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The New Majority

A View into the Motivations and Aspirations

Of Iran's Women in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Omid Kheiltash

2013



## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

The New Majority

A View into the Motivations and Aspirations

Of Iran's Women in Higher Education

By

Omid Kheiltash

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Val D. Rust, Chair

The study explores Iranian college women's intentions and goals in pursuing higher education degrees and empirically examines what might explain their disproportionate levels of representation within the work force despite their overwhelming representation in universities and their desire to work outside the home.

Survey questionnaires were administered to college-going women and men in four universities in Tehran to explore the reasons women chose to pursue higher education and their professional aspirations after university. The quantitative data found that women pursued higher education to improve their skills in their field and to learn about the things that interest them, and least of all to get away from the home environment, to find a spouse, due to job availability, or because "there was nothing better to do." Both women and men indicated very strong parental support of their educational pursuits (with women scoring

higher) and varied reactions to their parents' expectation that they work (with men scoring higher).

The qualitative portion of the study comprised interviews with college women to ascertain the above, as well as what factors may contribute to their aspirations and efforts. Some of the motivations for pursuing higher education were similar to the quantitative findings such as increasing social status and learning about the things that interest them. Others were starkly different, such the desire to find a spouse, having nothing better to do, or simply because it was considered the only possible course of action to take. The findings found women faced many obstacles and barriers both within the university setting as well as in their efforts and desire to secure employment, such as an unsupportive university setting, unrealistic and unfair societal expectations, and an unsafe or unwelcoming professional environment. The study also presents a new Iranian feminist framework that builds upon precedented feminist theories, but more effectively speaks to the complexity of the education/occupation divide in Iranian women's unique case. The framework's robustness is supported by the data and argues that in considering educational and career aspirations of university women in Iran, the following must be taken into account: The outlier women who successfully enter the work force, especially within prestigious professions and positions; societal perceptions; national policies; economic climate; institutional and workforce climate; globalization; family; and women's perceptions of all of the above.

The dissertation of Omid Kheiltash is approved.

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to Reza, my beloved husband and soul mate.*

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- Rust, V., Dhanatya, C., Furuto, L. H. L., & Kheiltash, O. (December 07, 2007). Student Involvement as Predictive of College Freshmen Plans to Study Abroad. *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 15, 1-16.
- Kheiltash, O. (2009). *Inequalities in Iranian Education: Representations of Gender, Socioeconomic Status, Ethnic Diversity, and Religious, Diversity in School Textbooks and Curricula*. In Holsinger, D. B., & Jacob, W. J. (Eds.), *Inequality in Education: Comparative and International Perspectives*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. Pp. 392-416.
- Kheiltash, O. (2009). *What are Women's Motivations for Pursuing Higher Education in Iran?* Presentation at CIES Western Regional Conference, Los Angeles, CA.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Women's enrollment rates within institutions of higher education have been on the rise within virtually every nation in the world. Furthermore, women are surpassing men in numbers at the undergraduate level in many countries. This is true for the United States as well as in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the United States in 2005, about 43 percent of women ages 18 to 24 were enrolled in college, compared with 35 percent of young men (US Census Bureau), while in Iran, women account for between 52 to 60 percent of higher education enrollments<sup>1</sup> (Zahedi 2003).

In fact, Iranian women have made such significant strides and are at such an institutional advantage over their male counterparts upon entering colleges and universities, that the government had proposed a quota system limiting the number of women to 50 percent in the fields of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy (Mirhashemi 2003). However, women continue to flock to colleges and universities, they continue to outperform their male counterparts in the highly competitive national entrance examination, the *Konkour*, and they continue to shrink the gender disparity gap even in the most advanced degrees.

In other words, the global trends we are seeing in gender parity at the higher education level are also what are being witnessed in Iran. Iran is not an enigma in this respect, but because of the inequalities women face and the obstacles and restrictions that

---

<sup>1</sup> The statistics on the total enrollment of women in higher education vary. The Statistics Center of Iran and UNESCO site it at 52 percent, while other works such as Zahedi's (2003) have claimed the percent is higher.

are unique to them socially, politically and legally, such achievements in higher educational attainment become more striking. Furthermore, while global trends have been favoring women's enrollment in higher education overall, the "South and West Asia" region, in which Iran is a part, is staggering comparatively. The table below charts the global tertiary education trends by region for the years 1999 and 2007. UNESCO reports the percent female of total enrollment in 2007 for the South and West Asia region as 42 percent, while Iran's percent female of total enrollment is significantly higher at 52 percent. The region's gender parity index in 2007 was 0.77, and Iran's was 1.15. In fact, of the nine countries in the region, Iran is the only one with over 50 percent female tertiary enrollment. Those nine countries are the following:

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- India
- Iran
- Maldives
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

Iran's gender parity statistics are more comparable with Central Asia and Arab States who achieved 52 percent and 50 percent female enrollment in 2007 respectively. The fact that Iran and Arab States enjoy gender parity in higher educational attainment debunks the common misconception that education is not a high value for women in Muslim nations. While greater obstacles may exist for women in Islamic nations, and there are often severe social and cultural restrictions on women's advancement and non-

domestic pursuits, this is not to say that education is not a high cultural value. The descriptive statistics of Iran's higher education trends over the last two decades as well as this study's research shows that precisely the opposite is true for Iran, namely that education is not only important, but that many women and their families feel it to be critical to their development and advancement. Iran is very much in accord with the rest of the world with increasingly large numbers of women pursuing tertiary education.

Shaditalab (2005) writes, "The interaction between education and change in the system of cultural norms and values is observable, especially in the share of girls' participation in universities from the most economically disadvantaged provinces and far from their home towns. In fact, the education that once was accessible for a small elite group, now has spread throughout Iran" (p. 53).

Regrettably, proportional ratios at the early stages of tertiary education do not translate to proportional male/female representation within advanced degree programs or to favorable or prestigious professional outcomes after graduation.

In Iran's case, one example of dismal inequities with respect to occupational attainment across gender is the fact that women constitute a meager 3.5 percent of all managerial positions (Zahedi 2003). In fact, according to Zahedi, one UN report ranks Iran the 97<sup>th</sup> among 102 countries with respect to its percentage of women in managerial positions.



**Table 1: Global Tertiary Education Trends**

Region	% Female of Total Enrollment (2007)	Gender Parity Index (2007)	Gender Parity Index (1999)
World	51	1.08	0.96
Arab States	50	1.05	0.74
Central & Eastern Europe	55	1.25	1.18
Central Asia	52	1.10	0.93
East Asia & the Pacific	48	1.00	no data available
Latin America & Caribbean	54	1.19	1.12
N. America & W. Europe	56	1.33	1.23
South & West Asia	42	0.77	no data available
Sub-Saharan Africa	40	0.66	0.67
<b>IRAN</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>1.15</b>	<b>0.80</b>

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics' Global Education Digest 2009

Though the lack of female representation in managerial positions is likely due to a number of factors one of which may pertain to education, it nevertheless sheds light upon the structural forces that function as barriers for women in Iran.

### **Research Questions & Objectives**

The study presents the rationales, objectives, struggles, and hopes of the female college-going population in Tehran through both a quantitative and qualitative lens. In this vein, research questions are as follows:

1. How do college-going women rationalize their objectives for pursuing higher education? How are they similar to or different from college-going males' rationalizations?
2. What do women perceive to be the institutional climate of their prospective universities as related to females?
3. What do women define as their obstacles and support mechanisms (tangible and otherwise) throughout their higher education endeavors?
4. What are women's goals and aspirations beyond the university experience?
5. How do women's educational and/or professional goals and aspirations interact with familial and societal expectations of them as Iranian women?

The empirical findings are then used to examine the following two objectives of the study:

1. Women's perceptions of their educational and life goals and challenges are juxtaposed with the degree to which they coincide with or contradict national civic and socializing tactics and policies. That is, women's achievements, goals, and perceptions of themselves and their futures are compared with governmental programs, policies, statements, and civic education on the issue of the socialization of women. One aspect of this work, then, is to consider to what degree the women of today's Iran are the products of their society and of national socialization efforts, and to what degree they deviate from the governmentally structured depiction of the "Muslim Woman Ideal."
2. In the tradition of a grounded theory approach, this work attempts to formulate a conceptual framework that best speaks to the research findings, as it is argued that

the phenomenon of gender and higher education in modern-day Iran has no ideal theoretical lens through which it can currently be viewed.

## **Historical Context**

The historical context of higher education in Iran as well as the cultural, religious, and governmental climate of Iran is of significance particularly as it relates to and informs women's education and policies pertaining to gender and gender segregation of any kind.

The history of the establishment of universities in Iran dates back to 1851 and was exclusive to men. Furthermore, higher education institutions were limited only to the national capital of Tehran until after World War II (Handhaidari et al. 2008). Women's participation in institutions of higher education in Iran has had a relatively short history, beginning during the reign of Reza Khan of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925 – 1979) and the admittance of women to the University of Tehran in 1932 (Shavarini 2006). Until then women's highest education degree was high school completion, with the exception of admission into the Higher School of Midwifery.

Part of modernization efforts in the 1940s and 50s included the expansion of women's enrollment and access to higher education, but women's enrollment remained significantly less than men's at less than one-third of the total population of college-goers (Keddie 2006), and was primarily limited to the upper socio-economic echelons of society.

According to Keddie and Mattee (2002, p. xxx), "The Pahlavi dynasty was characterized by top-down modernization, centralization, and autocracy, all of which helped bring revolution." With increasing widespread unrest came political activity that often centered among student populations and universities. The Pahlavi Dynasty's final

years became increasingly “arbitrary, pro-Western, and controlling” thereby fueling student movements and unrest, with universities becoming “the center of political activities and instrumental to the all encompassing change that occurred in 1978/1979 – the Islamic Revolution” (Hamdhaidari et al. 2008, p. 232).

However, with the overthrow of the Shah’s regime and subsequent coming to power of the Islamic Republic came drastic changes to the university system. According to Handhaidari et al. (2008), the revolution put an end to the afore-common and widespread US-Iran academic relations. Also, institutions of higher education were deemed too Western and un-Islamic, and by 1980, they were altogether shut down for four years in order to be properly “cleansed” and Islamicized. When universities finally reopened, one-third of instructors did not return (Handhaidari 2008), some fields of study were gendered for both women and men, content was adjusted to meet more “Islamic” criteria, classrooms were gender segregated, and veiling for women was compulsory.

While higher education changes were drastic, Khomeini and his regime upheld that education was a high priority for both women and men in the new Islamic Republic who strongly emphasized it to be the path toward the Islamization and internalization of the “cultural revolution.” (Handhaidari et al. 2008). However, Karkehabadi (2007) writes, “In higher education the government, although officially supportive of women’s education and employment, in reality reduced opportunities for women by gender quotas, male privilege, and lack of financial resources” (p. 60). Karkehabadi argues that Khomeini’s policies reduced access to women in higher education during this period.

The eight-year Iran/Iraq War (1980-1988) has been called the lost years with the country’s resources being consumed by military activity (Hunter 1992). However, the war

did have some unintended benefits for women's access to education and to the workforce because of the mandatory call for young men to join the military and the increased economic and manpower demands of a war-torn nation. Karkehadi (2007) writes, "Economic factors contributed to changes in education and the workplace too. While the initial Islamic government supported a traditional role for women in Iran, the Iran/Iraq War made it necessary for women to participate in the workforce" (p. 62).

After Khomeini's death and the end of the war, many of the restricting policies that affected both women and men were eased (Karkehadi 2007). Through the 1990s, restrictions against women's access to certain fields of study were slowly lifted, and by 1994, "barriers were officially let down to allow women legal access to all fields" (Karkehadi 2007, p. 63).

After the revolution, the Islamization of the nation and subsequently the tertiary education system both benefited and challenged women in their educational attainment. In fact, before the 1979 Revolution, when Iran was far more "Western" in its structures and systems, women lagged behind their male counterparts in education. Much of the discourse of the Islamic Republic pertained to the Muslim Woman Ideal as being educated so that women may be better mothers in order to pass on the pillars of Islam to their children. Therefore, with some exceptions such as restrictions on field of study at the higher education level, women's educational advancement was to a large degree supported publically and politically even in the early years of the Islamic Republic. It was only after the tipping effect in favor of women in tertiary education when the government considered capping women's enrollment. It can be argued that while the Islamic Republic has created barriers and inequities for women in their pursuit of higher education, it has also facilitated

their advancement, whether intentionally or otherwise, through an emphasis on the value of education for women.

According to the Statistics Center of Iran, in 1969, women comprised 25 percent of the college-going population. In 1979, 30 percent of college-goers were women. In the 1980s with the rise of the Islamic Revolution, women's enrollment dropped to the 20s and fluctuated through the mid 1990s. In 1994, women's enrollment finally steadied at 30 percent and has been continuously climbing since. As can be observed from the chart above, the tertiary enrollment rates for women and men from 1996 to 2006 show a steady climb for both women and men, with women at a proportional advantage over men in 2002, a proportional advantage that has been climbing since.

Higher education in Iran has seen an exponential surge of both women and men since the 1990s. With the steady climb of both women and men's enrollment, it may be argued that education is a fundamental value not only for women, but across gender lines, and seems to be of paramount importance at the religious, cultural, familial, and personal levels. It should be mentioned that one explanation for the surge in the college-going population pertains to the coming of age of the post-revolutionary baby boom population. In the early years of the Islamic Republic, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini heavily publically advocated large families and encouraged the population to have multiple children. This has resulted in Iran being one of the youngest countries in the world in 2005 with the vast majority of the population being under 30 years old. Therefore the surge in numbers coincides with the period when the post-revolutionary baby boom became college-aged.

Below is a breakdown of percent female tertiary enrollment by degree from 1996 to 2007. According to the Statistical Center of Iran, women have been the majority of higher education enrollees since 2002. Since 2001, women have comprised the majority of bachelor's degree students, and while their numbers drop at the master's and doctoral levels, they remain in the 40 percent range in most years, with the gaps between women and men's enrollment shrinking each year. For instance, women comprised only 34 percent of doctoral students in 1996-1997, but a decade later in 2006-2007, they comprise nearly half the doctoral student population at 47 percent. The chart also indicates that men are more likely than women to pursue an associate degree, the lowest and least competitive of the higher education degrees obtainable.

**Table 2: Percent of Women's Tertiary Enrollment by Degree in Iran, 1996 – 2007**

Year	Associate	Bachelor	Master	Doctorate	TOTAL
<b>1996-97</b>	37%	40%	21%	34%	39%
<b>2001-02</b>	43%	52%	30%	41%	49%
<b>2002-03</b>	42%	55%	32%	42%	<b>51%</b>
<b>2003-04</b>	42%	57%	34%	44%	<b>52%</b>
<b>2004-05</b>	41%	57%	35%	44%	<b>51%</b>
<b>2005-06</b>	43%	57%	37%	46%	<b>52%</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	42%	57%	42%	47%	<b>52%</b>

Source: Statistic Center of Iran

Clearly women have made phenomenal strides in their pursuit of higher educational attainment. And already, their educational attainment is bringing about positive ideological

shifts in their society. Shaditalab (2005) writes, “In addition to the positive relationship between education and attitudes toward family or women’s employment, the perception of women’s importance in society is also a crucial cultural variable. A national survey found that 63.4 percent of women but only 56 percent of men believe that society considers the male as the more important gender” (p. 50).

This work’s aim is to bring women’s voice to the national statistics in helping explain this phenomenon. Namely, how do they themselves articulate their motivations for pursuing higher education, what they want for themselves after they graduate, and what the process has been like for them as women.



## **CHAPTER II:**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Literature on the issues of access and enrollment patterns of women in higher education in Iran is an area of research that has begun to flourish in recent years. This sudden expansion of research endeavors specifically addressing women's motivations and rationale for pursuing higher education in Iran not surprisingly coincides with the relatively new phenomenon of women's increased representation in Iranian colleges and universities. Since the "tipping" of higher education pursuit in favor of female representation has only been a reality since 2001, most research pertaining specifically to women's motivations for pursuing higher education has come into publication well within the last decade. Related research on gender and higher education is discussed in this chapter as it relates to educational achievement, gender segregation, and inequality of opportunity and outcome across fields of study, level of tertiary education, and occupational attainment.

#### **Gender Socialization and Segregation**

Cross-national comparative studies on gender parity in national school systems argue that while the global trend toward gender parity is being systematically achieved in many countries, gender segregation and cultural inequities still leave much to be desired in the way of intrinsic equity between the sexes. For example, in assessing the gender parity of 149 nations' pre-tertiary education systems, Wiseman (2008) concludes that while there is a "cloak of equality" in enrollment numbers in many of the nations with respect to access,

performance, and opportunity, one is left to wonder whether gender egalitarianism [is] encouraging parity rather than equity” (p. 195). Wiseman specifically considers the impact of sex segregation in national education systems in considering whether educational equality is being achieved. Iran is presented as significantly above the international mean with respect to its gender-segregated schooling (98.34% in 2003), with only Saudi Arabia more segregated. (The international mean is 19 percent, and the United States is less than 1 percent). Wiseman argues that among these extreme cases of gender segregated schools systems, as is the case of Iran, there is an “overt effort to offer comparable education to boys and girls. In this way, many of these highly gender-segregated systems attempt to show that they are ‘separate but equal’” (p. 188). In fact, Wiseman’s data demonstrates the wide success girls are having in these systems. He writes:

Of the seven most gender-segregated systems gender parity or a girls’ advantage in secondary enrollment is either achieved or likely in six of them. These results suggest that girls are doing surprisingly well in terms of access to formal education in gender-segregated systems (p. 191).

Iran is one of the 6-out-of-7 highly segregated countries Wiseman refers to above, and it is the case that women are outperforming men in secondary exams and college entrance examinations in Iran. Gender segregation does however continue to have implications of inequality despite the gender parity numbers. For example, Wiseman finds differences in pedagogy – that co-educational and boys-only schools tend to have more experienced teachers that lectured more than girls-only schools. Wiseman also sites well documented research that gender discrimination continues to take place in schools where the formal policy is one of equality. He writes:

Delegitimizing gender discrimination in schools does not mean that gender-biased teachers, administrators, curricula, and textbooks are going to

immediately change their attitudes and behavior – and there is much comparative and international evidence to suggest that the ‘hidden curriculum’ still often works against girls and women around the world (Stromquist, 2005) (p. 196).

In the case of Iran, the curriculum and the education agenda is not quite so hidden, but rather explicit with regard to the unique and segregated visions of education for boys and girls. That said, it has been documented by researchers that the gender segregation of the education system under the Islamic regime has in actuality allowed for fewer barriers in access and opportunity for Iran’s women. Esfandiari (2003) writes, “Traditional families who had not sent their girls to school before – because the teachers were men or the school was not Islamic – these were the girls that took the greatest advantage from the Islamization of schools, or the fact that schools were no longer mixed, as a way of justifying their presence out of the home” (p. 6).

Another potential benefit of a segregated education system has been documented by Karkehabadi (2007) who argues female students have benefited with increased autonomy and confidence despite having fewer resources than their male counterparts. She writes that a single sex education system “may have also helped Iranian girls to develop more autonomy and confidence in their own abilities and skills, attributed in part to their current academic success even with unequal numbers of facilities and resources.” She continues to state:

Girls in a segregated environment have the opportunity to engage in space constructed and largely administered by women. There is no distraction or need to fulfill typical roles of caretaking or service to men in this environment. Without being seen as the other, girls can work to achieve goals and identity (self actualization) on their own terms and not in comparison or as a complement to males (p. 61).

Karkehabadi also mentions a major benefit of a sex segregated education system: that it increases the need for women in professions that necessitate same-sex environments, such as medical doctors, teachers, and administrators (p. 62).

While women may have benefited in various ways from their single sex classrooms throughout their primary and secondary schooling, many are faced with co-educational environments once they enter university, and it is not clear whether and how those early “benefits” play out for them in their later schooling. In addressing this question, part of the objective of this work is to delve into how women perceive the institutional climate of the university (both at co-educational and all-women institutions) and what they define as their obstacles and support mechanisms (tangible and otherwise) throughout their higher education endeavors.

Clearly, it is well documented that the “Islamic cleansing” and gender segregation of the education system since the 1979 revolution did indeed open doors in education for many women, especially those from more traditional or devout families and backgrounds, and is therefore one of the factors that has contributed to the rise in numbers of women in colleges and universities. However, this very influence has also had an impact on the nature of and goals for women’s education, the institutional climate of education institutions for women, and the rising of new barriers. Under official documents created since the establishment of the current government of Iran, reference to women and the purpose of and goals for their education is articulated. Alavi-Hojjat (1994) writes,

One of the principal objectives of the key members of the present Iranian regime has been to restore women to the positions they consider appropriate. Women are considered to be deficient in intellectual and emotional stability, and thus are disqualified for careers which require cool emotional stability, and thus are disqualified for careers which require cool judgment and strength of

character such as the judiciary or high administrative positions. Women are considered to be particularly suited to the important tasks of motherhood; however, major decisions, both within the household and without, are to be made by men (p. 99).

These sexist notions of gender roles and abilities are explicitly discussed in public speeches conducted by high order clerics and government officials. Kar (2001) writes, “Many of the texts and narratives related to religion currently used in Iran’s seminaries contain the same ideology and viewpoints that the Taliban are practicing. Violence and hatred toward women is the distinct feature of these texts” (p. 195). She goes on to make a list of topics discussed by these clerics around the issue of gender such as the following example from a speech given by cleric Mohsen Saeedzadeh:

Women do not have the right to go public and be present in the public arena; Women must stay at home; If women have to leave the house, they should pass by the walls and the sides of the sidewalks quickly; Nobody should see women’s faces; Nobody should hear women’s voices; If women have to speak, they should not utter more than five words; Women are not allowed to travel; Women must whine and cry for their dead; Women are creations of the same rank as horses and houses; Women should be battered; If women die from the kicks and blows of their husbands, their husbands will not be punished; [and] The majority of those who will go to hell are women (p. 195).

Of course, the explicit language of gender inequality has significantly subsided in recent years, even among the most hard-lining clerics and political figures. However, legal disparity between the rights of women and men continues to persist, thereby continuing to perpetuate the strong message of the inequality and subordination of women in Iranian society. Alavi-Hojjat (1994) evidences gender inequalities through the documentation of the history of the revocation of Iranian women’s rights after the rise of the Ayatolla Khomeini and the Islamic revolution. She argues that early marriage for women was officially encouraged, birth control programs were halted, legislation favoring women’s

rights were overturned, and women were banned from many fields of study such as technology, veterinary science, and agriculture (p. 199).

Even more explicit are the policies and laws that address the sex appropriate and segregated nature of men and women in Iran subsequent to the rise of the Islamic Republic. For instance, the First Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan (hereafter called the First Plan) of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1989-1993 clearly emphasizes the role of the Iranian woman as mother, and the purpose of educating her as first and foremost for the moral survival, stability, and education of the family she is to 'head.' That is, her identity as a mother dominates all other possible motivations for pursuing education. Moghadem (2000) similarly writes, "Islamic ideology emphasizes the complementary aspects of the biological differences between men and women, and considers family – not individual—as the basic social unit" (p. 208).

The progression from this initial plan to the one that followed it further speaks to the systematic differences placed on the sexes. In 1993, a new plan was drafted called the Second Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan (hereafter referred to as the Second Plan) of the Islamic Republic of Iran 1994-1998. There are some key differences between the First and Second Plans; the Second Plan is more detailed as to the gender distinctions that must be made blatantly clear early on in a child's educational career. That is, the Second Plan more explicitly assigns unique roles and responsibilities for boys and girls, making the point that distinctions between them must be made early in their lives. In it, girls are encouraged to pursue the field of education. The Second Plan allows for and formally encourages women to have "social and political insight" and to assume "top level positions" (although only specifically mentioned for the realm of education), it is far more

stressed that women be trained to abide by their “Muslim identity” and to fulfill their roles and responsibilities first within the family setting. The Second Plan clearly steers women toward the pursuit of education as a means to strengthen their primary domestic role, or at best, toward degrees and professional aspirations in areas that are traditionally considered ‘female.’ The goal of women’s participation in such arenas is intended to advance the family unit rather than directly advance society through academic and professional contributions.

Works tend to point to the governmental hand in these socialization and redirection efforts, stating that the Islamic Republic has made serious attempts to segregate the academic pursuits as well as the future professions of women toward more “suitable” fields (Mehran 1991) such as education and health services (Moghadem 2000). Issues of gender segregation across fields of study in Iran have been presented as one indicator of the inequity of access and opportunity and the socialization of women into distinctly “female” fields. Mehran (1991) writes, “There has been a deliberate policy to redirect educational and occupational choices among women” (p. 49). Similarly, what Moghadam (1991) termed “market gender asymmetry” that she empirically observed in the early 1990s is still alive today, namely, segregation that cuts both in higher education and in the work force, thereby disadvantaging women in both arenas.

