Generational conflict among second generation Iranians in California

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Generational Conflict among Second Generation Iranians in California

By

Nasim Sarabandi

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Abstract

Generational conflict has been a significant and persistent theme in various immigration studies and scholarship. Yet, few qualitative works have been conducted by Iranian scholars in the United States to assess the quality and complexity of the subject for Iranian immigrants. In this thesis, I explore and analyze the lives of second generation Iranians in California (Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area). Through the identification of various themes present in generational conflict, such as family cohesion, gender roles, educational and career achievement, and cultural identity, I illustrate how Iranians have attempted to build an ‘imagined community’ in exile. Based on my research and interviews with twenty-three second generation Iranian men and women between the ages of 18 and 35, I argue that this ideal image of community lacks cohesion and suffers from a variety of challenges and deficiencies.
Introduction: Background on Iranian Immigrants

Over the past 40 years, many Iranians left their homes and moved to other countries. Mobasher (2012) asserts that there have been two main waves of Iranian migration: the first wave took place before the Islamic revolution of 1979; the second wave occurred during and after the tremendous political change created by the war. Before the revolution, the number of migrants was insignificant most of them students, funded by the Shah’s government to pursue their education outside of the country. I identify those who migrated during or after the revolution as the ‘first generation,’ and their children as the ‘second generation’ of Iranians.

The United States was one of the main destinations for Iranians after the Islamic revolution despite the political tensions between the U.S. and Iran. Mahdi notes (2001) that many Iranians chose to make a second home and build a new life in the United States because of America’s reputation as a country of immigrants, a country with unique opportunities for success and progress for foreigners.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Office of Immigration Statistics, and the U.S. Department of State, Iranian immigrants are a relatively new population in the country. The number of Iranians granted lawful permanent residence peaked in 1990 with an estimated 24,977 immigrants admitted. From 1980 to 2004, more than one out of every four Iranian immigrants were either refugees or asylum seekers. The number is reasonable and expectable due to the tremendous political changes then taking place in Iran.

Mobasher mentions there are no accurate statistics, but estimates are that approximately two million Iranians are living in the United States. The American Community Survey of 2006-2008, published by the U.S. Census Bureau, indicates that 422,663 Iranians
were then living in the United States; Iranian estimates are larger than official documents. (Mobasher 2012) The primary areas of Iranian settlement are Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, Texas, and the Washington DC-Baltimore metropolitan area. In 2010, according to other independent surveys performed by Iranian-Americans themselves, approximately 1–1.5 million Iranian-Americans are living in the U.S., with the largest concentration — about 720,000 people — living in the Los Angeles area. (Gilanshah 2011)

The U.S. Census Bureau further indicates that Iranians are among the most successful groups of immigrants in socioeconomic terms, and are above the U.S average for educational achievement. Furthermore; among the foreign-born, 50.6 percent have graduated from college (Cited from Portes & Rumbaut 1996). More than half of the Iranian immigrant population is employed in management, professional and related occupations. Statistics over the past 20 years indicate that Iranians are among the most successful immigrant groups in the US, which subsequently differentiates their quality of life.

Mehdi Bozorgmehr argues that Iranian life outside of the homeland is strikingly non-religious. He contends, “Most Iranian Muslims in the U.S. are secular. (Religious Muslims from Iran have no reason for leaving a strict Muslim society)” (Bozorgmehr & Sabagh 2000). Moreover, there are many non-Muslim Iranians in the United States (Christians, Armenians and Assyrians, Baha’is, Jews, and Zoroastrians), to whom the Muslim label does not apply (see Kelley & Friedlander 1993). Thus, religiosity is not a significant issue among the Iranian population in the United States. However, in times of crisis or religious conflict, Iranians are among those populations who are viewed with suspicion and hatred by U.S. public opinion and official governmental institutes.

Notably, recent studies by the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) show that Iranian-Americans are diverse in their religious beliefs, and are a mostly secular
community. According to a survey findings, “by a nearly two to one margin, those who were questioned stated that their religious identity was “not very strong” (65 percent) as opposed to “very strong” (35 percent).” (PAAIA website)

Nevertheless, except for research on the religious background and identity of Iranian immigrants, I found few studies precisely working on the subject of conflict (Mobasher 2012; Mahdi 1999) between the first and second generations. Of those studies, few utilized in-depth interviews as a means to determine the various aspects of the conflicts and challenges experienced by the second generation. Studies on issues of conflict between the generations provide Iranian scholarship with a clear image of the social engagement of this population. They also help to enrich previous studies.

Generational conflict is mentioned often in Iranian scholarly work; however, this thesis is the first to address the topic comprehensively through the process of my having lived with and interviewed the second generation.

In my research, I examine the quality of generational conflict between the first generation who entered the U.S. during the time of the revolution in 1979, and second generation Iranians who grew up in the United States. In the section on theoretical framework, I present the sources and nature of the conflict between the two generations. I begin that section with a critique of assimilation theory regarding the adaptation of second generations and, instead, argue from the perspective of active agency on the part of the second generation during childhood.

I claim that Iranians built a community in exile based on their imagination and ambitions. Such a community carries historical symbols from ancient Iran, but portrays a different image of Iranians as a successful group. I argue that this image embodies paradoxes between the beliefs of the first generation and the lifestyle of the second generation.
Paradoxes are apparent in gender issues, educational attainment, career goals and identity.

I chose the second generation as my subject because it is a young adult population and constitutes a considerable portion of the Iranian diaspora in the United States. Scholars can better understand the younger generation from studying their childhoods, upbringing, ideas, thoughts, and challenges, and the cultural and social barriers they experience in American society.

I expect this research will add value to immigration studies for two main reasons. First, the Iranian community is unique because of U.S.-Iran state relations. Those who leave Iran to seek a new life in the United States do so, to some extent, for political reasons. As Portes and Rumbaut (2006) argue, this fact may influence family stability and cohesiveness, and puts a dual pressure on parents, particularly among the refugees. Because the ideology of the Iranian government led to the imposition of restrictions on personal life, even for those not active in political organizations, all Iranians take these restrictions into consideration when deciding where to emigrate.

The second reason concerns the Iranian culture. Iranian immigrants come from a traditional society with socially strict norms and values. Based on a survey conducted by PAAIA, Iranians in the U.S. are a notably non-religious community. Therefore, Iranians receive cultural codes from other sources such as historical values and normative traditions. The breaking of or non-adherence to social norms that emerge from traditions results in isolation and difficulties in life, particularly for women. Therefore, assessing the stories and experiences of immigrants portrays a clear image of the Iranian community, even in its complex cultural structure.

In this research on generational conflict experiences of Iranians, I interviewed adults of the second generation between the ages of 18 and 35. I asked about their memories back to
childhood and their opinions on the challenges and tensions they face within the family. Interviewees consisted of 12 women and 11 men. The in-depth interview was the main technique used for data collection. I lived in California for two months, observing the lives of the Iranian community, and was thus able to closely assess and analyze the complexity of Iranian communication patterns and relationships.

Second generation Iranians are mostly young adults (after more than 30 years of immigration since the revolution). They are a valuable source of information because most of them are single and do not have children of their own. In conducting this research, I have tried to answer the following questions: What are the main tensions and conflicts between the first and second generation of Iranians? How does the second generation balance the contradictions and conflicts? What are the indicators of cooperation within families? How does the Iranian family perceive the second generation? How does the second generation create a balance between their two different lives? How do they redefine traditional gender roles?

I argue in the section on theoretical framework that ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983) is a mental concept that has had consequences for the practices of Iranians living outside of their homeland. I explore various aspects of the ‘imagined community’, arguing that Iranians have developed a form of successful and highly accomplished community with specific characteristics, while preserving strong cultural roots and a rich history.

In the following section, I illustrate and develop the main theoretical framework and arguments that are presented above. I then examine the significant studies on second generation Iranians.
Theoretical Framework

The main argument of this paper focuses on the conformities and paradoxes of the ‘imagined community’ built by Iranians in the U.S. in order to portray the problems of such a community, I explored the various aspects of generational conflict experienced by first and second generation Iranians. In the following section, I begin with macro assimilation theory and the segmented assimilation approach towards immigration. I then examine the second generation from the perspective of their childhoods. I argue that looking at the process of adaptation from the viewpoint of the second generation as children provides a more comprehensive picture of the complexities of their lives than does assimilation theory.

Assimilation Approach

Most of the theories related to integration and assimilation of immigrants and second generations are influenced by the classical theory of Gordon (1964). Other scholars, such as Zhou and Xiong, have developed more recent theories. According to Gordon, assimilation is a step toward achievement and success in the host country. (Greenmand & Xie 2006:6) Classical theorists assert the assumption that assimilation is a necessary part of the process of upward socioeconomic mobility for immigrant groups. Advocates of this approach assert, “Assimilation and acculturation is a unilinear process of adaptation and adjustment for new immigrants.” (Chaichian 1997:612)

Additionally, Gordon (1966 & 1961) argues for seven levels of assimilation that encompass the acculturation process, referring to the adoption of customs in the receiving country. The seven levels are: structural, marital, identification, assimilation, attitude and behavioral reception, and civic assimilation. Based on the segmented approach to immigration, immigrants can proceed on a variety of paths. Portes and Zhou argue in segmented theory that, “the United States is a stratified and unequal society; therefore,
different segments of society are available for immigrants to assimilate into.” The authors distinguish the possible paths that immigrants take toward assimilation. These pathways include what has been argued in classical theory as the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants into the middle class. Another possible path is assimilation into the underclass, which results in poverty and lack of social mobility. A third possibility is that immigrants will integrate economically while preserving their traditional cultures inside their social groups and communities. (Greenmand & Xie 2006:6)

Incorporation into different segments of society shapes the path and destiny of ethnic groups. Warikoo states: “using an integrated structural-cultural explanation, it argues that the trajectory of ethnic communities depends on which segment of U.S. Society the upper-middle class, the ethnic or disadvantaged minority communities families are incorporated into.” (2001:3)

If we consider the first path as full assimilation of immigrants into the host country, the second path allows for partial integration, opening up many different avenues to incorporation into the host society. Immigrants could integrate into the country economically, while persisting in their own values, norms, beliefs and customs, and transmitting their cultural values to their children. As Mahdi argues in his work, the parents’ backgrounds affect the process of identity formation for their children. Children are influenced by the religion, ethnicity and culture of their parents on the one hand, but gradually learn to live in a new context from their friends and surroundings. As active agents, immigrant children play a critical role in shaping their integration into the host country by making choices and negotiating the contradictions and challenges of creating a new life.

