustment requires overcoming cultural and ingrained social traditions as well as becoming accustomed to asserting their opinions (Gilanshah, 2011).

Although the culture in the U.S. is relatively free in regard to gender, gender differences are still observed (Gennetian et al., 2008; Ghazal Read, 2004). Gender disparities that permeate the U.S. culture are rooted in the country's own unique past. As a melting pot of different cultures, the U.S. has held onto the ideal that women are still the managers of the home and men, nominally at least, are considered to be the breadwinners. Therefore, just as in Iran, women must

navigate gender differences. In the U.S., official sanctions do not create gender roles, but instead the culture perpetuates these traditional ideologies (Giele, 2008).

Adaptation of cultural identity. Cultural identity for immigrants allows them to connect their new lives with their past (Nelson, 2010). Iranian women who immigrated alone could connect with new communities in the U.S. and find support for transitioning to their new lives (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Previous research into creating a new cultural identity has shown that Iranian women benefited by gaining freedom, education, and employment opportunities, but experienced the grief of losing their home, kinship relations, and friends (Gilanshah, 2011).

Cultural identity forms from the interaction of an individual's original culture and the culture of their new home (Bahramitash, 2007; Karimi et al., 2012). For successful Iranian immigrant women, the creation of a new cultural identity included joining their cultural heritage with opportunities in their new homes. As the U.S. is populated by cultures from around the world, it is the identification with other Iranian immigrants that has had the greatest impact on happiness, success in work, and educational endeavors (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Sleep, 2004; Stewart, 1993; Tremayne, 2006). By gaining the support of a community similar to those found in Iran, women can be empowered and can empower others to make a change in their own lives and identities. Across a number of studies completed by researchers analyzing the way immigrants make their new homes in different countries, empowerment been found to be a key to success (Suárez-Orozco, Louie, & Suro, 2011). Therefore, even though women are not always ideal candidates for working outside the home in Iran, in the U.S. it is important to find a community that welcomes these changes from traditional models of women in society (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). This union of traditional ideologies and the drive to succeed outside the

home creates a sub-culture within the immigrant communities of women who are ambitious and successful but still maintain ties to their homes and friends (Bahramitash, 2007).

A third adaptation of cultural identity relates to how the community as a whole interacts with them. Immigrated women consider themselves to be successful in their own minds and in the minds of their peers, but the need to create a balance in their home and work lives is important to traditional groups in immigrant communities (Sleep, 2004; Stewart, 1993). Therefore, the cultural identity of these successful women must integrate their own aspirations in work and education with the values of the community (Sleep, 2004). By ensuring that all aspects of a person's identity and the outlook of the community are incorporated successfully, immigrated women can be successful in the U.S. (Stewart, 1993).

Bi-cultural identity and Iranian immigrant women in a new home. Being bi-cultural carries a variety of implications. When people move abroad, their allegiance to their own culture often conflicts with the cultural norms of the new country. To succeed in the U.S., immigrants need to adapt to a lifestyle that appeases both old and new cultures (Hongdagnau-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). Sociocultural norms vary from region to region within the U.S., and becoming bi-culture involves mixing one's own culture with that of their new home (Bill, 1970; Sleep, 2004). A bi-cultural individual adapts to either culture more easily than someone who has not been exposed to these influences. Therefore bi-cultural individuals are able to interact appropriately in both cultures. Many immigrated women have adapted successfully to new cultural norms (Bill, 1970; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004).

When analyzing the successes of Iranian immigrant women in education, the workforce, home life, and in the community, the majority of these women have not just adhered to traditional or modern stereotypes of women, but instead have combined these different

perspectives (Giele, 2008). Although women do not have the same rights in traditional Iranian society, many of these women incorporate the latter into their own success in a new environment that is more open for both genders. The bi-cultural identity allows mastering social situations that require the individual to adhere to different gender norms. As a result, the most successful female immigrants are likely to imitate the traditional gender roles in conjunction with their new status in the U.S. to a greater extent than those who are not successful (Kian, 1997; Singer, 2004; Sleep, 2004).

As an added pressure for success, the fact that a woman is or is not bi-cultural is important to consider because it places her in opposition to those women who are solely of Iranian heritage. When looking at the factors that make these women so successful, bi-culturalism is a distinct differentiator. For those individuals who identify as bi-cultural, it is not just the need to come to terms with a single perspective of the feminine role, but instead it is the co-existence of two different perspectives on women in society. In the end, being bi-cultural is a factor which may lead to or inhibit success in achieving professional goals (Kian, 1997).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of any study determines how research is conducted and how the information gathered in conducting the research is analyzed (Giele, 2008; Nelson, 2010). However, all research projects are inherently unique, if only because of the population used. Because each is different, the framework must be adapted accordingly.

The life-course model for high-achieving professional women. The life-course model of research is an effective method of analyzing a person's experiences and then drawing conclusions based on their outlook and how they navigated various difficulties (Giele, 2008). A person's life story is linked to their perception of self, perceptions of those around them, and

their outlook on their goals and accomplishments (Giele, 2008; Scheffler, 2007; Singer, 2004). It is within these perceptions that people determine how they will act in society and how they will formulate their own desires to be successful. The life-story method allows researchers to gather qualitative data and analyze the way study participants think about work, their home life and their aspirations to succeed (Nelson, 2010; Giele, 2008; Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Singer, 2004). As most of the actions an individual takes are intrinsically linked to their perceptions and responses to stimuli, they often do not even realize the influence of their learned experiences. By examining a person's past and their interactions with stimuli, it is possible to determine not only their perspectives on the world, but how their experiences affect their daily lives.

When working with female Iranian immigrants, the life-course method facilitates research that compares the past experiences of an individual and their interactions with others (Nelson, 2010). Women who have moved from Iran have a unique outlook formed by pressures from the homeland in conjunction with their experiences in a new setting (Geiger, 1986; Naber, 2006; Singer, 2004). The life-history method assists researchers in analyzing study participants' stories that cover the course of a lifetime and provide a historical perspective. It is not just the facts surrounding the events that make this kind of research useful, but also the participants' comprehensive perceptions of these events (Hagemaster, 1992; Giele, 2008). Women immigrant experiences must be analyzed to determine not only why they have been successful and the ways their experiences have impacted their lives, but more importantly the problems they faced and the support, strategies, and other factors that contributed to their success (Singer, 2004). The problems juxtaposed with the subsequent success of study participants make this model central to the study because both obstacles and ways to overcome them must be understood (Giele, 2008).

Status, gender, and leadership theory: Iranian immigrant women's leadership and potential to lead others. Successful immigrant women have the ability to help other women succeed by sharing their experiences and lessons learned (Geiger, 1986). Women who have succeeded can provide leadership to new immigrants (Hagemaster, 1992; Giele, 2008). Immigrant women can inspire other women to pursue their aspirations and make a difference in their own lives. When considering leadership theory, it is clear that strategies used by women who have already been successful can contribute to a model that can prove valuable to others (Hongdagnau-Sotelo & Raj, 2004).

While successful women might not necessarily want to be leaders in their own right, the study of the experiences that contributed to their success can allow them to take on leadership roles in an ad hoc manner (Giele, 2008; Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Their experiences can allow them to help others by example; they are exemplary models of success within the community (Hagemeister, 1992; Sleep, 2004; Stewart, 1993).

Leadership and transformational theories. For those women who have recently immigrated to the U.S., leadership might initially seem to be out of the realm of possibility. As community leaders, immigrant women can assert their independence (Stewart, 1993). Women can empower other immigrant women by using their leadership as an example of what is possible according to transformational leadership theory (Naber, 2006). Leadership styles differ from person to person, but as each woman asserts her own style, she can have a positive impact (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Naber, 2006).

Transformational leaders hold positive expectations for followers. They inspire, empower, and stimulate followers to achieve beyond expected levels of performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This leadership approach can empower female Iranian immigrants once they

move to the U.S. (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Not all immigrant women are immediately successful, but by example they can encourage and empower one another to make a change in society. Because the role of women in Iran often takes place in social circles, women who have grown up in their native country can apply their social skills to ease their transition. However, they must also adapt these skills into their new roles in American society (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Leadership is a two-way street for these women as it allows them to make a positive impact on the lives of women in the community, and at the same time they are empowered to make a change in their own lives (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Work-Life Balance in a New Light of Choices

One of the central tenets of this research is the idea of the work-life balance for Iranian women immigrants. Women immigrants from Iran have the opportunity to reinvent themselves in a new context because of the lack of restrictions on women in the U.S. (Giele, 2008). However, as they endeavor to change the way they live so they can be successful, they need to maintain a balance between their work and personal lives (Elder & Giele, 2009; Giele, 2008). Allowing oneself to become consumed by one or the other creates a problematic imbalance. By comparing work-life balance as it is practiced in Iran versus the balance found by successful women in the U.S., it is possible to gain insights into the strategies of success for female immigrants.

Work-life balance in Iran and the Middle East. In Iran, the societal pressures imposed on women to maintain the home restrict many women to traditional gender roles (Stewart, 1993). Many women in Iran attend institutions of higher education, but they are no longer allowed to enter into careers in fields that have been deemed unavailable for their employment (Giele, 2008; Razavi, 2006). Maintaining work-life balance in Iran is difficult for a woman because she must

ensure that she maintains her traditional role in perfect form as well (Razavi, 2006). Women are still able to work outside the home and have taken on jobs in the government and in private enterprises, yet the role of women is still also intermingled with her role of wife and mother (Giele, 2008). In Iran, the work-life balance is even more important than it is for Iranian immigrant women abroad because it requires the maintenance of a traditional home life which the community accepts while also allowing these women to work outside the home (Giele, 2008).

It is the balance of work- and home life that makes it difficult for many Iranian women to succeed in a number of fields due to the amount of time that they must dedicate to their work plus the difficulty of maintaining the social ideal of womanhood. A woman in Iran who must maintain a single position within society, either as a working woman or as a woman who maintains the home, can still provide support for others, though (Giele, 2008). Consequently, mothers push their daughters in school and provide help to women who are wanting to be successful abroad. It is not just the work-life balance that allows women to be successful as a whole, but it is the decision to take on one role or the other. In both cases women are reliant on the support of others (Stewart, 1993).

Work-life balance in the U.S. In contrast to the work-life balance of women in Iran, most women in the U.S. are limited only by the amount of time and effort that they can expend on each role. Women in the U.S. find it necessary to set priorities and balance their roles accordingly. However, many women find it difficult to navigate the social pressures of home and family life in conjunction with their desire to be successful in the workplace as they feel the pressure from society that they should be able to do both (Giele, 2008). The forward-thinking liberal side of the U.S. culture impels women to rival the successes of their male counterparts.

Even though the U.S. represents forward thinking in views on women in the workplace, women raise a family and control most aspects of the home as well (Geiger, 1986; Sleep, 2004).

Self-Efficacy and the Desire to Succeed

The immigrant women who succeed often have certain characteristics that set them apart from other immigrant women who experience less success. To determine the best strategy, it is important to determine which traits need to be reinforced to achieve success (Giele, 2008; Hanson & Pratt, 1991). Women immigrants must reconcile the dual cultures they inhabit (Maslow, 2013). To succeed without these traits would be difficult (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004).

The first two traits which successful women seem to have in common are motivation and a desire to succeed. These traits correlate with working extremely hard in the face of adversity (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). The goal of these women is to succeed regardless of the obstacles that they face (Osanloo, 2008). These traits can help other women to emulate their success, and can be reinforced through motivational techniques (Maslow, 2013; Osanloo, 2008). It is also important that women endeavoring to be successful be motivated not just by the actions of others, but also from within themselves (Ettehadieh & Bayat, 1993; Saeed, 1981). Motivation can be strengthened through mentoring programs, open discussions, and modeling one's own goals after those of another. Although motivation and a desire to succeed should start from within, external stimuli can be reinforcing and helpful (Scheffler, 2007; Singer, 2004; Narjes, 2011).

Two other factors to analyze in conjunction with the desire to succeed are self-reliance and resilience. Most Iranian immigrant women are dependent, at least in part, on their families and their social groups before they move, but it is important that they do not rely too heavily on

these support systems. Self-reliance has been a common attribute of women who have who have become successful (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Cotter et al., 2001). Resilience is also importance because barriers to success still exist for women in the U.S., and they must be willing to keep trying if they initially fail at an endeavor (Razavi, 2006). In the U.S., gumption and a desire to succeed are two of the most powerful attributes a person can have, and self-reliance in the face of adversity strengthens resilience (Maslow, 2013; Razavi, 2006). For Iranian immigrant women, this is even more important as societal pressures to maintain traditional gender roles can dilute their feelings of self-reliance and success (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

Self-efficacy is another major factor in the success of women who move abroad. An argument can be made that women move because of their desire to expand their roles outside the norms of their restrictive society, but it is also possible that they want to succeed at any cost (Razavi, 2006). It is not that these women are attempting to go against society, but instead feel as though they are not fully accepted into their roles in the work force within Iran (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

Aspirations in education and socioeconomic status. The aspirations to advance and reach full potential can help in comprehending the plight of female immigrants in the U.S. (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). Aspiring to the best possible the work environment and opportunities for higher education drive many of the most successful immigrant women. These women push against their own boundaries to make themselves better and to succeed in something they had not been able to achieve before (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

The aspiration to have the best possible education is one of the key reasons for many Iranian women to make the move to the U.S. in the first place. However, it is this aspiration that makes it difficult for women to resign themselves to remaining within the same gendered roles

that have contained women for decades (Geiger, 1986; Sleep, 2004). When women become more educated in the U.S., they desire to stay in the country because opportunities presented to them tend to increase as well. Educated women may feel pressure from traditional groups, however, to return to Iran to continue their familial legacy and manage the home (Moghissi, 1991). Their education has given women the power to overcome obstacles that would have limited their advancement in Iran. By contrast, in the U.S. their education creates opportunities in the workplace (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). The aspiration to do well in all educational endeavors becomes synonymous with success, not because a degree is necessary for long term goals, but because it makes the process less difficult for many of these women (Giele, 2008).

The desire to increase socioeconomic status is an additional aspiration that fuels many successful women's desires. The desire to move up in *class* in a classless society seems to be an oxymoron, but in truth it is this desire that motivates some of the most ambitious people in any culture (Sinno & Killen, 2009). Even though a class system is not acknowledged in the U.S., certain indicators of wealth and success are still used to detect who has and who has not succeeded in achieving the American Dream (Narjes, 2011; Sinno & Killen, 2009). Ambition to change one's own position within society is a powerful force for immigrant women.