With respect to Iran, Moghadem (2000) writes, “In general two factors are considered as major contributors to occupational segregation: human capital...and discrimination. Based on social and cultural perceptions concerning the appropriate role of women in society and the job market, women may be discriminated against” (p. 207). She further argues that a host of economic, ideological, structural and educational factors contribute to the patterns of female labor participation in Iran.

Older studies from the early 1980s were done by Tohidi with high school women and men to see what factors may predict career and achievement motivation. The studies found that socio-economic status played a major role. While women scored lower overall in career motivation, upper to middle SES women scored higher than males in both career and achievement motivation. Tohidi (1984) also found that perceived community resources, community discrimination, and the amount of value put on marriage” were the most important factors in predicting women’s career and achievement motivation (p. 482).

Other studies cite the role of a misinterpreted Islam within national practices as the explanation of women’s lack of greater academic and societal presence. Moghadem (2000) writes:

The reference to Islamic principles can be gender biased. The qualification concerning adherence to Islamic principles can be used as an obstacle for equal access. It can be argued that the proper place for women is at home ...[and] men as heads of households should be given priority [in the public sector] (p. 208).

Barazangi (1997) states that in Muslim societies, universal secular schooling did not enable Muslim women to overcome any biased social construct of womanhood. Women’s higher educational enrollments have much to do with the complex and unique cultural factors at play within Muslim societies.

Others studies such as Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari’s (1994) point to a kaleidoscope of factors contributing to educational and occupational inequalities. School textbooks are cited to be one potential cause of gender inequalities and segregation in that there is an explicit lack of proportional representation of females, and when women are portrayed, they are depicted in traditional roles as mothers and nurturers, and tend to be confined to the home. Similarly, Shaditalab (2005) comments on the content of school textbooks as a



mechanism through which women's socialization was promoted. She writes, "The contents of schoolbooks were changed in accordance with state ideology, and a new definition of Iranian woman's role was propagated, one that idealized her role as homemaker, such as it had been in the Quajar era (1779-1925). Other than being a wife and mother, a teaching role was distinguished as suitable for women in contrast to 27 roles depicted as appropriate for men" (p. 43).

Despite socializing efforts and the abundance of explicitly sexist messages and policies, women have not been confined to the home, are not marrying early (the average marriage age for women is 24), and have arguably been the greatest resistive force against the current regime and its attempts. Afshar (1996) writes,

For the past fifteen years Iranian women have become the standard-bearers of Islamism in Iran and have been obliged, by law, to present veiled, and often serene and silent, face to the world media. Yet in practice, despite the continuous efforts of the State to control and curtail them and their activities, Iranian women have fought a long and successful battle and regained much of the ground that they had lost in the early days (p. 197).

More specifically, Afshar claims that not only have women stood up against the revocation of their rights, but they "have managed to reverse the discriminatory policies on education, they are attacking the inequalities in the labor market and demanding better care and welfare provisions for working mothers" (p. 214). Afshar goes on to say that "although the road to liberty is one that is strewn with difficulties, Iranian women, as ever, have come out fighting and have proved difficult to dominate" (p. 214).

These acts of resistance can be witnessed in all echelons of society as women push the Islamist envelop in personal aesthetic, public presence, education, and within the work force. As Tohidi and Bayes (2001) argue, "The case of the 'Islamic Revolution' in Iran has

shown [that] the mobilized and politicized Islamic women are not going to allow the male leadership to return them to the 'house of obedience' to play solely wifedom and motherhood roles" (p. 40).

Iranian society and even policy has been undergoing systematic change as a result of such efforts led by women. For instance, according to Shaditalab (2005), even the minister of education has acknowledged the need for change in the way women are depicted in textbooks.

### **Explaining the Phenomenon: Why Are Iran's Women Flocking to Universities?**

In explaining women's persistence in Iran's higher education institutions, Mehran (1991) identifies two factors that might explain the ability of women to maintain their level of educational attainment. She argues that education serves as a political and socializing tool in training the "New Muslim Woman" who in turn will ideally play a dominant role in perpetuating the social and political goals of the current government (p. 50). Furthermore, she argues that the dominant role of the family in socializing girls to value educational attainment is particularly true in the case of Iran. While Mehran's explanation may to some degree be accurate, it is not supported with research and it does not help explain why the majority of women in higher education do not continue their academic pursuits if it is the case that both governmental agendas and family socialization support their progress.

Aghajanian et al. 's (2007) findings conclude that despite the strong push by the current regime to cultivate the Islamic woman ideal of early marriage and childrearing, such a paradigm shift has not taken place on a societal level. The authors attribute this to the "tenacity of the attitudes about women's education and work values that were nurtured in the prior regime, and the expansion of sources of information for women" (p. 51). They

seem to be arguing that the influx of this current generation of women college attendees can in part be attributed to the fact that they were raised by mothers who are of the previous regime – a time when women enjoyed greater liberties, were more equal in the eyes of the law and society, and who, generally speaking, also strived to obtain academic and professional advancement.

Furthermore, aside from the first decade of the Islamic regime where pro-family and domestic aspirations were encouraged, the less conservative governments of Rafsanjani, Khatami and even Ahmadinejad encouraged women's participation in higher education, and to some extent, even in the work force.

Forces such as educational attainment, family values, and labor force participation will have a greater impact on women's patterns of social, educational, professional and familial participation than will governmental policies and their socializing efforts.

Aghajanian et al. (2007) suggest, "These attitudes toward education and nonfamilial roles, fostered by the monarchy and strengthened through pragmatic policies pertaining to education and work for women, seem entrenched and suggest continuing modernization despite religious and political strictures" (pp. 55-56).

In a later work, Mehran (2009) applies a new theoretical framework to Iranian higher education trends as well as to the representation of women and men in faculty and institutional decision-making positions in considering the sex segregation and inequalities that cut across gender. She presents the numbers of women and men who hold faculty positions by level, and enter higher education programs by degree and field of study, and uses Sara Hlupekile Longwe's women's empowerment framework (WEF) to argue that the issue of gender cannot be considered simply as a women's issue, but rather from a male-

female perspective that does not treat gender as a one-dimensional issue in isolation. Rather, “it is a balanced and inclusive framework that can be applied to the female educational experience in Iran without being caught in any form of dualism” (p. 546).

Mehran outlines Longwe’s framework that identifies women’s equality as having five hierarchical levels that must be reached in order to achieve gender equality: welfare, access, conscientisation, participation, and control. Merhan defines each of these levels, reinterprets and applies them in relation to the Iran context, and argues that in the case of Iranian women’s equality in education, the WEF model is better applied non-hierarchically. By so doing, these five levels “will be placed within a dialectical relationship in which an attempt will be made to portray how the interplay between state policies and women’s choices have led to transformation in female higher education in Iran” (p. 548).

The major adjustment made to the framework is the reinterpretation of conscientisation and participation, because according to Mehran, the two are hierarchically inverted in the case of Iran. She argues that “the status of women and their empowerment was not treated independently throughout the revolutionary movement; it was addressed only after veiling became an issue with the establishment of Islamic rule” (p. 546). In other words, conscious discrimination of women and men took place after their participation in their active and inclusive participation in the political scene during the Islamic Revolution.

Mehran argues that gender discrimination and inequality has cut both ways, and the WEF framework allows for a holistic consideration of gender discrimination for both women and men. She identifies the degree to which each of Longwe’s levels has been achieved since the 1979 revolution for women and men. While women have achieved equality in access at the undergraduate and doctorate levels, their numbers remain lower

at the master's and specialized doctorate levels. Furthermore, women's level of participation at the decision-making level is significantly lower than their male counterparts as is depicted by their low numbers as professors and high-ranking administrators within institutions of higher education. Also, women outnumber men in all undergraduate fields of study with the exception of engineering, which further exacerbates "gendered" fields, the "feminization" of certain fields, and Mehran argues, the discrimination of men in the fields in which they are underrepresented. Looking at discrimination toward both sexes, Mehran also points to the early restrictions placed on both women and men with respect to the fields of study they could pursue.

Mehran calls for a need to "hear both women's and men's voices regarding why they want to enter university and to understand the underlying reasons for choosing specific fields of study" (p. 555).

In a 2005 publication, Shavarini examines the factors that propel Iranian women to pursue higher education. The work points to post revolutionary "Islamic 'packaging'" of the education system as one of the factors that increased women's enrollment. She sites works that argue that with an Islamic veil on education, traditional and religious families were more likely to send their daughters to school and even college. The other factor has to do with the women themselves: she states, "It may...be that university has become the only viable institution through which young Iranian women can alter their public role and status" (p. 336).

### **Women and Motivation**

Shavarini (2005) who attempts to explain the feminization of Iranian higher education utilizes an open-ended survey question to assess why women in Iran choose to

pursue higher education. The study concludes that women are not flocking to colleges and universities strictly for academic purposes, but rather because they see it as a means through which to acquire certain opportunities and experiences to which they would otherwise be closed. Shavarini writes,

Young Iranian women do not consider college an avenue through which they can acquire skills and knowledge. For them, college is an experience of intangibles: of feeling uncontrolled; of increasing their 'worth' for marriage; of gaining respect; and of acquiring independence – all of which are rarely available to women in this society (p. 340).

In a later work, Shavarini (2006) considers the juxtaposition of women's high enrollment rates in institutions of higher education with their lack of representation in the work force after they graduate from college. She claims that one of the positive byproducts of the rise of the Islamic Republic has been the enhanced value of educating women, and by extension, the increase in representation of women in colleges and universities. The work presents women's voice in identifying qualitatively their motivations for pursuing higher education and their thoughts on entering the labor market after graduation. She argues that female students' reasons are not as a result of the influence of religion, but rather, Iran's "socio-economic culture" at play.

The study documents her female subjects' four main reasons for pursuing higher education and sites these reasons in the order of significance. Those reasons are as follows: first, women claim to pursue higher education because it gains them respect. Second, college student life provides them with temporary autonomy. Third, the college environment is an opportunity to learn more about the opposite sex and is often the first time women can interact with male peers who are not relatives. Finally, a higher educational degree is believed to enhance social status, which makes for opportunities for

more advantageous marriages. She points out that none of these reasons pertain to academics, learning, or acquiring certain skill sets.

Shavarini's research (2005) presents college-going women's own voices when explaining the disproportionately high female enrolment rates in higher education institutions. She argues that women's motivation lie in the intangibles having to do with increased autonomy, status, "worth" in marriage, respect and independence, intangibles that are rare commodities to young Iranian women outside the institution of higher education.

A 2011 work by Rezai-Rashti qualitatively explores women's participation in higher education, their views, interests, and desires, and the ways in which this education affects gender relation dynamics. Reasons for pursuing higher education for the women interviewed often pertained to personal interest as well as limited choice with respect to securing desirable professions without a college degree. Many felt men have greater options for employment and may not need a university degree the way women would in order to find good jobs. The study's subjects also shared that due to the greater freedoms men have in Iranian society, there are many distractions that tempt them away from their studies, while women, being more restricted, would have "nothing else to do" (p. 55) but to study. According to Rezai-Rashti, one of the greatest outcomes to women's participation in higher education is that it "is changing their expectations, making them more aware of inequalities, and affecting their ideas about marriage and family. They are becoming more conscious about their rights as women and actively participating in changing their social landscape" (p. 59).

One of the factors that may in part explain the gap between higher educational attainment (high) and occupational attainment (low) for women is the fact that access to the former is in and of itself what gains women social respect and enhances their social status. Shavarini (2005) writes, "Access to college alone, not the credentials earned after tertiary education, earns these Iranian women social respect" (p. 342).

Shavarini's (2005) research also points to women's overwhelming desire to secure employment after completing their higher education degrees. She writes, "Regardless of respondents' socio-economic background, these women desire not to be financial burdens on their families and/or future husbands. In other words, they hope their education will lead them to find jobs in the labor market and to secure financial independence. There is an undeniably strong indication that these women want to find employment" (p. 343). This desire is strongly reflected in the subjects of this study as well, despite the reality of low prospects for securing employment after completing the college degrees. The reasons for these lower job prospects for women are discussed in the following section. In addition to the continued prevalence of sexism that either shuts women out or is so blatant that women self-select to remove themselves, one argument is that with the country's unemployment so high, the job market is difficult for any newcomer to penetrate, let alone women who are bypassed by employers who often opt to hire men, the traditional heads of households who may be in greater need for the position.

### **The Education/Occupation Gap for Women in Iran**

While women in Iran have clearly made advances across all levels and fields of study in their pursuit of higher education, and in many cases are surpassing their male counterparts on entrance examination scores and enrollment, their educational advances



have not translated to comparable advances in the job market. Despite their educational achievements, women face countless barriers in securing work, let alone positions in desirable professions.

Aghajanian et al. survey female high school students about their attitudes on education, work and marriage. Their study finds a strong positive attitude toward education and career attainment across all socioeconomic classes and geographic location. Eighty percent of those surveyed wanted to go to college, 93 percent said they wished to work, and 93 percent said they would not stop their education to marry a desirable husband. Interestingly, the study also reports that 90 percent of the adolescent women surveyed claim they have approval of their fathers to pursue work outside the home.

In surveying high school women in Iran, Aghajanian et al.'s (2007) findings point to the disconnect between women's high educational and professional aspirations and the reality of the lack of job opportunities for both women and men. Despite that disjunction and the continued socializing effort of a government that favors women's presence within the home, the authors believe this high aspiration trend will persist across classes and among both urban and rural communities.

Shavarini (2006) argues that while women have significantly greater difficulty penetrating the labor market than their male counterparts, the employment climate in Iran is stark in general, and overall, country-wide joblessness further exacerbates women's marginalization in the work force. While many of Shavarini's subjects do wish to work, they are very aware of the fact that "in a tight job market that favors men as breadwinners," they are far less likely to find jobs.

Shavarini (2006) addresses the reality of private sector jobs where women are likely to opt out of even considering them a viable reality because of the level of harassment, discomfort, and potential stigma they may face even if they do obtain the position. "Work environments are often rife with male hostility, and hence such jobs are not considered a viable option."

There seems to be an inclination toward a forced buy-in to the status quo for many of these women. One woman resigns herself to the idea that if she is to work, she will probably only have the opportunity to teach because "private sector jobs are coed and I know I will face harassment. In this society, teaching is an acceptable profession that provides a *moheet-e sa'alem* [safe and healthy environment]. I have better grades than half the men in my class, but I'll end up teaching and they will end up with the well-paying jobs" (Shavarini p. 1976). Another woman writes, "Do I think I will find a job after I graduate? What man in this society is going to take me, take us [women], seriously enough to hire us?" (pp 1977).

Shavarini (2009) has published extensively on the issue of women and higher education in Iran. Her essay, "The Social (and Economic) Implications of Being an Educated Woman in Iran" takes on a more personal and sober tone as she considers the risks, drawbacks and potential ramifications of pursuing higher education as an Iranian woman through a conversation with her friend, Haleh whose daughter is in her second year in college.

Shavarini presents Haleh's torn argument as she anxiously awaits her daughter's delayed return from her summer class. While it was always Haleh's dream to have her daughter be admitted into university, she now feels more conflicted. The essay portrays the

other side of the higher education access coin: that college may be making women “captivity-aware,” that there are “social and economic implications to the detriment of women” (p. 135), and that few opportunities exist for women outside the home once they have graduated. Haleh says, “I am beginning to wonder if [a college degree] is worth it. Is there a place for [women] in our society after they graduate? In the end, it’s only to find a better husband. We end up in the same place: inside the home” (p. 135). The issue of women’s pursuit of higher education degrees is a complex one and one that is even more commendable when one considers the costs as well as the rewards.

Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam (2011) have conducted a more recent qualitative study on women’s experience around higher education and their perceptions of limited access to the work force. They argue that their lack of equal representation in the job market pertains to both economic forces as well as “gender ideology” (p. 419). Very similar to the research objectives of this study, they look to see what might explain the education-employment gap for women, and what barriers university-educated women themselves identify. (p. 422). According to their data, “Iranian women are conscious of the systemic barriers in their way and that they have devised various strategies to navigate those obstacles” (p. 438). They go on to say that the disenchantment caused by the education/occupation gap and the obstacles they face even when they do enter the work force may in part explain their involvement in protest movements in 1999, 2001 and 2009. They conclude by saying, “With respect to women, education creates cohorts of women with gender and social consciousness and new aspirations and expectations, including equal civil, political and economic rights of citizenship. The gap between those aspirations and the socio-legal realities creates status anxiety and grievances, and forms the basis for

feminist collective action. We are likely to be hearing more from Iran's young generation – both from its women and its men” (p. 438).

### **University Climate for Women**

Shavarini (2006) speaks of the institutional climate of colleges and universities for women. One of her subjects shares, “At the university gate I am stopped and told my makeup and hejab [Islamic appropriate attire] are improper; and in class my comments are dismissed or discredited by my male peers and male professors as ‘emotional female viewpoints’” (p. 1977).

Shavarini (2006b) discusses the paradoxes of women's pursuit of higher education by presenting her qualitative study of women's voices from 2003 and 2005. She argues that while higher education provides women opportunities for independence, self-realization, increased social status, interactions with men and individuals from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and a generally heightened outlook, it also opens their eyes to the limitations of higher education institutions that perpetuate the broader social inequities. For instance, women are treated as second class citizens within colleges and universities by their male professors and peers, their education is often two-tiered where they may be left with less knowledgeable professors and fewer educational opportunities, and they are aware of the stark reality of a job market that favors their male counterparts after they graduate. The paper sheds light on the complexities of women's significant presence in institutions of higher education and gives voice to the women themselves in addressing the many, often contradicting nuances.

Rezai-Rashti (2011) discusses the overwhelmingly positive impacts of attending university for the women she interviewed. She writes that her female interviewees

“believed that universities are creating an environment that raises male’s and female’s consciousness and provide an opportunity to meet each other which would not have been possible in any other social situation.” She goes on to say, “Women in general discussed how the university created a safe space for them to become more confident” (p. 56).

Shaditalab (2005) discusses these contradicting nuances in describing the tension felt by women:

Educated women experienced cognitive dissonance and role tension resulting from different socialization processes and role discrepancies. Their attitudes, values and expectations were inconsistent with those of the wider, i.e., revolutionary value system. When social pressures forced them to behave in accordance with new regulations, the norms and value conflicts made the situation more difficult to tolerate (p. 44).

While there are issues of institutional climate that are exclusive to women’s experiences in Iran, there are other challenges that are shared by the general college-going population, irrespective of gender. Issues of higher educational quality is one such example. Handhaidari et al. (2008) argue that despite the rapid expansion of higher education in the past two decades, higher education institutions are not providing students with quality instruction that translates into workforce readiness, job security and job creation. They believe that shortcomings include “a broad curriculum not addressing rapid change” and “the lack of a genuine program for real needs of the workforce” (pp. 234). The data presented in this work also speaks to this point of quality and job preparedness as is discussed in the qualitative findings in chapter 6.

### **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

This chapter outlines an assortment of feminist theories which speak to various aspects of the research questions at hand. It also refers to more general sociological theories that aim to explain unequal educational and occupational outcomes across gender and the state of women in higher education. Next, variations among the two most relevant feminist approaches, namely liberal and radical feminism is briefly discussed and the elements and applicability of each is considered with respect to women in Iran's higher education institutions. Strengths and limitations of these two theories is presented in order to demonstrate the rationality behind temporarily choosing a slightly modified radical feminist approach over other theoretical orientations when examining the state of internal, social, and institutional climates and outcomes of gender and higher education in Iran.

The discourse around Islamic feminism is outlined with an emphasis on the conceptualizations of women's issues in the Iranian context. These lenses have been helpful in guiding this work's research objectives and have informed aspects of the phenomena at play, but they do not seem to entirely accurately encompass the issue of Iran's women in higher education. Finally, conceptual frameworks that specifically focus on conceptualizing the Iran woman dynamic will be presented such as the works of Mohanty, Mir-Hosseini, Mehran and Tohidi. Informed by the works of these Iran-specific researchers, one of the objectives of this work is to provide an amalgamation of a feminist theoretical framework that is better able to speak to these issues at play. The final section of this chapter, then, is

the presentation of a conceptual frame that can help explain Iran's gender and higher education phenomena.

Bourdieu (1973) addresses the politics and increased monopoly of academic qualifications in higher educational systems in the context of social and cultural reproduction and argues that higher educational culture is not only based on class relations, but also on the socialization process of power. Furthermore, this power is not obtained by every individual embarking within the structure:

The fact remains that the educational system is less and less in a position to guarantee the value of the qualifications that it awards the further one goes away from...its own reproduction; and the reason for this is that the possession of a diploma, as prestigious as it may be, is...less and less capable of guaranteeing access to the highest positions and is never sufficient to guarantee in itself access to economic power (p. 82).

He argues that the purpose of institutions of higher education is to maintain ruling class monopoly in society and to ensure and legitimate their access and professional success. Though Bourdieu focuses on class and generally neglects the issue of gender dynamics within the same setting, the conceptual rationale remains the same. If his analysis of the upper class is replaced with males in general, his argument may still hold in the context of women in Iranian higher educational institutions; gender is likely to be a much more crucial predictor in accounting for access to professional outcomes and 'economic power' than the possession of a higher educational degree. In other words, women with equivalent academic qualifications are less likely to achieve the same or comparable occupational and economic outcomes as their male counterparts.

Liberal analyses of gender discrepancies in educational systems have tended to focus on sex role development through a socialization lens, where issues such as

differential treatments, sex-typing, and discrimination practices are central. This theoretical approach acknowledges the role of educational systems in perpetuating discrimination based on sex and states that girls are socialized within this unbalanced environment and embody a sense of inferiority as a result of their socialization. The liberal view is generally optimistic about the role of education: though education is viewed to be one of the factors that helps in the socialization of women into a state of inferiority, the liberal stance is that the system can be improved to ultimately eliminate sexism within schools. For instance, textbooks, can be edited to eliminate gender stereotyping, teachers can be better trained to utilize “gender-sensitivity strategies” (McCormick, 1994, p. 49), and alternative teaching approaches may be used to allow for various learning styles that accommodate both sexes as well as diversity within classrooms.

Liberal analyses, then, might view the gender imbalance of advance degree attainment within higher educational structures as the *outcome* of years of discrimination that results in the two different ‘sex-appropriate’ messages that are either implicitly or explicitly given to boys and girls. These messages in turn result in the ‘sex-appropriate’ division of subject area and level of educational attainment.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) briefly discuss expectation and labeling theories that speak to this notion of the internalization of one’s roles and abilities. These theories can be summed up as the subconscious act of living up – or down – to others’ perceived expectations. In this way, it may be argued that the imbalance in educational and occupational outcome between the sexes can be considered in part as a self-fulfilling prophecy.



Such conceptual perspectives may be useful to consider in examining discrimination patterns within the school structure – whether at the primary level, undergraduate level or otherwise—so that the perpetuation of sexist messages can be internally combated accordingly. Similar types of reconstructive strategies such as increasing instructor awareness and neutralizing sexist curricula might be suggested for better balancing gender ratios across advanced academic degrees, particularly within fields of study that women generally avoid.

It is rather problematic, however, to consider the issue of women’s state in higher education solely through a socialization or liberal feminist lens. First, socialization models place a heavier focus on women rather than the structural forces at play. Such a focus can imply deficiency on the part of the individual discriminated against as opposed to external factors that cause inequity.

In contrast, radical feminist perspectives focus greater attention on social and structural factors in explaining the gender gaps within education. This theoretical approach argues that education is an oppressive mechanism that functions as the transmitter of ‘male knowledge’ and subsequently devalues and trivializes the place and experiences of women within it. Educational systems, in mirroring the societies in which they exist, are patriarchal in nature and are agents in maintaining the superior social position of males within those societies.

This tight coupling between the educational system and the state is especially true in the case of Iran, as education is very highly centralized and closely regulated by the state. Furthermore, the role of women within society and the purpose of and goals for their education is explicitly addressed within official documents and even the Constitution.

Great emphasis is laid on the role of the Iranian woman as mother as well as the necessity for her to embrace her 'Muslim female identity.' Such documents even explicitly assign unique roles and responsibilities for boys and girls, making the point that distinctions between them must be made early in their lives and followed throughout the progress of their education.

By stressing the state (and subsequently, the educational system as an agent of the state) and its role in perpetuating the division of roles and labor based on sex, radical feminism is better able to account for gender disparities particularly in a nation like Iran where not only is the education system closely regulated by the state, but that explicit statements are made by the state that work to maintain the patriarchal division of labor and education.

Radical feminist's focus on the structural dynamics of gender gaps within academic fields of study closely align with the research questions of this work in that it is the aim of this study to examine, via the experiences and opinions of the individuals within the system of education, what structural forces—in this case, the educational structure—contribute to the proportional imbalances that exist between the education/occupation gap, and across subject areas.