Iranians, as a relatively new group of immigrants in the U.S., have not assimilated completely into American society. The literature on Iranian immigration demonstrates this
fact. According to Mahdi’s research, Iranians preserve their cultural identity through prejudicial usage of the Farsi language and identifying ethnically as Iranian. He states that these factors may influence their social and cultural identity as well as impede integration into host country communities. That might be true for the first generation, but the life experience of second-generation individuals is vastly different from their parents. Chaichian’s findings on the first generation concur: “While the majority of respondents are fully bilingual and receptive of the host society's culture, they are confident enough to bring up their children based on Iranian cultural values. Yet the longer they stay in the United States, the more isolated they become and the lonelier they feel.” (1997:612) This fact confirms that, emotionally, Iranians identify more with the homeland than the host country.

**Childhood Perspective**

The second generation includes children of immigrants that are born in the sender country as well as those born in the host country. This group grows up or lives in an atmosphere that is different from that of their parents. Orozcos (2001) calls both U.S.- and foreign-born children the ‘children of immigrants’.

The process of completely re-shaping one’s identity depends greatly on the context in which one is living. The second generation grows up in different terrain from that of their parents. Orozcos argues that second-generation identities are very complex and hard to generalize. The perspective of second-generation immigrants toward life is based on a new culture, language, and environment developed at school and through peer relationships. Their perceptions and understanding are different from the previous generation. The important issue for Iranian second-generation immigrants is that their parents were raised in a traditional culture in a developing region of the world, and they are growing up in a developed country.
A completely new social context introduces many conflicts and challenges into a child’s world. The conflicts develop during the growth process as an important part of the child’s personality. But, conflict may also lead to delinquency. Orozcos asserts that the more “Americanized” children of immigrants become; the more likely they will engage in risky behavior.

Recognizing children as active agents in their own lives, and not merely as receivers of cultural products, changes our understanding of childhood. Qvortrup, a Danish anthropologist, presents a new perspective on the role of children. He argues that children articulate and change the cultural product. They are not just socialized by the adult world, but they form and build their own world at the same time. This viewpoint is completely different from classical approaches that perceive children as passive receivers of socializing products.

Contrary to the traditional approach, accepting children as autonomous individuals affirms that children are a permanent and persistent part of society. They are a social category in and of themselves. Children are influenced by adults, and they influence adults in turn (Qvortrup 1990) The classical viewpoint regarding a child’s upbringing does not support the complexity and multi-faceted lives of this particular group of immigrant children.

Focusing on the agency of children to select particular aspects of family and social structures provides a very different view than assimilation theory. Interview questions regarding childhood memories comprise an important part of this study. I asked the second-generation subjects to elaborate on their own stories and experiences, and to relate their responses to environmental pressures and conflicts. By taking a new approach to the way we look at the development of immigrant children, we change our entire perspective on the complexities of this group. Children negotiate throughout their upbringing, which helped the second generation construct their identities.
Based on Qvortrup’s argument, I confirmed that, from early age, second generation Iranians proactively react to their environment and produce a new culture and social life for themselves. All children manipulate and reproduce reality based on experiences with their parents. Decision-making for immigrant children is not as easy as for other groups. They selectively combine some aspects of their parents’ culture and background with core American culture.

Assimilation theory suggests an acculturation model that depends on the larger social context to which children are exposed. Childhood theory argues that something more than environmental factors are effectively involved; decisions made by the children themselves may create their future. As Portes and Rumbaut point out, the three factors of parental human capital, modes of incorporation and family structure (whether or not the family is intact) effectively influence the future of the second generation. (2006:215) From a macro perspective, nationality has a critical impact on family structure: culture of origin, the experience of the group upon arrival, the educational composition, and the age of the individuals all determine the success of second generations (Ibid). Even with positive modes of incorporation and high levels of human capital, however, we cannot overlook the difficulties and challenges of second generations face during adaptation.

Through the interview process, I found that the second generation was aware of the conflicts and difficulties which made each of them the actual player in the struggle with peer groups, family and friends. My assumption is that even a child’s choice to not follow their parents’ wishes or advice must be recognized as an individual decision. For example, in some cases, a child might be from a family with substantial personal and community resources, but still might choose not to follow in the footsteps of his or her parents.
Creating an Imagined Community

Iranian identity has crucial importance for members of the Iranian nation, particularly immigrants. As one enters a ‘Persian’ house, the observer will see symbols and images from ancient Iranian history, which makes evident the tremendous effort to maintain connections to an absent and distant past. I argue that the conflicts and strain that exist between the first and second generations needs to be recognized as an attempt to preserve Iranian identity and the imagining of a unique form of community. In their efforts to retain their ethnic identity, first generation Iranians and their children may confront different kinds of challenges; those challenges can be seen in various forms of generational conflict.

The first generation imagines the Iranian identity through specific characteristics of symbolic and historical signs. For example, first generation immigrants strive to maintain a particular definition of femininity for girls and women through efforts to carefully monitor girls’ behavior and attitudes. Strict rules, severe discipline, and narrow codes of conduct imposed throughout the second generation’s upbringing are attempts to control reproduction and the preservation of ethnic identity. The first generation expects the second generation to be successful in academic pursuits and the job market, and to present an authentic and traditional image of the Iranian family. These are all efforts to preserve national identity in a racialized society that, in many respects and unintentionally, uses the structural methods to suppress and marginalize immigrants. I assert that each of the aforementioned behaviors contains within it a method of resistance and the means to avoid being perceived as a ‘second-class’ or ‘subordinated’ citizen in highly racialized and stratified American society.

Immigrants, who perceive the citizens of the host country as ‘the other’ and place greater value on their own traditions and norms, turn the meaning of ‘otherness’ on its head. Yen Le Espiritu (2003) argues that we need to shift attention from the ‘otherness’ of
marginalized groups to the ‘otherness’ of the dominant group. Immigrants redefine themselves in relation to the dominant group, but they do not perceive themselves as ‘the other’. Conversely, they perceive the American culture as ‘other’. Attempts to establish a new definition of what it means to be pure Iranian result in the pressures that first generation Iranians place on the second generation. The first generation observes traditional ways of expressing what it means to be Iranian, and they expect their children to imitate them while children may act differently and chose non-obedience. Espiritu asserts for instance that, “female morality defines as women’s dedication to their families and sexual restraint is one of the few sites where economically and politically dominated groups can construct the dominant group as other and themselves as superior.” (2003:160) I argue, however, that sexual behavior is not the only means by which they distinguish themselves from American society; building a new image of community is another way to express the differences in Iranian culture and identity as different from the dominant group. The important point is that the image of the ‘new community’ may not truly express the reality of Iranian life.

It is worthwhile to mention, as Orozcos confirms, “Much of immigration is a process of comparing the here and now with the there and then.” (2001:87) Those who are raised in their country of origin “share a number of characteristics with their parents”, such as “a dual frame of reference, appreciation for new opportunities and a general optimism about the future.” (2001:88) But those who are born or grow up in the new country have a different frame of reference. The author is critical of the traditional approach to identity; that is, the view of assimilation that focuses on the full integration and acculturation of children. However, generational conflict is not due merely to the fact that each generation is coming from a different background: that of Iran, on the part of the parents, or America, where the children grew up. There are other sources of generational conflict, such as in the building of the ‘unique community’. ‘Unique community’ for immigrants is defined as a very
distinguished form of social organization that conceals the vacuity of the missing original society with all of its values and characteristics.

Benedict Anderson (1983) claims that developing an ‘imagined community’ is a means of preserving identity. It is a collective action for the purpose of acquiring a collective identity, but relying on more than symbols and ancient artifacts from a rich history of rituals, a wealth of literature, or thousands of years of civilization. Anderson asserts that, “Communities are to be distinguished, not only by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined.” (1983:6) He argues that this form of nation is imagined because it exists only in the minds of its members. Another way that one might understand ‘imagined community’ is, that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship.” (1983:7) Anderson uses ‘imagined community’ as a notion to oppose the claim that nationhood exists early in human history. He argues that ‘print capitalism’ (emergence of national calendars, clocks and language embodied in newspapers and books) helped shaping the concept of nationalism. People productively thought about themselves and their relations to others and this process constructed nationalism.

Anderson’s argument concurs in many respects with the literature on immigration. However, I argue that Iranian immigrants, with their rich history of civilization and symbolic ideas, are developing another form of ‘imagined community’ in exile from their homeland. Here I borrowed Anderson’s word of ‘imagined community’ in order to explain a different pattern of preserving identity among Iranians. First generation Iranians attempt to transfer the pattern of success and family-focused values, particular gender roles and attitudes related to preserving traditions, onto the ‘imagined community’. The ‘imagined community’ finds helpful ways for immigrants to live safely in American society, which places a high value on
individualistic achievement.

First generations pass the burden of the pressures they experience from living in an unfamiliar society onto their children. First generation Iranians wish to find stability within the process of immigration while attempting to maintain connections to their cultural identity that have no actual, external or logical roots in the host society. Their wish for their children is that they encounter fewer obstacles in achieving high social standing so as to avoid discrimination from American society. This desire motivates the first generation to insist on success, authenticity, and the preservation of a pure and rich culture that can be clearly distinguished from the culture of the new life.

Immigration scholars have assessed the various kinds of generational conflicts. These conflicts place severe pressures on the second generation, as I illustrate below.