Family values of success in higher education. The family has two primary functions: first, to integrate children into the societal normative value systems and instill relevant status expectations, and second, to offer a stable emotional environment (Milani, 2012). However, it is also the role of the family to instill ideas and values that motivate children to succeed in areas that are desirable for the family and the community as a whole (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Geiger, 1986). In addition to their primary roles as mothers or wives, women also fulfill the roles of supporting and nurturing the family (Geiger, 1986; Milani, 2012). Family values can be used to

instill traditional values and gender roles, but they can also be used to reinforce the positive and empowered roles of women in the U.S. Therefore women who immigrate to the U.S. and those who create family ties in their new lives can be supportive of others (Hanson & Pratt, 1991; Karimi et al., 2012).

Familial expectations to be successful are also important for women especially when they immigrate alone and are separated from their families (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Because many women choose to move to the U.S. without the support of their families, these women are far more likely to be successful if their families have instilled the values of success in work (Keddie, 2001; Gemelli, 2008). While traditional roles in Iran do not promote women working outside of the home, families may still reinforce in their daughters ideas of success outside the home (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). When these values have not been instilled, it is even more important that they rely on their own resilience (Lerum 2004).

Many women have found success in careers because of familial support in their endeavors instead of the admonition of their family (Lerum 2004). When the family supports these women, they are able to go against social pressures and advance in any number of fields. Most noticeable in society are those women who have chosen careers in government and have become diplomats and community leaders (Ghazal Read, 2004). They demonstrate that women are able to hold positions on a par with men even in societies where the position is not considered ideal for any woman (Milani, 2012; Kian, 1997).

Often families do not encourage the idea of women in the workplace in Iran because of traditional gender roles, yet one aspiration that is still highly promoted in Iranian families is that of education (Ghazal Read, 2004). Women have been allowed to enter into higher education for decades, and this aspiration has remained constant despite changes to the educational system in

Iran (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). The high regard for education is important for a number of reasons. For one, education allows women who pursue success in the workplace and abroad to gain access to higher paying jobs and positions (Kian, 1997; Milani, 2012).

Influence of cultural values on professional careers. Cultures reinforce different values within the members of a society that tend to be fairly constant regardless of their origin. Whereas some women are more apt to pursue careers because of their cultural upbringing, others are more likely to remain at home in roles as housewife and mother (Falicov, 2007; Razavi, 2006; Saeed, 1981). However, these same cultural values are important in supporting women in their endeavors abroad (Poya, 1999). Although Iranian culture as a whole denounces the role of women in the workplace, it is far more common for support to be provided in terms of education and aspirational goals abroad (Falicov, 2007; Fishman, 1978). The desire to maintain a personal life within the home remains in the equation, but success in balancing work, education, and a home life in alignment with cultural values is often due to the support of family (Falicov, 2007; Giele, 2008).

Women in Iran are encouraged to be successful (Giele, 2008). The culture of Iran prides itself on success; and while women are more often than not considered to be the ones who should maintain the home, they also receive recognition in the workforce. Undoubtedly, some groups will continue to push for women to resume those roles which were normal during the period before the rule of the final Shahs, but others also note the success of women in any number of fields. Some universities are limiting the enrollment of women in classes deemed controversial for their own sensitive natures, whereas others are keeping recruitment open (Falicov, 2007; Fishman, 1978). The culture of Iran values success in any endeavor, which underlies the motivation of women to succeed within the home while also succeeding in professions.

Because women are deemed equal to men in the U.S., women who are successful are judged as harshly as their male counterparts. In this light, the support of family and friends within the Iranian community contributes to the success of women as it allows for them to gain a sense of balance in their lives (Singer, 2004; Sleep, 2004). The stress of being pressured to succeed while also maintaining an active home life and marriage is difficult for some women; this is what is expected in their culture and is considered a possible road to navigate (Giele, 2008). When women succeed, it is not just their personal success that counts, but the prestige is reflected onto the entire community. It is the success of these women that allows others to mimic their success (Ghazal Read, 2004; Poya, 1999). An understanding of societal and cultural implications that affect the way women view the world helps to comprehend the challenges successful immigrated women overcome.

New Strategies and Models of Success for New Immigrant Iranian Women

The strategies employed by successful women in the U.S. are important as they show that by balancing work and home lives, women can be successful while still remaining true to their own cultures (Coutin, 2003; Falicov, 2007). By analyzing the strategies and the ways in which immigrant women succeed away from their home cultures, new strategies can be devised (Bahramitash & Esfahani, 2009; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Immigration is always a difficult choice, but having examples of women who have been successful can ease the road to success (Ghazal Read, 2004).

The first strategy for immigrant women to understand is success in completing higher education. Immigrant women need to have a clear idea of what they want to concentrate on in higher education (Alksnis et al, 2008; Bill, 1970). By keeping a clear focus in mind, the best goal can be identified and a plan can be devised to achieve the goal.

When selecting long-term life goals, it is important to know which field of study will yield the greatest rewards (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Women tend to receive higher pay in fields traditionally dominated by males, but entering these fields may be difficult because of preexisting stigmas against the female gender (Alksnis et al, 2008; Amin & Al-Bassussi, 2004).

Job placement, also, is an area that correlates with education. In any field, a career decision involves reconciling differences in terms of academic and technical abilities, but fields in which gender is a controversial topic will prove more difficult (Amin & Al-Bassussi, 2004). When searching for a job, it is important that women prepare thoroughly for the positions they desire (Coutin, 2003; Fishman, 1978).

A further strategy for success is the creation of work-life balance. The desire to succeed in the workplace often overrides the desire to maintain a balanced home life, but this balance is needed for immigrant women to succeed comfortably (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010). Women need to create a balance in their lives to feel fulfilled socially and personally (Gilanshah, 2011; Singer, 2004). Women who create this balance and then integrate their lives according to balanced priorities can experience a full work life and an enriched home life. The happier and more content the immigrant woman finds herself, the better she recovers from loss and the more effective she can be when obstacles arise.

Support systems as a driving force. Support systems are necessary for anyone who is attempting to grow and change in their personal and professional lives. In terms of female immigrants, support systems come in the form of communal and social relations, work flexibility, and specific job practices that are designed to aid women in their endeavors (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Maslow, 2013). First, flexible hours are important when creating a work-home life balance especially when children are involved. Because family and children are an

important aspect of Iranian culture, having flexible working hours allows the woman to succeed in the work environment (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Carlson & Kacmar, 2000). Flexible work hours are not available in all jobs, but practices such as maternity leave allow for some flexibility (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Gennetian et al., 2008). When working to create balance for the Iranian woman with a focus on the home and the desire to succeed in the workplace, social support from friends and family is pivotal (Falicov, 2007).

A woman needs a strong support system that gives her the power to overcome obstacles including those imposed by society (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010). When working to achieve goals and attempting to be successful, the support system is often a driving force. To make a transition to a new culture and make a change in one's own life which leads to long-term goal attainment, support systems play a central role (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010; Maslow, 2013).

Cultural mentoring and growth for new immigrants. The mentoring approach to train a woman to succeed develops the abilities of independent women and allows already successful immigrant women to help new arrivals (Giele, 2008). Because the success of women is based, in part, on the social and work balance they created after immigrating to the U.S., they are apt to help new immigrant women find their own paths. Strategies will not work the same way for each woman, but the benefits of mentoring are clear because it promotes feelings of kinship while also helping the mentee realize that they, too, can be successful. Mentoring reinforces positive goals and guides mentees in understanding ways in which desired results can be achieved. Mentoring programs have had great returns for the effort expended; as a result, women who are the subjects of mentoring programs have an advantage in reaching their goals (Athey, Avery, & Zemsky, 1998).

Mentoring programs vary greatly from relationship to relationship, but the theories of mentoring programs are relatively consistent. The goal of the individuals in the mentor-mentee relationship is to understand the benefits of the relationship and then to support one another's wants and desires. That is, it is not a one-way relationship where the mentor provides all of the support and information; instead the mentor also grows through her interaction with her mentee (Athey et al., 1998). Interactions may consist of sharing a feeling of pride or making a major change in personality and goals. Immigrant women enter in mentoring relationships can receive help in aligning long term goals with those of the mentor.

Mentoring programs are not merely external stimuli, but instead are relationships in which an immigrant woman actively engages. Mentoring programs can create a valuable bond between mentor and mentee, especially when the relationship goes both ways and benefits both parties (Athey et al., 1998). However, unlike those stimuli which promote growth and change through the influence of family and social structures, mentoring programs allow for one-on-one interactions. In addition to increasing one's drive to succeed, mentoring can influence some of the biggest changes in a person's perspectives about their own role in society. At minimum, mentoring programs act as reinforcement in assisting individuals to achieve their goals (Athey et al., 1998).

Job Satisfaction. Women may find the attempt to balance their home and work lives to be a harrowing experience (Giele, 2008). As such, job satisfaction is an important factor to consider. If a woman is not happy with her position, she is far less likely to succeed (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Falicov, 2007). Correspondingly, women who are happy in their jobs balance their home and work lives much more easily (Ghazal Read, 2004).

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review covered available research findings spanning the reasons for immigrant women to move to the U.S., ways they have adapted, and the most successful strategies for finding a work-home balance once an immigrated woman has successfully integrated into her new society (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004; Scheffler, 2007). The emphasis of this chapter was to explore the literature related to how successful immigrant women have been able to maintain balance in their lives while also accommodating their need to achieve their academic education and professional careers in the new community. The literature review was enriched not only from examination of the roles of women in the U.S., but also by perspectives on women's positions abroad and successes achieved under adversity in a new home country. The path has not been easy for any immigrant woman, but evidence shows that it is possible to be successful and create a balance in women's lives (Giele, 2008; Scheffler, 2007).

In addition to the strategies analyzed, such as mentoring programs and other factors that have allowed immigrant women to succeed in their new home, it is also important to note the ways in which women have succeeded in areas outside the home where they were previously restricted to performing the duties of wife and mother. Although a number of factors work against the advancement of women in the workplace, support systems have allowed many women to succeed. When analyzing the effects of cultural pressures on women abroad, it is clear that without the support of family and friends women would have a much more difficult time in achieving their aspirations (Giele, 2008).

Reasons to be Optimistic About Women in Iran and the Middle East

Iranian emigration movements have found success not just because of a diaspora movement from the Middle East, but because of the strength of the culture of Iran. Over the past

quarter century, millions have moved from Iran to other areas of the world; in the U.S., Iranian immigrants have tended to concentrate in a few areas. These areas create a sense of community for women who otherwise might feel out of place. Even though the women may be unnerved by their move, they have supportive resources at their disposal. It is through the communal spirit of the Iranian community that the findings of this research may have a strong reach because the research can validate the idea that Iranian immigrant women have a societal obligation to help their sisters of Iran.

The Iranian culture is strong socially and even though many of the people who left Iran had relatively similar viewpoints on gender, social groups, and economic status, not everyone agreed on all issues. Instead, it is more hopeful that because all have moved to a new country to start their lives over or to take part in a period of expansion that they will be willing to help. Community, regardless of whether it is based on culture or on similar life movements, allows for people to take care of one another for the betterment of all in the group.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology and Procedures

Women who have emigrated from Iran to the U.S. face new challenges in creating a stable balance between their professional and personal lives (Giele, 2008; Scheffler, 2007). In many cases it is difficult to learn how these women have become successful in the U.S. because they often do not share their strategies with others (Laufer, 2001). Although research findings are available on ways women in general adapt to society, additional information is needed to identify strategies that have worked well for immigrated women to integrate into a new society (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raj, 2004). The present dissertation study is based on qualitative data obtained by interviewing that captured first-person perspectives from Iranian immigrant women. This study of high-achieving working Iranian women in the U.S. employed a qualitative methodology based on an interpretive phenomenological approach. The study explored factors that influenced higher-educated immigrant Iranian women in achieving their academic goals and professional careers while integrating family roles and work in a new country.

This study was patterned after the Giele (2008) research study which used the life-story methodology to focus on four periods throughout the lives of the study participants: childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, current life, and future plans. The goal of this study was to understand the challenges and priorities that impact high-achieving immigrant women in achieving success and balancing their personal and professional lives.

The data for this study was provided by interviews with 21 immigrant women who had advanced in their professional careers and personal lives. Their stories and life experiences were subjected to qualitative analysis to identify the commonalities and differences represented from case to case. Emphasis was placed on gaining insight into the participants' reactions to the stress of transitioning into living in the U.S. and how they overcame their challenges (Kelley, 1993). A

high priority, also, was placed on examining the support systems used by the study participants, their methods of success, and the ways in which they can provide guidance to others (Guirguis, 2013).

The life-story method was employed for this research study following the Giele (2008) study which proved the value of this method. This chapter restates the purpose statement and research questions. Descriptions of methods, research design, and study population are then presented. The instrument used to collect the data is described, as well as measures taken regarding its validity and reliability. In addition, the procedures for gathering and analyzing the data are covered. This chapter includes a description of safeguards to be followed that comply with requirements of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of the research participants.

Restatement of Purpose

Very few studies are available on Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. In this qualitative research study, the researcher focused on indicators of ways in which Iranian immigrant women have succeeded in assimilating and acculturating in their new country. The research study focused on professional Iranian immigrant women to ascertain motivational factors that have contributed to or impeded their success in achieving their academic goals and professional careers. Of interest were the practical strategies these women used to integrate their work and family responsibilities, including the support provided by their families and ethnic community. Their collective behaviors added to an understanding of how Iranian Immigrant professional women have steered their academic goals and careers over a lifetime, identifying and reacting to a variety of cultural, social, and personal barriers, as well as opportunities. The findings gleaned from the data assisted in identifying strategies and motivations that have contributed to the

success of these women. This exploratory study was designed to provide information to other women seeking to achieve their academic goals and professional careers while balancing their work and family obligations.

Research Questions

The research questions were based on Giele's (2008) narrative life-story research interview framework and were modified to apply to high-achieving Iranian women in the U.S. The research questions for this study are grounded in the following four themes: Identity, drive and motivation, relational style, and adaptive style.

1. How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?
2. What experiences (motivations and drives) shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how did these experiences impact their professional careers and family-life-balance decisions?
3. What strategies were utilized to support their professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations?

Research Design

The qualitative research method was appropriate for this study that focuses on problems, issues and challenges that take place in the natural settings of participants. Interviews with 21 Iranian first-generation, higher-educated women living in the Los Angeles area provided the data for analysis. The primary focus was on the experiences and challenges reported by Iranian immigrant women who were motivated to achieve their academic goals and professional careers while balancing work and family obligations in the U.S.