One of the greatest drawbacks of the radical feminist approach, however, is that perhaps it is too radical in the sense that it rejects the possibility of improving the educational system. That is, the radical perspective does not believe the system of education can be altered to become more equitable across gender unless the greater structures change first. This deterministic approach, however, seems unrealistic and defeatist. If it is not a feasible possibility to throw out the system and start afresh, to

entirely transform greater society to embrace more gender equitable ideologies, or to completely separate men from women within educational institutions as a whole, radical feminism does not leave much room for other, less drastic options that still allow for substantive improvement in gender equity.

One suggestion given by radical feminists such as Spender (1981) is a separatist solution where women make their own educational systems and act in accordance with their own rules. It may be argued, however, that the strategy of separation has not helped in the case of Iran because women are not able to make their own rules as a result of a highly centralized educational system. Almost all Iranian schools through high school are single-sex institutions and only at the college level is there the option for the sexes to be mixed.<sup>2</sup> Yet this separation has not ameliorated the issues of gender inequity because of the blatant differences that are stressed between the roles of women and men within society.

Therefore, rather than to hold to the notion that the current educational system is a lost cause, it seems far more beneficial to work within the boundaries of reality and begin to promote awareness and change within the existing system. The theoretical approach of this work, then, adopts the radical feminist perspective in relation to the social forces at play within the structure of education while maintaining the optimism of the liberal perspective in hopes of raising awareness and even some degrees of equity across gender *within* the system.

One caveat is that these two theoretical focal points of this work – liberal and radical feminism – have both been produced and practiced predominantly in the West. Another

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<sup>2</sup> Many colleges and universities are single-sexed, and in co-ed universities, classes are sometimes run separately for women and men.

criticism of feminist discourse produced in the West is that it takes on a reductionist approach when considering the lives and realities of women in developing nations such as Iran. Mohanty (1988) writes, “I would like to suggest that the feminist writings... discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular ‘third-world woman’ – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of western humanist discourse” (pp. 62-63).

Moghadam, Mir-Hosseini and others discuss this feminist-theory gap in relation to the Iran context. In discussing the same challenge of being properly theoretically captured, Mir-Hosseini (1996) states, “The Islamic Republic has acted as a catalyst for the emergence of what can be described as an indigenous—locally produced—feminist consciousness” (p. 164).

Islamic feminism has made an attempt to close these gaps in its emphasis of women’s rights and equality in a specifically Muslim context, taking into account the distinct religious, social, and structural differences that exist for Muslim women. While “there is no coherent, self-identified and/or easily identifiable ‘Islamic feminist’ ideology and movement operating within the boundaries of Islamic societies” (Moghissi 1999, p. 126), some general descriptors can be applied to identify the parameters of the discourse.

Islamic feminism defines equality and power on starkly different terms than western feminists, and faults western feminism for buying into capitalistic notions of power and equality. It argues that an unadulterated, non-fundamentalist, non-patriarchal Islam (i.e., Islam in its pure sense as depicted in the Quran) does not restrict the rights of women, and in fact is a protector of women’s rights and safety, promotes gender equality,

and can even be an empowering tool for women. Islamic feminists take issue with blaming the religion for the inequalities Muslim women face and argue that the fault lies in the interpretation (or rather, misinterpretation) of the Quran as well as the politicization of the religion as a suppressive tool.

Indeed, the feminist activity that has been quasi-successful in Iran has been similar to this Islamic feminist discourse, namely that it has rooted its discourse firmly within the Quran and demanded equal rights for women by arguing that it is not only aligned with, but even mandated by the pillars of Islam. But feminist activity and the pursuit of women's rights in Iran has not stopped there while Islamic feminism does. Islamic feminism does not entirely encompass the more secular efforts and actions of active women living in and constrained by an oppressive Islamist political structure. That is, Islamic feminist activity and discourse is founded on the teachings of the Quran, but socially and politically active women living in Muslim nations may or may not choose to conceptually base their dissent in the same manner, or may not even be Muslim, but will still seek equality and social justice.

Moghissi (1999) similarly critiques, "To privilege the voice of religion and celebrate 'Islamic feminism' is to highlight only one of the many forms of identity available to Middle Eastern women, obscuring ways that identity is asserted or reclaimed, overshadowing forms of struggle outside religious practices and silencing the secular voices which are still raised against the regions stifling Islamification policies" (p. 138). Traditional Islamic feminism does not therefore apply to all Middle Eastern women's system of defiance, to their articulation of their cause, or even to the source of the inequity. Similarly, Moghissi (1999) argues, Islamic feminism encapsulates women to "look for women's rights to

culturally authentic, home-grown ideologies, that is, ‘the Islamic framework’” and therefore implying that “feminism is and must remain the privileged domain of women in the West” (p. 9).

Tohidi (2002) summarizes some of the activities of Muslim women against “their leaders’ patriarchal agenda” (p. 284) in the following way, further shedding light on the diversity of feminist activity within an Islamic context:

Many women are asserting themselves, undermining the clerical agenda both within and outside the Islamist framework. They do this in various ways: by subtly circumventing the dictated rules (e.g., reappropriating the veil as a means to facilitate social presence rather than seclusion, or minimizing and diversifying the compulsory *hijab* and dress code into fashionable styles), engaging in a feminist *ijtihad*, emphasizing the egalitarian ethics of Islam, reinterpreting the Quran, and deconstructing Shari’a-related rules in a women-friendly egalitarian fashion (e.g. in terms of birth control, personal status law, and family code to the extent of legalizing a demand for “wages for housework” (p. 285).

Moghissi (1999) critiques Islamic feminism in relation to the unique situation of women in Islamic fundamentalist societies. She explores and critiques the conceptualization of trends within these societies, proposing that in such restrictive environments, observable patterns may not necessarily be speaking to individual will, but rather, the forced will of the regime that insists on compliance. And to make matters worse, theorizing these trends from the outside has often led to a misguided acceptance or sense of understanding of the will of women within these societies. She writes:

The intellectual tendencies which might be understood as making concessions to fundamentalist regimes and movements – in effect abandoning women to their iron rule. Is this tendency driven by fear of physical violence or by a paralyzing anxiety lest one be accused of cultural insensitivity of ‘Orientalist’ tendencies? Or is it a postmodern specimen of the attitude of ‘exotic’ practices and institutions which, viewed from afar, are celebrated as ‘authentic’, ‘local’ responses to indigenous problems – and excused as inevitable because they ‘fit’ with culture (p. 6)?

Other issues arise when applying Islamic feminism to the case of Iran and their pursuit of higher education and professional aspirations. According to Moghissi (1999), Islamic feminist discourse was largely formulated and continues to be theorized in the West. Secondly, she argues that the majority of “gender-conscious women” in Islamic fundamentalist nations “rarely choose to identify themselves or to be identified by others as feminists, be it Islamic feminist or not. In fact, these women, fighters for equality, do not apply the term ‘feminist’ to themselves, or even consider ‘feminist ideas’ as applicable to the Middle East” (p. 126).

In essence, it may be argued that exploring the dynamics of women in these oppressive societies through an Islamic feminism lens is equivalent to using the very language and structure of either the outsider or the oppressor to better understand the oppressed.

Moghissi calls for a more radical “feminism” that in its academic discourse is more “outrage[d]” and speaks more directly “against the crimes targeting women in the name of religion” (p. 7). She heavily critiques Islamic feminism, and calls instead for a Gramscian “radical revolution in thought,” but she falls short of taking the first steps toward articulating that thought.

While literature on feminist theories is vast, useful, and rich, no single feminist theoretical framework directly addresses the state of college-going and career-aspirational women in Iran. In fact, more feminist scholars are pointing precisely to the goodness of diversity over universalization in discourse as a means of more effectively conceptualizing gendered nuances in the Middle East and elsewhere. Tohidi (2002) writes,

Whether it is within a faith-based framework (‘Islamic feminism’) or

various schools of secular feminisms, gender debate and women activists and intellectuals of diverse inclinations (religious members of the Shia majority and of minorities such as Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, Bahai, and Sunni Islam, as well as secular activists) have become a critical component of the growing pro-democracy and reform movement in Iran (p. 858).

In fact, in later works, Tohidi (2009, 2010) argues that feminism in Iran is in large part “rights oriented” (2010, p. 378) and diverse rather than falling into binary feminist categories such as East/West, liberal/radical or Islamic/secular. In other words, there is both tension and divergence due to the eclectic nature of feminism and feminist activity in Iran, and also convergence and collaboration over specific common goals for women, such as changing sexist laws and increasing access to employment. Therefore, the study is enriched and informed by the various feminist perspectives via a multi-perspectival reading of the above literature. Building upon the works of these Iran researchers and theorists, this work utilizes a grounded theory as a methodology to ultimately generate a new and dynamic Iranian feminist framework that takes the complexity and diversity of Iranian women students’ contexts. The next section outlines the methodological and grounded theory components of the work.

### **Toward a New Theoretical Framework**

One major objective of this work is to provide a more representative theoretical framework based on sound research that speaks to the academic and professional goals and objectives of women in Iran and the prevalent gap that exists between their academic and occupational attainment. As is supported by the quantitative and qualitative data analyses of the following chapters, this study presents a new *Iranian* feminist theoretical framework that is two-fold.



First, it begins with the efforts of women themselves. Women have been, are, and will continue to be instrumental in shifting the nation toward a more equitable tertiary educational system and workforce gender balance, especially those who successfully break through the glass ceiling. Much like Mona, a PhD student from Al Zahra University (who is one of the subjects from the qualitative data collected) articulated, it is women like her who will help increase the momentum in the right direction for all women in institutions of higher education and in the workforce, and the more women successfully break into traditionally male sectors of education and work, the more traditional notions of gender roles will dissolve on a macro level. The success many women have had professionally despite the multitude of challenges on the personal/familial, institutional, political, economic, and societal levels speaks to the fact that they themselves are at the core of why national dynamics have been shifting – albeit too slowly – in their favor.

The significant role and potential power of women to make change, however, is not sufficient enough an explanation to describe the phenomena at play or enough to achieve substantial change within the system itself. To say that women should work to defy the odds and break through the many barriers in larger numbers within an inequitable system is like saying that marine animals should build resilience against oil spills in order to reduce the damage done. Clearly women have the motivation and aspirations for participating in higher education and the professional sector. However, so many limitations exist that only a small fraction are successful in securing higher level and higher pay positions. Despite women's clear aspirations for both, a significant gap exists between educational and occupational attainment, and this gap is a result of a multitude of dynamics at play, many of which are clearly outside that which women themselves have direct

control. In the case of Iran, it is argued that women must necessarily be the pioneers who break through barriers repeatedly and in larger numbers, but they are not the sole answer to correcting a flawed system, nor does their inability to achieve gender balance in these arenas help explain the gap. Women are, however, the activation energy it will take to get all the other parts pointing in the right direction.

Therefore, the second part of this framework proposes that all seven of the below dimensions need to be taken into account in order to more effectively conceptualize this education/occupation gap. Those seven dimensions are as follows:

1. Societal perceptions – This dimension speaks to the prevailing norms, stigmas, behaviors and actions generally deemed socially acceptable vs. unacceptable for women (and men), and the general social climate as it pertains to women’s academic and professional aspirations and attainment.
2. National policies/politics – This dimension pertains to concrete policies and national politics that disadvantage women in their pursuit of education and occupational attainment. It is important to note that religion is not a
3. Economic climate – The high rate of unemployment coupled with a flooded market of young people entering the work force at the same time is important to take into account when considering women’s access to the workforce. At the time of data collection, the significant majority of the population of Iran was under 30.
4. Institutional climate – This dimension addresses the ambiance within university settings as perceived by the women who attend them. Namely, it takes into account the emotional and behavioral climate as perceived by women within institutions of higher education, both among professors and fellow colleagues. This dimension also

pertains to the restrictive forces at play within universities as they relate to women, such as their behavior/actions, attire, and areas of study.

5. Globalization – Clearly, not even the most closed nation-states can keep global trends, attitudes, and activities completely out their borders. The overwhelming trend on the global stage for many decades has been a shift toward gender equity and a high degree of both educational and occupational attainment, and that trend has had influence within Iran’s borders.
6. Family – This dimension addresses the parental (and in some cases spousal) degree of support, permission and acceptance (or lack thereof) of women’s aspirations, and the degree to which the family unit motivates or dissuades women’s actions and pursuits.
7. Women's personal aspirations and expectations – Women’s own desires, hopes, goals and personal philosophies on educational and occupational attainment must necessarily also be taken into account when considering the dynamics at play.

As this work argues, the state of women's aspirations and access to academic and professional attainment cannot be accurately described without a theory that takes all of the above into account. Based on this study’s research findings, a multi-tiered approach must be employed to more fully synthesize and encapsulate the dichotomies between Iranian college women’s aspirations and issues of access. This framework affirms that while many have broken through the multitude of barriers that exist for them (and are often unique to them) as Iranian women, for a more gender equitable climate to be created for women to achieve their professional aspirations, there needs to be continued systematic improvement to the entirety of the system. No single dimension alone can

adequately describe this gap. And even these seven dimensions cannot fully communicate the dynamics at play without taking into account the first part of this framework, namely the role, agency and power of the Iranian women who beat the odds. Without a holistic approach to understanding the internal dynamics at play, a framework that considers this gap will be lopsided at best.

To sum up, if part two of the framework describes all the moving parts of a machine necessary for it to function properly, part one is the key or igniting spark that activates the machine to kick start into movement.

Chapters Five and Six, the findings sections of this study further supports this new Iranian feminist conceptual framework, and applies it to the analysis of the data itself. Data supports both parts of the framework, and with respect to the second part, all seven dimensions are individually discussed and supported in relation to the data.

## **CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study. But first, it is important to define methodology as distinct from “method” (which is presented in the next chapter) and to adequately define both.

### **Method vs. Methodology**

Method and methodology are often incorrectly used interchangeably by researchers when in actuality they speak to different aspects of the research process, or more generally, to the scientific method. In reality, each relates specifically to different aspects of the scientific method, and as Rust (2003) argues, there is a hierarchical relationship between the two where methodology precedes and even transcends method. In other words, method relates to how one obtains and analyzes data/information, while methodology pertains to the research design, defining of the problem, communication of the findings, future implications of one’s work, the theoretical framework employed, and even the choice of method selected, because as Rust argues, that choice “should be made on theoretical grounds” (p. 9). In defining method, Rust (2003) writes, “When one decides on the methods of data collection, one is asking the following questions: what kind of information is being sought, from what sources, and under what circumstances? When one decides on how to analyze the data, one is deciding how to make sense out of the data that has been collected”(p. 3).

Before one can go about gathering and analyzing one’s data (engaging in the method of one’s study), some essential questions pertaining to methodology, namely the how and

why of one's research, need to first be answered, hence the hierarchy between the two. Rust writes, "The process of deciding on an appropriate research method moves the researcher into the realm of methodology and epistemology" (p. 5). In other words, methodology informs the method used as well as helps to tell a contextual story of the data in the context of the study and in the grand scheme of the field itself.

It is only fitting, then, that theory and methodology be presented in advance of method. Grounded theory is introduced in the following section as the methodology of choice followed by a presentation of a new Iranian feminist theoretical framework that was informed by the qualitative and quantitative findings of this study. This new framework is presented in this chapter rather than in the theoretical framework chapter because it speaks to how method informs communication of the findings, future implications of one's work, and the greater meaning of one's research to the broader discourse.

### **Grounded Theory**

The methodology utilized in this study is a quasi-implemented grounded theory approach. The theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter evolved and was generated only after the completion of the data collection and analysis process. This is because grounded theory as a *methodology* functions as the tool to provide a more concise theoretical framework through which to view phenomena. In the case of this study, the data collected from Iranian college-going women (and men) informed the evolution of the theory that explained it.

According to Glaser (1992), grounded theory is "a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area" (p. 16).

Likewise, this study's undertaking begins with data collection not only as a means to better address the conceptual and theoretical components of the phenomena under examination, but also as an empowering tool for subjects to be given an active and agenda-free arena through which to be heard. Grounded theory prioritizes the data above all else and invokes a subsequent theory that speaks directly to it, rather than a deductive approach based on *a priori* hypotheses that reverse this process. Brewer and Hunter (1989) write, "The theoretical imagination is limitless. The theorist can conceive of infinite possibilities, including many that may prove to be sheer fantasy. For these reasons, theorizing requires aid and the discipline of empirical research" (p. 30). A grounded theory methodology better ensures that one is theorizing soundly based on research and evidence rather than "sheer fantasy," and a theoretical framework evolves and is born *from* the research rather than being the conceptual starting point that may limit the lens through which one interprets the findings.

The debate between an inductive and deductive approach generally pertains to whether an empirical work is better served validating established theories or generating new ones, with grounded theorists siding on the theory generation side of the debate. However, grounded theory as it is used here is primarily intended to allow the data to speak first, uninformed by any already-defined conceptual lens, and only secondarily to achieve theory generation. Through this grounded theory lens, then, one of the "findings" of the work is the theoretical explanation of the experience, perspectives, and rationale of Iran's female college-going population.

Research was conducted via quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection without the initial formation of hypotheses or a specifically defined research agenda. That

is, foundational research questions were not guided by a rigid context and structured deductive reasoning. Rather, it was the aim of this work to allow the formulation of themes to inductively occur through the agency of the participants. Similarly, grounded theory methodology advocates data collection and coding – not hypotheses and research questions – as the first step in the research process. Furthermore, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously in the grounded theory approach. Charmaz (1983) writes, “Grounded theorists shape their data collection from their analytic interpretations and discoveries, and therefore, sharpen their observations [which] serve to strengthen both the quality of the data and the ideas developed from it” (p. 110). In this way, the researcher closely observes the data being collected as it is being collected in order to better enhancing and directing the next step in the collection and analysis process.

Conrad (1982) argues not only for the utility of grounded theory specifically in higher education research endeavors, but also for mixed-method research designs. He writes,

Grounded theory, which employs the constant comparative method, does not perpetuate the mindless dualisms (such as quantitative versus qualitative research) which have militated against the careful examination of theory and method in higher education (p. 260).

The research design of this work aligns with Conrad’s premise that grounded theory speaks to comparative and collaborative research efforts as it evokes both quantitative and qualitative data gathering approaches.



## **New Iranian Feminist Theoretical Framework Supported**

Thanks to the Grounded Theory methodology, a new Iranian Feminist theoretical framework is presented in this work that sits on the shoulders of the theories that precede it and combines their relevant aspects to create a holistic picture when considering university women's motivations and aspirations. As is supported by the findings of this study, there are multiple dynamics at play when considering the motivations and aspirations of college-going women and the obstacles they face in reaching them. Their responses paved the way toward creating a modified conceptual lens through which to better articulate and understand the Iranian context. In this section, this new framework is applied to the findings to not only better articulate those findings, but also for the findings work in support of the robustness of the framework itself.

The first and arguably most significant aspect of this Iranian feminist framework is the efforts and successes of Iranian women themselves who defy the odds and obtain reputable careers and financial independence. The incredible grit and perseverance of Iranian women who jump through hurdles of all shapes and sizes to reach their pedagogical and professional goals cannot be understated, and more and more women are breaking through barriers and shrinking the gap.

Part two of this framework is the interplay of a multitude of forces that directly or indirectly inform, influence, or affect the motivations, aspirations, and professional outcomes of Iranian college women. Each is considered and discussed based on the data collected.

1. Societal perceptions: One of the overarching themes discussed by many of the women interviewed was "society" or "societal expectations." This overwhelming and

omnipresent entity was quite prevalent in the interviews, and was the source of a great deal of pressure felt by these women, far more so than any other factor including one's own parents, religion, professors or institutional climate. Women used such strong language as feeling judged, fearful and even deadened by societal practices and expectations. It seems that the societal burdens they felt were two fold: not only did they feel they were faced with inequalities and limitations placed on their sex, but also, there were also added expectations that were unique to them, expectations that were often competing and felt unrealistic or unfair. There was a pervasive sense of being seen in society as the inferior sex on the one hand, and yet, feeling that it was this same society that grandly expected a great deal from them – needing to be simultaneously competent in the home, as cooks, mothers, wives, and home makers, being educated, being aesthetically well-kept and beautiful, and if they wished to be accomplished in other ways, such as professionally, one would not be respected “in society” if it was at the expense of any of the other expectations.

2. National Policies/Politics: The burdens and limitations felt by these women were not solely intangible. National laws and policies continue to exist that make gender discrimination legal and maintain a clear hierarchy between the sexes, and while substantial improvements have been made since the early years after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, definitive systematic inequalities have by no means disappeared. Women's rights continue to be breached with respect to property, inheritance, divorce, child custody, compulsory veiling, and in the workforce, to name a few. Most blatantly, women are recognized in Iranian law as worth half a man. Therefore, the legal restrictions placed on women and the psychological affects

they have on the country as a whole cannot be discounted when considering the education/occupation gap.

3. Economic Climate: As has been discussed above, the high level of joblessness in Iran coupled with a flooding of young people into the market simultaneously has had a negative impact on women's ability to secure desirable posts in the workforce. Men as traditional heads of household are significantly favored during the hiring process. With the scarceness of jobs for young women and men alike, it is exponentially more difficult for women to compete for positions, especially the better paying and more reputable ones.
4. Institutional & Workforce Climate: The university environment was often described as unfriendly, unsupportive, apathetic, or even hostile to women. "Institutional Climate" includes university policies and practices; peers and colleagues; and professors and staff. Their programs and/or the lack of support and opportunities in university disenchanted many of the subjects interviewed. The study did not unveil, however, whether the institutional climate felt more hostile for women than men; further research should be done to decipher men's impressions of the institutional climate. Furthermore, some subjects felt that certain workforce environments were either unsafe for women or too hostile to be worth securing. The workforce climate seemed to also be a great dissuading factor for women to either select from a smaller, more female-appropriate group of jobs or refrain from entering into jobs altogether.
5. Globalization – The global discourse on human rights and women's rights is clearly present in the language and aspirations of women interviewed. Tohidi writes that

there is “increased influence in more recent years [relating to] increased processes of globalization and international currency of the discourses of human/women’s rights spreading through transnational feminist activism and new communication technology such as the Internet and satellite TV,” and she argues that this “increased globalization has intensified “glocal” dialectic, meaning the interplay of local-national factors with the global-international factors” (p. 375). These educated women used common language that showed the influence of global trends of equality and equal opportunity. Interestingly, as articulated by Tohidi, many juxtaposed these rights with their efforts to strive toward their aspirations within the Iran context – the “glocal” influences in action. That is, they were cognizant of the gap between what has been adopted on the global stage and what is feasible within their country. In fact, these women are aware that in order to reach their aspirations in Iran, there must necessarily be a degree of finesse and working with (not against) the current national system. One cannot reject the structure, but rather, work strategically within it. Going against the grain in Iran has the potential for immediate and dire consequences, as evidenced by the human rights and women’s activists who are currently serving heavy prison sentences. The women of Iran are clearly connected with global affairs and efforts, either in discourse or in the desire to partake on the world stage through conferences, research, or even travel and migration. They know that adopting and implementing these values wholeheartedly is not currently possible in Iran, and they have become quite skilled in adopting variations that fit within the confines they are faced with as Iranian women. This interpretation of international women’s rights to fit an Iranian mold is

the very essence of women effectively pushing the envelope and continuing to lead the country in the right direction.

6. Family – Every student interviewed communicated some level of parental support from both mothers and fathers with respect to higher educational aspirations. This is not surprising considering the students interviewed were already all university students, and therefore would very likely need their parental consent and/or financial support to enroll. That said, it is unquestionable that being highly educated is a societal value that crosses gender lines, religion, geographic region and socio-economic status. Securing higher education degrees, especially in more selective universities and programs, comes with a high level of prestige, arguably more so in Iran than in the United States. Parents of women and men alike strongly encourage and support their children to go to college, and often encourage them to seek degrees above and beyond the Bachelor's. With respect to professional aspiration, all the women who spoke about their parents said they supported work outside the home, but some said they knew of other more "traditional" families who did not support any type of job for their daughters. Only two of the subjects interviewed were married, and both stated their husbands were highly supportive of their educational aspirations. It appears, then, that for women, educational pursuit is generally strongly encouraged by families, and occupational pursuit may be supported with some caveats. Of course, these generalizations are simply speaking to trends based on a small sampling of data as well as national statistics of women represented in higher education and the work force.

7. Women's personal aspirations and expectations – This last point is in some respects redundant in that it speaks to women's perceptions of – and the degree to which they may have internalized – all of the above. That is, women's aspirations and expectations have in some respects been influenced by the environment around them, on a global, national/societal, institutional, and familial level. This final point still needs to be included to bring the story full-circle. Many women articulated their perception of the limitations and restrictions on them, and how they engage with this perception has an impact on their actions, either as warriors who fight through, as realists who know the odds are stacked against them, as having "bought in" to the expectations they perceive society has of them, as wishing to flee from the country, and everything in between.