**Generational Conflict**

The causes of strain and struggle between first and second generations have been a significant topic among scholars. Foner and Dreby (2011) describe the main sources of conflict in intergenerational relationships among immigrants. They acknowledge that the traditional values and customs of the first generation, including the expectation for respect and obedience, are the cause. Parental pressure to marry within the ethnic group, and resistance to do so from the younger second generation; the family expectation of high academic achievement; the embarrassment felt by the youth for having non-English speaking parents; as well as issues of gender, class and legal status are sources for further tension. (547-548) Foner and Dreby further argue that conflict is mixed with caring and cooperation within immigrant families, i.e., that rejection accompanies acceptance. An opportunity for resolving intergenerational conflict is presented when the young move out of the parental home to begin making their own way in life. Foner and Dreby argue that second generation
immigrants are agents of cultural innovation. As active agents, children affect the immigration process by not always following the same path as their parents.

Foner (2009b) discusses other causes of conflict between first and second generations such as strict discipline and the expectation of obedience within immigrant families; and, restrictions regarding relations between the sexes, particularly for their daughters who want to socialize and date their male companions. These rules often apply differently to sons, whom the parents expect to act in a ‘masculine way’ or to ‘demonstrate their manhood’. Rafael Ramirez argues that, in the case of Puerto Ricans, men are allowed to exercise their sexual freedom and demonstrate a sense of pride for doing so (Toro-Morn & Alicea 2003). Controlling and monitoring the whereabouts and communications of girls imposes pressures on their mobility and autonomous decisions. Intentional inconsistency in the discipline of girls and boys results in a double standard of restricted daughters and emancipated sons.

Another pressure on the second generation, and source of conflict, is to marry within the ethnic group, as are achieving good grades in school, and obtaining an advanced degree in college, particularly in law, engineering or the medical field. Having parents who cannot speak English fluently, is embarrassing to second generation Iranians. Linguistic problems loom large in children’s memories and cause them discomfort in situations involving family secrets or mediating translation in medical or legal settings. Additionally, first generation Iranians might feel very emotional towards their homeland, while the second generation does not realize the importance of such an attachment.

Other significant causes of conflict are gender issues. These include gender roles, surveillance of sexual attitudes and behaviors, attempts to control girls’ bodies and their physical appearance by the kind and color and form of clothes they can wear. The female members of the family experience greater strictness on this issue. Espiritu argues that parents
exercise disciplinary power over the female members of the family by endeavoring to control their sexual attitudes and demanding a specific ideal of behavior. There are external factors that influence the use of such disciplinary measures. The family insists on ethnic identity in contradiction with American society. In her studies on Filipino families, Espiritu explains “how idealized descriptions of the virtue of immigrants’ daughters allow aggrieved groups to turn negative into affirmation and to attribute their own marginalization to the deficient morality of their oppressors.” (2003:177)

Ethnic identity can be observed in the disciplinary and behavior controls employed in the upbringing of daughters. First generation parents interpret disobedient behaviors as ‘unauthentic’, ‘non-ethnic’, ‘not caring about traditions’, ‘not family-oriented’, and ‘unchaste.’ They expect their daughters to reflect the parents’ ethnic values and symbols in their behavior and appearance. Espiritu contends that “how the margins imagine and construct the mainstream in order to assert superiority over the latter” lead us to realize the process of resistance against racial oppression. A focus on female chastity and sacrifice provides a source of power and pride among ethnic minorities; while labeling white women as immoral and promiscuous to demonstrate the moral superiority of the immigrants’ own principles. Morality is used for “disciplining and regulating social” life. Concentrating on the role of women as persons dedicated to the family and practicing ‘sexual restraint’ provides the context in which the “dominated group can construct the dominant group as other and themselves as superior.” (2003:160)

A similar attitude is practiced among Iranians. Moghissi (1999) argues that the same pattern exists within the Iranian community and family. Though Iranian family structure is changing, the diaspora community tends to preserve and perpetuate patriarchal relationships. Iranian men want to maintain the power structure of the past; Iranian women fluctuate
between traditional and modern values. Mobasher (2012) believes that most Iranian women feel ambivalent about gender roles; they also want to preserve some of the traditional gender practices of Iranian culture. Mobasher further argues that, “a significant number of Iranian women are ambivalent about sexual freedom and American family relations. Like the traditionalist, although less intense and extreme, these ambivalent Iranian immigrant women are also inclined to find the American family structure and values to be loose and lacking moral restraints and integrity.” (2012:147)

Further, ethnic identity has a strong connection to the female body and appearance since “women's bodies serve as a vehicle to maintain the collective identity of groups.” (Cited from Banet-Weiser 1999; Moors 2000; Wilson 1985 in Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2005) Thus, the way that women dress and wear make-up reflects on the national identity and traditional culture. Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2005) argue that clothes are an important way of expressing publicly the individual and collective identities of marginalized groups. This fact has more importance for immigrant groups who wish to perceive themselves as superior in the new country.

For many immigrants, family togetherness is another characteristic that distinguishes them from American society. Espiritu affirms that not only Filipino culture is family-oriented, but Asian-American and African-American cultures also share that claim. The close-knit characteristics of Iranian families are mentioned several times in Iranian scholarly literature (Mahdi 1999; Mobasher 2012) On the other hand, Mobasher discusses the serious challenges that threaten the stability of the Iranian family, “Both Iranian men and women are marrying at later ages and marriages have become less stable. Even though marital dissolution in Iranian culture in shunned, the divorce rate and the number of single parent families among Iranians in the United Stated have increased substantially. There also has
been a sharp rise in cohabitation, premarital sex, intergenerational conflict, family tension and emotional separation of married couples.” (2012:142)

An important point to emphasize is that women typically carry the burden of maintaining family togetherness. “It is women - through their unpaid housework and kin work - who shoulder the primary responsibility.” (Espiritu 2003:162) This fact places a dual burden on women who, in many cases, work outside the home. In the case of Iranians, Mahdi (1999) references the changing gender roles in the family and the reduction in male power inside the family framework. Nevertheless, having close-knit and strong ties within the family continues to constitute a source of cultural pride for immigrants.

As mentioned earlier, excelling in school, achieving educational goals, and succeeding at career goals offer another source of pressure for second generation Iranians. Espiritu claims that ‘money’ carries a lot of symbolism in American society such as “personal inadequacy, loss of control, failure, security or need for social approval”. (2009:51) Most immigrants put their greatest efforts into protecting themselves with money. The same motives spur the first generation to pressure the second generation to receive the best grades, pursue the best academic majors, and be successful on the job. Such high family expectations may result in frustration and a feeling of failure for those who cannot meet them.

To avoid “social subjugation” (Espiritu 2009:51) by U.S. society, immigrants and their families are forced into seeking high economic status and to building strong routes to achieving the dream of ‘American success’. These efforts become the vehicles by which immigrants can change their social status and place a value on the individual as useful and making a profitable contribution to American society. Successful fulfillment of these goals helps to minimize the feeling of being a ‘second-class citizen’ and reduces the risk of encountering discrimination in the racially- and economically-stratified society of the United
States.

The above literature affirms how the efforts to reconstruct culture in a new society, ties the private lives of immigrant families to the social structure at the macro level. Every trivial practice of immigrant families has a relationship with the external framework outside of the private sphere and the closed doors of private homes. Espiritu emphasizes, “focus on the contradictory expectations over the meaning of sexuality and success . . . conceptualizes intergenerational strain not only as a private matter between immigrant parents and their children, but as a social, historical and transnational affair that exposes multiple and interrelated forms of power relations.” (2009:47) Mobasher (2012) ties such a mechanism to political evidence outside of the home. He claims that the hostage crisis in the 1980s, and more recently 9/11, influenced every facet of the Iranian community.

I argue, however, that Iranians are trying to build an ‘imagined community’ on experiences from their homeland that have specific characteristics. By constructing a resilient culture and attaining the highest status in American society, Iranians can realize their dreams in their ‘home away from home.’ Iranians could not have built such a society inside Iran because of the many cultural, social, and political obstacles to realizing their dreams (such as the irreclaimable nature of the political system and resistance from the many religious layers). Exhibiting unblemished pride differentiates Iranians from other groups and proves that they have made worthwhile contributions to the American society.

Achieving the Iranian dream of an ‘imagined community’ imposes contradictory expectations on second generation Iranians. Being Iranian and identifying as Iranian means one is highly successful, strictly adhering to family values, accepting a particular model of femininity, and complying with gender role expectations. Creating such an ‘imagined community’ is problematic. The expectations and pressures can often result in paradoxes and
conflicts. While attempting to meet the expectations of their upbringing, second-generation Iranians encounter contradictions from their own experiences as children, which differ from those of their parents. Children make their own choices about how to handle the pressures and expectations placed on them.

What are the contradictions that the second generation confronts in daily life? How does it manage to face the cultural contradictions of their parents’ backgrounds? What are the main paradoxes and sources of contention between parental values and those of the second generation? What is the second generation’s perception of the American and Iranian cultures? How different are the opinions of the first and second generations regarding gender role expectations? In which aspects are the viewpoints of the two generations similar? In the next section, I briefly review some of the significant Iranian scholarly literature on the second generation of Iranians. I then illustrate and answer the aforementioned questions in the findings and interview analysis section.

**Earlier Studies on Second Generation Iranians**

There is no comprehensive qualitative research examining Iranian inter-generational conflict from the standpoint of the second generation. Iranian scholars have studied the second generation, but they have concentrated on issues of identity rather than inter-generational conflict. Some of the studies, generated approximately 20 years ago, are no longer relevant.

Mobasher makes reference to the topic in his work, but his main focus is a political approach to Iranian immigration and ethnic identity. Mobasher (2012) identifies three consistent patterns of Iranian ethnic identity in the second generation: disillusionment, sympathy and ambivalence. Those who fall into the first group make a clear distinction between Iranian and American ethnic value; they are critical of the first generation as being
inflexible and failing to accept the American culture. The second type has a sympathetic and supportive approach toward the first generation. The third type, however, accepts some of the values of Iranian culture, but is critical of others; they create “reconciled, harmonious cultures of their own that is neither Iranian nor American.” (2012:126)

Ali Akbar Mahdi conducted two major studies of second generation Iranians, which looked at issues of gender perception and ethnic identity. According to one of his works, “The record of the Iranian immigrants in developing a sense of ethnic identity and community is mixed. They have a strong desire for preservation of their cultural heritage; they show no significant resistance to the assimilating forces of the host community.” (1998:94) Mahdi argues that second generation Iranians encounter various challenges as a consequence of their parents’ background. Most significantly, the seizure of the United States embassy by the militia in the 1980s resulted in the first generation being perceived as terrorists, fanatics, and anti-American.