Qualitative nature of the research. Marshall and Rossman (2006) reasoned that “qualitative research is interpretive and grounded in the lived experience of people” (p. 2). Myers (1997) explained that qualitative research helps researchers to understand people and the social and the cultural contexts within which they operate. As stated by Adler and Adler (1987) qualitative study focuses on understanding rather than on predicting or controlling the phenomena of study and their variables. Methodologists have offered three major purposes for qualitative research: “to explore, explain, or describe a phenomenon,” or, in other words, to “understand, develop, or discover” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 33).

For narrative research and phenomenological studies, the main type of data is qualitative because the responses are captured in the form of individual experiences reported by the study participants. Qualitative data is central to the research design and methodology of this study. In employing the narrative inquiry, personal experiences and the life-course approach were important to clarifying and coding the data (Creswell, 2009; Golafshani, 2003).

The life-story method. According to Giele (2009), “Life histories reveal patterns that surveys cannot, because surveys take a fragment approach that examines the effects of variables on given outcomes in the populations” (p. 238). Life stories are useful because they are comprehensive and cover social issues, along with the individual life circumstances. The associated subjectivity gives a view of life from within, and the narrative form adds the dimension of change over time (Kohli, 1981). Gathering information the study participants deemed important allowed the research to be framed as a series of case studies. Life histories can reveal patterns pertaining to issues that affect a selected sample of similar subjects. Singer (2004) suggested that the life-story method is a sub-discipline of personality psychology known as narrative-identity research. The focus is on the individual and the way in which each employs

narratives to develop a sense of personal unity and purpose across their life. The life-story method devised by Elder and Giele (2009) looks at past, present, and future in order to link internal feelings and external situations. The authors also mention the method facilitates tracing continuity over a person's lifetime. Elder and Giele (2009) point out that the life stories are comprehensive (social and individual), subjective (from the person's point of view), and narrative in form (which accounts for change over time).

Giele's (2008) research that used the life story methodology focused on four stages of life: early childhood, adolescence and early adulthood; current life, and future plans. The questions that focused on young adulthood asked respondents to reflect on the time in college and aspirations for career and family life. To understand the context, it was important to explore the study participant's memories from early adulthood. Focusing on early childhood, questions centered on and the beliefs held by the woman's family towards education, and siblings, finances and expectations. These are designed to learn how the person was treated as a child. Additional questions focused on mid-adulthood, with the study participant encouraged to reflect on rewards, recognitions, frustrations, problems, and successes in both work and home life. This section examined current life status. The final questions invited women to reflect on their future goals and aspirations.

Research Procedures

This phenomenological study focused on individual life stories and events in the study participants' past. In the life-course approach, the goal is to ensure that the events in successful women's lives can be related in such a way that others can learn and adapt their own lives accordingly (Giele, 2008). Life stories are key as they represent the unique perspectives of each participant and reveal how each study participant interacts with the world. During the data

collection process, two main points of focus dealt with phenomenological studies and narrative interviews. Phenomenological studies focused on discussion of structures of conscious thought produced by first-hand experiences and perspectives on a given subject. Each of the 21 women interviewed in the present study expressed different perspectives on her success and different narratives to relate her experiences in moving to the U.S. These first-hand perspectives were pivotal to the study (Brinkmann, 2009).

Study participant selection. The study procedures entailed several interactions with the participants prior to the interview. The invitation letter to participants is included in Appendix A. An Informed Consent Form, which each participant signed, is presented in Appendix B. The Interview Instrument along with instructions to the participant is shown in Appendix C. A post-interview Thank You Letter is included in Appendix D. The GPS IRB approval letter is placed in Appendix E.

Each study participant met the criteria for selection to participate in this study. These were: (a) born in Iran, (b) educational level at least a master's degree, (c) professional career, (d) age between 30 and 60, (e) immigrated after the Islamic Revolution, (f) have a family (spouse and children), (g) obtained their higher education in the U.S., and (h) have no relationship with the researcher. The selection criteria applied not merely to their records of high achievement but, in addition, to the ways in which the prospective participants maintained career success and balance between their work- and home lives.

The data collection phase of this research entailed interviewing the 21 Iranian women using a variety of formats, including in-person, phone and Skype. In addition, following the interview, each participant entered her own responses to the questions using the Qualtrics online survey software. The face-to-face interviews took place in offices, coffee shops, restaurants,

classrooms, and homes. The interviews were planned to be completed within one hour, but the average interview lasted 2 hours with a minimum of one hour and a maximum of 2 and a half hours. Prior to the interview each interview participant was furnished with a copy of the main questions (see Appendix C). As requested by the study participants, the researcher substituted in-person interviewing with telephone interviewing and including Skype sessions, which in a few instances were expanded by emailing. The combined data collection forms facilitated capturing comprehensive responses from each participant. The flexibility accommodated the needs of participants and allowed efficient follow-up to obtain clarifications and elaborated comments.

The narrative interview was critical to using the life-course model as explained by Giele (2008). The narrative interview brought forth the experiences of the women who could create a life-course model for others to follow (Stanley, 2008). Conducting the interview relied on posing leading questions that directed the participant's responses using a combination of stimulated recall and the interview instrument questions (Gray, 2009). This approach allowed the interviewer to further direct the responses with prompts and to request the interviewee to provide examples and elaboration, but with care to avoid biasing the answers. This method encouraged participants to articulate their own stories and go into depth about the particular events they felt were the most important in their own lives (Gill, 2011; Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Some women focused more on their personal lives and how their family supported them, whereas others focused on the progress of their business lives over time. This personalized focus underlying the narrative approach allowed each woman to express her own perspectives and make the subject her own (Fales, 1982; Franzosi, 1994). Each participant, with her opinions on the reasons for her success, contributed both to developing a composite view and providing useful variations that could prove valuable to others.

Human subjects considerations. All study participants were assured of confidentiality and adequate protection of the information they provided. The interview notes were coded by assigning each study participant a number from 1 to 21. When attributing comments to a study participant and discussing responses, the identification used was: Participant 1, Participant 2, and on through Participant 21.

Each respondent completed an informed consent form that explained the research and choices each participant had with respect to confidentiality and sharing of information (Appendix B). The assurances of anonymity allowed the participants to speak freely about their experiences and their personal and professional lives without fear of associating their comments with their personal or professional identities. In order to conduct this research, permission was required from (and granted by) the Institutional Review Board of Pepperdine University. Although this study was designed to minimize any risk for the participants, some questions had the potential to provoke an emotional response or painful memory. However, all participants were given the option to refrain from responding to any question or to terminate their participation at any time. In accordance with IRB requirements, all notes and data were kept in the researcher's possession and were stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Data gathering approach. The researcher used Giele's (2008) life-course framework to identify subject participant experiences that pertained to the main four themes: identity, motivation and drive, relational style, and adaptive style.

- **Identity.** How does participant see herself? What factors does she identify with in describing herself? Does she mention her race, education, ethnicity, social class, or how she is different from or similar to her family? What qualities does she mention that

distinguish her (e.g., intelligent, quiet, likable, innovative, a good mother, lawyer, wife, etc.)?

- **Drive and motivation style.** What are the study participant's needs for achievement, affiliation, or power? Is study participant driven, or relaxed and easygoing? Is she concerned about making a name for herself? Is she focused more on helping husband and children than on their own needs (nurturance vs. personal achievement)? Does she mention enjoying life and wanting to have time for other things besides work? Does she enjoy being with children, doing volunteer work, seeing friends? Does she have a desire to be in control of her own schedule, to be in charge rather than to take orders?
- **Relational style.** What is the study participant's typical way of relating to others? As a leader, follower, negotiator, equal or colleague? Does she take charge? Is she independent or very reliant on others for company and support? Does she have a lot of friends or is she lonely? What is the nature of her relationship with her husband?
- **Adaptive style.** What is the study participant's energy level? Is she a risk taker, or is she conventional and uncomfortable with change and new experience? Does she like to manage change, to think of new ways of doing things? Is she self-confident or cautious? Does she prefer a slow or fast pace or does she seek routine and plenty of time? Or does she prefer to be doing several things at once?

Data gathering instrument. This study was conducted using the qualitative methodology of life-history interviews that were conducted using a semi-structured interview approach (Creswell, 2009). See Appendix C. The researcher conducted one-on-one, open-ended interviews with each of the 21 participants to encourage "rich, vital, substantive descriptions...of

the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 116). Each question was thematically and dynamically constructed for the purpose of contributing knowledge.

The methodology employed provides in-depth insights into the achievements of Iranian women who had immigrated into the U.S., including their challenges and strategies in maintaining work-life balance. Socio-demographic data was collected from the study participants to provide context, as well as aid in analysis. Prior to the interview, and as part of the process of recruiting participants, the researcher provided information about the study and built rapport with each study participant.

Interview questions and process. The interview questions followed the Giele (2008) life-story framework to reflect upon the study participants’ experiences as immigrant women attempting to achieve work-life balance. The interviewer also asked the participants to respond to a series of socio-demographic questions that asked them to state their professional titles, ages, highest degrees obtained, and ethnicity. The demographic information collected included: birth date, place of birth, education level, occupation, employer, marital status, date of marriage, spouse’s birth date, spouses education and occupation, children’s gender and year of birth, mother’s education and occupation, father’s education and occupation, siblings gender and year of birth, total household income, own earnings, health/illness/accidents/disabilities, religion, languages, countries visited and lived in.

The researcher spent a few minutes at the beginning of the interview discussing the importance of the study and procedures to be followed. The interview questionnaire with open-ended questions encouraged flexibility of response (see Appendix C). In using the life-course method of data collection, according to Elder and Giele (2009), experiences are filtered through

the individual as well as relationships between the individual and the surrounding of social structure.

- The first set of questions covered early adulthood focusing on college, including study concentration, graduate degree(s), and occupations along with expectations about life style and family life.
- The second set of questions related to childhood and early adolescence. Topics included family attitude toward education, sibling influences, financial circumstances, and religious community.
- The third set of questions asked about the participant's current adulthood. The questions covered achievements and frustrations in employment, family, and faith. Participants were invited to reflect on multiple influences, including work opportunities, marital status, children, lifestyle, community, housing, racial and gender issues.
- The fourth set of questions concentrated on future adulthood. Participants were requested to comment on future goals and considerations related to family, faith, community, mentor concerns, health, and finances.

Training to become a qualified interviewer. The researcher was trained to conduct interviews that required following proper procedures for academic research, including the need to treat each subject uniformly. The researcher read extensively about methods pertaining to qualitative interviewing and practiced interview strategies during her doctoral coursework. Gray (2009) suggested that researchers adhere to core ethical considerations, namely professional integrity and responsible relationships with research participants. Ethical considerations specific to interviewing, according to Gray (2009) are: “(a) promises and guarantees, (b) risk assessment, (c) confidentiality, (d) organizational permissions, (e) data access and ownership, (f) mental

health of informants, and (g) advice exchange” (p. 394). The training included instruction on building rapport with participants and ensuring anonymity by reviewing the informed consent form and explaining the interview process in advance of beginning the interview.

Validity and reliability of data gathering instruments and procedures. Validity and reliability of the interview protocols are important as they enable future researchers to build on and further elaborate the study findings. Validity refers to trustworthiness of the data in measuring what it intends to measure whereas reliability refers to the “extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 597). The integrity of a phenomenological study is protected by *epoche* the ancient Greek word symbolizing setting aside preconceptions, knowledge and judgments. The researcher needs to revisit the phenomenon “freshly, naively, in a wide open sense” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33) with the intention to consider each experience independently.

Instrument validity and reliability is needed to ensure feasibility and accuracy of the interview process. The researcher tested the interview instrument with an Iranian woman who matched the characteristics of the study participants to verify that the questions were be easily understood and answered. The importance of validity and reliability is emphasized by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers (2002) who labeled research without rigor as worthless and of no utility.

The first-person perspectives of the different participants represented individual experiences used to create an overall scenario of factors that led to success for immigrant women (Creswell, 2009). The interviews were conducted in a way that would ensure minimal compromise in the data and at the same time would allow for participants to respond freely.

Ensuring that the data is accurate allows the responses to be pooled and meaningfully analyzed (Creswell, 2009).

Work-life balance has many dimensions that have been studied over the past decade. In association with the Digital Women's Project (Weber, 2011) several doctoral students have focused their dissertation research on this subject area. The variety of topics demonstrates the breadth of the qualitative methodology and is based on Giele (2008). Krymis (2011) was concerned with understanding women of faith and how impacted balance issues. Barge (2011) was particularly interested in the competing priorities of African American women and the specific issues they faced as they sought to achieve work-life balance. Heath (2012) categorized the various strategies women with children employed in achieving work-life balance. Almestica (2012) explored the impact of work-life balance on women that were employed in a male dominated career. Jenson (2013) studied the role of technology among Native American women and its impact on their ability to balance work and family. Toston (2014) examined strategies of women leaders within a specific protestant church community. Capron (2014) explored the role of mentoring on organizational retention. Campbell (2014) explored women leaders of a major theological association. Rothberg (2014) considered the role of health, particularly cancer, and its impact on work-family life. Additional studies associated with the Digital Women's Project (Weber, 2011) are currently in progress at the time of this writing.

Other studies that have utilized the life course method within the Digital Women's Project include an emphasis on women who have endured significant hardships in their childhood, which may have impacted their lives. Neiworth (2015) studied women in leadership roles and considered the number of significant adverse and traumatic experiences during childhood, which shaped their leadership styles. Shahisaman (2015) studied a sample of women

leaders in the financial industry in India with findings that indicated effects of family and culture on all decision processes. Green (2015) considered strategies of women leaders working in the non-profit sector of the economy.

Coding and analysis of data. Coding of interview responses was an important aspect of processing the data. Responses from each study participant were anonymous to the researcher during the coding and analysis stage. Even though the interviews were done in a way that ensured the different women's responses would be accurate (data free of contamination), their responses could still be compromised unless the information was carefully protected. Because the requirement to keep the data anonymous was so important, the responses were recorded in a manner that ensured the researcher did not know which participant was associated with any response (Golafshani, 2003). Coding for anonymity allowed for the researchers to objectively examine the information provided by the study participants and minimized problems during analysis of the data.

Analysis of the data involved further coding of the responses into categories that represented themes articulated by the study participants. Another doctoral student who was familiar with life-course research helped to establish coding inter-rater reliability by sampling 10% of the interviews for coding consistency; this step validated the study findings based on responses from the study participants. Themes were identified across the study participant cases, grouped and analyzed. In this way the data constituted a type of consensus on relevant issues that led to developing the study findings. Although the study was guided by the three main research questions based on Giele's (2008) four themes, a variety of issues emerged that also entered into the analysis. Through analyzing the stories and themes, the researcher identified success

strategies that emerged to develop a model for additional newly immigrated women to follow (Creswell, 2009; Golafshani, 2003).