A more complete theoretical discourse about Iranian women's motivations and aspirations must take a multi-perspectival approach that takes all of the above in account, as well as the interplay between them.

## **CHAPTER V: METHODS**

The methods used are outlined and discussed in this chapter. The study utilizes a multi-method or triangulation approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, thereby strengthening the findings' overall reliability. Finally, the section addresses some caveats about sampling and other issues of validity.

### **The Multi-Method Approach**

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were employed in order to enhance the integrity of the findings. This multi-method approach has been described as multiple operationalism (Campbell and Fisk 1959), triangulation (Webb et al., 1966), convergent validation or methodology, the multimethod/multitrait approach (Campbell and Fiske, 1959), or simply, mixed methods. According to Denzin 1978, triangulation is the "combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (p. 291). By mixing methods and utilizing more than one data collection approach, the study's findings are enhanced in a multitude of ways. Brewer and Hunter (1989) argue for multiple and diverse empirical measurements as a way of reducing methodological error.

They write:

Our individual methods may be flawed, but fortunately the flaws in each are not identical. A diversity of imperfection allows us to combine methods not only to gain their individual strengths but also to compensate for their particular faults and limitations. The multimethod approach is largely built upon this insight (pp. 16-17).

Similarly, Jick (1979) identifies triangulation's ability to reduce error and strengthen the reliability of research findings by utilizing methods that complement and counterbalance each other.

In all the various triangulation designs one basic assumption is buried. The effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weaknesses in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of the other. Although it has been observed that each method has assets and liabilities, triangulation purports to exploit the assets and neutralize, rather than compound, the liabilities" (p. 604).

By mixing research methods, particularly across quantitative and qualitative approaches, studies' findings are more likely to be robust and better reflective of the phenomenon being studied.

Feminist researchers especially advocate for a "multi-sourced" approach (Glucksmann 1994, p. 158) when conducting research on women. Maynard (1994) discusses the historically commonplace practice of utilizing primarily qualitative methods in feminist research and argues that this "old orthodoxy" is "no longer tenable...[since] this polarization of quantitative verses qualitative impoverishes research" (p. 14).

In the case of this work, the triangulation method better enhances the grounded theory approach in that the qualitative component of data collection was highly informed by not only the quantitative data collected, but also by the gaps and limitations of the survey approach. That is, the researcher employed triangulation as a means of fulfilling a grounded theory requisite of doing data collection and analysis simultaneously, thereby strengthening the process through which new data was collected. In this study, I rely on primarily two research methods. These methods are survey questionnaires, and interviews and are discussed in further detail below.



## **Survey Questionnaires**

The study's quantitative findings were informed by a total of 375 survey questionnaires collected from female and male college-going students from four universities in Tehran during the spring and summer of 2004.

Sample selection for the quantitative component of the study occurred at two levels: institutional selection and the selection of individual participants at each institution. The selection of institutions for sampling was based on judgment sampling. Judgment sampling is a non-probability sampling of the target population based on the researcher's best judgment about the degree of representativeness between the subgroup selected and the target population. In other words, the selection of the sample is not based on chance, but by the thought process and informed opinion of the researcher. In this case, four institutions of higher education in Tehran were selected based on the degree to which they represent the college-going population in Tehran, and even to some degree, of the entire country. Furthermore, judgment sampling bases its selection on the types of samples that have the potential of best informing the study. Judgment sampling is often selected when there are challenges to securing a randomized population sample. Here, individuals at Tehran universities are more likely to be representative of the religious, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of the country as a whole thereby representing a richer sampling of students than universities in other regions of Iran.

The institutions selected were Sharif University of Technology, University of Tehran, Islamic Azad Universities, and Al Zahra University. The selection of institutions was based on each institution's relative significance as a higher education institution in the country and degree of representativeness among universities in Iran. For instance, the University

of Tehran is arguably one of the most nationally and globally recognized of all institutions in the country and is one of the most prestigious public universities in Iran. Founded in 1928, it was the first institution of higher education in Iran, and has been known since as the “mother university” of Iran. With nearly 40,000 students (undergraduate, graduate, and post graduates), the most nationally prestigious sister medical school, and 40 faculties, institutes, and research centers, students from all corners of the country and even abroad are represented within it. Interestingly, the students surveyed from Tehran University were the most likely of the four institutions to indicate that they had been admitted to their first choice school.

Sharif University of Technology (hereafter referred to as Sharif University) was selected because it is highly prestigious and traditionally a male-dominated institution because of its science, engineering, and technological foci. It is regarded the best technical university in the country, and Sharif women are respected, revered, and stereotyped to have a certain toughness to them. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi founded the university in 1965 under the guidance of MIT advisors. According to a 2008 Newsweek article about the university entitled, “The Star Students of the Islamic Republic,” Sharif University graduates who apply for admission to PhD programs at Stanford University boast some of the highest scores in the electrical engineering entrance examinations and are generally among the highest performing students. The article goes on to say that of the 1.5 million high school students who take the highly rigorous college entrance examination (the *Konkur*) in Iran, “only about 10 percent make it to the prestigious state schools, with the top 1 percent generally choosing science and finding their way to top spots such as Sharif.” Both Tehran University and Sharif University have been home to political activity over the years.

Student movements have arisen at both universities, and Tehran University is home to the national Friday prayer speeches that are televised and radio streamed to the nation each week. These universities are no exception to the global trend of higher education institutions being central to student political movements and activism.

Al Zahra University was selected because it is a public, all-female university and is the most politically and religiously conservative of all the institutions selected. It was established in 1964 as a private institution under the ruling Empress's name, Farah Pahlavi University. Post Islamic Revolution, the university was renamed Al Zahra after the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad Fatehmeh Zahra and was converted to a public institution. It is the smallest of the four universities, with approximately 8,000 students enrolled.

Karkehabadi (2007) writes that Al Zahra University "was consequential in opening more doors for Iranian women" (p. 63) and cites (Poya 1999) who argues that the university "provided women an opportunity to study fields that had previously given priority to male students." And in 1994, it established faculties in Engineering and Technology and Physical Education and Sports. Considering the objectives of this study, it seemed especially important to select an all-female institution of higher education among the institutions surveyed. For one, it was worthwhile to consider the differences of Al Zahra students' perspectives regarding the institutional climate of their university as compared with women from the rest of the co-educational universities.

Finally, Islamic Azad Universities (heretofore called Azad Universities) are the youngest, largest, least competitive, and most costly of the four selected institutions. They are private institutions and generally less prestigious, but with student enrollment at 1.3 million, they comprise a major proportion of the college-going population in Iran. In fact,

the Azad university enrollment is such a large proportion of college goers that when statistics are gathered and presented by the Statistics Centre of Iran on patterns of higher education enrollment, they are presented separately as “public universities” and “Islamic Azad universities.”

The Azad university system was established in 1982 because of the exorbitant demand for higher education as compared with spaces available. While the university struggled with issues of quality and rigor in its earlier years, its caliber has notably improved and the prestige of attending these institutions has risen for its attendees and graduates. Unlike public higher education institutions in Iran that are governmentally funded and largely free to students, students must pay a high tuition to attend Azad Universities. First, an Islamic Azad (meaning “open” or “free”) University was established after the revolution in 1981. Its activities quickly expanded throughout the country, so that today thousands of students are benefiting from its educational offerings. Not relying on government funding, it charges students with tuition fees. About 180,000 students in 80 towns and cities were enrolled in this university in 1988-89, studying single subjects or taking full time day or evening courses. Applicants do not have to produce specific educational certificates to enter this university, but its entrance examinations match those of other universities. The certificates issued by this university are recognized upon evaluation by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. The students of the Tehran branches of Azad universities were surveyed for this study, not only for logistical and geographic consistency reasons, but also because Tehran is Azad Universities’ headquarters.

A total of 400 surveys were administered to students to the above four universities in Tehran. Of the 400 collected, 25 were discarded due to incompleteness. Surveys were distributed personally by the author to both men and women at all institutions with the exception of Al Zahra University, where the entire student body is female.

While every effort was made to achieve stratified random sampling in the distribution of surveys, it is more likely that the questionnaire distribution more closely aligned with a convenience sampling approach. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that bases selection on the relative ease and accessibility of data collection. Who is chosen to participate is based to some degree on who is available, which means that subsets of the population have no chance or a less likely chance of being selected.

However, there were controls within the survey distribution approach that served to lessen the impact of a non-random sampling, such as varying at which times, on which days, and at which locations the surveys were distributed. Also, there is no reason to believe that the sample of student responses collected are representative of individuals who would think or feel significantly differently than from those who were not selected to participate (the “out of coverage” members of the population). Finally, the nature of the research questions being asked are such that they can be adequately answered by any student in the stratified samples, thereby making convenience sampling an effective approach for this study’s purposes.

Therefore, to some degree it may be argued that the work made every attempt at accomplishing stratified random samples of the statistical population of each university. The researcher was not purposefully including or excluding any particular individual from

the selected population, and was attempting to approximate a random sample using a convenience sample.

The researcher hand-distributed each survey to student passers-by in communal or high foot-traffic areas on university campuses. For instance, surveys would be passed out to students in the dining hall, library, or as they passed by university entrances or squares. Students were informed of the researcher's student status in the United States, and were asked whether they were interested in taking a 5-7 minute survey. The vast majority of students agreed to complete the survey. While an exact figure was not maintained, the researcher estimates that of all students asked to complete the survey, at least 90 percent agreed. Many were curious about the nature of the research after submitting their surveys to the researcher.

When access was granted to certain classes or departments, surveys would be administered to students who were willing to complete it. Permission to distribute surveys among university students at each university was loosely granted, but because of restrictions previous researches have had gaining unadulterated access when conducting research in Iran, official permission was not requested from the Department of Education. Some researchers have reported that when attempting to conduct research in Iran, they have had a portion of their surveys confiscated, thereby jeopardizing the integrity of the sample. Therefore, while all efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of the surveyors, a loose attempt at obtaining official permission was made. For example, verbal permission was informally obtained from certain departments or university management offices to be granted permission to be on the premises and distribute surveys. No written

permission was ever sought or granted, and the researcher's presence and activities were never questioned or cause for concern at any of the universities.

Given the lack of freedom of speech in Iran and the risks involved for any who speak against the general philosophies and premises of the Islamic Republic, it was particularly essential to ensure that all individuals surveyed took no risk in participating in the study. With regard to the quantitative research, respondent confidentiality was achieved by keeping surveys anonymous. While general demographic information was requested, students' names were never asked or documented. The researcher has no way of tracking which surveys were completed by whom or knowing the identity of any of her surveyors. Furthermore, none of the surveys ever left the possession of the researcher.

Finally, the survey questions were generally not politically sensitive in nature, and were looked over and revised many times by Iranian students to ensure the items were non-threatening. For example, when students were asked to provide their religion, the Baha'i faith was intentionally excluded from the list of options despite the fact that there are many practicing Baha'is in Iran. Iran's Islamic government recognizes and to some degree tolerates the Sunni sect of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, but not the Baha'i faith. Baha'is have historically been persecuted and discriminated against. Many were executed simply for their religious preference and still suffer from persecution. In fact, at the time the surveys were gathered in 2004, Baha'is were still banned from pursuing higher education in Iran (and they continue to be banned at the time of this publication despite continued global scrutiny, and efforts of the international community and the United Nations). The vast majority of Baha'is in Iran practice their faith secretly and do not publicize their faith. When asking students to document their religious

preference, the Baha'i option was intentionally kept off the survey, and "Other" was included because of the risks involved to respondents and the controversial nature of such a question.

The survey was loosely based on a translated version of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) of UCLA's Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) freshman survey. According to HERI's website, "Each year, approximately 700 two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities administer the Freshman Survey to over 400,000 entering students during orientation or registration. Published annually in "The American Freshman," the results from these surveys continue to provide a comprehensive portrait of the changing character of entering students and American society at large."

Similarly, this study's survey content included demographic information such as age, ethnic background, religion, sex, and socio-economic status, as well as interests, attitudes and beliefs about a variety of issues. A major section of the survey was dedicated to issues around higher education pursuit.

A total of 125 men and 250 women were surveyed. Of all respondents, the vast majority were undergraduate-equivalent students at 295.

**Table 3: Quantitative Surveys by Gender and Degree**

	Associate	Bachelor	Master	Doctorate	Total
Female	1	197	45	7	250
Male	0	98	19	8	125
Total	1	295	15	64	375



The original goal of data collection was to gather 100 surveys from each of the four universities in Tehran. However, because of logistical barriers and lopsided access, more surveys were gathered from Al Zahra and Tehran Universities. A total of 106 surveys were gathered from the women students of Al Zahra University. The women students of Sharif University comprised 37 respondents, Tehran University women comprised 72, and 35 women from Azad University responded. Male respondent distribution is as follows across university: 35 men from Azad, 39 from Tehran University, 40 from Sharif, and 46 from Azad University. Altogether, the data collection among the four universities is as follows:

**Table 4: Quantitative Surveys by Gender and University**

	Tehran	Sharif	Al Zahra	Azad
<b>Women</b>	72	37	106	35
<b>Men</b>	39	40	0	35
<b>Total</b>	111	77	106	70

The survey itself comprised 130 questions, most of which were provided as 5-point Lykert-type scales (most/least important, frequently/never, very/not at all, etc.)

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative data primarily in the form of interviews with female students was gathered in order to complement and triangulate the findings and literally bring “voice” to the research. In discussing the sound practice of mixing qualitative and quantitative

methods, Jick (1979) comments on the ways in which qualitative methods inform quantitative findings. He writes:

Beyond the analysis of overlapping variance, the use of multiple measure may also uncover some unique variance which otherwise may have been neglected by single methods. It is here that qualitative methods, in particular, can play an essentially prominent role by eliciting data and suggesting conclusions to which other methods would be blind. Elements of the context are illuminated. In this sense, triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives, but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge (p. 603).

It was essential to the work's aim to present women's experiences and perspectives *as they conveyed them*, and by so doing, not only were the quantitative research findings validated, but the interviews brought new dimension and added a richness that would not otherwise have been achieved if the work had only relied on survey data. Furthermore, because the survey itself was originally based on a loose translation of the American CIRP Freshman Survey as discussed earlier, it inevitably would not capture the culturally-specific nuances that interviews did. That is, not only did the mix methods compliment each other, but they were also able to fill the other's gaps and bring strength where the other may be weak.

Brewer and Hunter (1989) write that the the multimethod strategy is simple but powerful. Its fundamental strategy is to "attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have nonoverlapping weaknesses in addition to complementary strengths" (p. 17).

## **Interviews**

"We conceptualize interviewing as the process of getting words to fly," write Glesne and Peshkin (1992). Continuing along their baseball analogy, they go on to say, "As a researcher, you want your 'pitches' – your questions – to stimulate verbal flights from the important others who know what you do not" (p. 63). Collecting and presenting Iranian

female student's words and impressions of their own phenomenon is at the core of this study. The interview approach as a qualitative method is one that allows for the complexities, nuances, and depth that may be lacking in many quantitative tools such as the survey questionnaire this study also employed. The decision to conduct interviews was therefore an obvious choice given the aim of the study to hear directly from the female college-going population of Iran.

The research questions of this work are geared toward the opinions of women students themselves in explaining their experiences, motivations, internal processes and external actions in their pursuit of higher education. While the quantitative survey questions were written and reworked to take into account the specific aspects that may pertain to the Iranian female student context, the structure of the survey left little room for interpretation, discussion or explanation of responses. In fact, many students who completed the survey wrote in comments in the margins to better explain their response, even when this was not asked of them. Others wrote extensively in the "comments" section of the survey. It was apparent that many students wanted to be heard, and equally important, wanted their opinions represented accurately. Therefore, it was essential to invite them more directly into the research process by utilizing a method that gave them more freedom and flexibility to articulate their perspectives as they pleased. Thus the interview process can get complex and messy precisely because of its "nonreductionist" (Glesne and Peshkin 1992) approach to capturing the essence of a phenomenon at hand and the "thick description" (Geertz 2001) it has the potential to achieve. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) claim the intent of interviewing is:

to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for

something. Such a broad-scale approach to understanding is drawn from the assumption that qualitative research, notably nonreductionist, is directed to understanding phenomena in their fullest possible complexity (p. 92).

Qualitative research, and namely the data collected from interviews, added dimension and depth to the quantitative findings of this study in the form of thick description. Emerson (1983) writes, "Thick descriptions present in close detail the context and meanings of events and scenes that are relevant to those involved in them" (p. 24). While quantitative data was gathered from both women and men, the qualitative portion of the research was conducted almost exclusively with women. The purpose of this work is to represent the voice and intention of female students in Iran. Male student quantitative responses were gathered for a comparative point of reference between women and men, and while the Iranian male student voice is research-worthy in its own right, it falls outside the scope of this work that is interested in the phenomenon around women's pursuit of higher education in Iran and how they think and feel about that pursuit.

Fifteen interviews were conducted in order to better inform and enlighten the quantitative data. Because the opportunity presented itself, one class session at Azad University was also recorded in a mixed sex classroom, where similar interview questions that were presented to qualitative respondents were posed to the class. Despite efforts to the contrary, interviews were conducted in a somewhat *ad hoc* and structurally loose manner. That is, as was the case with the quantitative data collected, every attempt was made to achieve purposive non-random sampling based on a diverse selection of women, but ultimately it soon became clear that the issue of access and other barriers limited the availability of willing participants. Purposive non-random sampling stresses the criteria for selecting participants rather than the quantity of participants. Initially, individuals

were asked to participate after having been purposely chosen because of the degree to which they reflected the diversity and breadth of the sample population. For instance, they were from a certain school, studying a particular field, or at a certain level in their higher education undertaking.

While some variation in selection was achieved, it was impossible to reach the ideal degree of representativeness because of the difficulty to secure interviews with students. In addition, even when individuals were willing, it was important to assure them that the interview would be conducted on their terms in a manner that made them feel most comfortable. Therefore, at times, participants invited friends along to partake. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) write, "Interviewing more than one person at a time sometimes proves very useful: Some young people need company to be emboldened to talk; and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people who know one another" (p. 63-64).

In other instances, respondents asked to have a casual conversation rather than a structured interview around the issues at hand, asked the researcher for advice or about her background, asked not to be recorded, and some even did not complete their interview in one sitting and came and went throughout the process. As Glesne and Peshkin soundly advise, "Take all the care at your disposal to insure that the [interview] experience will be risk-free" (p. 72).

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), as an interviewer, one casts herself as the Naïve, a term that "characterizes the researcher's special learner role" (p. 80). This could not have been more the case in this interviewer's case as an insider/outsider who is Iranian and speaks the language (albeit not as fluently as one who has grown up in the country), but has never been enrolled in the education system in Iran, and who was faced with the

importance of balancing building rapport and trust through a mutual understanding, while simultaneously expressing interest and ignorance through a genuine desire to know and learn.

Interview sampling evolved from purposive sampling to snowball sampling. Snowballing is a non-random sampling method where new respondents are found through old ones. That is, respondents already utilized in the study will introduce other prospective participants that are willing to partake. The downfall of this method is that it is more prone to biased outcomes because participants who know each other are more likely to have the same opinions and beliefs or they may influence each other's responses. These issues may cause the sample to be less diverse than desired. However, since different clusters of snowball groups were identified and utilized, and since the interviews are supplemental to the quantitative findings of this work, it is believed that the findings are still useful and valid.

Interviews with about 15 students in their third year of undergraduate work or higher were administered. Interviews lasted 1 to 1.5 hours. Some students felt more comfortable being interviewed in small groups. Some classroom observation was also conducted, though it was difficult to acquire access to classes outside of the field of education.

### **Research Caveats and Limitations**

The Iranian higher education context raised a multitude of accessibility issues. It was the initial goal of the project to interview individuals representative of various schools, academic levels, subject areas, and ages. Getting subjects to agree to an interview was much more difficult than anticipated. There was a degree of suspicion and distrust that had

to be overcome, not to mention the general risks of having one's opinions documented on tape. Research endeavors therefore had to include a degree of selection flexibility which may have negatively impacted generalizability and the degree of representativeness of the data collected.

With respect to the qualitative data collected, it would have been preferable to have had more subjects in the sample so as to make the findings more robust. Also, perhaps the data collected from the interviews would have been richer in content had the same subjects been interviewed more than one time. This would have allowed for greater rapport in the interviewer/interviewee relationship, and subsequently more depth in the information gathered.

With regard to the quantitative data collection, the survey sample was limited to four universities in Tehran and did not achieve geographic diversity outside of the capital. While the researcher's goal is to select a sample that is representative, useful and appropriate for the study, there are limitations due to the method's inability to achieve random sampling. The limitation of judgment sampling is that it may be less representative of or generalizable to the entire population. This may decrease the degree of generalizability of the sample to only students in Tehran. However, the students of these Tehran universities themselves were from many parts of Iran, many of them traveling to Iran and staying in dormitories or with family to go to school in the country's capital. Therefore, while the university selection was geographically limited, the geographic representation of the students was not.

One of the greatest concerns of the researcher was to ensure that the translated survey would capture the cultural nuances and context of students in Iran. That is, it was

important to keep in mind that culturally specific dynamics and beliefs may be at play that may not be accounted for by an American college freshman survey that is simply translated and applied to a new context. Therefore, the survey underwent many revisions to better represent the correct tone, cultural understanding and sensitivity. However, based on some of the hand written responses in the last section of the survey where students may choose to provide open-ended feedback, a small handful felt some of the questions were confusing or unclear.

For example, the issue of ethnic diversity is one that is very difficult to define and discuss in Iran. Students were asked to fill in the blank for their ethnic background, and the range of responses to this question spoke volumes about the inaccuracy of the question, or perhaps, the difficulty in conveying our western notions of ethnicity. Responses to the ethnic background question ranged from “Iranian,” “Fars,” and “Tehranian” to the names of Iranian provinces, minority languages, cities, and finally, ethnic backgrounds. Many students left this question blank, others asked the researcher what was meant by the question and how best to respond to it, and a few placed question marks next to the question. The confusion in and of itself is grounds for discussion, and the topic of ethnicity and ethnic minority status is further discussed in the quantitative finds section of this work.

Another question that seemed to leave many women perplexed was the questions pertaining to relationships with professors outside of class. The question specifically asked the degree to which students interact with their professors outside of class time. It seemed the questions was culturally inappropriate because of the fact that many professors are men, and the possibility of interacting with a professor of the opposite sex is not only more



limited for women, but also poses some real challenges and potential controversy. It was later conveyed to the researcher by one of her respondents that women were not likely to mark “often” on this question at the risk of being accused of having inappropriate relations with their professors.

Similarly, when identifying the reasons students give for pursuing higher education, the average American may feel that a desire to “escape” or move away from home would be a reasonable driving force. However, in the Iran context, interestingly, the vast majority of student respondents, women and men alike, did not consider the desire to get away from family or the family environment an important reason for pursuing higher education. This is especially interesting with women, considering the degree to which their home lives are in general more restricted than their male counterparts, and the degree to which both women and men felt that going to college made them more independent.

In short, while the survey made every attempt at being culturally appropriate, in hindsight, there was room to revise and edit further for contextual sensitivity and appropriateness.

Finally, the sample of surveys gathered did not achieve the goal of equal proportions of women and men, university, and degree being pursued. For instance, only one participant was pursuing an associate degree of the 375 surveys collected. This posed some challenges to some statistical analysis approaches that are discussed in the findings section of this work.

While many limitations and issues of generalizability arose as a result of an improvised qualitative data collection procedure, this is not to say that the data collected and the ultimate findings of this work do not contribute to the field of research. In the

words of Rea and Parker (1992), "We would do better to focus on the data which has been produced, rather than implying rigid distinctions between styles of research and methods of data collection" (p. 34).

## **CHAPTER VI: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the quantitative findings on what motivates collegiate women (and men) in Iran to pursue higher education degrees as well as other noteworthy statistical trends and differences between female and male responses as they pertain to higher education and professional and goals. Descriptive statistics are first be presented on the data's trends, followed by the results of chi-square and correlational analyses.

### **Motivation to Pursue Higher Education**

Respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to the effects of certain factors on their decision to pursue higher education. Specifically, the question read, "*In deciding to pursue higher education, how important to you was each of the following reasons?*" Respondents were provided seventeen dimensions of motivation and rated the degree to which each dimension impacted their pursuit of higher education.

Eleven of the dimensions used in the Iran survey were adopted and loosely translated from the 2003 CIRP Freshman Survey. The CIRP survey included 13 items pertaining to motivation. In considering each item in relation to the Iran context, of those original 13, the survey administered in Iran deleted two and made some slight modifications to the translations so as to better capture the cultural nuances of the Iranian context.