Other challenges, that affect the second generation, arise from the traditional values and norms of the parents. Specifically, these concern sexual attitudes and the consumption of alcohol, and drugs. Some second generation Iranians respond with ambivalence to their parents’ expectations, as well as the expectations of American society.

The final challenge for the youth is the Iranian preference, even prejudice, for preserving the ‘Iranian identity,’ which is a romantic, historic and ethnocentric image from the ancient world before Islam entered Iran. (Mahdi 1999)

Hannasab conducted several studies on the sexual attitudes and behavior of Iranians in Los Angeles. She affirms the tensions and concerns of parents about the sexual behavior of the second generation. The first generation has no intention of endorsing American sexual freedoms for their children. In one of her studies (1998) regarding the Iranian second
generation’s views on dating and mate selection, she gathered data from 494 single Muslim and Jewish Iranian students at UCLA. She concluded that Iranian men hold more ‘Americanized’ attitudes regarding dating when compared to Iranian women. She also found that Muslims hold more modern opinions toward sexuality than do their Jewish counterparts.

Hannasab also conducted 20 face-to-face interviews with students between the ages of 19 and 25. She reaffirmed the existence of a double standard when it comes to dating and sexuality among the female members of Iranian families. She also concluded that relationships for young women are more serious and marriage-oriented than they are for young men. Young men perceive relationships as ‘gaining experience’.

Moghissi (1999) carried out a small study involving observation and interviews of female subjects in Vancouver and Montreal to assess the experiences of Iranian women immigrants. She concluded that Iranian women experience immigration more positively than men. However, she argues that distance from the homeland and Iranian heritage produces a ‘cultural resistance’ to the dominant culture of the new society as seen by the insistence on a patriarchal framework within the family and the larger Iranian community. In my research, I focus on the concept of cultural resistance among Iranian immigrants. Iranians have developed a new community from their imagination drawn from both the ancient world and their current strengths and potentialities. But this framework presents paradoxes and challenges, such as a patriarchal approach to men’s and women’s sexual roles and representation.

Methodology and Findings

In terms of data collection, I applied field research, participant observation and in-depth interviews as qualitative methods for analysis of generational conflict. Kvale (1983) defines the qualitative research interview as “an interview, whose purpose is to gather
descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena.” (Opdenakker 2006:147) The main reason I selected this method was the importance of achieving familiarity with the subjects and to gain in-depth information on the topic. As Crouch and Mckenzie (2006) confirm the main aim of the in-depth interview is to “generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences.”(485) Interviews helped me to understand and analyze the perceptions and feelings of second generation Iranians. The social conditions that produced their various experiences are important, but how the second generation perceives and interprets those experiences, is one of the major concerns of this study.

The interview as a qualitative field study method is also a feminist approach to research, and is a very important pathway for connecting to women’s lives. Generally speaking, I also think it is a distinctive and significant means to narrate and reflect on human life. Feminist researchers argue, “language is a resource to be used, and in use” for women to voice oppression and resistance simultaneously (DeVault 1990:112). I applied this methodology assuming that all human beings express varying layers of resistance throughout their daily lives, reproducing and changing solid structures by their agency. Therefore, dialoging by way of challenging and extensive conversation and interviews can expose the hidden aspects of their lives. “Women in different places and positions have long traditions of working at self-expression and understanding, using the language to talk about our lives, and working and listening.” (DeVault 1990:112) I believe the classical methods used in sociology may not be challenging enough or take into consideration the complexity and multifaceted experiences of either the Iranian second generation or any other immigrant groups.

The unit of analysis I employed in this study was the individual members of the Iranian second generation, generally between the ages of 18 to 35 years of age. The
interviews were conducted by consent of the interviewees and took between 1.5 to 2 hours each. All interviews were conducted in English. I selected respondents by using the ‘snowball’ method and completed 23 interviews. A weakness of the ‘snowball’ method as a non-probability sampling is that it cannot be properly representative of the Iranian second generation; that factor influences the validity of the sampling when generalizing results. Since I do not have access to a population frame for the entire second generation, the strength of using this method is that it is a useful means of finding respondents through networks of friends and families. The availability and desire of individuals to participate are important factors in the study; it is highly valuable to hear and document the stories of immigrant life. This is particularly true since I discovered that there have been very few studies conducted on the topic in the Iranian community.

I traveled in California for two months, from June to August 2013, to select sample groups from Iranian-American communities. The primary areas of travel were Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, including San Jose, Berkeley, Palo Alto, and San Francisco.

I chose California as the region of research because it is home to more than 50% of the Iranian immigrant population in the U.S.; it also has one of the highest concentrations of the Iranian diaspora. I am well aware that considerable populations of Iranians live in other parts of United States, specifically the Washington D.C. metropolitan area and Texas, Canada (Toronto) and in some European countries. However, this study is limited to the Iranian-American second generation in California. Thus, in terms of generalization, and as can be expected, the results of this study might be biased. Nonetheless, this study should be more accurate for the Iranians living in California; and, in few respects, the results can be generalized to be applicable to other groups as well. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed.
I personally engaged with the Iranian community in the summer of 2012, when I was living in Berkeley and volunteered as a Persian kindergarten teacher, for approximately three months. I became familiar with the Iranian-American community when I met with the parents of my students and talked with them about their lives. Communicating with my students’ parents drew my attention to the differences between the two generations. I found it valuable to research and analyze how those of the Iranian second generation present themselves. In addition, I was able to travel to Los Angeles, one of the main cities of Iranian settlement. Participation in programs and the lives of younger Iranians provided opportunities for me to meet first generation Iranians. I was also introduced to members of the second generation by friends. Thus, the initial acquaintance and interaction with the Iranian community lit the spark that led to planning my field research in the area.

I approached networks of friends through phone calls and text messages on social media (Facebook) to find volunteers, as well as sending flyers and emails to Iranian scholars and researchers. When participants volunteered through email, I provided detailed information to them on the project. I also emailed them consent forms and the time framework. I conducted most of the interviews in cafés and other public places.

I lived in the Bay Area for the entire month of June and interviewed 12 subjects from San Jose, Berkeley and San Francisco. I left for Los Angeles in the first week of July. I tried to conduct the interviews in person as often as possible. However, at the request of several of the subjects and due to the dispersion of the subjects throughout the Los Angeles area, I conducted most of interviews in this area through Skype. In this way, I was able to interview 11 cases.

The interviews took place either face-to-face or via Skype, depending on the preference of the participants. I determined that conducting all of the interviews face-to-face
was not possible due to time and financial constraints. Thus, I sought other avenues. Opdenakker (2006) argues that social cues and body language are important in the face-to-face interview. However, two months was a very short time to find 23 interviewees, so I conducted at least half of the interviews through Skype. I also used ‘video chatting’ to make visual the emotional and physical reactions of the interviewees.

Though the process of scheduling interviews via Skype demands considerable outreach, it accelerates the progress of interviews. But, the richness of the personal connection is lacking in ‘virtual’ contact. Eye contact and body language can strengthen communication; observing behavior through a camera lens does not serve as well. Furthermore, people are more likely to develop trust when meeting in person and speak more freely about their experiences and confidential matters. Thus, the Skype interview is very different from an in-person interview. Half of the interviews (13) were conducted in person and the other half via Skype. I utilized Skype so as to observe gestures and body language; I recorded all of the interviews and took extensive notes.

Engaging in direct communication with Iranians and having a personal presence in the field were critical aspects of the study, as was participation observation during the interviews. As Dreby and Foner assert, “We cannot study relationships between parents and children immigrants in isolation. The social, economic and political context of migration, settlement and incorporation provides background against which relationships unfold in the immigrant family.” (2011:559) Establishing relationships and contacts, observing environmental issues, cultural debates and the living conditions for Iranian immigrants, will increase the reliability of the analysis results. In addition, the socialization process of the second generation plays a significant role. The environment the second generation experiences in their respective communities can affect their cultural and social personalities.
I also visited Iranian organizations and attended social gatherings. For instance, I visited a religious house (something similar to a mosque) one afternoon during Ramadan; a place where Iranians (not necessarily Muslims) socialize with others (such as at Iftar during Ramadan). I also visited stores where I talked to Iranian salesmen, and spoke with women on the streets about their life experiences and opinions on immigrant life in California. I asked random questions and initiated conversations about their backgrounds, work, education, family, etc. I also met with scholars and university professors who are experts in immigration research on second generation Iranians and asked about their findings and observations. I should mention that I performed the informal field research to become familiar with the backgrounds of the Iranians I met, but the study is based completely on the interviews.

As an outside observer of the Iranian community, my previous discussions with the Iranian second generation regarding religion, politics, gender roles and cultural issues provided the background for conducting research on inter-generational conflict. As a more recent immigrant and, thus, an ‘outsider’, there is a significant difference between my experience and that of the second generation of Iranians.

First of all, I did not grow up in the United States, so I have limited knowledge about the educational system, the institutional framework, and the culture. I was fearful of miscommunication and misunderstanding during the interviews, particularly because participants were asked to speak in English; seventy percent were bilingual, but my first language is Farsi. I was also concerned that having to ask people to repeat their answers would be too obtrusive. I wanted them to feel comfortable so they would open up during our conversations. I discovered that language could be a barrier. Although, I received many compliments from interviewees on the proficiency of my spoken English, understanding the tone and emotional themes embodied in conversations was very difficult. These problems
later turned to my advantage; when I was transcribing the interviews and listening to reactions to the questions, I was able to realize the benefit of conducting the interviews in English. I spoke the language that they were most comfortable using and communicating with in their daily lives. I was also able to examine their proficiency in the Farsi language. I believe that translating their responses from Farsi to English would not have been as helpful during the analysis and assessment of the data.