The Role of Researcher in Qualitative Design

It was important that the researcher was open and used sensitivity, creativity, and insight in conducting research. Morse et al. (2002) pointed out that the researcher must be willing to relinquish ideas that are not supported regardless of personal opinions. This is congruent with the notion that to achieve validity and reliability the researcher needs to “eliminate bias and increase the researcher’s truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 604). This was accomplished by creating carefully worded questions in advance. The researcher also received training including emphasis on not deviating from the prepared questions.

The researcher’s role encompassed inviting the participants in this study, screening them against the stated selection criteria, and conducting the interviews in a face-to-face format, electronically using Skype, for example, or by email. Therefore, total anonymity in data analysis was only partially achieved, which emphasized the need for following measures to ensure complete confidentiality in handling and storing the data. The researcher directly interacted with the information, a factor that intensified the requirement for clarity and objectivity. Examining responses after participant identities were removed facilitated the detection of patterns that contributed to meaningful findings and conclusions.

Summary

This chapter presented the research study methods and processes associated with of interviewing 21 Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. who were determined to achieve ambitious goals of success and balance in their work- and personal life obligations in addition to meeting

the study criteria of being highly educated and pursuing professional careers. The life-story narrative framework of Giele (2008) and Weber (2011) was used to explore the narrative of women who were interviewed. The methodology used by Giele (2008) focused on the identity, motivation and drive, relational style, and adaptive style of women. The chapter reviewed the research design and recruiting of study participants along with the interview instrument and procedures, and coding and analysis of the data.

Chapter 4. Analysis and Findings

Presentation of Data

This chapter discusses the challenges and success stories that were gathered in the form of qualitative data from Iranian immigrant women interviewed for this study to determine how they balanced work- and family life with their high academic achievement and careers in the U.S. By analyzing the data collected from the various respondents and then compiling the information into a single overarching theory, the chapter outlines challenges these women faced in creating a work-life balance and how they dealt with their multiple roles. Immigrant women face a unique set of challenges in dealing with a new culture (Falicov, 2007). When examining Iranian immigrant women, the issue is compounded by the differences in the basic cultures of both Iran and the U.S. that make their transitions more complex (Haeri, 2009). The findings presented in this chapter are based upon data captured from a survey of 21 Iranian highly educated immigrant women with professional careers and family responsibilities, along with historical data about their own younger years. Looking at the changes in the lives of these women, we learned how their own actions were affected by the influences of others across a range of subjects (Borbor, 2008). The chapter begins with a presentation of the participants' demographics followed by a deeper discussion of the purpose statement and research questions. The remainder of the section focuses on a deeper analysis of the data in regard to the research questions.

Overview of Participants

Table 1, following, presents demographic information related to the 21 study participants who were interviewed for this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Birth Date	Birthplace	Occupation	Marital Status	Number of Children
1	6/9/1973	Tehran, Iran	Housewife	Married	2
2	9/6/1970	Tehran, Iran	Physician	Married	2
3	9/12/1972	Tehran, Iran	Psychologist	Married	2
4	xx/xx/1961	Iran	Software Engineer	Married	1
5	10/30/1977	Iran	Attorney / Stay at home Mom	Married	2
6	xx/xx/1978	Iran	Self-employed	Married	0
7	5/25/1959	Tehran, Iran	Architect & Realtor	Married	2
8	1/9/1958	Abadan, Iran	Business Owner	Married	2
9	8/11/1957	Tehran, Iran	Engineer	Married	2
10	07/xx/1948	Tehran, Iran	Education Director	Divorced	0
11	8/24/1971	Iran	Optometrist	Married	2
12	2/12/1970	Tehran, Iran	Doctor	Married	2
13	07/xx/1948	Tehran, Iran	Education Director	Divorced	0
14	6/1/1965	Iran	Pharmacist	Divorced	1
15	1/9/1958	Iran	Self-employed	Married	2
16	11/16/1965	Iran	Professor at CSUN	Divorced	1
17	xx/xx/1970	Iran	Surgeon	Married	2
18	xx/xx/1971	Iran	Lawyer	Married	3
19	xx/xx/1979	Iran	Company President	Married	1
20	11/2/1970	Iran	Philanthropist and Mother	Married	2
21	xx/xx/1979	Iran	Medical Doctor	Married	3

The participants did not respond in the same manner across all questions, but met the goal of providing sufficient information to analyze the key factors and determine which factors were most important in contributing to knowledge about immigrated women (Lerum, 2004). For many women the aspiration of becoming successful and independent from a male counterpart was a long-term goal although men still retained a higher average wage (Alksnis et. al, 2008). All of the participants were first-generation women from Iran who had achieved their academic goals of higher education and had met some level of success in the workplace.

Purpose Statement

This research study examined professional Iranian immigrant women to ascertain motivational factors that contributed to or impeded their success in achieving their academic goals and professional careers in the U.S. Of interest were the practical strategies these women used to attain their academic goals and to integrate their professional work and family responsibilities, including the support provided by their families and ethnic communities. According to Creswell (2009), scholars and researchers using an advocacy/participatory worldview must engage with their study population/community both theoretically and practically in order to actually invoke sustainable social change for the greater good. Using an advocacy/participatory worldview, the researcher explored first-generation Iranian immigrant professional women's life story narratives (Giele, 2008), based on their identity, motivation and drive, relational style, and adaptive style.

The goal of this research was to use the narrative life-story research approach to discover how the study participants achieved their success in their new lives (Brinkmann, 2009). By analyzing the life-story narratives of high-achieving Iranian women in the U.S. and then comparing their lives with others, new insights were gained. By reviewing the information

provided through the interview process, the researcher identified factors that allowed certain women to move forward, feel empowered and lead others (Franzosi, 1994; Hagemaster, 1992).

Research Questions

The research questions were based on Giele's (2008) narrative life-story research interview framework and were modified to apply to high-achieving Iranian women in the U.S. As with all research methods, it was important to tailor the questions to those individuals who were being interviewed and analyzed; differences in circumstances can have a major impact on the overall responses of each participant (Hamilton et. al, 2008). The research questions for this study were grounded in the following four themes: Identity, Drive and Motivation, Relational Style, and Adaptive Style. These four themes expanded on the idea that all aspects of a woman's identity and success play off one another in creating a better understanding of the world around her and providing insights in response to the following research questions:

1. How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?
2. What experiences (motivations and drives) shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how did these experiences impact their professional careers and family-life balance decisions?
3. What strategies were utilized to support their professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations?

Several questions were included to allow the participants to explain their feelings within each of the four motivators. For Identity, questions such as the following were asked: "How does the participant see herself, how does she identify herself? What qualities does she mention that distinguish her (e.g., intelligent, quiet, likable, innovative, a good mother, lawyer, wife, etc.)?"

For Drive and Motivational style, questions instead focused on participants' own reasons for moving forward. Questions included: "What are the study participant's needs for achievement, affiliation, or power? Is the study participant driven, or relaxed and easygoing? Is she concerned about making a name for herself? Does she have a desire to be in control of her own schedule, to be in charge rather than to take orders?" Each of the focal points for the given motivators and reasons for advancement provided unique insights into the different areas of the psyche for the women in the study and their relationships with others.

Ethical Considerations

In this study one of the main concerns was keeping participants' information confidential. Because of the relatively small number of first-generation professional Iranian women in the Los Angeles California area, the researcher was acutely aware of the need for confidentiality in all facets of collecting and reporting participants' identifies and data. General information is provided in the Overview of Participants section of this chapter, and each participant was assigned a unique number. A further challenge was to create a safe space in which participants could talk freely about their experiences, struggles, difficulties and successes. According to Collins (2000), we need a safe space to discuss our personal information, our needs and our desires, and finally our identity. Thus, the researcher began by telling her own experiences, which helped create a space in which the participant could identify with her story and feel she was not alone in pursuing this challenging life. She could then feel freer to share her experiences. In social studies research, the investigator and the investigated can feel they are connected when the researcher articulates and presents their own experiences in conjunction with the participants' views they wish to learn about.

Interview Process

This study used what Patton (1990) called standardized open-ended interview questions. A set of carefully worded questions were asked with the intention of leading each respondent through the same sequence of interview questions. Patton (1990) stated three reasons for using this type of interview process:

1. The exact instrument used in the evaluation is available for inspection by decision makers and information users.
2. Variation among interviewers can be minimized where a number of different interviewers must be used.
3. The interview is highly focused so that interviewee time is carefully used. (p. 287)

The participants also completed a socio-demographic questionnaire to provide added context to the interview. The interview contained six sections of questions. The first four categories dealt with the four stages of life: (a) early adulthood, (b) childhood and adolescence, (c) adulthood-current, and (d) adulthood-future. The last two addressed additional categories of coping strategies (Weber, 2011). The standardized open-ended interview process reduces variation among interviewers, and increases the legitimacy and credibility of the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This open-ended process allows participants to answer the questions with as much detail as they desire (Turner, 2010). Although the questions were written in advance and presented in exactly the same way for each participant, follow up questions and prompts encouraged clarification and expansion; these gave the interviewer flexibility in the data collection process (Turner, 2010).

The researcher first recruited the participants using the respondent-driven identification method, known as snowball sampling. The researcher initiated the snowball sampling process by contacting potential study participants from among highly educated Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. The snowball interview invitation method allowed for the recruiting of subjects by

asking each interviewee to refer acquaintances to participate. The pool of subjects, as it continued to grow, created a snowball effect that added to the sample of qualified participants. This method of sampling ensured diversity of experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2009).

Purposive sampling was used to identify and select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a technique used to study a specific “cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within” (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). The selection process involved contacts with prospective participants who could voice the struggles and successes of highly educated Iranian immigrant women who came to the U.S. Prospective participants also needed to meet selection criteria related to their professional career and needed to be managing work-life balance and family obligations.

The researcher collected 40 phone numbers and email address of women qualified to participate in the study. The researcher contacted prospective participants and explained the purpose of the study (Appendix B). Then, if a prospect agreed, the researcher sent information about the study, research questions, and consent forms (Appendices A and C). The researcher received 21 responses from qualified women who agreed to participate in the study and be interviewed. All participants were happy to take part in this research when they realized their voices would be expressed at an academic level and would contribute knowledge for social change for immigrant women. The researcher explained the interview process and reminded participants they were not required to answer any questions that stretched beyond their comfort level. The researcher asked if the interviews could be recorded and then asked the questions in the manner specified by the Weber (2011) study based on the life-story framework. The researcher conducted the stimulated recall, semi-structured, focused interviews (Gray, 2009, p. 373) via phone and Skype, while strictly adhering to the IRB approved protocol. “Data

interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said” (Patton, 1990, p. 347).

The interviews were conducted in English and Farsi, the participants’ first language. At the beginning of the interview, some participants preferred to be interviewed in English; when the researcher realized they were having problems in expressing their emotions and feelings, she suggested it was all right to talk in Farsi. The researcher then translated the responses to English and confirmed that the translation conveyed the participant’s intended meaning. Interestingly, a participant who was fluent in English suggested that talking in Farsi was much more comfortable. The researcher learned that even when a person is fluent in a second language, they may prefer their first language when it comes to expressing inner feelings, emotions, and challenging conversations. The average conversation was two hours with a maximum of two and a half hours and a minimum of one hour. Participants who had more experience and were older spent more time in the interview. Age and education in this process was also significant in terms of degree of satisfaction and integration into U.S. schools and society. In addition, all of the participants also answered the interview questions in written form using the Qualtrics online survey software, and this provided valuable reinforcement of the points participants felt most important to highlight.

Coding

The researcher completed transcriptions of the interviews and reviewed all interviews along with field notes and journal entries. The first phase involved reading the entire transcription of each interview to absorb the general idea and also to maintain a holistic perspective on each participant. The researcher made notes on the transcription about any major

issues raised in the interview or noted in the journal. The researcher coded each interview in order to preserve participants' confidentiality. In preparing to analyze the data, responses were compiled and grouped into sections representing themes or codes (Creswell, 2009). The themes consisted of phrases that expressed an idea or thought. If a phrase, expression, or idea came up consistently, then in each of the 21 interviews it was coded one time to create a list of nodes. The researcher went through each interview transcription a second time to ensure that no references were missed. This process provided sufficient information to respond to the research questions while also allowing efficient access to the information for the researcher.

Each study participant's answer was coded for emergent as well as a priori categories of the narrative life-story framework (Giele, 2008). The first four categories dealt with the four stages of life: (a) early adulthood, (b) childhood and adolescence, (c) adulthood-current, (d) adulthood-future, and the last addressed the additional coping strategies (Weber, 2011). Another doctoral student who was familiar with life-course research helped to establish coding inter-rater reliability by sampling 10% of the interviews for coding consistency; this step validated the study findings based on responses from the study participants.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: "How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?" This research was associated with Giele's (2008) idea of a blended identity and an individual's perspectives in relationship to their heritage and contemporary life.

Theme of identity. During the course of the interviews, the idea of identity in regard to gender and family life was commonly mentioned. In Iranian culture, it is not uncommon for the female members of the household to be pressured to marry and have children (Gennetion et. al,

2008). This idea was mirrored in the roles of these women who needed to blend their own identity as a mother with that of a professional person. The data showed the theme of cultural pressures to do well and yet maintain a balance of roles, and this pressure was seen throughout the study data. However, the participants also had strong female role models who showed that they could be strong women and work outside the household. Participant 3 explained that:

I left Iran when I was 16 to come to America to pursue higher education. My parents were very supportive even though their own degree of education is low. I remember as a young girl I always wanted to be able to be educated and financially independent.

Even though some people in a region of Iran had lower levels of education, the aspiration to achieve a high level of education was common (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). This created a conflict of interest for women who wanted to create an identity for themselves. Similarly, although the majority of the respondents were married and many had children, their family life and motherhood roles did not seem to deter their long term goals as they created their new identities.

Another key aspect of the findings was shown in the way the dual nature of work and home came together, as indicated in the response of Participant 4. She explained that in her own desire to start a family, she had to put her career on hold, which then changed how she saw herself. Her entire identity was wrapped up in her position, but then it became instead focused on the needs of her family and her newly born children.

My goal was to become a software engineer. I worked in the field for about 10 years until I got married, had a child and decided to stay home with the baby. When she was 2, I started a new job that allowed me to work from home. I telecommuted for about 5 years as a Market Analyst. My work consisted of research and writing about trends in the U.S. and International software markets. Then I ventured as an entrepreneur starting my own business in areas unrelated to software. Now, I am back to my own field, working again as a Software Engineer for a financial company in Los Angeles.