The two items that were in the CIRP survey that were deleted from the Iran survey were the following:

- To improve my reading and study skills
- To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas

“To improve my reading and study skills” was deleted because generally speaking the K-12 system of education in Iran is more academically rigorous in Iran than in the United States, and the assumption is that such skills must be mastered in order to do well on the college entrance examination and ultimately, in college. This question sounded too rudimentary to Iranian students as a potential reason for pursuing higher education. Students felt that reading and study skills needed to be mastered *before* students entered university, and therefore the question was a moot one.

The second deleted item, “To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas,” was deleted because Iran is more similar to Europe’s system of higher education than the US system where students apply directly into a field and all “general education” takes place prior to tertiary education. In other words, there is no general education to be had once students enter university, so the question would not pertain to Iran’s context.

Six more items pertaining to student motivation were then added based on research done on women in higher education as well as input from students and one Education professor in Iran to ensure that the cultural context and understanding of students’ perspectives within the country was taken into account.

Finally, respondents also had the option to “fill in the blank” and include any other reason that may have motivated them to pursue higher education. Below is the list of all 18 dimensions of motivation. Students were asked to rate each dimension’s degree of influence on their decision to pursue higher education on a Likert-type scale from “1” to “5”, with “1” signifying no influence and “5” signifying a very strong influence.

The asterisked items in the list below indicate what the Iran survey had in common with the CIRP Survey, and non-asterisked items were created with the Iran context specifically in mind.

- My family's wishes\*
- Encouragement from a role model, teacher, or mentor\*
- There was no job available\*
- To get away from family/home environment\*
- To get a better job\*
- To make me a more cultured person\*
- To have higher income\*
- To learn more about the things that interest me\*
- To prepare myself for pursuing advanced degrees\*
- To get training for a specific career\*
- There was nothing better to do\*
- To become a better parent
- To find a spouse
- To become more independent
- To improve my skills in my field
- I inevitably had to go this route/It was the natural course of things
- To increase my social status
- Please share any other reasons, if any: \_\_\_\_\_

The mean response of women and men was then calculated for each dimension of motivation. The mean of male vs. female responses for each response is represented in the

chart below. Generally speaking, there was more variation in women's responses than men's with women's means ranging both higher and lower overall. That is, women tended to respond more extremely on either end of the scale of options than men. The items in bold in the chart below are the dimensions where the response of women and men are statistically significantly different. Of the seventeen dimensions, women and men had mean responses that were significantly different in five of them. The seventeen dimensions are rearranged in the chart below based on highest to lowest female mean response. The top six highest mean responses for both women and men are in red font. It is important to keep in mind that means close to 3.0 are not necessarily indicative of a neutral or apathetic response, but may also be reflecting strong preferences on either end of the spectrum of responses (either very high or very low), which average out to a median score around a "3." Therefore, only high and low mean responses are analyzed here. The statistical analysis portion of this chapter below captures what mean descriptive statistics cannot. Women and men shared the same top two reasons for pursuing higher education in the same order of preference (However, women's average response was higher on both counts.):

1. To improve my skills in my field
2. To learn more about the things that interest me

Women's third highest reason was to "prepare myself for pursuing advanced degrees" at an average score of 4.30 out of 5. This reason makes sense considering over 75 percent of women indicated the highest degree they wished to obtain was a doctorate or post-doctorate (as is further discussed later in this chapter), and just over 60 percent of men wished to study past a masters degree. Next, with an average score of 4.27, women

indicated that becoming “a more cultured person” was a strong reason to pursue higher education. This again is not surprising considering it is part and parcel of education as national value that has substantial prestige and social clout.

Similarly, “increase social status” is clearly an important factor for women at an average response of 4.23 more so than for men (at a mean score of 3.88). The difference between women and men’s responses to this question is statistically significant, and this makes sense considering education is arguably one of the best ways for women of all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds to increase their social standing. Increasing one’s social status is a benefit of education for women and men alike, but it is likely more so for women because their channels to do so is more limited than men. In short, education is a wonderful means through which to “move up,” especially for women in Iran.

The least important reasons women cited for pursuing higher education were “there was nothing better to do” and “there was no job available.” Interestingly, at least with the former, the qualitative findings found a different result. That is, pursuing education for the sheer fact that it was better than to “sit at home” was a common theme among women who discussed their motives.

Of the fifteen reasons listed in the following chart, five average responses of women and men were statistically significantly different. However, upon closer examination, the responses are still somewhat comparable. For instance, with respect to the reason “to learn about the things that interest me,” women’s average response was 4.47 while men’s was 4.04. The difference between women and men’s responses is statistically significantly different, however, in actuality, both feel that it is an important reason (men closer to “important” and women were between “important” and “very important”). In other words,

while the statistical analysis is significant, it can be argued that it is a reason that was important for the vast majority of college students, women and men alike, and that, for all intents and purposes, responses between women and men were not really all too different.

**Table 5: Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education (based on 5-point scale)**

Reasons for Pursuing Higher Education	Female Mean	Male Mean
To improve my skills in my field	<b>4.55</b>	<b>4.28</b>
<b>To learn more about the things that interest me</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>4.04</b>
<b>To prepare myself for pursuing advanced degrees</b>	<b>4.30</b>	<b>3.89</b>
To make me a more cultured person	<b>4.27</b>	<b>3.92</b>
To increase my social status	<b>4.23</b>	3.88
<b>To get training for a specific career</b>	<b>4.19</b>	3.82
To become more independent	3.99	3.76
To get a better job	3.97	<b>3.97</b>
To have higher income	3.92	<b>3.95</b>
<b>To become a better parent</b>	3.87	3.43
My family's wishes	3.17	3.48
I inevitably had to go this route/It was the natural course of things	3.03	3.14
Encouragement from a role model, teacher, or mentor	2.49	2.64
There was no job available	2.45	2.80
<b>There was nothing better to do</b>	2.06	2.67
To find a spouse	1.93	2.00
To get away from family/home environment	1.63	1.84



## Statistical Analyses

Two statistical tests were run. First, the chi-square test was run to find whether there was a statistically significant difference between women and men's responses as they pertain to their reasons for pursuing higher education, the highest education degree they wish to obtain, their intention to work, and some other indexes pertaining to religiosity, domesticity, and political activity. However, student responses to some questions was at times heavily lopsided with too few responses in some of the cells, posing some statistical challenges including a violation of one of the basic assumptions of the chi-square test. Therefore, only the results of the chi-square tests that did not violate the assumption are presented, and those that did were eliminated. The results of the chi-square test are not presented for all questions as some of the findings lacked reliability.

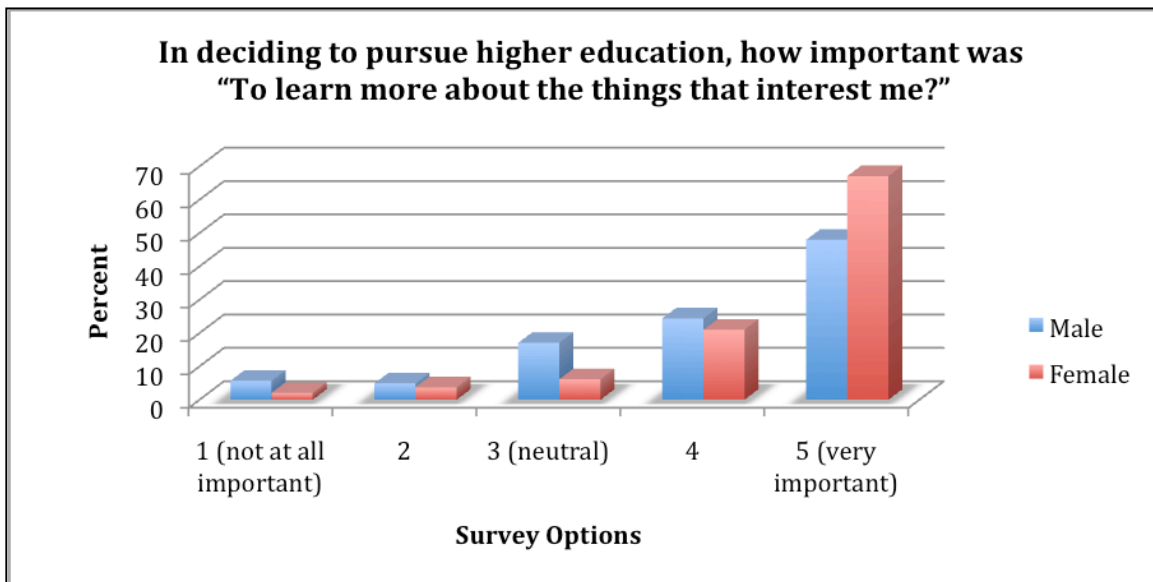
In order to quantitatively triangulate results, get directional insights into the data, and because in some cases chi-square assumptions could not be met, a second statistical test was run. Ordinal logistic regression was the most obvious choice because it is a statistical technique that can be used with ordinal dependent variables. The data was ordered and given a value (for example, Bachelors = 0, Masters = 1, PhD = 2, Post-Doctorate = 3) and a regression was run to get correlation values.

In the cases where assumptions could not be met for either statistical test, some values were grouped together where it made sense in order to meet the minimum-cell assumption.

The chi-square test found five dimensions of motivation where the difference in women and men's responses were statistically significant. These five are charted below, and explanations for the statistically significant difference are discussed in each case. As

mentioned earlier, in many cases, while the P-value is very low, the general trend in responses between women and men is not completely dissimilar, but tends to be more exaggerated for one group. For example both women and men strongly indicated that learning about the things that interested them was an important reason for pursuing higher education, and very few in both cases indicated that this was not at all a reason for pursuing their advanced degrees. However, more women than men responded that this dimension of motivation was “very important” to their desire to pursue higher education.

**Figure 1: Pursuit of Knowledge**

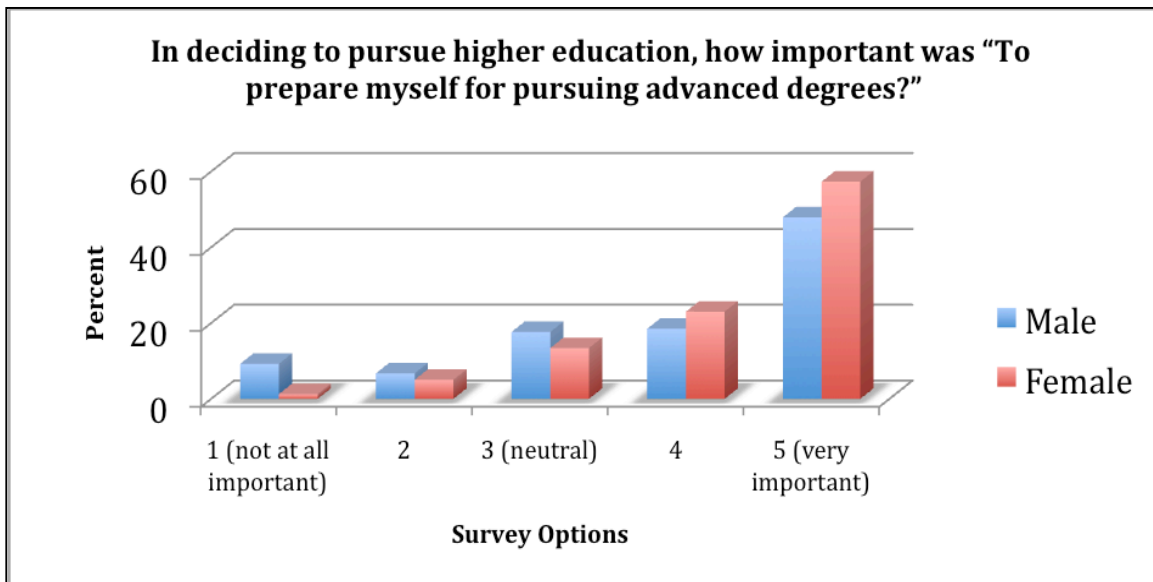


There is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses (P=0.0009).

Interestingly, previous research on women and their motivation for pursuing higher education claims that women are not as interested in acquiring knowledge for knowledge’s own sake as a motivating factor. However, this work’s quantitative findings indicate quite the opposite. And when this question was triangulated qualitatively, the same results were revealed, namely that women did indicate one of their motivations for pursuing higher

education was the pursuit of knowledge in its own right and the desire to be lifelong learners. In fact, among both women and men, the second most important reason for pursuing higher education among the sixteen dimensions of motivation was to learn about the things that interested them. The mean response for women was 4.47 out of 5, and the mean for men was 4.04 with 88 percent of women and 72 percent of men choosing “important” or “very important.”

**Figure 2: Pursuit of Advanced Degrees**

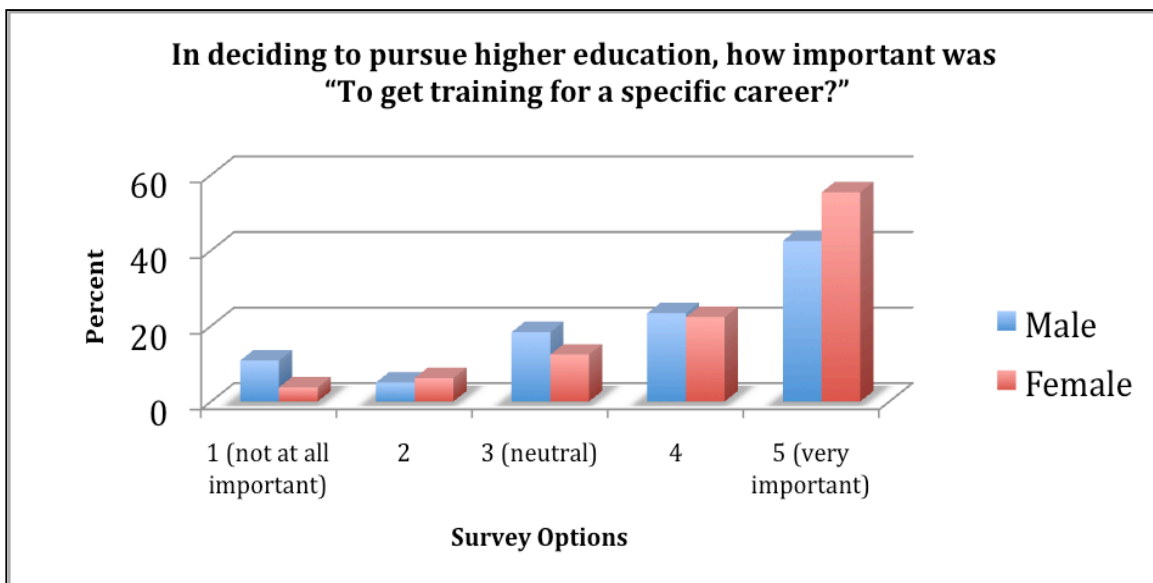


There is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses (P=0.0022).

While there is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses to pursuing higher education for the purpose of then pursuing more advanced degrees, it is clear that this dimension is important to both sexes alike. Eighty percent of women and 66 percent of men responded that pursuing more advanced degrees was an important or very important motivator for pursuing higher education. These findings are in line with a different survey question which asked students which higher education degree

is the highest degree they wish to obtain. Again, both women and men had strong preferences to continue on toward their doctorate or post-doctorate degrees, but more women wanted to pursue the highest obtainable degrees than men. These findings not only mirror the national trends over the last decade with women leading their male counterparts in *Koncour* scores, number of college applicants, and college admittance, but they are also indicative of how education is a very high value in Iran as a whole across gender lines.

**Figure 3: Career Aspirations**

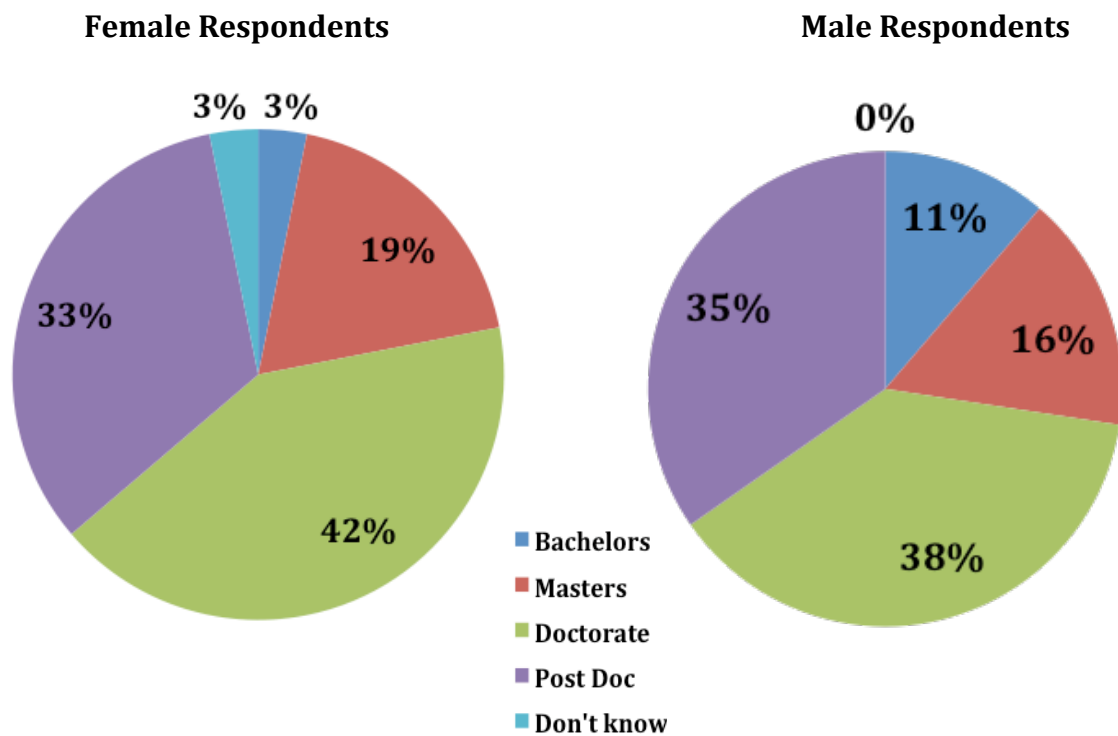


There is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses ( $P=0.0216$ ).

The results of the question, “What is the highest educational degree you wish to obtain” further triangulate the results of education as a high value among women and men alike, with women indicating a stronger preference toward pursuing their education further. The pie charts below are a breakdown of the percentage of students by desired degree by female and male responses. Of the female respondents, 75 percent indicated a

desire to pursue a doctorate degree or higher, and of the male respondents, 73 percent wished to pursue a doctorate or higher. While the upper echelons are comparable between women and men, more men than women indicated a wish to stop their higher education aspirations after obtaining their bachelor’s degree. Eleven percent of men as compared with only three percent of women indicated that a bachelor’s degree was their highest educational goal.

**Figure 4: Female and Male Responses to Degree Aspirations**



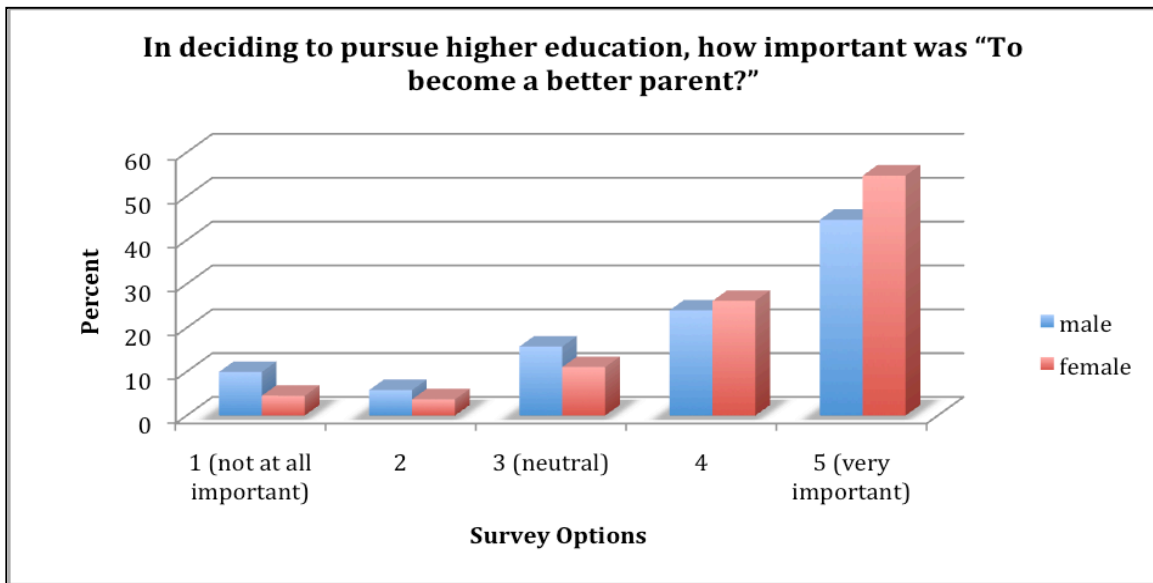
While the response to the question, “Highest degree you hope to obtain” is significantly different between women and men ( $P=0.02$ ), the trend in responses seems to indicate that women are only slightly more inclined to wish to pursue the most advanced degrees while more men than women aspire toward completing their bachelors.

It is important to note that, however, that unlike the CIRP survey where data on college freshman is solely collected, the respondents to this survey were a random sampling of students enrolled in any level of higher education. Almost 80 percent were bachelor's students, and of that 80 percent, less than half were in their first year.

Over 70 percent of women and just under 60 percent of men indicated that pursuing higher education as a means of getting training for a specific career was either somewhat or very important to them. While achieving training in order to secure work after college is of high importance for most of the male and female respondents, it is interesting that women indicate this as a higher motivating force than even men given the fact that in reality, women make up only a minority of the workforce in Iran, especially as it pertains to the most prestigious or better paying positions. It is clear that women do indeed wish to work outside of the home, and that it is not just any work that they wish to pursue, but a professional career. As is discussed in the next Qualitative Findings chapter, the women interviewed overwhelmingly communicated a strong desire to secure employment after obtaining their higher education degrees.

These results suggest that women see higher education as one way of increasing their chances of securing careers, and they may feel that obtaining higher education degrees gives them a much-needed advantage after college when pursuing professional opportunities in a climate where men are favored. While men also indicated that getting training for a career is a motivator for pursuing tertiary education, the findings suggest that the need may not be as dire for men as it is for women. That is, men may have other outlets in receiving training or securing work and may feel college is not as necessary toward those aims as women do.

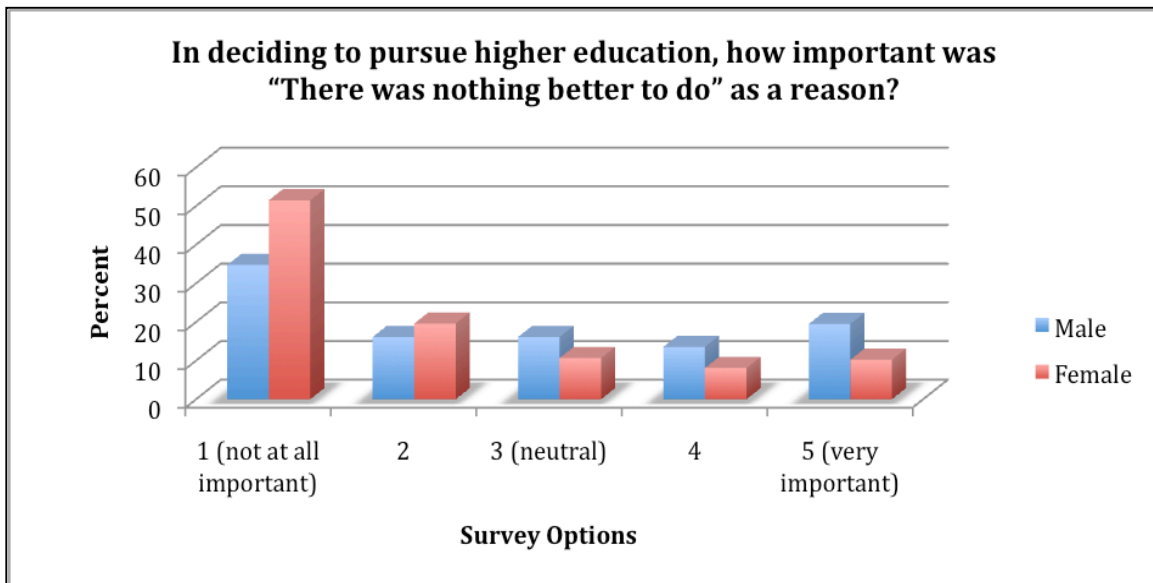
**Figure 5: Parenthood**



There is a statistically significant difference between women and men's responses ( $P=0.099$ ).