It is noteworthy to mention that women were more willing to talk with me and discuss their experiences. When interviewing men, I had to be more inquisitive to obtain the detail I was seeking. Women spoke more intimately and were more comfortable with the process. My gender and upbringing, and being understood as fully Iranian, created a slight barrier when talking about personal issues with men. However, as an outsider and researcher, I was able to observe and analyze my observations from a more neutral and less biased position.

During the interviews, I adapted seven sets of questions from the work of Tuan (1998) on Asian ethnic experiences. Hence, I asked about the early experiences of the respondents at school and with other social institutions, their engagement in peer groups and the Iranian community; and their experiences of racial or ethnic discrimination. I then proceeded to ask questions regarding family background and the current location of family members (father, mother and siblings or relatives). I attempted to determine how important it was for the families that the respondents engage in Iranian culture. I asked about the respondents’ current lives, practicing traditions and Persian cultural values. I also considered emotional relationships and how the families respond to the younger generation’s values. I asked some questions regarding ethnic identity and whether the respondents follow news of Iran or watch Iranian TV programs and shows. The questions were designed to determine how the respondents think that they are perceived by other Americans, as well as by other immigrants.
A set of questions concerning political engagement was included given the importance of politics in Iranian life. The final set of questions concerned conflict between the first and second generations over issues of religion, gender, education and work. I asked about any instances of debates, discussion or conflict regarding Iranian and American culture and lifestyle.

Data analysis involved a two-step process. First, after each interview, I wrote down my field notes. I was unable to take notes during the interviews because doing so would be distracting to me since I am not a native speaker. However, recorded interviews helped me to preserve the details of the interviews and aided me in confirming facts and recalling contradictions. I transcribed each tape and focused on the main themes. I reviewed my field notes and wrote a narrative immigration story of each interviewee. Oliver Serovich and Mason (2005) assert that transcription is an act of representation from language. Interviews can be transcribed naturalized or denaturalized. I transcribed the interviews naturalized so as to interpret the tones, pauses, or any changes in language. The narrative story includes the experiences of the respondents. I developed a typology of the second generation’s conflict and the types of challenges they face during their teen and younger years. After reviewing again my field notes and the transcribed recordings, I wrote up the significant themes.

Regarding ethical issues, the SUNY Albany’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study in April 2013. I anticipated that some questions would be sensitive for the respondents, particularly the questions regarding childhood histories and memories. Before beginning, I asked each respondent to stop the interview in the event they became uncomfortable. I also provided each respondent with an informed consent form to sign and details of the study. I asked for permission to record the interview. During transcription, I removed any language that would identify the speaker and used aliases when referring to the
interviewees. All of the interviews are confidential and anonymous.

**Background on the Study Sample**

The targeted sample for in-depth interviews consisted of 23 individuals between the ages of 18 and 32. The majority of the interviewees were between 23 and 29 years of age. I found the interviewees through my network of friends and organizations. Using the ‘snowball’ method of sampling, I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with 12 women and 11 men from the second generation.

Geographically, the sample was divided between two main groups in California. Approximately 12 subjects were residing in the San Francisco Bay Area, and 11 were living in the Los Angeles area. Most Iranians living in Los Angeles are settled in Orange County and Long Beach. Economic life is centered along Westwood Avenue (often called ‘Tehrangeles’), where Iranian restaurants, markets and stores carrying Persian foods and products can be found.

As mentioned above, the method used in the project is qualitative and based on open-ended and in-depth interviews with the second generation. The breakdown by gender of the interviewees and other sample characteristics are outlined below.

All but two of the interviewees who are college graduates have bachelor’s degrees. One was a student in college during the time of the interview, and the other was unable to finish. Eight out of the twenty-three interviewees were either in graduate school or had already completed their graduate studies.

None of the respondents were married or had children at the time of their interview. One of the interviewees identified as a heterosexual with bisexual tendencies. Twelve respondents were living either temporarily or permanently in their parents’ home during the
time of their interview. Most of the participants belonged to the middle or upper middle class, as defined by U.S. standards. Most of the interviewees had either attended Farsi school or had a Farsi tutor as a child. Approximately 90 percent of the subjects could speak Farsi, with a broad range of competency, but they could all read and write at an intermediate level. All of them stated that they celebrate or attend Persian holidays or events. Their level of interest and attendance varied based on the cultural interests or pedagogy of their parents. In most cases, the mothers were more influential in the passing on of the Persian heritage and traditions to the children. A few participants had a religious background or upbringing; but, in many cases, it was only the mother of the family who held religious beliefs and practiced the religious rituals.

Three of the interviewees experienced difficulties in their teenage years either at school or with their families. One of them was expelled from school for using drugs; another dropped out of high school and spent time in jail or in a rehabilitation facility. The third was highly aggressive and was unable to finish college due to depression. Each of the aforementioned interviewees has to some extent recovered and resumed a stable life. A fourth interviewee suffers depression from an identity crisis and has been receiving therapy for the last few years.

Most interviewees’ parents are college educated and aware of Iranian political issues. One or both parents of seven of the interviewees had been directly involved in political activities in Iran, such as during the revolution in 1979. Two of the interviewees are children of political refugees. Those whose parents have a political background are more aware of politics, but they have also experienced more difficult times due to their parent’s suffering. Two of them are particularly critical of their parents for being emotionally depressed and chose not to pursue a higher education. One of the interviewees did not complete college
despite good records.

**Analysis of Interviews**

The main objective of this research is to explore the quality and complexity of the lives of the Iranian second generation in California, particularly their interaction with the first generation. Interview questions included the sub-categories of gender experiences, inter-family relationships and the quality of communication between the parents and children. I also inquired about identity issues and the ways in which the Iranian second generation expresses itself. As in other immigrant groups, the tensions and conflicts in most Iranian families incorporate with cooperation and respect for parents. The second generation may reject some aspects or parts of their parents’ lives, but accept others. They understand the causes of the conflict and know that being a child of immigrant parents raised in a different culture presents challenges in their lives.

I have extracted four themes from the analysis of interview transcripts.

First, several of the second generation made reference to the issue of identity, either directly or indirectly, as a source of conflict with parents. One of their main concerns was their relationship and sense of belonging, or lack thereof, to either the Iranian or the American culture.

Second, the second generation talked about family cohesion, and specifically the paradoxes between the stereotype of a family-oriented Iranian culture and the separation or emotional divorce of their fathers and mothers.

Third, interviewees often raised gender issues, especially experiences related to women’s sexuality.
Fourth, the interviewees noted that educational achievement and the ‘career gap’ (Following semi-formal careers such as engineering and teaching or constructing their individual job) were sources of conflict with parents.

**Identity**

The subject of identity is one of the most controversial issues in the field of immigration, particularly for the second generation. Foner (2009b) contends “generation also is used as a measure of distance from the country of origin.” (3) Hence, adult immigrants from another country are considered the first generation, and their American-born children are referred to as the second generation.

Second generation Iranians in California have preserved differing levels of identity with relation to Iranian culture and heritage. Most respondents confess that they lived and grew up in two worlds, that of the home and that of American society. They learned the complexities of American culture from school and their peer groups. At the same time, their parents placed a heavy emphasis on knowing and learning about Persian culture, language and history as a major part of their identity. The first generation sees a contradiction between the two cultures and argues that Iranian behaviors and culture are more collective than the individualism of American culture. Family in America is defined as a husband or wife and their children. At the same time, most interviewees told me they have close relationships with their extended family, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. All of them have traveled to Iran at least once. Both of these points indicate the importance of both worlds to the second generation.
The Iranian community has preserved ethnic cohesion through symbols, myths, ancient stories, poems and literature. Parents tried to educate their children regarding the meaning of being Iranian. The second generation learned that having an Iranian national identity is different from having an Islamic identity. Such an ‘imagined community’ has strong roots in the Iranian diaspora. As Benedict Anderson argues, all of the ‘cultural artifacts’ connect Iranians to their historical identity. A unifying identity through an imagined community that no longer conforms to the culture in Iran and all of the current realities creates a sense of richness and superiority to American society. Anderson claims this is ‘imagined’ because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (1983:6) Those of the second generation have various objections and critiques of the Iranian community. They compare Iranian heritage and the whole of their culture to the more modern and individualistic American culture. In comparing the two cultures, they refer to the many ways that they are made uncomfortable by the emphasis placed on them being Iranian.

The interviewees have a variety of opinions about living in an Iranian community in California. While some respondents appreciated such an opportunity, others experienced problems living in such a close community. Parvaneh’s family were studying and living in Georgia to establish their life. They moved some years later to Los Angeles for having more relations with relatives and friends. She does not like her isolated parents lifestyle from Americans and has many objections; she has been in therapy since 2009 due to an identity crisis:

*I am tired of the Iranian community in LA. Iranians in Georgia are American-Iranian, but here are not so much American. They behave in a different way; Iranians here kept the negative part of our culture. They do a lot of ridiculous gossip and they are
intertwined to each other life. The boundaries are not very defined. It is just kind of like cheshmo ham chashmi. (When someone is jealous on others’ achievements and successes and talks publicly around it). In Georgia if we see Iranian, we said hi, how you are but here, if you see homeless person like they are, people pretend they are not Iranian. Iranians who came to L.A. did not try to assimilate. They have not to do it. In process of assimilation you leave some part of culture and keep the rest. But here Iranians did not drop negative part a lot... I have identity problem. The things that hurt me are from blurred boundaries. I should be American but I am not. I have been very much in my Iranian part. I don’t behave that way.

She explained how Iranians (particularly first generations) tend to stay and work in their own community which keep them in very personal and trivial matters of each other. They communicate more than Americans and break individual’s boundaries. For instance, they judge others on sexual behavior or give an opinion on how people should communicate with each other.