As a mother, she was still able to find a work balance in terms of her identity at home which was something that eluded other women in the study. Some women found they could not continue working while they took this time to start a family and had to fully shift their efforts because of the pressure to start a family and be a stay-at-home mother without helping to provide financial support. Participant 16 explained in depth how her own feelings of doubt and the pressure to identify as a mother first and foremost influenced her other decisions surrounding both home and work:

I felt very guilty when my kids were 2 and 4 years, but my mom and dad were taking care of them while I was at work. It was hard for me to leave them with them, but I started to manage my time and spend great quality time with them later. For my third child, I did not work until she was 3 years. I try to work and go back during their school time.

Overall, in the theme of identity the pressures of family were seen the most readily, and without family support the need to succeed in both one's work and one's home life could likely find a different balance.

Theme of drive and motivation. Although women are expected to have specific roles in Iranian society, Iranian women feel the pressure to do well if they choose to work outside the home. There seems to be an expectation from family that if a woman chooses a professional path, she should aspire to the doctoral level. Many of the respondents made comments about the fact that they were pressured to go far in school with some specifically focusing on the idea of becoming a medical doctor. Respondent 2 explained:

I was told to study hard to become a doctor from an early age, and to be honest after getting my Bachelor of Science degree I couldn't think of anything else besides continuing working hard in that direction. I always imagine meeting prince charming somewhere through school but never had any specification for it. I just wanted to be in love and happy. I do have 2 beautiful kids that I adore most of all. I am happy I can work limited hours if I choose to do. I am happy I am in a field that there is a need [for] and I can find a position anywhere if I choose to.

This was reflected in another respondent's description of her home life and pressure from her family. Respondent 2 explained that her own drive was hindered because of outside influences and yet she had always been on the same path. She stated:

I actually thought that I would practice medicine, but I got Multiple Sclerosis in medical school and after completing med school and a year of internship in New York I decided to leave medicine.

While their different upbringings all fueled their own wants and desires to do well, so many different factors affected their motivation that they had to determine their own long-term goals.

Theme of relational style. This study found similar ideas of relationships among many of the women. In particular, the pressure to marry and have children was commonplace as the majority of the participants were married and had multiple children. More than 80% of the women were married and more than 85% of the participants had children. This caused a hardship for many women as they felt the pressure from their own heritage to be mothers compounded with their own maternal instincts. Respondent 2 explained:

It was hard to decide and juggle family and work. Something had to give, and I didn't want it to be my kids! I chose to concentrate on my family and have my work as a second priority.

The women all had to come to terms with the pressures they faced from their own families as well as from the need to relate to their traditional roles. These pressures created a unique relationship with their families as well as with their careers and their work environment.

Some women felt as though their gender was also under scrutiny in the workplace as they were often in fields that had otherwise been dominated by men. As explained in relation to their home life, many women felt as though they needed to go into specific fields as these were considered ideal in Iran, and subsequently these were the fields they studied during their time in

college. This was especially apparent in the response of Participant 18 who dealt with the issue directly:

Working in a prominently male dominated industry more than 20 years ago was a challenge. I relied heavily on my technical expertise and my smarts but not having a female role model in a management position, even in the U.S. job market, was a big challenge which required lots of trials and errors. Building strong personal relationships was another challenge. I believe a big part of it again had to do with the way I was brought up but also moving to a Western Country where standards and relationship boundaries are different for someone who had not experienced them before...

Gender is not simply a culture barrier, but instead is a barrier that arises because of the differences in gender in the workplace depending on the career field of work. In Western culture, the sciences have long been dominated by men, and the arts tend to be considered more feminine. By pushing young women into pursuing careers in the sciences, the numbers of women in underrepresented areas increases, but this can then lead to conflicts of identity and a strain on some relationships.

Participant 19 also had interesting points to make in regard to relationships and how this can be useful in both personal and professional settings. While Study Participant 18 mentioned issues when looking on a professional scale, Participant 19 explained that her relationships at home helped boost her own ability to do well in the business world. This again pointed out the need some of the women felt in regard to their home-life balance and their general relationships:

I integrate my personal life and professional life and each one helps each other. The way I maintain it at work is through prioritizing ... Job satisfaction and good marriage relationship makes it easier. I think everything goes and fits each other. Everything has to be connected to each other in daily life.

Theme of adaptive style. The need to adapt to the different roles and the pressures of families made it difficult for many women. Many adapted by relying on their families to allow them to work outside the home while maintaining the same roles that are traditional in Iranian

society. Adapting to the modern world by creating a sort of partnership with their spouses allowed these women to work outside the home even when faced with immense pressure.

Participant 6 explained:

I wanted to become an engineer but did not think how difficult it is with raising kids. Engineering work can never be part time and it always starts early in the morning. If my husband did not have flexibility in his business this would have never worked out. My husband lost a lot of his business because of raising kids. The school timing did not work with my early morning schedule. I spent hours in the evening making up for it.

Although burdened with the additional pressure of maintaining these two roles, while adhering to the expectations handed down by their heritage as well as those inherent in their new roles, these women were able to pursue their own goals by adapting and relying on their families. These women were able to maintain their careers, focus on family, and find balance with their individual home lives, which reinforced the theme that adapting is an important factor that contributed to work-life balancing.

Another aspect in dealing with the importance of adaptation was heard as study participants explained that their own family pressures at home and in their family helped them to adapt to their new world in the U.S. Respondent 21 focused on this in one of her responses in terms of how it impacted her overall ability to adapt and how she was able to grow due in part to familial pressure and guidance. She explained that the pressure while living at home in Iran was great, she was able to incorporate different aspects into her identity when she moved:

Although I was born and stayed in Iran until I was 18... I feel that I am Iranian and American. Why I feel that way is because I want to pay respect and my appreciation to the only land (my home) that I have known to be a home for myself as an immigrant. I embrace this identity and am very thankful for all the good possibilities and freedom of choices offered to me and my family. As I grow older, I have found that I developed a culture within a culture. I embrace my Iranian heritage despite being American. I finished my higher education and I feel pleased about my all accomplishments at work which I could not done in Iran.

However, she also explained that her sense of self-worth was due not only to her own perceptions but also because of the way she viewed other influences in her life. It was her cultural heritage that she adapted in the U.S. but she also relied on these perspectives and aspects of her identity as well:

With the support of my cultural expectations for education, my own motivation and supportive place here empowered, I developed my identity. I feel both parts in me are very strong. Freedom of choices and my high level achievement help me to keep going forward to make a difference for others. I feel responsible to give back. My kids, my husband and my community and workplace recognize and are proud of my achievements.

It was through this balance she showed that with respect for her own identity as an Iranian woman in conjunction with her identity as an American in the workplace she was able to truly feel that her success was well earned and justified. She adapted her own beliefs and educational background to the need of the new culture and, in doing so, she was successful in a variety of new and unique ways. Similarly, Participant 3 explained that she finally felt comfortable and well situated in her place in society and culture:

I feel I am at a very solid place in my life. My current focus is well-being and growth of my children. My work is very stimulating and my home life is very fulfilling. I do have to say though this is the first time in my life where I feel things are somewhat quiet and established. I am enjoying it very much.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 focused on how past experiences influenced individual actions and reactions to others. In particular, the researcher asked about experiences (motivations and drives) that shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how these experiences impacted their professional careers and family life-balance decisions.

Theme of identity. As explained in covering the theme of family reliance and the building of interpersonal relationships, family greatly affected many of the respondents and

caused them to change their long-term goals and plans for a career. Participant 5 explained that the influence of parents and the opportunities they afforded focused her own life on her children:

I am an older parent and my children are still young. My main concern is to provide my children with the lifestyle and education opportunity that I had in my life.

Many of the participants could not focus solely on their identity in the corporate world because of the lack of free time to build a family. In many industries it is not uncommon for people to change their goals after they understand the inherent risks in the jobs or that the hours are too long to support a stable family life. Similar to the feelings expressed by Participant 6 previously, Participant 4 explained:

When my child was born I decided to stay home and raise her, leaving my career ambitions behind. I had no family support and leaving my child at a day care all day long was out of the question. I didn't expect to face such a life-changing decision when I was younger and professionally ambitious. I think this is a hard decision every professional woman faces when they decide to have kids. Even though I always worked at least part time or from home, my career ambitions were put on hold for about 15 years.

Without the family support that other respondents relied upon, Participant 4 put her ambitions on hold because of her lack of this support. If she had been able to have familial support, she might have been able to advance her career after having her child. It clearly caused a disruption in her identity as a career woman and as a mother when she had to make this choice.

Maintaining one's identity in the face of differing cultural ideologies and perspectives was seen in a number of the interviews. Many participants focused on the notion that the two cultures' perspectives could actually help women. Participant 14 focused on the need to create a balance between both her Iranian heritage and the culture of the U.S., which allowed for new opportunities for her and for others. She explained that in this balance, she found a new sense of completion in the Post-revolution world:

After the Islamic revolution, all the laws surrounding women's rights and their protection changed and the environment was not healthy. There were no choices and autonomy for women and children. I really disconnected myself from that environment with restricted options for women... I really threw myself into American culture and kept my family expectations and a good part of my own Iranian culture as well... I mixed the good values from both cultures and I adapted them to fit with my identity and now I am an Iranian American even though I was not born here. I feel I have my own independence to choose in my life and I did. This new environment is my home.

For women such as she, the idea that identity can only be dictated by a single force is less accurate than for others. Participant 14 showed that she was able to create a sense of balance between two very different cultures and, in doing so, was able to create new life for herself. Respondent 10 mirrored the idea of success in terms of how the two cultural influences complemented one another and helped to reinforce her success:

I think the support of encouragement, mentoring, independence and opportunity embraced my two cultures, I mean my two worlds of Iran and America helped with my growth and development. I feel good that I created for myself a good fresh start for my identity. I think that's my reward, to be able to reach my professional and my personal goals.

Each respondent was able to succeed in a variety of different fields with their own success strategies. It was not a single foolproof method that was adopted by all of them, but instead it was the balance between these different perspectives that helped them to achieve their goals and create a new identity for themselves. It was through this balance that each was able to find her own way in a new world and with a different culture to deal with in terms of position and cultural values.

Theme of drive and motivation. Even for high achieving Iranian women, the goal of having a family and children remained strong in the background of their cultural heritage. The theme of family was reinforced by the theme of traditional pressures to excel in areas regardless

of the barriers. The primary motivator from childhood to do well and succeed was cited as one of the main influences to do well. Participant 15 stated that:

I believe the Iranian culture values academic success and achievement to get higher education and have a prestigious professional career. In my family in Iran. I was surrounded with high educated from British education and they all had a huge job before revolution. I was encouraged by my parents, grandma, aunts and brothers to become a lawyer. I think this environment helped me to achieve my dreams. And my self-motivation and my commitment helped me to reach my academic goals.

As women were given more flexibility and education in the period after the revolution, many women were still pressured by gender stereotypes in terms of their role in the family (Scheffler, 2007). The pressure to succeed within the home carried forward to the same pressures to do well outside of the home and succeed. Cultural pressures added to the pressure they put on themselves in their daily lives. However, some women also rebelled against the idea that they must succeed in all areas of their lives; many pointed out their desire to be at home with their children such as Participant 8:

I do not feel guilty compromising work for my family life. I sometimes feel guilty if I am not home as frequently. I make up for it by trying not to squander any time I have with my family when I am home. I probably was not prepared for the demands of work and life balance, but I am always addressing it in one way or another.

Theme of relational style. The relational style for women in this study in regard to past experiences was a major influence in their overall decision-making and work choices. In particular, the decision to marry and have children versus the goal of creating an independent position in the workforce was cited by several participants as a major influence. Participant 6 described the differences in pressures from their parents:

My dad encouraged higher education and my mom encouraged getting married soon. I was pushed by my dad to come to U.S. and study. He is an engineer and I followed his footsteps. I am happy did not listen to my mom. I am an engineer and having a good job with life satisfaction.

This reinforced the theme of family pressure but with a focus on the parental roles. While the general family pressure was attributed to husbands and children for many of these women, past pressures came from their parents. This was also evident in the responses from Participant 7 who explained her situation when growing up:

I received 'mixed messages' all along. My mom emphasized the significance of being independent as a woman and importance of having an education and a profession. She was not however a big fan of long, enduring educational process! She would have preferred I had married someone wealthy at a young age!

Even though the mother wanted her to be an independent woman who would be able to take care of herself in a profession and also to have a good education, she also focuses on the problems of a long and drawn out education. This is a dichotomy where, as a woman, she was pushed to succeed but at the same time she should be married because it was a simple route. Hence, more women remain at home with their families while husbands spend more time outside of their home. The women who were well educated still had to reconcile with the traditional roles of women in Iranian society. These influences all contended with one another and women needed to make choices about their long-term goals and their careers. Additionally, many women focused on how the expectations of their parents and others impacted their individual successes, as indicated by the response from Participant 20, who explained:

Other's perceptions were big on me and I think a big part of it has to do with our culture from Iran. I have always been able to meet management expectations which at times has caused unnecessary stress on my life but I realize now that failure or quitting have never been in my vocabulary.

In addition to the direct pressure from parents, the extended family of many of these women influenced their choices. Some of the participants seemed to have a greater level of pressure from parents and extended family than others. Participant 12 was one of

the most detailed in how this pressure focused her own ambitions in terms of her field of study:

Both my parents were/are college graduates. My mom's dad was a judge and a proponent of women being educated. So the same principles were applied in our family. My mother, to this day, loves reading and learning about new concepts. That is what I grew up with and hence is a strong core in me. But as I mentioned above, I was a very good student and unfortunately due to the standards in Iran in those days and my family in particular, pursuing art or even architecture which was the major I would have liked to apply for, was not an option.

This shows that there was not just the pressure of going to school and to marry but instead to focus their efforts into a specific field. Participant 12 reinforced the theme that even when there is a drive for one field, the pressures from family members and others tend to influence their long term decisions. It is the tension between their own ideas and feelings and those of their parents that leads to a number of key changes in their choices.

Theme of adaptive style. One major point of interest comes from how these women adapted their own wants and goals to those of their parents and the Iranian culture as a whole. As mentioned previously, some of the participants noted being pressured to go into particular fields over others because of the cultural standards to uphold:

I think having an education for me was not a choice. It was a necessity, not a luxury. I was very motivated person and ambitious from early years. I knew what I wanted to achieve. My parents did not push me but they were very supportive for my school education. Iranian standards for education are high. You have to go to medical or law or business, not art, or cooking or fashion design. This value is nested into our culture.