Once again, both women and men indicated that "to become a better parent" was a strong motivator in deciding to pursue a college degree, with more women (over 75 percent) than men (over 60 percent) responding with a 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale. While there is a statistically significant difference in female and male responses, the trend between the sexes is similar in that responses are generally skewed to the left, suggesting that parenthood may be a strong value for young women and men alike.

**Figure 6: Apathy/Lack of Enticing Alternatives**



There is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses ( $P=0.0055$ ).

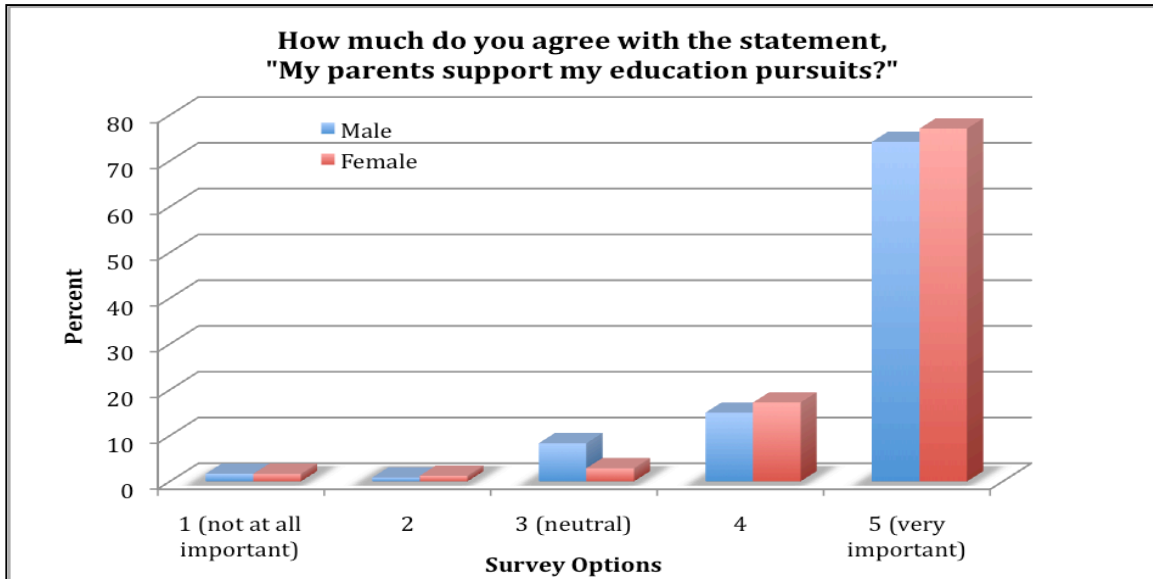
Women felt rather strongly that “There was nothing better to do” was not a major reason for pursuing higher education with over 50 percent responding with a “1.” Men on average also indicated that having nothing better to do had little to do with their higher education pursuits. Again, this chart indicates that students, and especially women, are not apathetic about their decision to pursue higher education. However, the qualitative findings are more complex and assorted than the quantitative on this dimension of motivation. Some women interviewed did express that attending college was a better option than “sitting at home” or other outlets that felt restrictive to them as women.

Over 85 percent of both women and men responders indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “My parents support my educational pursuits,” with women having a slightly higher parental support percentage than men. The difference between women and men’s responses were comparable, and there was no statistically



significant difference between the two groups. These findings are strongly aligned with the qualitative data that found that parents almost unanimously and wholeheartedly supported their daughters' education pursuits.

**Figure 7: Parental Support of Education**



There is no statistically significant difference between women and men's responses.

In order to see whether parents' own education level was at all correlated with their children's desire to pursue higher education, a chi-square test and logistic regression were run. Responses to two questions pertaining to fathers' and mothers' highest education degree was combined and run against responses to the highest education degree women and men wished to obtain for both tests. Both tests concluded that there was no significance between parents' education level and students' academic aspirations. In other words, parental education does not significantly impact the highest education degree students wish to obtain. The details of the results of the logistic regression are as follows:

P1 = probability of bachelors

P2 = probability of masters and doctorate combined

P3 = probability of post-doctorate

Women:

The log of odds (P3 vs P1) increases (beta = 0.2555) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.48). The log of odds (P2 vs P1) increases (beta = 0.2906) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.41). The log of odds (P3 vs P2) decreases (beta = -0.0351) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.76).

Men:

The log of odds (P3 vs P1) decreases (beta = -0.5414) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.054). The log of odds (P2 vs P1) decreases (beta = -0.42) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.11). The log of odds (P3 vs P2) decreases (beta = -0.12) when parental education increases, but is not significant (p=0.52).

The results of the chi-square test are as follows:

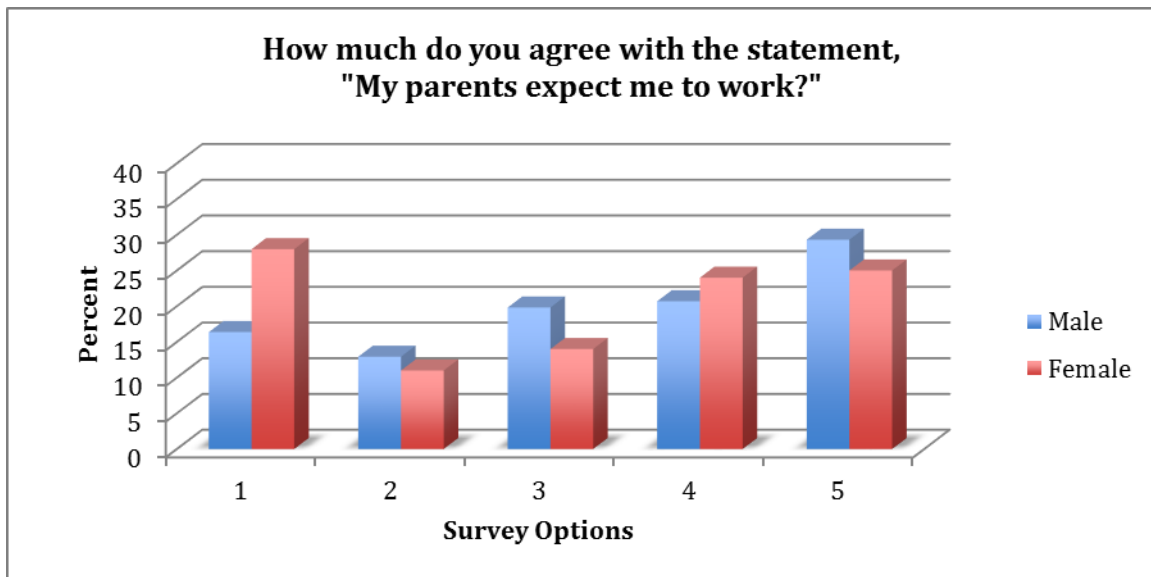
**Table 6: Chi-Square Results for Parent Education and Student Degree Aspiration**

<b>Females:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Probability</b>
<b>Chi-Square</b>	8	4.27	0.8316
<b>Males:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Probability</b>
<b>Chi-Square</b>	8	13.31	0.10160

These findings seem to suggest that higher education is not a value shared only by the most educated portion of the population; education is a value that is shared by a wider range of students, irrespective of parent education level.

Parental support of men and women’s professional aspirations was much more varied. When women and men were asked the degree to which they agreed with the statement, “My parents expect me to work,” the responses were more scattered, and men indicated more than women that they had their parents’ support.

**Figure 8: Parental Support of Work**



There is a statistically significant difference between women and men’s responses.

A chi-square test was run to see whether women and men’s responses to the statement, “My Parents support my educational pursuits” was significantly different from “My parents expect me to work.” The results of the statistical analysis conclude that the

responses between the two questions was statistically significant for women with a p-value of 0.0055.

Clearly education is a strong value for families, regardless of gender. Women indicate a slightly stronger family support for their education pursuits than men. However, as would be expected, parents' expectations of their sons are different from their daughters. The most responses for women was in the "not at all important" category for parental work expectation, while the most responses for men was in the "very" category.

Perhaps the wording of "expectation" rather than "supporting" work endeavors would have provided a better representation and comparison. The fact that parents' expectation that their children, and especially sons, work is not higher may be due to the country's current state of unemployment and the difficulties for young people to secure jobs. The economic climate, the fact that the vast majority of the population in 2005 was under 30, as well as the fact that many young people were reaching employment age simultaneously, increased competition in the work force and further exacerbated the difficulty of securing employment. Therefore, it may be that "expectation" is too idealistic a word for parents to use for their sons and daughters alike knowing the obstacles young people face in their career pursuits. In conclusion, one can arguably state that if the wording was changed for this particular question, perhaps the results would be better reflective of the general widespread support of parents for their children, and especially sons to work.

In order to see whether there is a relationship between "My parents support my education pursuits" (28I) and "My parents expect me to work" both a chi-square test and a logistic regression were run.

A logistic regression was run to see whether a correlation existed between parent's support of their children's' academic pursuits and their expectation that their sons and daughters work. The p-values for both women and men were not significant in the chi-square test, and with the regression, the log of odds was not significant for any combination for either women or men.

The result of the regression are as follows. Due to the significantly lopsided nature of the results of these questions, certain values needed to be grouped together to not violate basic assumptions of the test.

P1 = probability of disagree strongly and disagree somewhat combined

P2 = probability of neutral

P3 = agree somewhat

P4 = agree strongly

Women:

The log of odds (P4 vs P1, P3 vs P1, P2 vs P1) were all not significant (p=0.90, p=0.64, p=0.55 respectively).

The log of odds (P4 vs P2, P3 vs P2) were all not significant (p=0.37, p=0.24 respectively).

The log of odds (P4 vs P3) was also not significant (p=0.41).

Men:

The log of odds (P4 vs P1, P3 vs P1, P2 vs P1) were all not significant (p=0.87, p=0.87, p=0.88 respectively).

The log of odds (P4 vs P2, P3 vs P2) were all not significant respectively (p=0.56, p=0.84)

The log of odds (P4 vs P3) was also not significant (p=0.71).

The result of the chi-square test are as follows:

**Table 7: Chi-Square Results for Parental Support of Education and Parents' Work Expectation**

<b>Females:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	4	1.31	0.861
<b>Males:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	4	1.83	0.767

### **Domestic Aspirations**

The study wished to also explore whether women with strong desires to get married, have children, spend their free time with family, or pursue other “domestic” aspirations were as likely to wish to continue to pursue more advanced higher education degrees. The qualitative findings indicated that women in general had high educational and professional aspirations irrespective of whether or not they wished to get married, have children, or pursue other “domestic” objectives. In order to triangulate these findings a domestic aspiration indicator was created based on six survey questions pertaining to home life to see whether women with a high domestic index were as likely to wish to pursue advanced degrees. The six domestic aspiration questions are as follows:

#### **Domestic Aspiration Index**

- In deciding to pursue higher education how important was “to find a spouse” as a reason?
- In deciding to pursue higher education how important was “to become a better future parent” as a reason?
- Rate yourself on your degree of “ability to work well with children”
- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “The activities of married women are best confined to the home.”

- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “Having a family is important to me.”
- How much time have you spent on average spending time with family as compared with the average student?

Since the ordering for each of the above six questions was consistent, the responses were averaged over the different variables per scale value to create one domestic variable. Interestingly, the results for men were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ), while women’s was not.

**Table 8: Chi-Square Results for Student Domestic Index and Student Degree Aspiration**

<b>Females:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Probability</b>
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	8.79	0.7202
<b>Males:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Probability</b>
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	26.2646	0.0098

### **Religiosity**

A religiosity index was created much in the same way as the domesticity index in order to see whether a significant difference might exist between women and men’s degree of religious or spiritual practice and faith and their desire to pursue advanced degrees. The index was created based on the averaged response to the below nine survey questions.

- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “I participate in religious events.”
- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “I discuss religion.”
- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “I read religious books (Koran, Bible, Torah, etc).”

- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “I pray.”
- Rate yourself on your degree of religiosity.
- Rate yourself on your degree of spirituality.
- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “Religious understanding is very important to me.”
- How much time have you spent on average in prayer/meditation compared with the average student?
- Rate the importance to you of having spirituality in your life.

Once again, the chi-square test results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference for men ( $p < 0.05$ ), but not for women.

**Table 9: Chi-Square Results for Religiosity Index and Student Degree Aspiration**

<b>Females:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	17.79	0.1222
<b>Males:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	22.75	0.03

### **Political Activity**

Finally, in order to glean whether students who were more active and/or interested in politics would be more or less likely to wish to pursue more advanced tertiary degrees, a political interest index was created based on average responses of the following three survey questions:

- I discuss politics



- Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement, “The reality is, individuals don’t really have the power to bring about changes in society.”
- Rate the importance to you of influencing the political structure.

The chi-square results showed that political interest was not statistically significant for either women or men. The results are below.

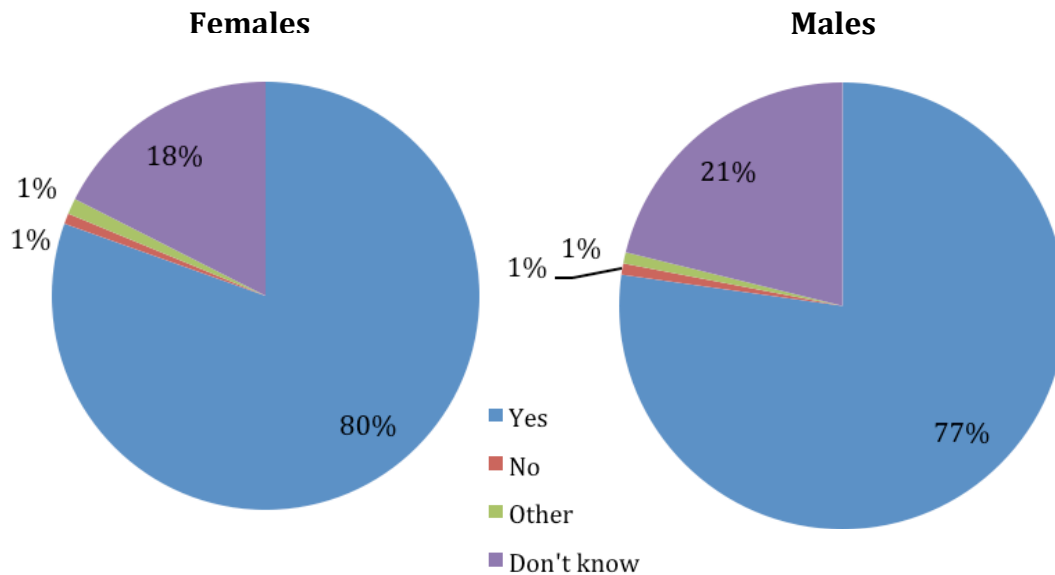
**Table 10: Chi-Square Results for Political Activity Index and Student Degree Aspiration**

<b>Females:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	14.67	0.2598
<b>Males:</b>			
<b>Statistic</b>	Degrees of Freedom	Value	Probability
<b>Chi-Square</b>	12	13.35	0.3441

### **Intention to Work**

Both women and men overwhelmingly indicated a strong intention to work after college. As indicated in the pie graphs below, interestingly, of the women surveyed, 80 percent said they planned to work outside the home, 18 percent said they don’t know whether they will work outside the home, and only one percent said they did not plan to work outside the home. These figures were higher than men’s responses, 77 percent of whom said they planned to work, and 21 percent of whom said they were uncertain. The women interviewed in the following chapter also communicated a very strong intention to work outside the home, though they presented a more complex case, outlining a multitude of factors that make it difficult for women to achieve this goal.

**Figure 9: Female and Male Responses to Intention to Work**



The following chapter triangulates the above findings in some cases, and where mentioned, finds different results than the trends found in the quantitative data.

In sum, women present a strong case both in their desire to pursue the most advanced tertiary degrees and in their professional aspirations, and they state overwhelming parental support for the former. The trend for high tertiary degrees and career aspiration does not waiver among women with varying socio-economic status, religiosity, domestic aspiration, or political activity. In other words, this determination seems virtually unanimous and unwavering, at least in how it is presented in a survey to one researcher. The data is clearly comprised of women who wish to present themselves as driven and determined, a tone that is mirrored in the qualitative section of this work.

Why, then, do the actual figures of women enrolled in the highest tertiary degrees or within the work force not mirror these aspirations? The answer may in part lie in the

obstacles and limitations they face as women, and their perceptions of the restrictions that are unique to them, much of which were far more richly captured in the qualitative data.

## **CHAPTER VII: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with 14 women students attending one of the 4 universities surveyed. Of the 14 subjects, 1 was a doctoral student, 2 were pursuing their master's degrees, and 11 were undergraduate students. There was 1 student from Sharif University interviewed, 3 from Al Zahra, 8 from Azad, and 2 from the University of Tehran. Of the 14, two were married with children, and 12 were single. As was discussed in the Methodology & Methods chapter, due to the importance of ensuring that all subjects feel safe and comfortable, interviews were conducted on interviewees' terms. Some students chose to have an informal interview with a fellow colleague or in a focus group, one asked not to be recorded, others offered little personal or demographic information and were not pressed for it, and still others were keen to have their voices heard and go "on the record" about issues they were clearly ready, willing and eager to discuss.

Women were asked about why they chose to pursue higher education, what obstacles and support mechanisms were present in their paths toward their educational aspirations, what they wished to do after graduation, how they felt about their university, professors, and peers, and the overall climate of their institutions. They were also asked more general questions regarding their personal interests and hobbies outside of school, about their families, and about their perceptions of Iranian society and being a woman in Iran. (See appendix for a complete list of interview questions.)

Below is a chart of all the students interviewed. All participants' names were changed to protect their identities. Their pseudonyms, year in school, university, major, and any other specific demographic information that could be obtained is provided below.

**Table 11: Demographics of Students Interviewed**

Name	University	Degree	Major	Other
<b>Shirin</b>	Al Zahra	Bachelor	Educational Management	
<b>Sayeh</b>	Sharif	Bachelor	Chemical Engineering	Original from Sari, a town in northern Iran
<b>Mona</b>	Al Zahra	PhD	Education	
<b>Leila</b>	Al Zahra	Bachelor	Education	
<b>Bit</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Humanities (specific major unknown)	
<b>Katy</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Humanities	
<b>Andisheh</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Sports Science	
<b>Nusha</b>	Tehran University	Master	Management	
<b>Nassim</b>	Tehran	Master	Journalism	Married with 2 daughters
<b>Tara</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Mathematics	
<b>Fahimeh</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Sports Science	Married with a child
<b>Peyvand</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Sports Science	Originally from Qom, a highly religious province southwest of Tehran
<b>Sahar</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Unknown	
<b>Sanaz</b>	Azad	Bachelor	Unknown	

### **Women's Motivations & Aspirations**

Uncovering women's motivation for pursuing higher education was a task that posed somewhat of a challenge only because the general feedback from women was that

not continuing their educational advancement was not an option for them or in the mind of their families. In other words, asking students why they chose to pursue their education was like asking the obvious, and while each participant cited some reasons for continuing their educational pursuits, underlying their answers was an implication that taking such a course was the only course of action. Educational advancement and a focus on credentialism is a high societal value. Peyvand, an undergraduate student studying Sports Science at Azad University says, "One thing that is really important to Iranians is being educated. We all expect a certain level of higher education."

Specific reasons regarding their academic aspirations pointed to similar results as the quantitative findings. Namely, women frequently discussed the significance of obtaining knowledge in its own right (or as a woman), familial desire, financial security and independence, prestige and advancing one's position in society, and interest in one's field. Interestingly, more often stated in the interviews than what was represented in the quantitative findings was a sense that there was nothing else/better to do with one's time.

### **Knowledge Acquisition in Its Own Right**

Learning for learning's sake was also a major motivating factor for the women interviewed, findings which are highly comparable to the quantitative results that indicated "learning about the things that interest me" as one of the highest reasons for pursuing higher education. Women often mentioned that they had an interest in their field, had a thirst for knowledge, and saw themselves as lifelong learners. For instance, Sanaz mentions that she wanted to pursue a higher education degree because she really enjoys learning about the things that interest her. Shirin, a third year undergraduate studying Educational Management at Al Zahra University says:

I chose to continue my studies after high school because I prefer being a student to doing anything else. Since I was a child, I was very curious. When I got older, I really liked to pursue knowledge. But in order to formalize my interests, I need an advanced degree.

Sanaz, an undergraduate at Azad University says she enjoys her own mental shifts and the degree to which her thinking and perceptions of the world have expanded. She says, "I think your mindset changes when you increase your education." She feels this is an essential component of the university experience, and one that is particularly significant for women's advancement in Iranian society. Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University, uses almost identical words in discussing her motivations: "I liked continuing my education... because one's mindset changes when you enter university."

Sahar, a bachelor's student at Azad also discusses higher education as a mechanism through which to be better equipped in daily life. She says, "If a problem comes up in life, I want to be prepared to handle it. I think education teaches you things and gives you life experiences."

Sahar goes on to say, "I think a woman should have something useful to say in a conversation. Someone who is not educated won't be able to contribute in a conversation. She has to be able to carry some knowledge on her own." Sahar's comment not only points to the importance she places on knowledge acquisition in its own right, but also to the importance of being seen as intellectually legitimate and credible in society.

### **Legitimacy & Social Status**

Legitimacy and increasing one's status within one's extended family, social circle, and greater society was extremely important for every woman interviewed. Bitra, an

undergraduate student at Azad University says pointedly, “I saw my friends, family members, and everyone was keen on higher education.” Education is the ultimate status symbol in Iran, and was articulated as a solid way for women to advance themselves within society.

Women also make a point to convey their desire to pursue knowledge and progress in their learning for a lifetime, not just the span of their current higher education degrees or while a student. Shirin, a third year undergraduate student in the field of Educational Management at Al Zahra University says she loves being a student, not just because of her student-status, but because of all it represents for her as a lifelong learner. She says, “I’d like to stay a student forever! Well, not forever, but I’d like to have a student’s spirit even if I’m a professor one day. I [would like to] continue to be a seeker of knowledge...to be like I am right now and not think that just because I’m a professor, I don’t need to pursue [knowledge] or learn anything else. I have to keep going higher. I really need to continue to advance and progress.”

Sayeh, a third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering said, “When your education level advances, so does your prestige in society. Everyone call you ‘Ms. Engineer.’”

Sanaz, an undergraduate at Azad University discusses the importance of educational advancement for women in particular, and juxtaposes the heightened status that comes with academic advancement with the even more pressing need for women to be educated due to their roles as mothers.

I came to university because a woman must be able to pull herself up in this society through a healthy and useful career given the restrictions that society places on women. Women need to go as high as possible in education because they’re going to be mothers one day. And also going to university is



an accomplishment in and of itself. So just having an undergraduate degree is not enough for me.

Similarly, Peyvand, an undergraduate student studying Sports Science at Azad University says, “As an Iranian woman and mother, I have to be able to at least be up to speed with the latest information and technology. One way we [women] can do this is to go to university.”

Sanaz, an undergraduate student at Azad University says that when a woman in Iran increases her education, her prestige and credibility also increase in society: “You have this sense that people approve of you more—that they view you as more credible. That may or may not be the case, but that’s the impression you have.”

Educational advancement, then, becomes the most obvious and ultimately necessary path for women in obtaining higher social status and prestige as women, mothers, and members of society. As a result, the urgency women and men feel in getting admitted is intense, and competition is high. Some women such as Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University, even admit that they chose less competitive fields of study so that they would be admitted into university. Their longing for admittance is so strong that they are willing to sacrifice studying what they are more interested in (or even what may yield better professional promise later) in order to be granted admission. Leila also discusses prestige and social credibility as her motivations for pursuing higher education:

Because the *koncour* is so hard, I just selected this major [Education] to get accepted. I kept saying, I just need to get into university – maybe due to family pressures, society’s pressures – but whatever it was, just getting into university was so important. The way it is in Iran these days, if you go to university you are more accepted in society. But society plays a really major role. People who have attended university have more credibility when they say something. It seems like when I only had my high school diploma, society

wouldn't accept what I had to say, even if it was right. But if people know I'm studying at university right now, they might more easily accept what I say.

Shirin, a third year undergraduate studying Educational Management at Al Zahra University also admits her major and coursework are not what she would have ideally like to study, says:

I may know as much as a PhD student, but I don't have the degree yet, so I need to continue my education. I don't like [my field of study] itself, or some of the courses I take. But I have to get through them and energize myself somehow so I can obtain my degree. I have to pass these courses to get somewhere.

In fact, even in the quantitative surveys collected, many students wrote into the comments section that they did not enjoy their field of study, but it was better to be admitted to any field and go to university than to bypass the opportunity all together or try again. In practice, it seems that obtaining a higher education degree is more of a motivator for students than the specific content knowledge obtained.