As in the above example, interviewees from Los Angeles find living in Iranian’s community challenging. However, they also mention the positive aspects of living together as a means of developing a sense of Iranian identity. Others think that being stereotyped as flashy or materialistic is better than being judged as a criminal. Two of the interviewees think it is reasonable for Iranians to display their wealth by the kind of car they drive or the house they live in:

*I am against the stereotypes about Iranians. I think any people with that amount of money, will be flashy. It is behind that. It is like life of celebrities and Hollywood. People like Kardashian.*

Parvaneh is critical of her parents’ behavior and not being very close to other cultures (such as American culture). She spoke about her mother and father placing distance between themselves and American culture. Her father rarely speaks English anymore, and her mother only speaks English at her workplace:
My parents were Iranian and had a little bit of American things. When we moved here my parents became totally Iranians. The ethnic identity in LA is crazy. People can live here without speaking English. I don’t personally like it. Feel my parents are cheating themselves.

Saman is one of the second-generation that sees both sides. He and his family have contributed in many positive ways to the Iranian community. They have established social services and NGOs for abused children and the elderly and serve many Iranian clients. Saman answers differently to the question of confrontation with the Iranian community:

Iranian networks taught me cultural sensitivity and patience, but on the other hand, Iranians, although they watch for each other and help each other, but they also screw others faster since they trust each other. Someone wants to take advantage of other.

It is worth mentioning that interviewees themselves have stereotypes about Iranians living in Los Angeles. While approximately half of the respondents live in Los Angeles, they try to distinguish themselves from other groups of Iranians. It is a typical attitude in the Iranian ethnic community to think they are not flashy or materialistic. Iranians living in the Bay Area usually consider Iranians living in Los Angeles as materialistic or superficial. Leyla thinks television programs, such as the series Shahs of Sunset, promote and strengthen negative stereotypes of Iranians:

Iranian community affects my life style. Anywhere you go, you will be stereotyped so when I say I am Iranian they answered Los Angeles Iranian? People have this image of Iranian are associated with movies like Shahs of Sunset or Bijan brands. It is kind of an impression. They think you are super rude, don’t care to have a modest style of life and love being in nice house or nice car. This affects me since I constantly try to break these stereotypes.

Another interviewee refers to the same problem, but he agrees with the stereotype about Iranians who live in Los Angeles:
I found LA Persian community very materialistic, shallow, very wealthy, educated and judgmental. I don’t feel any sense of connection to them. I am an artist and activist. I am not a doctor, engineer or lawyer. They judge me for that. I lived in LA twice for a few months.

I observed that the identity that a member of the second generation adopts is related to their childhood experience, conditioning and upbringing. If children grow up in an Iranian community with close family relationships, they stay more connected to Iranian culture. They develop more awareness of traditional norms and values and learn to balance life in both cultures. In cases where the second-generation individual grows up in a suburb, far from an Iranian community, their interest in maintaining Iranian roots is diminished. Further, those of the second generation who are well educated and have attained high cultural status are more likely to balance the paradoxes of living within two cultures. They are also more likely to try to provide some form of social services to the Iranian community in the future. The children from less political families, i.e., a father or mother who were not directly involved in revolutionary activities, are more likely to be successful in their own educational endeavors and establishing notable careers for themselves.

Family Cohesion

A significant assumption regarding the strength of family cohesion in Iranian culture exists in local and community conversations and scholarly works. Mahdi refers to the central role that family plays in Iranian society. He also asserts, “family continues to serve as a familiar refuge against the unfamiliar world of the host society.” Mobasher contends that family “continues to be the most important agent of socialization for second-generation Iranians in exile.” (2012:155) This fact is generally true, and the Iranian family, including relatives, constitutes the main source of support and security for immigrants. As he later mentions, the collective culture of Iranian traditions contradicts the American individualistic view that rewards independence and individual achievement. However, I find the assumption
of family cohesion in the Iranian family to be quite arguable.

Espiritu (2009) has researched young Filipino-American women and men. She claims that family is a source of cultural pride for the respondents. Making sacrifices for one another and being willing to give time to others is mentioned in her studies. The same pattern can be found among Iranians, who believe that this aspect of Iranian culture distinguishes it from American culture. Similar to Espiritu’s results in assessing Filipino life, a significant number of second-generation Iranians do not experience a sense of togetherness or cohesion in their families because of the struggles with their parents in young adulthood. This may be the result of the pressure felt by the parents to successfully integrate into the new society and achieve a higher standard of living. At the same time, external pressures and changes in gender roles are causes for conflict for parents. The parents may respond to these pressures by placing expectations on their children to achieve future success.

Despite the ideal of familial togetherness, approximately half of the interviewees stated that their parents are officially divorced, emotionally separated or living in unhappy marriages. Six of the parent couples were officially divorced. Children of divorced parents experienced significant problems. One of the interviewees failed to mention that his parents were divorced during his interview and lied when responding to questions about his relationship with his father. He has not seen his father since he was six years old. He pretended that they have a happy family life. Later, he contacted me and confessed that he did not feel comfortable discussing such a personal matter. When I asked why he had lied, he told me that he was trying to protect his mother because Iranian culture can be very judgmental toward divorced or widowed women. His explanation really resonated with me because Iranian cultural practices are strongly rooted in old traditions. This old way of thinking leads to judgment and gossip because the culture does not accept divorced women.
Gossip has a significant impact on Iranian migrant families. While many people feel that it is acceptable to talk about others, many interviewees reported that gossip in Iranian culture is far more prevalent than it should be. They referred it as a source of conversation as well as conflict with friends and relatives. Iranians tend to hide parts of their lives and keep secrets in order to protect themselves from judgment or other problems.

The strength of this idea is demonstrated in Arman’s response to the divorce of his parents. He believes that his parents are separated because of the drama caused by relatives:

\[
\text{My dad and mom were always respecting each other. It was problems with family since their families were much involved in their relationships. There was bunch of family things behind that. They got divorce because of external thing. It is unfortunate. It sucks at the beginning. You know always drama and jealousy is going around, in Persian families.}
\]

Gossip, jealousy, and talking behind each other’s backs were mentioned several times by interviewees. Respondents identified unjustifiable intervention in another’s life and the lack of respect for personal boundaries as undesirable Iranian behavior, whether in arranged or non-arranged marriages. In many respects it is a consequence of the Persian background of the parents; if the relatives were not Iranian, there would be less gossip and fewer unwanted interventions.

Yet not all of the divorced families experience conflict and tension. Some of them are able to handle the emotional aspects of divorce peacefully after the couple separates. Two respondents were very comfortable with the divorce of their parents. The father of one of the interviewees continues to live close by and maintains contact with the family. He occasionally comes on weekends to the family home to see the children and remains on friendly terms with his ex-wife. Saman, who is a member of the family just described, believes:
Here is the point and reality that I have seen. When women come here and all of a sudden women have economic opportunity and they have financial footing, vast majority of them were willing to work and get financially independent. They will be without their husband. It is simple. From that generation (my parents’ generation) there is very few who are in a long-term, happy and committed relationship or marriages. My parents were great. They never fight or abused. But they just found they should not be married. My father came to our home Saturday mornings. They are good friends and have their connection. They come and go. We never felt that the divorce was an issue or giant with stresses or anything like that. We found that they are not living together. I think my parents were really good at communicating with us. I was 16 and my brother was 18. And they explained things and we were good at it.

In cases of emotional separation, parents stay together for the benefit of their children. They may live separately, but they are not officially divorced. The common stereotype in Iranian culture is that Iranians are very family-oriented and preserve their emotional connections.

Clearly there is a paradox between the expectations of family togetherness, gossip and the reality. This paradox creates complexity in the lives of immigrant families. The case of Iranians is similar to that of other ethnicities, such as those from Asian countries, who think about and express their concerns for family cohesion.

**Gender and the Second Generation**

They seemed like other Iranian families. They had two daughters; mother looks like a strict person on children’s upbringing. The little girl around four years played with her friends in back yard. After some minutes they all came inside to grab some fresh fruits and rest. She was sitting in front of me on her knees by ground. Her mother passed behind me and warned the little girl to sit “properly” and asked, “How many times I have told you to cover your underwear?” the little girl was obviously frustrated and got her legs close to each other.
The above quote was my observation at a gathering of one of the Iranian families living in Santa Cruz, California. Some recalls of female interviewees from childhood memories affirm similar parental reactions to their unconscious behaviors. Strict sexual order and surveillances were applied to train them with traditional norms and values.

Years later when girls grow up in a more sexually free culture, they understand two different approaches towards body that lead the conflict. It is typical of the kinds of conflicts that the first and second generation of immigrant families experience. Sexual relations are known to be a source of conflict, particularly for the daughters. (Foner 2009b)

Espiritu refers to daughters as the ‘keepers of culture.’ The behavior of girls and young women is dictated by Filipino culture. Order and discipline are maintained through the monitoring, control, and punishment of the daughters. Girls who disobey the rules are branded “radical”, “untraditional”, “non-ethnic” and “selfish”. Societal emotions hold power and authority over young women, and they “determine if their daughter is an authentic member of their racial-ethnic community.” (2009:63)

A similar pattern can be observed and reported among Iranians to some extent. The patriarchal structure of Iranian culture places responsibility on the women for maintaining the depth and richness of the ancient cultural practices and representing them to the rest of the world. Within this structure, not only do men (the fathers) try to control their daughters’ behaviors and attitudes; women (the mothers) reinforce the same role models and values either by remaining silent regarding punishments, or by behaving in the same ways as the men. Thus, girls are disciplined as subjects of their nationality as well as their gender. However, girls have more problems with their fathers than mothers. For instance, two of the interviewees found it more convenient to negotiate the issue with their mothers. They recalled that in several incidents, fathers merely applied disciplines and did not tend to
discuss it.