As with many of the other participants, the adaptive nature of women was demonstrated in their willingness to go into a different field than originally preferred. The participant was pressured to change her own perspectives on education and at the same time showed a theme of adaptation to outside pressures in an attempt to ensure that she performed well and also met the standards of others.

Similarly, participants expressed the idea that their parents were the reason they felt as though they could succeed. In a culture that was heavily regimented by gender, having supportive parents was key. Participant 2 explained:

My parents were the whole force behind me. They believe a woman needs to be able to support herself at any stage of life. So, they made sure to tell me there was no stopping until I completed my education and nothing was to stop it, not even getting married or having a family. They believed if you pause education for any reason, it becomes harder to get back into it.

It was not just that the women felt they could succeed due to societal pressures, as Iran promotes education in general, but it was the idea that their parents and family supported them. It was this momentum that allowed them to make significant leaps forward in terms of overall success in the business world and, more importantly, in their education and in their various roles and positions.

Another method of adaptation was to take their own experiences and skills and then work through their problems using a variety of other means. Many of these women did not come from affluent families and had to work for their own success in an attempt to make a name for themselves and also maintain a family. Respondent 2 explained how her own background allowed for her to adapt as necessary:

My parents' education had no effect on me and my education; neither did having any brothers or sisters. One thing that affected me positively but indirectly was being a professional Gymnast for about 10 years earlier. As a dedicated gymnast I learned to endure hard work and time management which came very handy later in life. Coming from low middle class family did certainly affect my education and made things a lot harder, but obviously not impossible because I made it what I was set out to do after all. Finances affected my decision as to where I lived and where I went to school and that I had to work hard to get here.

For Participant 2, the goal was to do better than she had expected in an attempt to grow as a person and make sure that she was going to succeed in balancing all areas of her life. Athletes often have a stronger determination than others and yet this respondent only reinforced the same

theme that societal pressures along with strong individual drive can dictate how women can succeed in their desired fields.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was designed to determine the strategies utilized to support professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations. This question represented an attempt to determine success levels of the participants in their respective fields and the choices successful Iranian women made.

Strategies to maintain identity. The highest priority of the majority of participants in the study was to achieve a balance between different roles in the home and responsibilities of work (Brough & O'Driscoll, 2010). As explained earlier, one theme was that balance included receiving help from their significant other, and the husbands acted as a kind of buffer for their wife's roles. Respondent 2 explained how this practice worked out between her husband and her:

[We] both work inside and outside of the house but to a different degree. We both have a personality that likes to get things off our list so we prioritize well. We each have taken certain roles that we know we can accomplish.

It is important that partners establish a sense of balance in their marriage that fits with their gender roles as well as maintains their motivations (Singer, 2004). This dichotomy of identity is reflected in the need to balance work and home as it is important to avoid spouses' obligations overlapping in a way that causes problems for the woman both in terms of her work life and her family. Another respondent explained that she maintained strict separation of work and home life so as not to let them overlap and cause undue stress outside of the work environment. Participant 12 explained:

I try to balance how much time I spend on work (like I shut off my email and phone) so that I can have time with my family and take proper vacations. My strategies would be maintaining harmony in my family and my workplace [which] means all the members in my home are involved; my mom cooks, my dad picks

up the kids, my husband and I manage the rest. The whole family feels in balance by supporting and being involved in the process.

This allowed her to feel that she was making a significant contribution to her home life as she aspired to reach her professional goals. This reinforced the theme of family pressure and yet the identity she projected showed she was willing to do what was necessary to succeed, but not at the expense of an unbalanced life.

Success is rarely easy and participants often faced issues with balancing their different identities and creating a strategy for success. One of the participants explained the ways in which she maintained her own sense of identity and how this directly influenced the career choices she made. According to Participant 4, her job search included a focus on work-life balance:

My field of work (the high-tech industry) is very competitive. It is customary for my peers to have 50-60 hours per week at work. When I was looking for my last job, I specifically looked for a company that values work/life balance. At my current job, no one is expected to stay at work more than 40 hours per week. They respect flexible work hours and are even gradually implementing 'work-at-home' options. I also looked for a job that has little travel requirements. I spend time in the evenings and on weekend with my family and take care of my aging mother.

For this respondent, her own success was based in part on choosing the company she worked for so that it would fit with her home life. Her success was not based on a single issue, but instead it was through her own diligence that she was able to find a position that fit all of her needs. Her work allowed her to achieve a measure of success while it also allowed her to maintain a work-life balance that gave her a number of options for time with her family.

Strategies surrounding drive and motivation. The theme of drive and motivation in this study was apparent throughout the different responses of the participants although the extent to which this work-life balance affected their lives varied. For some of the participants, it was a matter of timing and balancing the different roles of work and home through careful scheduling.

Participant 17 explained that this balance was strictly adhered to in her home and very few deviations were allowed that offset the balance:

As I said, I try to keep work during work hours and then give my attention to home matters when work hours are over. Only in cases of emergencies do I spend home time on work. Also, I find that if I make lists of things to do, then I can be more efficient in getting things done at work and not bringing the work home.

Her drive and motivation to succeed in the workplace did not directly impact the success of her home life due to the clear separation of her different roles. Through a careful planning of her roles, this respondent demonstrated both her drive to hold down a stable career and to maintain a successful home life. This does not mean that she felt her work was the priority, but instead that her family life and personal time should always be kept at the highest priority.

Women were pushed in some circles to pursue their education because of familial pressures. It was not commonplace in older generations for women to go into academia, but in the more recent generations this has shifted. Participant 4 explained this was her case:

In my family there were high expectations for achieving educational goals. My mother and her 3 sisters all had college degrees and were professionally active. Even my grandmother had a high school diploma, which was quite an achievement for women of her era in Iran. I came from very high upper class and elite class. What I have been taught throughout my childhood was that I could not get anywhere without an education and a minimum of a 4-year college degree was a must.

Therefore, while many women felt oppressed by their families and obligations, many more performed admirably because of familial pressure. It was a delicate balance that led many women into a position where they were able to succeed academically.

Some participants focused on influences in the U.S. versus in Iran that played a part in their desire to maintain balance between work and home, but also focused on the importance of each part of their lives. As with Participant 17, the overall theme of isolating and separating the two parts of their lives was not uncommon in the responses of several of the other participants.

Respondent 16 explained how the transition between cultures and countries impacted their methods of balancing the different parts of their lives:

The transition experience from Iran to here as a young new immigrant student made me strong, and I can and I always figure out how I can. If I can not do it one way, I do it in a different way. I do not want to be perfect and I am not bothered by balancing it, I want to use my talent for integrating the positive of positively everything that is around us. The relationship with my kids, family, my community affected by our behaviors, therefore, I think the healthy quality time bring more harmony and meaning to my purpose of life. It's nice feeling to be flexible, prioritize and plan ahead, not be perfect and be balanced.

This comment advanced the idea that the nature of immigration was reinforced by drives and motives consisting of both personal thoughts and feelings, but also external factors and pressures. Similarly, many of the respondents picked up on this theme in their own answers and showed that it was through drive and determination that they were able to do so well in both areas of their work-life balance.

When looking at strategies for success, several of the respondents focused on the idea that harmony and balance were the major drivers to succeeding and doing well. It was not just that these women were able to succeed through their own efforts, but also through the ways in which they were able to find a balance with their family. Participant 12 explained that her strategies included the need to have family pitch in on daily activities:

My strategies would be maintaining harmony in my family and my workplace. All the members in my home are involved. We feel in balance emotionally and logically. I also have peace of mind and harmony at work.

As with Participant 12, many of the participants in the study expressed the idea that through a balance with family, the overall group benefits. It is not just that the single person succeeds alone, but instead it is through help from others that they do well.

Strategies for relationships. The idea of relationships impacting the nature of this balance was further examined and detailed through a variety of the different respondents'

perspectives. The relationships between the participants and their families were clear influences in all of their answers as each one showed a desire to maintain this balance in their own right. However, it was also a driving force to maintain this balance in the best possible manner for the benefit of loved ones over personal desires. Along with the need to achieve balance for personal reasons, balance itself was also a major motivator. Participant 13 explained:

I think, of course, home and work environments play together. I plan ahead and use my strengths and mix everything to have a good quality of my multiple roles. That's my purpose to enjoy my family and keep my productivity at work. I make sure I go to my kid's baseball games on Saturday and have sabot on Fridays nights with my husband's family and my own family. I think when I am happy inside and get satisfaction and recognition from everyone, I get a sense of quality time of my overall life.

This participant expressed the apparent need to ensure that the different parts of her lives all maintained a sense of balance, but at the same time also showed the need for validation from family members. Without their family's support, there was little chance they could maintain their two separate worlds in the corporate world and at home. Therefore, many respondents felt the need to please that kept them from losing sight of this balance in the long term and helped them to keep focused even in trying times.

Another major factor that showed the relationship aspect of the need to maintain a balance was motherhood and how best to serve the participants' own families. In addition to cultural norms, personal norms also played a major part in the respondents' focus on their home and work lives and maintaining the balance through careful planning and barriers. Participant 19 explained:

After my completing my higher education, I got married. I had my son. I did not have anyone here. I had to stay with my baby for 2 years, forget about working for a while, then I had another child. I decided to stay longer for my second child. It was hard for me after all hard work for my high degree but I stayed for 6 years then I went back to work. I have no regret at all that I stayed at home, my American professional [friends] could not believe that I am not working and using

my high academic degree. It was hard for them that I am staying mom and not using my degree! My model was my mom, in that respect. She raised us until 10 years; then she went back teaching. I always believe the early year's attachment with mom or dad is essential for baby's longtime learning and growth. My mom stayed with us and I followed my mom values.

As shown by this respondent's need to maintain a sense of balance between her home and personal life in conjunction with her desire to succeed as a parent as well as in the corporate world, it was clear that a number of different factors all came together. Others, such as Participant 4, explained that their balance changed over the years of their individual work and family lives:

In my earlier career stage, I put long hours at work, and traveled for my work quite often, stayed away from home for weeks, socialized with colleagues and quickly jumped at every career opportunity that could raise my rank or paycheck. After starting my own family, my expectations and aspirations have changed to the reverse direction. I don't prefer travelling, and I would rather not spend extra time at work. Work/life balance is extremely important to me.

In achieving balance between her relationships in her work and home environments, the respondent showed that the family was a central focus for their lives as reflected in a number of their different perspectives on how to maintain a work-life balance.

Strategies for adaptation. The adaptation to work-life balance was clear in how each of the respondents attempted to maintain their two separate worlds and showed the drive they demonstrated throughout all of their actions. Family was a key focus for these women and yet they adapted to a number of different factors in their work- and home lives. It was not a single issue they dealt with but instead a combination of factors that came together as the respondents attempted to maintain the sense of balance. Participant 12 explained:

My education motivated me to lead and be in control in positive way. I think when women are independent and they are emotionally strong, that they can use their positive strengths for a same purpose in life. I think that having more choices and resources helps us to be in balance in a positive way.

Their personal satisfaction was not derived only from their work or their role at home, but instead it came from both of these sources. As mothers, these Iranian immigrant women were able to adhere to their own family values, but at the same time they could join the professional ranks and maintain a balance between the two. Their roles increased the amount of pressure the women were subjected to and their roles testified to their adaptability and their need to succeed in all of their different endeavors. For some participants the stress was a normal part of life, but it was just something to be dealt with and not complain about. Participant 14 explained:

Excessive workload has just made me more efficient and taught me how to focus on the important tasks. I have learned over time how to manage other people's expectations by comparing them to my own and rationally evaluating what I am capable of doing and letting other things go. I think I've taken advantage of opportunities to advance my career, but never let others define what advancements are 'necessary' for me.

As with many working mothers, the need to adapt to any number of situations for both their home and work environments produced stress that was manageable through help from family; but at the same time the need to adapt was always present. While advancing in a career, each change made was weighed individually, reinforcing the idea that these women knew their individual roles but also needed to be prepared to adapt to maintain their work-life balance goals.

Success through adaptation was a major coping strategy for many of the participants. When all of their individual successes were measured and compared in terms of their own drives and adaptations, modification of general activities was a major factor in their success. Participant 14 demonstrated that her need to balance her life and also to stay focused allowed her to succeed in achieving her goals:

I believe that the best strategy to have is not looking at it through balancing multiple roles, because if I balance, I have to trade something or take away something for another. I look at it differently. I look at integrating my life with the different areas that I have to meet the expectations on—whether, it is my

education, my religion, work, my family, I mean everything. So I integrate it into one, and I believe that is the best strategy rather than trading off one or the other.

As shown by Participant 14, the goal was not to just balance for the sake of balancing, but to make sure each of the roles did not overlap with any of the others. Her strategy allowed her to adapt and change with the needs of each role and succeed as an individual with each of her commitments. The combination was effective: applying democratic and participatory leadership while communicating effectively with family members; managing time; putting things into perspective; planning and sharing plans; making conscious efforts to learn from experiences; and integrating roles for meaningful and fulfilling work-family obligations.

Keyword Cloud

A number of key concepts continued to surface as the interviewing process continued. The most common influences included family, education, husband, balance, prioritizing, values, patience, freedom, and choices. With regard to the workplace, the most common keywords included competitive, flexible, stress, job, family, balance, priorities, and attitude. Overall, the keyword cloud showed that the most common influences included prioritization, balance, stress, and attitude toward a given subject (Poya, 1999). There were many influences among the different perspectives of these women, but certain information continued to emerge as the main pressures in terms of influencing women immigrants in careers in the U.S. (Laufer, 2001). The pressure of balancing home life and work caused women to feel that they must maintain a separation of work and family, a condition that always create pressure regardless of heritage. Each influence and keyword showed specific information about the study and how women from a variety of backgrounds developed strategies and found solutions to achieve their own work-life balance.

Summary

Overall, the major influences affecting women in the workplace seemed to stem both from their own motivation and the need to find a meaningful balance between work- and home life. As the family was a key factor in all of the respondents' information, the pressure to achieve balance was one that was always apparent for the study participants. When each woman was forced to choose between her family and her work life, the majority of the respondents explained that their husbands and children were the greatest influences over their lives. The strength of this influence also showed that even though Iranian women were able to move higher in society than in the past, the main influences over their lives mirrored those of Iranian society, even abroad. Those women who made the choice to immigrate felt pressure to succeed in all of their endeavors. Education remained a key element in all of their responses, and the role models seen in their family directly influenced the choices of each participant in the study.