Tara, a math major undergraduate at Azad University also discusses the significance of education for her as a woman and her desire to pursue higher education past the bachelor and even Master's levels, "I wanted to pursue higher education because there weren't a lot of educated people around me. I also feel that in society, particularly ours, a woman is better placed if she is educated. I would love to go as far as possible [in my education], so I can contribute something to the field."

### **Degree Aspirations**

Many of the students interviewed made a point about not wishing to cease their educational journey once they complete their current degrees. Several specifically mentioned as one of their aspirations, a strong desire to pursue further higher education

degrees. Some women such as Sahar, an undergraduate student at Azad University, felt that so many young people, and specifically women are becoming educated in Iran that a bachelor's degree is no longer enough to set them apart or provide the level of prestige that it once used to do. She says, "I want more than just an undergraduate degree now. A bachelor's degree has become so generic and common for women—like it's just something to have. So I want to go as far as I can in my studies."

Similarly, Sahar, an undergraduate student at Azad University talks about her new desire to continue studying and pursuing higher education degrees after completing her bachelors. She says:

I'm convinced I want to finish my undergraduate studies and move onto graduate study. Coming to university I told myself I'd only pursue my undergraduate degree. But I've changed my mind and feel strongly about continuing my education because higher education gives women confidence—they can speak their mind. And I felt like I was really starting to experience a lot of new things. I felt I was getting closer and closer to my goals. I'm not only learning more about my society, but also [about] my substantive studies. So I plan to continue my education as much as is possible.

Peyvand, a bachelor's student at Azad University studying Sports Science also wished to pursue more advanced higher education degrees and discussed her degree aspirations in relation to her male peers: "Every young girl sees herself in competition with her male counterpart. She wants to at least get her undergraduate degree. She just wants to get as ahead as possible.

### **Interacting with Men & Finding a Future Spouse**

While none of the students interviewed sited a desire to find a future spouse as a reason for pursuing higher education, some felt that this was a major motivating factor for other female students. Nusha, a master's student studying management at Tehran

University, discusses her perception of why women in her society pursue higher education in such high numbers. She says, "Some women want to get a college degree simply to find a better husband. They know a husband won't even come their way if they only have a high school diploma. I'm not saying it's a consideration for me, but it definitely is for a lot of women. And for a lot of women it's just about getting out of the house, seeing a couple of guys, talking to them."

While commentary such as Nusha's points to an underlying desire of some students to finally have the opportunity to be in an institution where they may interact with individuals of the opposite sex that are not their family members, it also points to the high societal value placed on education, and specifically the education of women. Not only do women communicate that it was a strong desire for their families that they pursue higher education, but Nusha's comment above also sheds light on the notion that women are far more appealing to the opposite sex as life partners if they are educated.

### **Financial Independence**

Financial independence was a major motivating factor for many of the women interviewed. In fact, every subject interviewed communicated a desire to work and secure a suitable post outside of the home. These women's commentaries on their work aspirations are discussed later in this chapter. But it is important to point out that the desire to have a professional role in society, either for the sake of autonomy, financial independence, equality, or prestige, was a major reason cited by all the women interviewed. Sayeh, the third year Sharif undergraduate articulated her rationale for pursuing higher education as such: "For me, 80 percent of it has to do with financial independence. And the other 20 percent is, what else would I do? Sit at home?"

## **The Role of Family**

Overwhelmingly, women cite their parents as being major supporters to their educational pursuits, and often dictating higher education as a necessary goal for their daughters and sons alike. All students interviewed consistently stated their parents either encouraged them or insisted that they obtain higher education degrees. Sahar, an undergraduate student at Azad University said simply and directly, "I came to university because my parents wanted me to." Shirin, a third year undergraduate studying Educational Management at Al Zahra University says:

What my family wants more than me getting my degree or advancing academically is for me to be a cultured person with the education I have had thus far. They want me to have changed somehow, that is, if I am an educated person – if I have my undergraduate degree – I should also be a socially cultured and knowledgeable person. I shouldn't rush through my undergraduate degree just to have the degree itself. Of course, they are also very much supportive of and encourage my academic advancement.

Paternal encouragement of women's academic and professional aspirations was a common theme among many of the discussions with women. Three of the women interviewed specifically discussed their fathers' support of their higher educational pursuits and even of their future professional pursuits. These findings closely align with the quantitative data regarding strong parental support of both women and men's higher education pursuits. Peyvand, an undergraduate student studying Sports Science at Azad University attributed her desire to pursue higher education to two factors: her interest in her field and her father. She says, "I came to university to first repay my father in kind for all of his support and efforts on my behalf. He really wanted me to pursue higher education."

Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University, states clearly and pointedly, “Students have no responsibilities but to study. At home their [parents] just say, ‘study!’” She goes on to say that her father is particularly supportive of her educational pursuits. Specifically, Leila says the following about her dad’s support of her academic and professional pursuits:

My father is especially supportive of me. Really all my family, but I think in Iran fathers are very supportive of their daughters. It’s really important for my dad to see his girls be active in society – socially, professionally – at least it’s this way in my family. It’s more important for my dad that we be active than it is even for my mom.

Similarly, Sayeh, third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering discusses her motivations and aspirations in relation to her father’s teachings and desires for her:

Women have come to the realization that financial independence is very important. My dad always used to tell me that I had to go to a good university and pick a good field of study so that I can get a well-paying job and be able to support myself. He says I have to get a job after I finish school. Parents want their daughters to study. But then they also want me to get married...and they want grandkids!

It may be important to note that Sayeh is not originally from Tehran, but rather came to the capital to pursue her undergraduate degree at Sharif University. She is originally from Sari, a town in Northern Iran, and still, she like all the other interviewees communicated adamantly that her parents, and specifically her father, were strong supporters of her academic and professional pursuits. In other words, in this small sample, geographic diversity and even religious or more traditional beliefs do not seem to play a factor in deterring parental support. Even students at more conservative and religious universities such as the all-woman university, Al Zahra, made a point to talk about their parents’ support of their academic and

professional advancement. Mona, a PhD student in the field of Education at Al Zahra University discusses the support she and her sisters consistently received from her parents despite the fact that they come from a more religious (Muslim) background:

My family has some beliefs that might be deemed religious. But we are not dogmatic about it, and we are not a traditional family at all. That is to say, there are no limitations or boundaries on the advancement of women, or even human beings in general. My parents, or other members of my family, including my two sisters, always had the means, whether financial or otherwise, to advance. This was well established in our family – that I, Mona, must pursue my advancement. And there was never any limitation on my advancement. I chose my path of study, and my family has supported me so I can more easily follow this path and the opportunities available to me.

Peyvand, an undergraduate studying sports science at Azad University is from the highly religious and conservative province of Qom, located southwest of Tehran. She makes a point to discuss her parents' support of her academic pursuits. She also attributes their open-mindedness about their daughter's social activities to the fact they they, too, are educated:

I live in Qom and there are so many women who don't even leave their houses. Some go out just for groceries while others have their husbands buy even their personal things, and they themselves never leave the house. I want to be part of the outside world, in the university setting and mixing with others in society. Not only have my parents encouraged me to pursue my education, but in class I talk to the guy next to me and easily tell my mom or dad about it, and they're fine with it because they are educated. But my friend's parents who are not educated frown on my interactions with this or that guy and tell my father not to let me speak to men so openly. I know this is all because they have not pursued education or been in an educational setting, so they are bogged down by tradition and closed-mindedness.

Peyvand's commentary once again also is in line with the argument that geographic diversity and religiosity do not seem to negatively impact Iranian women's ability to pursue higher education. In fact, across demographic distinctions, women overwhelmingly

seem to enjoy freedom and encouragement from family and society to pursue even the most advanced university degrees.

Clearly, parents do not seem to be placing distinctions between their sons and daughters when it comes to pursuing higher education. They seem to be at least as likely to support girls as they are boys in achieving their educational goals. Nassim, a masters student studying Journalism Tehran University says, "My family is very religious, and they wanted me to be an engineer like my brothers." Once again in Nassim's case, her family's degree of religiosity does not in any way negate their desire for their daughter to pursue even the most traditionally "male" field of study such as engineering. Nassim claims her family is religious and yet is also simultaneously indicating that her family's desire is that she take the same educational path as her two brothers rather than studying subjects within humanities and liberal arts, fields she says her parents feel are "for lazy students."

Bitra, a humanities undergraduate at Azad University classifies her family as more "traditional," and still claims they are not only supportive of her desire to pursue higher education, but they insist she must continue toward a doctoral degree after she has completed her bachelor's and master's:

My parents have always made clear to me that stopping after an undergraduate degree is not acceptable. But they support me in whatever I choose to study, so long as I go all the way. I'm part of a more traditional family, so my parents see advancement not in terms of education or knowledge, but rather in economic terms. In other words, if I want to pursue something with the potential for economic advancement, they would completely support me. But they don't think an undergraduate degree is enough.

One subject even discusses her parents' support of her education despite the fact that she became pregnant and had a child with health complications. Fahimeh was a Sports Science undergraduate at Azad University who was married and became pregnant during



her studies. She shares the following story about the support she received from both her father and her husband:

When I got accepted to university, I did not have children. But I had a child in my third semester. My child had a lot of problems and I wanted to put aside my studies. My parents really wanted me to continue my studies. I didn't want to place my studies over my children. I stayed home a little bit but ultimately returned to school and passed my courses that semester. My husband and father were instrumental in getting me to finish my semester. They said if I just stayed home, I would miss out on studying what I really wanted. They said it didn't make sense to just stay home and deprive myself. My child has hearing and coordination problems, and it is because I stayed in school that I've learned how to interact with my child in a way that is helpful for him. I wouldn't have learned how to deal with my child's challenges if I hadn't continue my studies.

Even when additional priorities such as running a household and attending to one's child is a woman's reality, Fahimeh's parents and even husband were still highly encouraging of her educational advancement.

### **Women and Work – Aspirations & Limitations**

The quantitative data results found that women even more than men have professional aspirations and hope to secure suitable positions after they complete their higher education degrees. Having professional aspirations outside of domestic responsibilities was a common topic among the students interviewed. Sahar, an undergraduate student at Azad University says, "I want to be able to provide a good life for my family in the future."

Interestingly, it appears that it is not only socially acceptable, but even preferable that women advance themselves through education as a way of becoming more cultured, better wives and mothers, and more effective household managers. However, while women indirectly conveyed that higher educational attainment is a societal preference for women

and men alike, this widespread acceptance does not necessarily translate to occupational attainment. Furthermore, while many of the women interviewed reported that their families were supportive of their desire to work, or that their families even encouraged them to work and secure financial independence, these same women's perception of Iranian society and the work force was that society is not similarly supportive or willing to welcome women as professionals among its ranks. All 14 of the women interviewed discussed the desire to work outside the home, and most discussed the societal obstacles virtually in the same breath. Leila says,

It is so much harder for women to find work. Women's wages are a lot lower than men's. I think it's necessary for women to work, but it's very hard for them to find jobs. However, things are slowly starting to improve. But still, finding a job is very difficult. You know, they just want women for administrative posts – paperwork, essentially. They don't really put women in leadership positions. I don't know why, but I think slowly but surely this is starting to change as compared to several years ago.

Sayeh, a third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering, was among the best students in her cohort at the most prestigious university for engineering and the sciences in all of Iran. In fact, after the interview, two of her male classmates who were walking by congratulated her as they past on becoming “shagerd aval” or the top student after their final term grades had just been posted. Despite her impressive academic ranks and performance, she was very cognizant of the obstacles she would face upon graduation. She had a great deal to say on the topic of occupational attainment and the limitations she foresees. She clearly communicated the desire to work as an engineer, but simultaneously expressed a sense of hopelessness that the job market would only hire her for a secretarial post at best:

Maybe there has been a lot of advancement with women's education, but not when we actually go into the workforce. Everywhere in the job market the preference is for men. Even if an opportunity arises for a woman, she has to really prove herself, even try to act like a man in the hopes of getting the post. We [women] are all worried that when our studies finish we have no opportunity for work. Men can even go find posts in the South [of Iran], but obviously we can't.

I have a lot of friends who are definitely better than men academically, but surely they will not be superior in the workforce. The workforce prefers men.

You know my father is an agricultural engineer, and he has three classmates—one man and two women. The women work with him and have the exact same academic degrees. But while my father travels all over the place and is given challenging jobs, the two women are only given work to do in the office. They also get paid half of what my father's salary is, and they even were more advanced academically than my dad was when they were at university.

Mostly the workforce just wants women for administrative posts. I myself am studying chemical engineering, and as a profession it doesn't have an administrative aspect at all. The crux of the work in my field would be in factories—designing factory efficiency and production schemes. But the employers don't come to recruit us [women]. In hiring, many things are important like having people in high places, having contacts on the inside. Even when they come to recruit you, they have a list of candidates they've already chosen due to those individuals' connections on the inside, and then if they have about five or so spots open, the preference for those remaining five spots is men, not women.

Many dynamics seem to be at play with respects to the barriers that keep women out of the workforce. Sayeh's above comment points not only to the blatant discrimination women face (even after insider networking and preference initially reduce the number of positions available), but also to the possible mentalities of women themselves who recognize some opportunities are unsafe or off limits to them, such as traveling away from their hometowns for work purposes.

While women overall report to have parental support both in their pursuit of higher education and in their pursuit of work outside the home, one interviewee, Nassim who was

studying journalism, did comment about some of the professional barriers that stand in her way as a woman wishing to be a journalist from both society and from family. Her perception is that families' wish for their daughters is for them to obtain a high level of education, but it may or may not translate to their support of her in the work force. If they do agree to allow them to pursue a profession, it must be a "safe" one, which often limits women's career options and inevitably restricts what they are then able to pursue:

In traditional, religious circles in Iranian society, it is not acceptable for a woman to be out there [in public circles] talking openly to men, being in a profession that is mostly men, asking controversial questions, having discussions, etc.—this is not okay in our culture. Families want their daughters to be teachers. ["Safer"] basically means without men. Because the assumption is that communal or professional spaces are completely unsafe for women due to the presence of men. So for example being a secretary is seen as the least safe job, because a man can take advantage of her in a variety of ways. And Iranian families are very sensitive to this. They don't let their daughters apply for those types of posts. However, it must be said that those who want their daughters to pursue their education do so with the hope that they complete their education, get their degree, and then stay home, that is, don't go into the workforce.

When asked what a woman's choices are if her family is against her decision to work, Nassim goes on to say that is where women need to be savvy and plan their actions strategically:

It depends on how resilient she is—it's all about resilience. You have to fight for the very basic things you want, though this [resistance in allowing women to work] is mostly in religious families. In recent years many girls have become more savvy about doing what they want—and more incremental—instead of just coming out in open defiance. Somehow these familial pressures have made girls and women in Iran very strategic and diplomatic. When there is pressure on you and obstacles in your path, you learn to get to what you want in a lot of incremental and indirect steps, and this requires a lot of political maneuvering. And parents hope that once their daughters get married, their husband will "tame" or "train" them out of their unruly behavior.

Nassim finds that even women from more traditional households whose families may be more restrictive of their career choices or aspirations can still be successful in pursuing their goals by seeking out paths of least resistance that allow them to continue on toward those goals. It seems that due to all the obstacles women face, many have accomplished what they set out to via a survival mechanism and will that is more effective within their cultural context – namely a course of action that does not fly in the face of status quo but gently, yet persistently steps around it through many incremental victories that ultimately get them to the desired end result. It could be argued that thanks to the many dimensions of restriction placed on women in Iran on the micro and macro levels of society, they have had ample practice in diplomatic, yet persistent pursuit – women have learned how to get what they want, and their approach is perhaps far more effective than the feminist activism rhetoric or activity that is more prevalent in the West.

Clearly, parental role in women's desire to pursue a profession outside the home is not as unanimously supported, as higher education. Some women interviewed, such as Sayeh, have parents who desire them to work and be fiscally independent and able to contribute to their household income. Other participants shared some of their families' caveats. None claimed that their parents were outright opposed to their working after graduation. But regardless of where their parents stood on the issue or how they viewed the obstacles that stood in their way, many of the interviewees had grand professional goals in mind for themselves from upper management and professorships to becoming a business owner, working outside of Iran, becoming a national ambassador, and more. Shirin, a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University also has professional aspirations after her academic pursuits. She says,

I would like to be a university professor – a professor who is a role model. I want to have worked through and be free of the problems I see in our professors now. I want to possess the same positive attributes I see in some professors. You know they always say some professors change the course of your life. I want to be like one of those professors – the ones who are important and positive and life-changing. I'd like to do something for the field of education. I feel like what I can do as one person can somehow still remove a burden from society. [Professors] should be able to see society's problems and be equipped to solve them.

Mona, an Education PhD student at Al Zahra has clearly established aspirations for herself beyond her graduate degree.

I'd like to enter the international scientific community and really have something novel to contribute. I'd also like to be the Mona who has sufficient expertise in her own field of study, so that I can make my way into the international forum. I'd like to see myself in ten years having attended three or four international conferences, at least. As I've said, I have quite lofty goals, and I don't know whether many of them are realistic, but I do have these goals with respect to my studies. I don't want to limit myself to just Iran or just this university. I want to spread my wings and make myself known in the global community and also learn from them, because I still have a desire to learn.

Mona's professional goals were clearly mentally established, but she was also aware of the fact that despite her best efforts, they may or may not come to fruition. This dichotomy between grand goals and painful limitations was a common theme among the students interviewed. Many women were also highly cognizant of the fact that the reality is quite stark for them. While they were highly aspirational regarding their professional ideals, in many of the interviews, women communicated a sense of hopelessness or frustration with the obstacles that lay before them after degree completion.

Women such as Sayeh, the third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering, see many of the obstacles before them as limitations society inflicts upon the youth, and women in particular. She shares the following story to communicate her point about the difficulties of finding suitable employment:

I think one of the things that Iran is really successful in is making people feel empty inside. One week ago, I was talking to one of my friends who has finished her studies. She was saying, "What should I do now? After all this studying? Should I stay home like a girl who hasn't [gotten a college degree] at all and is just hanging around at her dad's house?" She feels really empty, and I think Iranian society is liable for this.

Often, women commented on their desire to secure careers and find employment after college virtually in the same breath as they discussed the overwhelming unlikelihood and/or obstacles they faced to achieve such goals. Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University, articulated her desire and her reservations much in the same way, but interestingly, she shed light on a paradox that undercurrents many women's sentiments, which is that while they view society as limiting, they also see societal expectations of them as being educated and making great strides in their educational advancement. Leila says,

Just school isn't enough. My first plan is to find a job, then work and study simultaneously. I'd really like to continue my education, but I'm not sure I can because there are lots of big hurdles to overcome to get work, and there are hurdles with pursuing another degree.

Some women's goals were articulated as including both an active professional and personal life. Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University expressed that she does have matrimonial and maternal aspirations, but her professional goals are also grand:

Ten years from now, first and foremost I'd like to be married, have a few kids. I'd also like to be the director of an educational institution. That's ideal!

While the reality of finding high caliber jobs is relatively low for women and men due to high unemployment and lack of jobs, with the job market favoring the latter, women still continue to aspire with very high goals. Below is a list of some of the posts and aspirations students said they wished to secure. Some of the women interviewed shared

that it would be nice to be married and “have a kid or two,” but none said they intended to exclusively stay home. All women asserted that they would work if given the opportunity of employment.

- “I would really love to be one of the first female ambassadors.”
- “I’d like to have a managing role””
- “I’d like to have the financial means to start a business. I think I would be good at it.”
- “I’d like to study in a developed country, and see the difference between studying there and studying in Iran, see how different women are in this society and that one.”
- “I’d like to see an educated society.”
- “I’ would like to be a university professor.”
- “I’d like to be the director of an educational institution.”
- “I’d like to enter the international scientific community and really have something novel to contribute.”
- “I’d love to go as far as possible [in my education], so I can contribute something to the field.”
- “I plan to continue my education as much as possible.”
- “I want to be able to provide a good life for my family in the future.”

Leadership and high-prestige professional careers are what all subjects said they wished to pursue when answering the question of occupational aspiration, regardless of university and field of study. Values such as being the “best at,” first, or the leader of something and going “all the way” in one’s education and/or profession were very common



themes among not only women, but often also the hopes of these women's parents for them. Many women in Iran do work in almost all levels and types of professions including prestigious and high paying posts, but far more work in more mid-level positions such as administration, pre-tertiary teaching, medical assistance, or retail sales. Despite this fact, no woman interviewed (or who turned in a survey questionnaire) even eluded to a desire to pursue these types of statistically more likely professions. It could be argued then, that perhaps, the representational lopsidedness of women and men in the workforce may in part be attributed to the possibility that when women face barriers in their pursuit of these highly selective and scarce positions, they choose to not work rather than opt to work at less prestigious positions. Families of many Iranian women do not see it as proper to work in some of these types of positions, and there is often stigma around them. It is a better option, then, that women refrain from work than to choose certain professions that are more easily obtainable.

However, while men may also have high hopes for their future professions, they may not have the luxury of opting out of the workforce due to the fact that they often function as heads of household; They may have no choice but to settle for the positions they can secure, regardless of degree of prestige.

### **University Climate**

Women's descriptions of the overall institutional climate of their universities was quite varied. How they articulated the "vibe" or emotional ambiance of their respective universities included positive, negative, and often complex responses. Many discussed their frustration with the quality of education, specifically as it pertained to the nature of their exams, the quality or availability of their professors, and the availability of resources. They

were disenchanted with the lack of collaboration, discussion and critical thinking in their coursework, the poor state of their libraries, as well as the unfair system of assessment.

Others discussed the difficulties that are a reality to women alone on university campuses, such as the challenges they face interacting with male peers or professors, the inconveniences of the *hijab*, or the restricting ideologies that significantly limit women's freedoms. Still others were more upbeat and positive in their descriptions, and described their universities as liberating and representative of opportunities to learn, interact socially and intellectually, and enjoy experiences that they as women may not have otherwise enjoyed.

### Professors

When asked about the university setting and what it is like being a student at their respective institutions, many students begin by describing their perceptions of and interactions with their professors. Sayeh, a third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering shared a handful of stories about her interactions with various professors as shaping her thoughts on the institutional climate overall:

The atmosphere here really depends a lot on the professors. Some of them really pay attention to the women, and help them with their substantive questions, etc. But others pay attention only to the men. I had a professor who wouldn't answer questions that his female students would ask. He was super religious, "Hezbollahi," so he wouldn't even look at the women in class. When I would go to his office hours, I couldn't tell if he was even listening or not. I mean, God you could at least lift your head while I'm speaking. I'm not a ghost or something!

Just this year, I finally concluded that I have to turn a blind eye to many things because if I don't – if I take them all in – like my [male] professor who was giving me dirty looks – or the one who tells me he will fail me with a 9 [out of 20] – this is truly emotional stress. But I've tried not to pay attention to these things any more.

Women such as Sayeh are starkly aware of the differentiated treatment of them as women by many of their professors and seem to work on internal mechanisms to cope, ignore, or overcome these challenges.

Shirin, a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University feels that professors can even function as obstacles to students' advancement. She has the following to say about difficulties of being a student at her university:

The hardest thing about being a student is you wanting something, but professors or others not wanting that same thing for you. In my opinion, if a student has financial problems or family problems, that's nothing. But if the student wants to work hard, but the professor doesn't have the time or patience for her, or even the other students don't want to deal with her, her opportunities become so restricted. This is the worst pain.

When Sayeh, a third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering was asked to describe her ideal professor, she bluntly stated, "A professor who doesn't tell us we're stupid. I don't know, I really haven't seen one." She goes on to elaborate:

Our professors don't put any effort in [to teaching] at all. They're all just after money. Especially since our department is very factory-minded, each of our professors is a shareholder in at least two to three factories. And then you have to find them and can't even ask them a single question. They're stressed out, upset, don't show up to one out of every few classes, and they send their TA's [to teach class] instead. They really don't make any effort for their students. And then they tell us we don't have the aptitude [for Sharif]. [They ask,] "How did you even get accepted here?" Well obviously we had something to offer that we got accepted.

I actually went in to see one the other day and he told me, "I have a flight in three minutes so you have 1.5 minutes to ask your question." What could I ask in 1.5 minutes? Then the other day I went to speak to my professor to say I really deserved higher than a 14 [out of 20], and he said okay, we'll review your work and if you're right, then I'll give you a 20, and if you're wrong, then I'll fail you with a 9. I told him that is really unfair and he said, "No, I'm spending time on your work instead of going out and making money."

The above two examples may or may not be the norm as far as professors' actions and level of engagement with their work and students are concerned. However, the students who communicated negative or unfair practices by their professors shared a feeling of resignation or hopelessness that could not be proactively addressed with them or other school officials. That is, the relationship between professor and student – and especially female student – was clearly hierarchical with little or no checks and balances with the respect to the former's actions. It should also be noted that the toughness of educators' approach reflected above is commonplace in the Iranian school system beginning very young grades, and Iranian students are accustomed to the often punitive, firm and unwavering approaches of their educators.