As an example of the above, Leyla describes the arguments and tension between her and her mother during her pre-teen years over the issue of hair removal:

*I had discussion with my Mom; she did not want me to start these things (hair removal) too early. She said I am too young and to be honest I was. I don’t think kids should start any hair removal or doing eyebrows when you are 9 or 10 years old. But you don’t want to look different from everybody else while you have black hair...It was definitely lots of fights, arguing and pleases until finally they give up and understand you don’t want to be made fun of at school.*

Family debates over clothing and style of dress were a common theme in my interviews with girls. Some of them told me that despite their efforts to dress properly, i.e., to respect family values, their parents often got upset when they wore shorts or bikinis. Mahsa states that his father was very strict about what he could or could not wear:

*My father is very Iranian; we could not wear thin tops, skirts, and shorts. It was mostly jeans and T-shirts. He is very sensitive...In terms of the way we dressed. It was very stifling in a way until I was 13...then my mom told me it is OK, you can wear thin tops.*

Most interviewees assert that they have opposing viewpoints from their parents, especially their fathers, regarding homosexuality and LGBT rights. They claim that, when it comes to the issue of homosexuality, their parents cannot understand people being anything other than heterosexual. They also expect their daughters to be monogamous, and to project the image of idealized “oriental femininity” which is defined as being loyal and chaste. For these reasons, parents, particularly the fathers, insist on perpetuating the patriarchal structure and believe that Iranian girls should be family-oriented, caring about and loyal to cultural values. Espiritu contends that the same pattern exists among Filipino families. She states, “Young daughters, are expected to comply with male-defined criteria of what constitutes
“ideal” feminine virtues.” (2003:167) She later argues that most girls may reject this pattern of behavior and ideal type. Iranian girls care more about respecting and valuing the family norms and expectations than their male counterparts; but they can also behave independently. More liberal-thinking girls are resistant to family and cultural expectations regarding sexuality.

Conversations About Shaving

Female interviewees spoke of their first experiences with hair removal, such as the shaving of legs or the face and eyebrow hairs, as being a moment of gendered cultural conflict. They claim that most Iranian girls have a lot of bodily hair and when they reach the teen years and begin making friends with other girls, they are embarrassed to have dark hair on their legs. When they participate in physical education classes, they fear the other children will make comments or discriminate against them. Leyla explains:

When kids have no problem pointing out you have hair on your arms or you have not shaved your legs… whatever. I think just being Iranian girl and going through the process of hair removal, the first time you do it, your mom never wants you to do it; you look around and see the white American girls that just naturally don’t have any hair. When you have something like PE and you do it in elementary and middle school (it is physical education and you do lots of exercise. In the last period of the day, they would dedicate an hour to physical education). In order to do that you should wear a uniform which is T-shirt and Shorts but when you are nine or ten and have not started hair removal, kids get problem and trying to explain to Iranian parents why you want to do it, you want to fit in and look like everyone else, you don’t want to be pointed out. That struggle between parents and Iranian girls is hard.

Mahsa spoke of a similar experience, but thinks her father was stricter with her than with her younger sister. She also said that, most of the time, her mother remained silent:
He did not like me to wear make-up. I could not shave my legs. I could not take my eye-borrow until I was 15. I think because I was the first child. Everything was harder for me...

Gender plays an important role in the parenting of Iranian girls. Mothers police the sexual behavior of their daughters by imposing restrictions on their bodily and physical appearance, and controlling their autonomy. The traditional Iranian family values the image of young girls as sexually innocent and virgin. As they mature, girls may put up a resistance and refuse to meet family expectations. Girls express their sexuality by wearing make-up, shaving and wearing particular clothing; for the Iranian family, they fear that hair removal and other beautifying measures will lead to the loss of a daughter’s innocence and virginity. Espiritu (2003) found similar attitudes toward the expression of sexuality among young Filipino women. She asserts that parents, even other male members of the family such as the brothers, strictly control the sexual behavior of girls. The purpose of such control is to present an image of womanhood that is chaste, modest, nurturing and family-oriented. As mentioned previously, for marginalized groups, women’s physical appearance – how they use their bodies, whether or not they wear make-up, and the kinds of clothes they wear – should represent the traditional culture and national identity. It is mostly the women that experience these forms of control and regulation.

Curfews, Dating Men

Most Iranian girls stated that dating was an issue for them. Going out late at night was not acceptable, and their parents asked them to postpone dating until they had graduated from high school and were in college. Sheida explained that curfew only applied to her since she was the only girl in the family. The end result was that she had a very difficult time, started taking drugs, and was expelled from high school:
This is something new that I talk about my relationships with my parents. When I was growing up they did not let me date. My first long relationship was two years and I hid from them... I was 18 and things were secret. I hated that relationship. They found out about it. It was because of sex I think. They always told me you don’t need to be worried about it until you get to college. They prevent me from dating. They think I should not have sex before marriage. I did not date until 18. Everything was secret. I let them know a little bit, not that much. They were like let’s put this off as long as you can. My parents were never good at communicating of what they want it. I really don’t have knowledge about what they want. They were always punishing me about everything, very strict on me; wanted me to go to school. Come home and go to bed. They wanted me constantly to be like this student, completely on the top. I was punished for everything. I was the only person that have curfew.

Mahsa had the same experience in her family. It was difficult for her to tell her father that she is living with her boyfriend, even though she is 28 years old. She thinks her father never wanted her to date men:

He did not like us to go out at a certain times. He needed to know all our friends. He got mad if we see some friends. He was very controlling in terms of social life... One major thing is family structure. Iranians are much closer even if you don’t want to be. It is a force there. It is an expectation to that. I can see the difference from my parents and my boyfriend parents. My parents are very hands-on. His parents are hands-off. You do whatever you want... Actually my father always preferred that I don’t date anybody. Nobody. You know what I mean. He does not want girls to date. I kind of disobey him. He is very traditional and when we moved together, he was freaked out. But there is a discussion in our family always. My mom told him that you moved to America, you brought kids here. So when my BF and I moved together, my dad was over it. It was a long discussion. It took long time for him to accept it.

Parvaneh told me she suffers from depression and does not date very much even at 27 years of age. She thinks that her upbringing and her depression make it hard for her to date:

My mom was always say if you want to go out with boys, bring your friends and be in group. So she does not want me to date. I was not allowed to go out alone. It is twisted. It is my own reservation and upbringing that I cannot get to relationships.
Iranian women grow up in a traditional culture that discriminates against women based solely on their gender. They are expected to obey and conform to the same gender roles as their mothers. For example, they do not have as much freedom as the male members of the family to go out with friends or to have opinions about their relationships. They are expected to be modest Iranian women.

Most female interviewees claimed to have had at least one discussion with one or both of their parents about sexuality and how to behave as women. They explained that young men are not as likely to have these kinds of conversations. They are permitted the freedom to do whatever they choose. One of the male interviewees confirmed that parents practice this double standard. He confessed that his older sisters struggled over certain issues with their parents, but he was able to overcome any conflict with them by laughing and making jokes about his aberrant behavior.

_I always have a little bit of slack about both of my sisters, I realized that; they never wanted my sister to wear tighter pants. They were very strict on them about make-up or doing their eyebrows. For me, it was like better. I make funny conversation about piercing ear and tattoo. It was much more open for me. I don’t know why. I guess in the Persian culture they are more conservative thinking for women as oppose for the males._

Hannasab (1998) affirms a double standard for women among Iranians living in Los Angeles. He confirms that many parents allow the male members of the family more freedom and the right to make their own decisions about sexuality.

Finally, interviewees made mention of their parents’ expectations to marry at a particular age and to an Iranian spouse or mate. Hannasab (1998) asserts that Iranian parents do not want their children to marry non-Iranians. As Foner (2009b) argues, this creates another source of contention within immigrant families. Restricting marriage to one’s cultural group or semi-arranged marriage contradicts the romantic love norm in American culture.
While most Iranian parents do not expect to arrange their children’s marriages, as their own were, they do express the desire that their children marry within the ethnic group. The second-generation interviewees were universally opposed to this expectation, emphasizing that they will choose someone who fits their own criteria or standards, not those of their parents.

**Gender Role Expectations**

Encountering changes in gender roles upon arrival in the more egalitarian American culture may come as a surprise to immigrants. In a repetitive pattern, women after years of living and working in the new society tend to equalize the power relations inside the family structure. Some scholars such as Mahdi (1999), have traced changing gender roles between Iranian men and women. Mobasher (2012) affirms that Iranian women, contrary to men who have preserved traditional beliefs and ideas, have become acculturated to a more equal approach to gender roles.

Saman confirms changing gender roles and suggests that a considerable number of women, after entering into a more equal world that presents opportunities for education and independent work, prefer to live alone or distance themselves from traditional values. In the United States, women have more opportunities and the freedom to choose their own lifestyles without consideration for family opinion or beliefs.

As di Leonardo argues, feminine ethnicity comes out from the kin-work of women within the family. Women carry the responsibility of maintaining the network of relationships within their immediate and extended families (Cited From Espiritu 2003:163). Interviewees were often critical about the dual burden on women of carrying responsibility for all of the housework as well as working a job outside the home. The youth are critical on this point and say that the mother should leave some of the housework for the father to do. Some
interviewees said that their fathers help with the housework, but that in most Iranian families, the mothers did all the cooking and cleaning. Homa, a young girl, has voiced her objections many times to her parents:

My dad expects my mom to cook. I usually get mad on this. I disagree with that. When he comes home and sees dishes in sink, He gets mad: “why are not they washed?” When I talk about it, my dad gets mad on me. I feel like they should have changed because of living in U.S. my mom does not argue and she does it. When she is tired, she gets mad but does not argue.

Mahsa concurs with the above and explains:

My dad thinks women should serve. But my mom thinks the role of women is to define how she wants it. My mom is very feminist. They have crazy parental relationship. It affects you a lot. You live with two different people and you don’t know who is right or wrong. I installed what my mom thought me. My dad thinks that the role of man is to make money and does not have to cook or clean. He sometimes takes garbage out. My mom who also works outside the home, thinks it should be equal partnership and they should share works. I was arguing with my dad a lot.

Espiritu argues that the burden of unpaid housework is stressful for women who also work outside the home. She asserts that, like Iranians, a family-oriented culture is a source of pride for Filipinos. However, the women preserve the strong family bonds through house and kin-work and the provision of services to other members of family. In American culture, women gain respect and acceptance from family and society through pursuing their individual goals and careers.