While family might be a pressure source for the participants, it was also a source of alleviation of stress for many. Several of the participants commented that their husbands and families relieved their pressures. It is also important to note that these same alleviators of pressure were part of the traditional culture of Iran. Although the source of stress and its alleviation could originate from the family, these women were able to balance the different relationships and roles. In the end, it was the differing perspectives on the roles of women that allowed the participants to maintain balance between their home lives and their work environments.

While Iranian immigrant women have more opportunity for upward mobility in the U.S., they must still balance traditional roles of Iranian culture while also dealing with their aspirations for upward mobility. Iranian immigrant women work to move upward in their careers and yet

must strive for the ideal home life and family. For many women, this balance was additionally stressful and yet for many home and family were sources of release and comfort. The different roles of women were balanced due to their own drive and their familial pressures. The family structure that pressured them to excel in education and pursue a career also facilitated separation of home and work, which helped in managing stress and change.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Applications

Regardless of immigrants' countries of origin, they invariably face a number of trials and tribulations when they move to a new country. The U.S. is often called the land of opportunity and therefore many of the immigrants who arrive in this country are motivated to achieve better lives for themselves. When examining Iranian immigrant women who come to U.S., we see that they face barriers typically associated with recent immigrants, and also barriers due to perceptions of their gender. Successful women do well because of a variety of factors that come into play together. In particular, the focus of this study was on Iranian first-generation immigrant women who came to the U.S. to achieve higher academic goals and to pursue professional careers. This study examined the participants' work-life balance, the ways in which they became successful, and their drive to succeed. Through a qualitative research methodology, a number of key factors were identified that showed how the participants endeavored to integrate family expectations and professional work to overcome their obstacles. These factors have shed new light on how these women were able to succeed in their careers and achieve work-life balance that minimized compromising their family lives.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

Analysis of the data associated with the research questions of this study led to identifying a number of key themes. All of the women struggled with the challenges faced by people from other cultures (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). In analyzing the information provided by respondents, the researcher detected strategies the women employed that contributed to the work-life balance that served their professional and family interests.

Research question 1. The first question was: "How did family expectations and Iranian culture influence Iranian women's academic goals and family-life balance decisions?"

As shown in several studies covered in the literature review, familial pressure is one of the main influences; it determines how women interact with their education and how they establish their long-term goals around family and business. Although women may strive to make changes and achieve goals in their lives based on their own inner drives, their intentions are also driven by external factors. In this light, the women in this study embodied the pressures of both society and their relationships to do well for themselves and to reach new heights. Interestingly, this is an extremely assertive position that blends well with the U.S. workplace and environment, which at times can be extremely competitive even for people who are born without the barriers imposed by immigration. Both societies, U.S. and Iranian, have unique values concerning how a woman should act and what she should do with her life. The familial pressure the Iranian immigrant study participants faced is unique because it forced them to come to terms with two drastically different societies. The Iranian women immigrants often carried pressures to do well because of the need to maintain the high standards ingrained in them by the Iranian culture before they immigrated to the U.S.

It is also this pressure and drive that can help them to do well even if they are not pressured into specific roles traditionally designated for women; instead, the findings supported the idea that the participants did well in pursuing their careers *because* of this pressure. This was important because it demonstrated that while the pressure on these women was often very high, the early influence and drive instilled within them allowed them to move into their specific roles. This was an important dichotomy for the research findings as it showed that the pressures and influences can be limiting in one light; when looked at from a different perspective, though, those influences enabled pursuing difficult career paths in part because of the high levels of pressure to succeed that were instilled from a young age. They understood the limitations, but

pushed through them and made the best possible lives for themselves. In part because of family pressure and their own drive to succeed, these women excelled over their competition and achieved career success.

Research question 2. The second question focused on how past experiences influenced individual actions and reactions to others. Specifically, it asked: “What experiences (motivations and drives) shaped the life course of high-achieving Iranian women, and how did these experiences impact their professional careers and family-life-balance decisions?”

In addition to the familial pressures these Iranian immigrant women faced, they also dealt with the social pressures and mores that influence the general business environment in the U.S. Women are not barred from any field and yet specific fields are predominantly male. In traditional Islamic countries, barriers are present that prevent taking certain educational paths. These restrictions limit women’s ability to pursue their own choices and once they have immigrated to the U.S. they can focus on those choices. The opportunities and autonomy in the U.S. allow women to succeed in a variety of career paths. While barriers for the women in the study were present in terms of what they were expected to do culturally as well as within the home environment, opportunities in the U.S. included additional choices that were not as available in Iran. The participants did not necessarily have the full support from their families, and yet the desire to do well and succeed in an otherwise new environment was a very strong influence. These women necessarily relied on their personal connections and relationships both at home and in the work environment. Therefore, it was especially important for self-efficacy to be a component of any strategy for success for Iranian immigrant women when they moved into their new roles and positions in the U.S.

Research question 3. The third question was included to determine strategies utilized to support the study participants' professional careers while still creating a balance between their work- and home-life obligations. This represented an attempt to determine the participants' own levels of success in their respective fields and to better understand the choices made by Iranian women who had achieved success.

Self-efficacy becomes a major issue not because of a lack of ability, but instead because the participants needed to make changes in their daily lives in order to succeed. Language was a key barrier because it represented both the struggle to do well in a new culture and in a new position of work. Women needed to deal with additional barriers in terms of gender when moving into the business world, but the language barrier was almost universal both with regard to using a new language and interpreting the jargon in the workplace. It is therefore important to recognize language as a key barrier for immigrants in general, and one also faced by women in the workplace as they cope with the complexities of interpreting interpersonal communications. When women are viewed as self-sufficient, they are held in a more positive regard in the workplace. They are able to stand on their own and move into fields and positions held by their male counterparts. This, however, is not to discount relying on others.

Research shows that with a mentor, women are able to experience how someone else has been successful in a work environment, and they are able to receive support specific to their understanding regarding the position, a type of support that might be lacking in their home or family life. Mentors have long been used in countries around the world and in Iran itself, which lends additional strength to the argument that mentoring these women to succeed and achieve helps with achieving their overall levels of success and in meeting the challenges they encounter.

Challenges and Barriers

During their interviews participants mentioned a number of challenges they faced. The variety of responses provided perspectives on themes, or commonly mentioned issues and obstacles. Taken together, participants' responses covered the range of viewpoints on these themes, with some obstacles being described in different ways and from different angles. As immigrants, the participants specifically mentioned issues pertaining to language and cultural barriers they faced. According to Participant 16:

I was faced with lots of obstacles such as not knowing the language and not knowing the culture. After 2 years, I adjusted and adopted many in a new home... Since I had a positive attitude towards Western education and culture, I learned the English language faster which helped me to overcome the barriers...

Comments similar to Participant 16's surfaced many times in the course of this investigation. In this light, language and culture then permeated the responses of participants on all issues and greatly impacted the participants' experiences of transition.

Self-Efficacy

The motivation and confidence of the Iranian immigrant professional women participants were high for achieving personal goals and finding a way to attain their goals, even when dealing with unexpected events. All of the Iranian immigrant women reported being able to solve personal and work problems if they invested the necessary time and effort. Almost all reported that it was quite easy for them to persist with their educational goals and accomplish them. Many stated that they stuck to their goals "like a pit bull" and did not let them go until they achieved them. They reported that "it was not that easy" for them, but if they tried hard, they could "make it." The participant 15 stated:

I did not know the American culture and the language. I enrolled in the ESL class and studied very hard to learn the new language. Everything was new for me in a new home:

from an ESL class to medical school in America. I worked hard and had a high motivation to make it happen in my new home.

Participant 18 shared:

Since Day 1, my family kept reminding me that we came here and left everything in Iran. We could not have stayed in our homeland because we are from a different religion. When Islamic revolution came, my dad said we have to leave otherwise we are going to be in trouble. My dad had a big job during Shah's regime. We had the luxury life but we left everything there. Yes. I kept hearing from my dad and my mom: that I have to 'make it' in my new home. I had a strong self-determination and high expectation that I have to climb the highest educational ladder in my new home.

Parental Expectations for Higher Education and Professions

Parental expectations were extremely high in their own move to make a change in their lives. Some of the women appeared to feel as though their parents were heavy influences and explained that in their home-life children were pressured to succeed in certain fields such as in medicine or in law that were highly prized. Participant 12 explained that this was a major factor in her own education path:

I did not like my major but living in Iran and having a high GPA in high school, left only 2 options for me, at least in the eyes of my parents, one to be a doctor or two to be an engineer; I chose the latter. Looking back, if I had a mentor I may have chosen a different path through my college years but I did what I was expected to do.

Others found they were only able to achieve their goals later in life because of the pressures to marry and have children at a younger age (Falicov, 2007). This unusual balance made for a unique dichotomy in the findings of the study and also reinforced the ideas put forth by Participant 12 that women who are successful find a way to maintain this balance even when outside pressures seem too great. Additionally, the drive to succeed helped them lead productive and successful lives both in the workplace and at home even though the struggle was often multifaceted (Falicov, 2007). Similarly, the majority found that spouses and their children were major influences over how they lived their lives and how they were able to succeed in the face of

such extreme adversity in a new country. Through this lens it is possible not only to see how some women were pushed into their positions, but also how even more could find the will to go into a career they were passionate about while still maintaining an active family life (Falicov, 2007).

Cultural Expectations

Cultural expectations mirrored those of the participants' family influences in many cases, as the women pointed out, although they were pressured into some roles against their will. The role of women in Iran focuses on the idea that there are only a few paths women can take in their lives. Participant 20 explained this:

When I was in Iran, the traditional gender values and Islamic government policies restricted me to reach my education and my advancement. Culture and gender expectations were very high. I could only imagine myself getting married and having children. I came from middle class family. I was very motivated to come here to the United States.

This emphasizes that even though these women made significant change in their own lives, there were still more expectations back home for them to start a family which most did. However, opportunities to achieve their own goals motivated them to move from Iran to the U.S. where they had more choice.

Mentoring

Mentoring programs are often useful in assisting women as they move into new careers, and for these immigrant women the need was even greater. However, many of the respondents did not have a mentor available to them either in their education or in work. In fact, Participant 19 said she wished she'd had a mentor:

Looking back, if I had a mentor I may have chosen a different path through my college years but I did what I was expected to do.

Twelve participants described the fundamental value of their mentoring experience in terms of being understood as a woman. These participants discussed being involved with a female mentor, and the gender-related connections that they felt with her. The participants described how these female connections had set a framework for their mentoring experiences, and how their mentor had been helpful not only in the workplace but also in their educational endeavors. The mentoring relationships helped them to push for changes in their own educational and professional goals. Participant 4 stated:

During my graduate school, the chair of the department and my advisor were my mentors. Their knowledge and their ongoing support thrived [helped] me to get my professional job. They understand what I went through as a new immigrant and as a foreign student. I learned from their experience. My advisor was like my mom anytime when I felt alone. She was there for me.

Opportunities and Autonomy

One of the benefits of being an Iranian immigrant woman in the U.S. was being able to achieve a new level of autonomy that might otherwise have been unattainable to the participant back home. In moving to U.S. these women were able to adapt their lives and grow as individuals outside of the parent culture (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). Participant 3 explained that from a young age “parents were very supportive even though their own degree of education is low.” It is not simply that these women were being allowed to make their own path in life, but also that they were allowed to lead by example and show that all women are able to achieve just as much as men if they exert enough drive and motivation. In this light, their own success also allowed them to become role models and mentors to other women who have moved to the U.S. from Iran (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004).

Strategies for Success

The participants assigned high priority to achieving work-life balance in order to help maintain their family structure. This theme also focused these women on the need to become self-sufficient because self-efficacy allowed them to maintain separation between their work and their family life. Of the 21 participants in this study, the majority were married and had children of their own as was shown in Table 1. Work-life balance was the key concern for many women around the world, and for Iranian immigrant women the struggle to maintain their traditional roles in balance with their profession was even more pronounced because of cultural factors (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Cultural and familial obligations allowed women to work outside the home, but at the same time they also needed to be dutiful wives and mothers. (Falicov, 2007). They maintained their work-life balance and achieved remarkable feats because of their drive to succeed in the face of adversity. It was not simply that these women went into the workplace and pursued a career without direction; instead it was the pressure they put on themselves and the support they received from their families that allowed them to achieve their goals.

Helping Other Immigrant Women

Immigrant women who came to the U.S. were often on their own in their struggle to achieve their goals. However, some were able to overcome the barriers and help one another.

This was the case of Participant 19:

I enjoy my job and helping and empowering other immigrant to make a difference in their life here.

Some of these women expected these newly arrived immigrant women to do well in their own endeavors including education and careers.

Review of the Methodology

The methodology of this project focused on the leadership model of Iranian women in the U.S. The women who were interviewed were all high achieving women who immigrated to the U.S. and were first-generation immigrants. A key focus of this research was to understand how the participants dealt with pressures to succeed in both cultures and countries (Laufer, 2001; Hagemaster, 1992; Hamilton et al, 2008). The research design included a qualitative survey wherein the women were requested to answer questions related to ways they were able to succeed and overcome the adversities they faced. Their responses were then compiled into a list to enable the researcher to look for similarities among responses. Even though the responses varied in several respects, many of the respondents focused on similar issues. They described the process of creating methods to achieve high-levels of success (Ghazal Read, 2004; Laufer, 2001). Not all the women responded uniformly, but the similarities among responses obtained through this qualitative method allowed the researcher to identify factors that allowed the participants to overcome obstacles and adapt to become successful in a new country (Hamilton et al., 2008).

A substantial barrier the participants faced was the need to be self-sufficient but at the same time develop strong ties to their community. Both the Iranian community they moved from and the new community that they moved into influenced the women's perception of their own roles in society. As Iranian culture promotes high levels of achievement in academics, the main barrier was not one of achieving a higher level of education in the U.S., but instead it was finding a balance with all of their different roles in the two cultures (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). Because women in the Middle East are also viewed as wives first, these women needed to maintain their traditional values while also engaging in leadership positions associated with their new roles.

Through a mentoring approach and networking these women found high levels of success in their chosen fields. However, when looking at the information provided by the respondents, it was clear that many of them entered into their given field not solely because of their own desires, but instead because of pressure from their traditional roles (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; Ghazal Read, 2004). It was this balance between their traditional roles and their new roles as leaders in society that allowed the women to maintain such a strong work-life balance.

New Home for Iranian Immigrant Women

Women in a new country need to develop their own autonomous roles outside of the parental culture in which they were raised. The influence of Iranian culture on the actions of these women was apparent in the fact that they focused on achieving ambitious goals in both the academic and business worlds, but at the same time they also were able to focus on those ideologies that allowed them to succeed as independent women in a new society (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004; Ghazal Read, 2004). By providing an example and assuming a mentor role they were also able to help their compatriots achieve similar goals if they so desired.