In the case of parental divorce, Sima suggests there is a major difference between Iranian and American family culture with regard to family ties and the responsibilities of women in the home. She has an American mother and an Iranian father who were divorced when she was six years old:
The problem they got divorced was because it was too much obligations and she could not foot down. She did not want it. My dad’s families came to home. My mom should take care of all the guests. That is why I take distance and do not want to be obligated.

The above example suggests that Iranian women carry a heavier burden than American women because of the obligations and expectations placed on them. Mobasher (2012) states that mainstream American family values are more egalitarian and individualistic, which distinguishes them from traditional Iranian values. (147)

**Educational Achievement and Career**

Immigrants endeavor to replicate ‘American success’ to be accepted as ‘true Americans’. The tendency is to create a secure life in the new society by pursuing careers in medicine or engineering. I found that to be a common strategy among the first generation of Iranians. I assume that educational and economic success is one of the means to avoid discrimination in the multi-ethnic society of the United States.

Though first generation Iranians are not culturally American, they attempt to overcome cultural differences by achieving a high standard of living. Through educational and economic advancement, they hope to claim their right to be recognized as ‘good citizens’ in the new society. Thus, the first generation adopts the ‘American way’ to success and encourages the next generation to strive for even greater success. Foner (2009) claims that such high parental expectations for educational and career attainment are a source of conflict among immigrants. Receiving top grades and attending university to become engineers, doctors, or lawyers is a source of considerable pressure for the second generation. Espiritu (2009) also confirms this fact and argues that ‘having money’ is the main weapon against social subjugation for immigrants. Iranians, like other groups of immigrants, want to assure their dignity and social status by achieving a high standard of living in the racially and
economically stratified American society. Money changes human relations and is a “meaningful symbol of feelings such as personal inadequacy, loss of control, failure, security or need for social approval.” (Robert Lane Cited from Espiritu 2009:51) Espiritu states that money traces the social ranking, difference, acceptance and membership in the United States and is the “basis of social esteem and status marker.” for most peoples (55).

A key finding from the interviews was the conflict between parents and children over educational achievement, which will influence their future career success. This situation may not be unique to Iranians, but as mentioned above, the Iranian community tries to portray a very perfect and ideal image of their life in America. It should be mentioned that the general statistics almost confirm the Iranians claim their economical and educational success but they do not cover deficiencies and problems. Most of the interviewees admitted that their academic successes were due to the high value placed on advanced education by their parents. However, they themselves did not think that a good career was necessarily tied to advanced education. Most of the interviewees had completed undergraduate studies, but were not interested in pursuing a more advanced degree. However, they admit that their parents encourage them to continue on in school and to choose ‘practical’ majors such as law, medicine or engineering. They responded that the pressure produced by these demands was a constant aspect of their childhood; they were expected to excel by getting the highest grades in school and staying at the ‘top of the class’.

Sima told me she was strictly disciplined throughout her childhood. When she fantasized about her dreams for her future, she and her father would argue:

I had clashes with my dad; after I was graduated from political science in college he asked me, if I am going to med school now. And I said are you kidding me?! He was disappointed about that. Also growing up he forced me to play piano. We fight a lot about my grades at school.
Parham discusses the same experience and emphasizes that he will not put this kind of pressure on his own future children. He said that he would teach his children to learn to know themselves and to find their own way instead of pursuing an education that does not interest them. He also contends that money and financial security were important for his parent’s generation and that he understands the causality of this attitude very well:

*I had projection to what I want to do on my career. I brushed over this. I felt lots of pressure to get engineering degree. I was very interested in political science, history, philosophy and sociology in high school and I shared it with my dad and he said, “these are nice hobbies, you get a real degree...” It is view of immigrants and Iranians to be safe, stable and valuable in U.S. I am an adult and make my own choices but that voice that value set, that perspective, I still carried with me. The type of work I am doing makes me more alive. I won’t do it for my children. My view is learning about ourselves, understanding the things in our life that inspire us and trusting those paths. They were worried that I won’t be able to take care of myself financially. They wanted to set me up for it. Money, financial and security was very important for them.*

Another respondent claims that his parents always talked about the reasons they emigrated to the United States. They justified the difficulties of emigration by claiming that the educational and job opportunities would provide a better future for their children. He understands the desire of his parents to have a safe and secure life:

*I feel if you born here or live here longer, you actually will be less materialistic because most of the people I know who came here in their older age. In early 20 or 30, they came in economic insecurity; they all studied biology, dentist and etc. there are lots of my friends who say we are car dealership or back and we don’t care. My generation is like more you work on what you want. It is like finding a career that suits you. It is not on being economically safe.*

Those of the second generation feel a strong sense of frustration for their inability to fulfill their parents’ dreams for their children’s success. Arman believes that the Iranian second generation could be more successful than it is:
I think the second generations have the potentiality to be more successful than their parents and they could be but I don’t think as majority they are.

The Iranian second generation does not experience as much discrimination or insecurity as their parents did. They wish and hope to accomplish the mission of their parents; but, they do not want the instability that their mothers and fathers experienced. Consequently, they live in limbo between realizing their parents’ dreams and continuing on their own independent paths. They were successful in school and college, but chose to follow their own paths and develop their own career goals.

Conclusion

What it means to be a second generation Iranian in American society is the theme of this paper. Through in-depth interviews with young second generation Iranians in California about their memories from childhood and early adulthood experiences, I explored the challenges and complexities of their lives. I have attempted to answer the following questions: what are the primary tensions and conflicts between the first and second generation of Iranians? How does the second generation balance the conflicts and the contradictions? What are the indicators of cooperation within the family? What is the Iranian family’s perception of the second generation? How does the second generation create a balance between their two different worlds? How do they redefine traditional gender roles?

Iranians share many characteristics with other groups of immigrants: They face the hurdles of assimilation and adaptation in the new society; and, upward and downward mobility depends on their educational, linguistic, social, cultural and financial base and resources. What makes the Iranian community unique is the political nature of their life in America. Iranians follow politics and social life closely, but from a distance. The political power in Iran is based on a religious system, but first generation Iranian immigrants in the
U.S. lead secular and less religious lives. However, they are still dependent on the cultural and historical symbols of their past. Second generation Iranians have received the cultural expressions of their parents, but hold their opposition with political structure and traditional social norms inside Iran.

Like other groups of immigrants, Iranians experience generational conflicts over issues as varied as gender roles, family values, educational and career expectations, and the difficulties of engaging in the Iranian community. However, by creating a second home far from Iran, in California, Iranian immigrants have put a physical distance between themselves and the reality of their upbringing. It might be claimed that Iranian lives are similar to other groups of immigrants but I argued that the form of community that Iranians have built lacks some aspects of reality. Imagining a highly successful community was the only refuge that could help Iranians to survive after tremendous political changes (Revolution 1979). Such a nationalistic efforts pushed pressures on the next generation and released new forms of discontentment (among second generations).

I argue that ‘imagined community’ does not merely consist of nostalgia for the symbolism and ancient history of Iranian culture. For first generation Iranian immigrants in the U.S., having a successful career, being highly educated, having a particular definition and expression of femininity, and placing emphasis on a close-knit family are other sources of power and pride from which they have developed an ethnic and national identity. These are the factors that generate their valuable status inside racial American society and differentiate them from other groups of immigrants. Such a definition of ‘imagined community’ differs from Anderson (1983) emphasis on role of ‘print capitalism’ for growing nationalist emotions. I have focused on the nationalism and its role for shaping a community far from homeland. A community that provides sense of belonging and it treats the lost identity of
First generation Iranians hoped to make themselves and their children feel less marginalized and vulnerable to racial and social discrimination by focusing on education and career and expecting the second generation to follow this same route. Iranians, once marginal to the mainstream values and lifestyle of America, have changed this reality and have proposed a superior place for their community. The aforementioned conflicts may seem similar to those of other ethnic groups, but such confrontations disrupt the idealized image of the successful Iranian immigrant, and create a true picture of the struggles and difficulties experienced by Iranian immigrants. For instance, balancing life between two different values on gender related issues was a common memory of Iranian girls while in many cases Iranian families intended to show their daughter’s success and character as a symbol of Iranian society.

Unrealistic expectations and constant pressure may result in failure, resistance and discontentment as illustrated in the analysis of the contents of the interviews with second generation Iranians. As an example, the preservation of traditional gender roles, or a mix of both traditional and modern values, demonstrates how national identity is tied to gender. First generation immigrant parents attempt to control their daughters’ choices about their bodies and their appearance in order to project a pure and chaste image of Iranian women. The source of these contradictions, which might be experienced by other Muslim communities as well, emerges from traditional beliefs and norms. Tradition tends to project the image of the ‘Ideal Persian’ girl. As the above makes evident, in many instances, every trivial detail of an immigrant’s life within the home is connected to the larger picture of what it means to be Iranian.
As a final note, although Iranians are understood as being among the most highly educated and financially successful immigrant communities in the U.S., the degree of social integration and assimilation affects their upward, and downward, mobility. Family structure and social capital determine the path to future success for their children. Coming of age in the socially liberal culture of America, while living with parents who attempt to impose traditional and highly rigid Iranian cultural values, presents a myriad of conflicts for the second generation, albeit, most of the second generations’ grievances express an understanding about, and take into account, parental concerns. However, the above just proves decisively that conflict should not be ignored or denied. The facts of Iranian life in the U.S. demonstrate how challenging and difficult immigrant life can be, and how those difficulties are transferred to the following generation.

One major limitation of this project refers to generalization of the results. The small sample size of the research and the snowball sampling strategy prevents me from proclaiming that the outcomes can reflect the Iranian’s generational conflict in the US or even in the California. The future studies should choose different strategies to cover more interviewees. Researchers can effectively apply the major sources of conflict founded by this research but need to be cautious in regards to generalization.
## Table 1: Study Participants characteristics

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status of parents</th>
<th>Living with parents</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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References


Hannasab, Shideh. 1998. Sexuality, dating and double standards: Young Iranian