Comparison to the Literature Review

When comparing the literature review to the responses from the women participants, a number of key similarities and differences were found. Although many of these women did focus on the way that they were able to achieve a work-life balance through asking for help from their spouses, others focused on how they were forced to work diligently to achieve their goal. It was not simply that this level of achievement was ingrained in their cultural upbringing, but instead it was the drive and gumption of these women to succeed that allowed them to do so very well. By providing a role model for others these participants were able to show how Iranian women tend

to be successful if they have such a desire (Amin & Al-Bassusi, 2004). However, this was also the source of the difference between the literature review and the actual findings.

The key difference between the literature from the findings based on the participants' responses was that many had to put their family before their careers even though this was not necessarily what they would have chosen. As explained by Participant 2:

I was told to study hard to become a doctor from an early age and to be honest after getting my Bachelor in Science degree I couldn't think of anything else besides continuing working hard in that direction.

This comment indicated that although women may possess the desire and ability to succeed, they may compromise their traditional family roles in pursuing their new positions. In evaluating the influence of the traditional culture on all of the women participants it was clear that compared with remaining independent, the majority admitted that their family still comes first. Some of the respondents focused on how they were able to work with a spouse inside and outside the home to achieve a sense of balance. This is a key difference between the literature that was reviewed and the actual responses from the participants of the study.

Limitations

When reviewing the limitations of this study, the primary issue was the limited number of respondents. While a large number of Iranian immigrant women live in the U.S., the focus of this study was on those who were in highly desirable positions who have succeeded in their personal endeavors both in their private and public life. In this light these responses were limited to 21 participants and the number of responses is considered relatively low in comparison to other studies. Ideally, the study would have included a larger number of participants in a variety of different roles and fields, which would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how the women were able to succeed in their careers (Brinkman, 2009). As explained by a

number of the women who were interviewed, the key methods leading to success favored by traditional Iranian culture were similar to those that lead to success in the U.S. As such, the limited sample size of the study limits understanding of the overall situation for all Iranian women who come to the U.S. Therefore, only certain strategies for success are evident in the study and the scope of the research is somewhat more narrow than ideal. Even with this limitation, though, the results are very viable in terms of being helpful to others who plan to come to the U.S. (Brinkman, 2009).

Real World Applications

The primary finding of this research was that with a mentoring approach and a drive to succeed, Iranian immigrant women moving to the U.S. can achieve high levels of success. While not all of these women had mentors that directly supervised them, they acted as role models, which can help other women achieve similar feats in their own lives. Women who follow in the footsteps of the study participants and their peers worldwide can draw on strategies that apply to the lives and goals of newly immigrated women.

On a global scale this research shows how women from a different culture can help one another when moving to a new country. Although the women of the study were from various walks of life, they demonstrated that through diligent effort they became successful. This was explained by Participant 2:

It was hard to decide and juggle family and work. Something had to give, and I didn't want it to be my kids! I chose to concentrate on my family and have my work as a 2nd priority. For me it's more meaningful.

This was an important aspect of the study, showing that on a global scale these women could create a network to help one another succeed. While their ability to move up in careers in Iran might be limited, they can still provide support for those women who want to move and become

independent. Maintaining the delicate balance needs to be taken into consideration. Developing strong connections within diaspora communities is a contributing factor in allowing immigrant women to succeed.

Recommendations to educators. With mentoring and a strong drive to succeed, Iranian immigrant women moving to the U.S. can achieve high levels of success. Educators tend to see the average student as identical from one to the next in their classroom planning and in interacting with their students. Immigrant women are often exceptional. Mentoring roles, even in an educational setting, can help these women to move forward. For educators, mentored students alleviate the problems of socialization between new immigrant students and the rest of the class that might be less than receptive to someone unknown moving into their fold. Not all of the respondents focused their lives in the same way, but it was possible to develop a variety of success strategies that the participants could use to influence the lives of other immigrant women.

Recommendation to policy makers. On a global scale this research provided information about ways women from different cultures can help one another when moving to a new country. An important implication of the study was that on a global scale the women can create a network to help one another succeed. Policy makers can be encouraged to institute changes that allow women to succeed while also removing the limitations that are put into place by society. Women in the home country can still provide support for those women who want to move and become independent. World leaders can help their own citizens to succeed when they decide to move abroad. Policy makers can take a step back, look at the situation in different countries, and then see which changes will have the most potential for overall impact. Policies for gender and education equality need to move beyond theory. They must also be implemented

and enforced. When policy makers commit to change and employ active monitoring systems, the end result will be improvement of women's prospects.

Conclusion

Overall this study confirmed that with diligent effort women have the ability to be successful. The study showed that with a strong balance in their lives, these women are not only able to succeed, but are also able to achieve amazing heights in terms of business success. Women from Iran who come to U.S. face a number of pressures that can hinder their professional and personal growth. By following known strategies and understanding the position of those women who have succeeded, newly immigrated women have the possibility of doing well on their own. Not every strategy works for each woman, but some measure of understanding is felt between women of different walks of life. It is extremely important to recognize that the participants' perspectives on their roles in the U.S. focused them on making choices that furthered their personal and familial goals. They have become role models for others.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Letter to Participate

Maryam Rostami, Ed.D. Candidate (ABD)

Dear Invited Participant:

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of Immigrant Iranian women who came to the U.S. and who have achieved their high academic goals and advanced their professional career while balancing their work activities with the demands of marriage and motherhood. The study research will provide understanding of how high-achieving Iranian women who came to the US attained their higher education, developed professional jobs and balanced family and work obligations. To accomplish this, we are interviewing Iranian females who were educated here and have a professional careers roles in an array of organizations. The study findings can be used to develop a social model for other women to meet the needs of their personal and professional obligations.

This interviewing process will take about an hour. We will begin with reading the consent form and obtaining your signature that indicates you wish to participate in the study. The questions at the beginning are very brief to get a snapshot of you, your present work, your education, and your living arrangements. Then I will ask four larger questions designed to help you recall several different periods of your life. I would like for you to tell me what stands out as being significant about these. Most people find this an interesting and enjoyable conversation. If, however, at any time you would rather not answer, you are free to decline.

For many years, my scholarly interests have focused on women's leadership, achievement motivation, and strategies for success, especially related to Iranian women. As a candidate for my Doctorate in Education at the Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology (GSEP), I would like to invite you to participate in the research study I am conducting to complete my degree entitled, "Strategies for Leadership: Motivation, Gender Identity, and Life Balance Among High-Achieving Iranian Immigrant Professional Women in the U.S. The study is designed to answer the three main questions:

1. What are the relationships among influencers (family expectations and Iranian culture) on achieving higher education for women who are striving to advance professional careers and work-life balance?
2. What experiences (identity, motivation, drive and adaptability, and relational style) shape the life course of high-achieving Iranian women and impact their professional careers and family life balance decisions?
3. What strategies are utilized to support Iranian high-achieving women in their professional careers and in achieving balancing work life?

To answer these questions, I will be conducting one to one, in person or phone interviews with high-achieving Iranian immigrant women in the U.S. in a wide range of organizations. The interview will take one hour of your time. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded. To protect your confidentiality and anonymity, I will assign your response and your name a unique identifier. I will conduct the interview near the end of April 2014. The interview data will be analyzed in May 2014. Upon completion of the study, everyone who participates in the interview process will receive a copy of the findings upon request.

Administration of the consent form: In order to continue with the interview, we need your written consent on this form, which has been approved by the IRB at Pepperdine University, and which assures you that there is no major risk to you in answering any of the questions. If you are uncomfortable with any question, you may decline to answer it, and you may terminate the interview at any time for any reason.

The interviewer will review the form with the respondent and answer any questions. I will collect the form at the end of the interview and leave a copy with the interviewee. In responding to the background questions: I will request that you fill out some basic information about yourself on the form that accompanies the interview. The requested information covers occupation, marital status, age, etc.

Do you have anything to change or add, or any questions or suggestions that you would like to raise? If something comes to mind later on, we would be glad to hear from you. You can find a mailing address, phone number and email address on this initial letter and on your copy of the consent form. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate your valuable contribution.

My warmest regards,

Maryam Rostami

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

Participant: _____

To: Principal Researcher, Doctoral Candidate in Education, Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

1. I _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Maryam Rostami under the direction of Dr. Margaret Weber, Dissertation Chairperson. This research study is being conducted to meet the requirements of a doctoral degree at Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology.
2. The overall purpose of this research is: This study explores the life course story of Iranian immigrants who came to the U.S. and achieved their academia goals and advanced in their professional fields, as well as the challenges they experienced, along with mentoring strategies they used to excel in the profession. By attaining details of Iranian women who have experience in different organization, we will better understand the impact of balancing work and family while managing a career. This study represents an effort to encourage educational institutions, private industries, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to recognize the importance of professional careers, and understand the work-life balance issues women experience as well as strategies that have been used for successful achievement in their new home country.
3. My participation will be the following: Completion of a demographic data sheet and participating in a face-to-face or phone interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes.
4. My participation in the study is planned to begin in April 2014 and conclude in May 2014. The study will be conducted in person or via phone or email.
5. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this study are: My participation in the study will further explore the impact of Iranian immigrants' life experiences and how they have impacted other women in different professional fields in their aspirations to achieve their higher educational attainment, professional advancement and balance in their personal and professional lives. My responses via narratives will provide a broader, more diverse view of how Iranian immigrant women in professional careers conceptualize and balance work and family obligations. This effort can potentially benefit private, public, and non-profit institutions to understand the work-life balance issues women experience in their professions.
6. I understand that there are certain risks and inconveniences that might be associated with this research. These include: time taking away from my schedule to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview. I will be asked to respond to questions regarding aspects of my personal and professional life experiences. If at any time I am uncomfortable answering these questions, I can choose to not participate.

7. I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after the experiment will be: Minimal recovery time is anticipated.
8. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.
9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
10. I understand that the investigator will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records, and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.
11. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact [REDACTED] if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions regarding my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Ms. Jean Kang, IRB Manager at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, via phone at 310-568-5753 or by email at Jean.Kang@pepperdine.edu.
12. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
13. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
14. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand.

I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Instrument

Directions

This questionnaire includes two sections you are requested to complete. The first section includes personal information that will be used to prove an overall demographic analysis of the full group within which you are a participant. The next section includes the actual questions that will be asked during a face-to-face or phone interview that is expected to last 45 to 60 minutes. Your responses are voluntary and at any time, you can opt not to reply either in writing or orally to any questions. In the event that this interview is taped, all materials related to this interview will be destroyed immediately following the completion of the study. Confidentiality is ensured regardless of whether the interviewed is taped or not because a pseudonym will be assigned to all information associated with your identity.

Socio-Demographic Questions:

Birth date _____ Place of birth _____

Occupation _____ Employer _____

Marital Status _____ Year _____ Spouse (partner) birth date _____

Husband's (partner's) education and occupation _____

Children (gender and year of birth) _____

Mother's education and occupation _____

Father's education and occupation _____

Siblings (gender and year of birth) _____

Percentage of total household income that you earn _____

Health, illness, accidents, disability _____

Religious background _____

Second language(s) _____

Lived in foreign country (name of country(ies)) _____

Travel outside of the US (name of country(ies)) _____
(in adulthood)

Main Study Questions

Question #1. Our first question is about the period in your life immediately after school or your early twenties. Some background questions first:

What was your major, name of your college, and year of graduation, what about graduate education?

What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life? What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out?

Question #2. (Childhood and adolescence). This next question concerns period in your life before college and the goals that you and your family held.

What was your family's attitude toward women's education and your going to college and what you would become?

What was the effect of your parents' education, presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, family expectations?

How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

Question #3. (Adulthood – current)

Since college, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced?

What type of mentors have you had?

What has happened that you didn't expect-in employment, family, faith, further education?

Has there been equal work opportunity, children, changes in marital status, or lifestyle changes for yourself or a family member?

What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, job loss? And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Question #4. (Adulthood-future).

Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns at the moment?

Looking further out, what are your goals, hopes and dreams for the next few years? What problems do you hope to solve?

Where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or finishing graduate school, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Question #5. (Strategies for balancing life).

What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles?

Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What makes you think that you could do both successfully?

Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family?

Have you felt any guilt related to either? Are the times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why? Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not?

What strategies do you implement in your own life in order to remain balanced?

Question #6. (Networking/Leader and Follower Relationships)

What experiences as a leader and or follower impacted your life? Is there anything in those relationships that you would do differently? Why or why not? Please share some thoughts on those instances.

Question #7. (Workplace Culture)

What impact if any have the following on your ability to achieve balance? Excessive workloads; management expectations; career advancement opportunities; and perceptions.

Conclusion

Do you have anything to change or add, or any questions or suggestions that you would like to offer? If something comes to mind later on, we would be glad to hear from you. You can find a mailing address, phone number and email address on the initial letter and on your copy of the consent form.

Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate very much what you have told me and your valuable time and willingness to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D

Thank You Letter

Dear Participant:

Thank you for expressing interest as a potential participant in the study on highly educated, achieving Iranian immigrant women who attained their academic goals and their professional development within work-family life balance that I am conducting as a part of my doctoral research study at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University.

The study of work-life balance issues and mentoring strategies for women in the different profession fields is important for several major reasons: It could reveal mentoring and leadership strategies women can use to excel in the profession; bring new thinking and understanding concerning historical, socio-economic, Iranian culture issues; the impact of self motivation in balancing work and family from women working in contract management; enhance women's understanding of their careers and how they interrelate with other aspects of their lives; and in addition, contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance issues in contract management.

I shall be contacting you shortly to schedule a date and time to conduct an in-person interview which will take approximately 60 minutes.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without it affecting your relationship with any other entity.

Thank you again in advance for your interest. If you have questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me by telephone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]

My warmest regards,

Maryam Rostami

APPENDIX E

IRB Notification of Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

Maryam T. Rostami

Protocol #: E0914D04

Project Title: The Motivational Factors of Higher Educated Iranian Immigrant Women:

A phenomenological study of Iranian women and influences on achievement and work-life integration in the United States

Dear Ms. Rostami:

Thank you for submitting your application, *The Motivational Factors of Higher Educated Iranian Immigrant Women: A phenomenological study of Iranian women and influences on achievement and work-life integration in the United States*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dear Weber, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

In addition, your application to waive documentation of informed consent has been **approved**.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thema Bryant-Davis".

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Margaret Weber, Faculty Advisor