Andisheh, an undergraduate at Tehran's Azad University studying Sports Science discusses her desire for more collaborative learning where ideas are shared and scaffolded rather than delivered unilaterally from professor to student.

One of the limitations of our university is guidance from our professors. Sometimes the professors don't take us seriously and are patronizing to us. We come to university from high school with very limited knowledge. And the professors don't bother trying to really infuse us with knowledge. The classes don't have an atmosphere of knowledge-sharing. Rather [the professors] just spew out information that we could all look up. For example, there has to be group discussion, especially in the humanities [majors]. Right now we don't have any discussions. It's all one-way lecturing, which is exhausting to sit in. We have to be supported in our ambitions. Everyone keeps telling us we are the next generation. Well we need actions to support this. We need to have our ambitions supported.

Katy, an undergraduate student at Azad University studying humanities, similarly addresses the frustrating feeling of one's ideas often not being valued or heard within the classroom setting. What these students describe is a perpetuation of an institutional

climate that sees students, and arguable more so women, as what Piaget termed “empty vessels” needing to be filled with knowledge:

It’s really bad when a professor says “no” before you even finish your thought. I may share my thought the first few times, but to be put down this way—it will discourage me from speaking up again. We had one great professor who was very attentive and engaging, and he had attracted all the students to him. That’s what happens if a professor is this way—everyone will want to study with him.

These students’ descriptions of their relationships with some of their professors is one in which students often do not feel respected, heard, or supported. They feel that in addition to all the other challenges they face, an unexpected other barrier is many of their own educators who are often not willing to help them achieve their goals.

Leila, an Al Zahra undergraduate student studying Education shares comparable sentiments:

When the professor asks my opinion, I give it to her/him, but she/he completely disagrees with me even if I’m right simply because I am just a student. [Professors] want to force their opinions on you. Some are like this, but others are more accommodating and will admit if you’re right about something. But most don’t collaborate with students.

Two of the women interviewed were specifically critical of their female professors. They communicated dissatisfaction with them because of what they expressed as a lack in quality and rigor as well as a lack of confidence when confronting the class. Shirin, the third year undergraduate majoring in Educational Management at Al Zahra University discussed her disappointment with female professors’ lack of academic publishing:

When I see that the female professors don’t conduct any research, I get frustrated. I see only the male professors doing research and writing articles, but female professors just teach. These things really get me frustrated. I see it mostly here at Al Zahra. I hear that the female professors are more active at other universities. So when I see these things I really get frustrated. I think it’s because women are afraid of taking initiative and advancing because they are afraid of failure. But men take more risks. It’s always been this way. And

in some ways, a woman's intrinsic characteristics make her this way. I know a female professor here who is very serious and is proud in a good way. That is to say, she's not the kind of person who does not speak lightly or speak nonsense. And despite the fact that her teaching style isn't very good, she is very keen on research. And I've noticed that she really enjoys the respect of her male colleagues. And that's why when I see her around—at lectures or events—she feels the respect of her male peers and therefore feels a lot of self-respect and credibility. But there are other female professors who don't have the respect of their male peers, and for this reason they undervalue themselves, and don't really participate in these lectures and events. So I think it's mostly the fear of failure behind their lack of interest in research.

There are so many issues at play in Shirin's description and perception of female professors and the specific one she describes above. She is highly critical of the women professors who do not conduct research or publish, arguing that in some ways it is likely due to their innate temperament as women, and when she describes one that is active in these reputable arenas, she communicates the importance of having her *male* colleague's respect as a sign of credibility. While it falls outside the scope of this work, it is interesting to note that if Shirin's perception or judgments of women professors are at all shared by even a small minority of students, it is safe to say that once women secure such highly coveted and prestigious positions as university professorships, the challenges and obstacles that face them do not diminish.

Similarly, when asked whether most of her professors at Sharif University were men, Sayeh, the third year undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering comments:

Oh, the female professors aren't good at all. They don't articulate or communicate well at all. And they don't seem to be very bright, I don't know. Right now I have a female professor who ...comes up with a lot of interesting class topics, but the students don't sign up for her classes. When she's holding class, she always has her head down. She doesn't make eye contact with the students. And she teaches quickly and then dashes out of the classroom; I don't know why she's like this. And female professors are very few—we only have two. And the husband of one of them also teaches here. So everyone always says, take that course with Ms. so-and-so only as a last

resort. They really don't communicate well at all. I don't know, I don't know why it is that the male professors communicate much more easily.

It remains unclear whether the general dissatisfaction of some of these respondents with their professors is due to the fact that they are women – perhaps the situations are exacerbated by an inner institutional climate that disadvantages or dismisses them – or whether their male counterparts also feel similar frustrations due to lack of quality, engagement and the like. Some respondents' commentary, such as Sayeh's seems to suggest that student/professor relations tend to be more strained and awkward for women due to the fact that most of the professors are men.

### Peers

Students' interactions and relationships with their fellow classmates was another common topic among some respondents when discussing the institutional climate of the university. Sayeh's experience was a particularly unique one that is specific to Sharif women, because they are the minority on their campus. While at most universities, women are represented in comparable numbers or they even outnumber their male counterparts, because Sharif is a technology, science, and engineering university, more men are enrolled than women. However, due to the overall increase of women's enrollment in higher education, the representation of women even at Sharif has shifted toward equilibrium. Sayeh shares, "I chose Sharif because it's considered the best university with the most prestige. My cousin tells me that back when she came here, girls were so few in number – maybe one or two. Now in our class of 120 students, forty of them are girls."

Sayeh describes her cohort as not being particularly supportive of each other, and speaks to the awkwardness between classmates – and most especially between the sexes –

and the difficulties of collaborating among each other. She goes on to describe the institutional climate at Sharif as it pertains to her male classmates, and how she feels she as a woman is perceived by them:

When I first came to Sharif, I thought that when I enter university and sit next to someone in class, they wouldn't look at me as a woman, but rather as a classmate. But it's not like this. I realized this in my first year. For example, when you ask [men] for a class handout or ask them a question, they think it's because you like them. And then they tell people behind your back that you like this guy. In this sense it's a really bad atmosphere. I don't know if it's just Sharif or other universities, too. After three years of being in the same classes, students still ignore each other. At first this was really weird, but now I think I prefer it this way.

Sayeh's negative description of the institutional climate at Sharif is not just limited to male/female dynamics. It appears that relations among female students can be equally strained, though arguably for different reasons. Perhaps the level of competition is so high that students, and especially women, feel they cannot afford to help someone else at the risk of disadvantaging themselves. It could be that the strained and unfriendly environment that this subject perceives among her peers is more exacerbated and unique at a university where the pressure and stakes to to perform is so high. This sentiment was not expressed among other subjects interviewed and could be more likely at a university like Sharif

Leila, a student at Al Zahra University, had a markedly different impression of the climate of her university as it relates to peers. She felt that the absence of men on her campus made for a more comfortable university climate. Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education shared the following about the increased comfort of being at an all-women's university:

I think it's really good that we don't have boys here. We're much more comfortable without them. We don't feel comfortable when they're around. It's like this in society, too. When we are around each other, we're kind of awkward and shy. Maybe this is because we haven't been around each other



from the beginning [elementary school]– the schools have always been segregated.

Leila's comment about the awkwardness between the sexes was a common sentiment shared among other women interviewed. Some felt that because the pre-tertiary education structure is strictly single-sex, women often do not have the opportunity to socialize with men and gain a better understanding of the opposite sex. This feeling of cross-gender under-preparedness is one that parallels previous research done on women in higher education in Iran.

Mona, who was a PhD student in the field of Education at Al Zahra University, had a different view of the university climate from any other student interviewed because she had a point of comparison between her undergraduate experience in the early days after the Revolution and her later experience as a graduate student. Her distinct response may also have been due to the fact that she was the only doctoral student interviewed, and she was also a lecturer at the university. She felt that the university atmosphere had greatly improved for a variety of reasons, mostly pertaining to the diffusion of heavy ideology that permeated the university climate in the early years as well as the proliferation of technology and globalization. She says:

When I was getting my undergraduate degree, it was the [1990s]. It was a decade after the Revolution, and the Revolution's ideals had much greater vibrancy than they have now. For example, right now I can come to the university without wearing any socks. Or I can walk in and they treat me like a student. Back then the atmosphere was more infused with ideology and thus was much more restrictive. You had to be tense and respect certain things. So when I compare then and now, I think part of the contrast is because the Revolutions' ideals have faded somewhat. And, as you know, you can now press a button and connect to the Internet, which can give you lots of information. So for these reasons, the atmosphere of the universities has become more open and more useful, and again, ideology has faded. Indeed, I can sense this shift at the undergraduate and PhD levels.

Mona's analysis of how the institutional climate has improved since her undergraduate years following the Islamic Revolution is in line with a general consensus that this is the case. The university climate as it relates to restrictions, mandates, limitations on women's attire, and overall quality has indeed improved. That said, there is clearly room for increased improvement on all dimensions of institutional climate for women in universities.

### Exams

Of the women interviewed, two specifically commented on assessments at their universities and the degree to which they felt them unfair, arbitrary and inconsistent with their learning. Sayeh had a great deal to say about her feelings on examinations at Sharif University. She felt that the unfair nature of assessments greatly hindered the overall educational experience of students. When asked what she would change about her university, she shared the following:

I would change our exam-taking system. Most of our exams are open book. The ones that are closed book are ridiculous. To memorize so many formulas...do you need these formulas in a work setting? And you would have access to them every day [at work] anyway.

And our exams are not useful. I don't know...they don't really show what you know. I know a lot of my subjects really well. But the professors test such esoteric aspects of the subject matter, and every year they give the same exam. So the students who know the exam question(s) from beforehand do really well. But it's not like they test you on everything they taught. Like last term in my mass transport class I got a 14, but I really deserved a 20 because I really knew [the material covered]. But the professor only asked 3 questions and it was on the same issues as years before even though we had many different towers, tankers, etc., and I knew all of them and had spent several days studying. I don't know, the exams really can't test your aptitude—many of the students cheat, some bring their laptops and connect to the Internet. Even one of my friends was taking pictures of the questions

with her phone, texting it to her friend to solve them for her, and then receiving the answer from her text.

Leila, the Al Zahra undergraduate studying Education discussed testing in relation to her professors' expectations and also felt the testing content in her program was arbitrary and unfair. She said, "I can't say I'm really satisfied with my professors. For some of them, what they say they want from you is not actually what they want. Like their grading system. They say [they want one thing,] but then they ask us something totally different on the test.

### **Societal Limitations & Obstacles**

Many of the women discussed the challenges above and beyond being a student that are unique to them within their society. They are cognizant of the roles they are expected to play and the limitations (whether legal/actual or more intangibly perceived) they face as women. These limitations infuse their lives on the societal level, and for many, even on the familial level. Peyvand, an undergraduate studying sports science at Azad University, speaks to some of these challenges both within the home as well as on a societal level. She says:

You know a woman who is a student is also a wife or daughter at home. Outside the classroom, she faces challenges with her family, culture, hijab, children, and so on. Men don't have these limitations. So a woman has many more concerns when she is a student. She doesn't have the luxury of just focusing on her studies.

For some women, the multiple roles they expect of themselves to fulfill is yet another dimension and speaks to the complex challenges of their perception of being a model woman by their own standards. Shirin, a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University feels that being a well rounded woman by her own

standards is to be able to lead the domestic responsibilities as well as fulfill her academic and publishing pursuits. She identifies yet another expectation of women on top of their roles as mothers, wives, and professionals – that of maintaining an almost artificial standard of beauty. She criticizes the women of her society for taking on Western notions of being an ideal women, namely, that they prioritize their aesthetics over their domestic responsibilities. Shirin has the following to say about what she observes in her society and what she expects of herself as a woman:

As a woman, I don't like what society expects of me. You know, women's roles are really fading these days. I think women don't have the same value in society that they used to have before. In our society now, women think it's better to not cook at all, or just spend their time hanging out. Most of this is emulating [the West], I should add. Basically they think they shouldn't spend any time or energy on running their household, etc. But in my opinion, I as a woman should both plan for my household, cook, and plan for my home life, and do the same for my time outside the home. That is to say, I'd like to know how to cook well and write an article well. I think this is missing from our society right now. Right now our society just likes for women to dress very well and behave like dolls – dress well, wear a lot of make-up, etc – that is, not be like a real person. Right now, forget about the men—women themselves prefer other women to wear short pants, heavy make-up, loud colors, and so on. So just imagine if you have a simpler or more subdued style; they don't like it at all. And now the men are this way too—they prefer a woman who is dolled up.

Shirin, who is a student at arguably the most traditional and conservative of the institutions represented, sheds light on yet another societal burden placed on women that is unique to them. Women must perform within the home, maintain a high personal aesthetic standard, pursue education, and if they so desire, also a profession, but the women who discuss these often competing standards seem to be eluding to an unspoken conviction that none of these roles and standards can be sacrificed for another for risk of judgment or stigma from family or society, or a lack of reaching one's own personal fulfillment. She goes on to say:

Our women must be leaders. A woman wants to work outside the home and also have kids. And if she doesn't want to have kids, then she has to face the social norm that women must have children. So it's really hard for a woman to manage all of this in this context.

It is the pressure of feeling they must manage all these roles and expectations, all while they are faced with the legal, societal and even familial limitations and restrictions, that feels so daunting and inherently unfair to some of the women interviewed. Fahimeh, a Sports Science undergraduate at Azad University says:

An Iranian woman has a lot of obstacles in her path. She needs to increase her chances to achieve her goals and secure employment [through education] and also simultaneously maintain a healthy mind and outlook. That is real success.

Similarly, Nusha, a Masters student studying Management at Tehran University says that the role of women in her society is to be "a good mother, a good wife, and a good cook." She further elaborates:

Even at the highest levels of education, a woman is deemed as "bad" if she doesn't know how to cook, and "good" if she does. So these values are maintained for women even at the highest levels at advancement. As long their "career" doesn't interfere with maintaining these values, it's okay. But if it does, or if she puts her career before being a mother or a good cook, then society says that's not acceptable.

In Nusha's case, then, it seems that in order for it to be acceptable to have a profession outside the home as a woman, she must first show that she is able to fulfill society's priorities for her, namely, her duties within the home. According to Nusha, only when a woman is successful as a mother, wife, and homemaker is it deemed appropriate and admirable that she maintain a career. However, none of these "primary" domestic duties can be sacrificed or even slightly compromised for the sake of the latter.

For all women interviewed, gender inequality is blatant and pervasive in virtually all aspects of their lives and with respect to the lifestyles and aspirations they wish to pursue.

Nusha, a master's student studying management at Tehran University discusses the societal obstacles and pressures in relation to her two daughters:

When I found out my kids were girls, I was truly saddened because I knew what challenges and obstacles were in store for them as girls growing up in our society—because they have to work so hard to barely be equal to boys. So when you ask me what I want for them, I just want some of these obstacles removed for them. I want that perpetual fear that is instilled in them by society to be alleviated — the rest will be ok; they can find their own way.

This mother's wish for her daughters is simply to have a more even playing field where her daughters are not disadvantaged and frightened away from what they would like to do. When asked why she thinks women don't have the same professional opportunities as men, Sayeh's (third year Sharif University undergraduate) comments pertain to restrictions she sees within the family unit and the expectation on women to attend to her homemaker duties and the domestic needs of the family regardless of her responsibilities outside the home. She says:

Maybe it's because [men] can put in more work hours. Women face many restrictions. When a woman gets married, she needs to be home by 2:00 or 3:00 PM, and her husband will ask her, "Why haven't you done X or Y chore?" It's as though she hasn't spent part of the day at work outside of the home. But men don't have these restrictions and can work as many hours as they want.

Bitia shares similar sentiments. She also feels that women's traditional roles within the home take precedent, but she seems to feel that it is the perception of women themselves that limits them. She says:

I think at this point in time, women are still just mothers, more confined within their woman role, and maybe at best [they choose to work as]

teachers. In this society, women are afraid to progress because they don't know how to reconcile it with their more traditional roles of mother or wife.

Bitra feels that the outlook of women themselves is limiting in that they do not know how to fulfill the societal obligations placed on them as women *and* be successful outside the home. In other words, rather than disregard these societal expectations, women struggle with (or refrain from) attaining certain aspirations if it does not fit into the mold of the Iranian woman ideal. They may critique this mold, but ultimately, as per Bitra, they are entrapped within it. Katy shares similar frustrations regarding the societal and familiar restrictions placed on her as a woman:

I think our culture has certain traditions that are very limiting. For example if I want to go somewhere, I have to tell my dad where I'm going. Even though they trust me. But the tradition is for a girl to tell her father her whereabouts. Boys have it very easy. But women are really limited.

Despite all the challenges discussed by these women, many made a point to say that the situation for women was improving, that a slow but steady movement toward gender equality on a societal and even political level was palpable, or communicated a can-do grit that they would not allow the odds stacked against them to stand in their way. Many women communicated a sense of hope for the future as it related to the improvement of women's state in the country and/or felt a sense of pride for having gotten as far as they had despite the challenges they faced. For instance, Andisheh, an undergraduate student in Sports Science at Azad University says:

We still don't have a society that can tolerate women in high political office. But even advanced countries started somewhere. I can imagine a female president in Iran some day —it's not outside the realm of possibility. And economically women have made a lot of progress since 10 years ago, but that is because they are also more educated than 10 years ago, too.

Mona also speaks to the overall positive societal shifts she perceives as well as her own resilience within a still-flawed system. An Education PhD student at Al Zahra University, she shares that while there are so many barriers for women in Iran's society, there has been some improvement, and she is optimistic that the situation for women will continue to broaden:

But society's perspective has not been able to take a toll on me. I always had my own individualism. So I didn't care how many obstacles society threw in my path as a woman or what opportunities it could provide me. My slogan in life has always been that I must always be a non-conformist, and I must achieve my goals by having followed the path of my individualism. For this reason, society's perspective has not been able to adversely affect me. I can say I have overcome this perspective. But I must also add that society's perspective is not as closed as we think. It is true that it is a perspective based on gender and gender stereotypes. We can't deny that. But I believe that my efforts as a woman as well as those of other women have been able to overcome society's views and obstacles. That is, it wasn't something that was impossible to overcome. The atmosphere is not one that is completely closed. It is somewhat open, but within its own context. Maybe in European or Western communities the atmosphere is much more open, but it's not as if all roads are blocked for women [here in Iran]. It really depends on women's individual efforts, but the women who undertake such efforts can likely be counted on one hand. Most women might see these obstacles and choose to give up instead of taking up these challenges head on. What I mean is that society has accepted that women should be at home, instead of being an individual moving forward in society...the role of a woman as a wife and mother is the norm in our society and is more acceptable.

According to Mona, then, there are many barriers for women including but not limited to societal perceptions, but that the national climate toward these issues is becoming increasingly more progressive, and that for a committed woman, it is not impossible to persevere and reach one's academic and professional goals. Even among the limitations women face and societal obstacles that they articulated, many such as Mona made a point to say that things are shifting toward the better and/or it was their responsibility as women to continue adding to the momentum toward



change and gender equality. This argument informed the Iranian feminist conceptual framework proposed in this study, namely, that Iranian women can and do successfully penetrate into areas that have historically been restricted to them, and the more of them succeed, the more they make access into these fields and arenas achievable for their fellow women. Mona felt strongly that her role in society was not just to advance her own personal agenda, but to contribute to the overall progress of her society, especially as it related to fellow women. She states:

I think of things as a process. That is, maybe our collective efforts may not have results in one or two or ten years, but these efforts might produce results one hundred years from now. So we have to make our voices as women heard: that we are just as capable, and that society must provide us with opportunities to realize our capabilities. This message will likely not be heard by society now or in ten years, but maybe, by virtue of myself paving the way as a woman, as well as others doing the same, we will see results in one or two generations to come. And in fact we can't say that full equality between men and women exists today in the rest of the world, either. Everywhere there is an effort on behalf of women's rights. I feel that we need to approach this as a process and wait for many movements—for women's rights and all human rights—to have results. For this reason, we must not lose hope or retreat. We must continue to move forward. Sometimes I feel people like me are really going against the tide. We are really going against society's mindset.

It is in large part women's own efforts and successes that have created a far more favorable and welcoming national climate that is more tolerant of them, not just in public arenas, but in the highest tertiary programs and in more prestigious and higher-wage professional positions (and in increasingly larger numbers). In explaining the dynamics at play, one must first begin with the efforts of the many women pushing their way up.

Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University says:

Tradition in Iran says women have to sit at home and do housework and take care of the children. But I think this tradition is almost dispelled today. Women do work outside of the home [now]. As individuals in our society, women make up 50 percent of the population and want to work and be

active. They also want to advance economically in society. Each individual woman should do her best in the position she has, with an eye toward advancing our society as a whole.

Students such as Leila see their actions not only as being in the service of their own futures and that of their family, but also as a greater good that benefits an entire society of women and men alike. Many vividly described the limitations they faced in order to make it as far as they had – from concrete to perceived, as well as their own internal feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Mona describes these feelings virtually in the same breath as her unwavering commitment to reach her goals, almost as if one was flaming the other. She shares the following sentiments immediately after articulating her career aspirations:

In Iran, achieving success does not come easily. And graduate study has had its own limitations and challenges. I can say I really fought to create the opportunities I've had in Iran. And I think part of it is the depression one feels in oneself. The feeling that I'm not being viewed as a human being, but rather a woman – not a woman who is equal in capability to a man – but rather a woman who in most instances is less capable than a man. That's the eyes I'm seen with. Although I'm not saying it's always this way, but this perspective exists and I feel it.

Mona was arguably one of the most articulate and assertive of the subjects interviewed. Her experiences with sexism and gender discrimination (whether explicit, implicit, or perceived) seem to only have strengthened her resolve to defy the odds and succeed in her academic and professional goals, but perhaps more importantly, to act as the champion and supporter for other women. She explains that what is holding women back is a clash of traditional cultural and religious beliefs on the one hand, and more progressive forces on the other. She says:

It seems like there is a paradox between modernity and traditionalism in our country. That is, we are both traditional and also moving toward becoming more modern. So naturally people are experiencing a sort of clash – that is, people who both want to participate in various social, economic, cultural, and political arenas, but are also bogged down and preoccupied with a set of

traditional beliefs. And I think this causes a clash in some people. So even among some women—some educated women, I see the remnants of these traditional beliefs in their minds.

Often times, there was a silver lining to women's depictions of their role in society. Just as Mona shared her resilience and the significant improvements she has seen within her society regarding women's advancement, so do others such as Shirin. Shirin, who is a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University, in discussing her professional aspirations to become a university professor, further elaborates why this is her ideal path. She expresses that she hopes to instill in her students a desire to understand and challenge society from a balanced perspective that does not consider every aspect as negative. She says:

[I would like] to depict Iranian society for [my students]. It's not always grievances and limitations. There are always positive points, and they should also see the negative ones. I want for them to be people who spot problems and go solve them. I don't want them to just accept everything they're told as a given and just follow all the rules. I want to cultivate students to be avid researchers.

Women like Shirin feel that a slow but steady evolution is taking place with respect to Iranian women's roles and place in society, and they see themselves as proudly partaking in that evolution. They have a role to play not just on a personal/familial level, but on a macro level that contributes to the momentum toward gender equality on a national scale.

### **Education as a Default Path**

A common sentiment, especially among women who are cognizant of the reality of the limitations in finding suitable jobs, is that they chose to continue to pursue advanced tertiary degrees because they may not be successful in securing a job. It seems that

continuing their higher education is at times a last resort when they are unable to find employment. In this way, continuing on their higher educational pursuits is a default situation in which many women find themselves, more so than men since they are not favored in the workforce. Two women interviewed stated plainly that pursuing advanced degrees was better than sitting home or “doing nothing.”

The fact that it is so much more difficult for women than men to secure employment is one explanation for why the ratio of women to men in the most advanced degrees are comparable. When men are favored in the work force, they may opt out of pursuing more advanced degrees in favor of making money. But when employment proves to be less of a viable possibility for women, they re-enter university programs and pursue advanced degrees, thereby strengthening their likelihood of securing employment later on and/or buying time until they can try again.

Sayeh, the third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering, described her grueling school schedule and admits that her preference is to stop being a student after obtaining her bachelor’s degree and begin working. But if she is unable to secure a job, she will have to go back to school. She shares:

Most of the students [at Sharif] get so tired because they really put pressure on you here. I myself last term had class from 7:30 AM to 6 PM nonstop. It was exhausting, and when you advance to upperclassman status, it gets even harder. I personally don’t want to study for one or two more years [after getting my bachelor’s]. If I find a really good job, then I won’t bother pursuing a graduate degree, because I’m really tired.

As Sayeh put it, continuing to pursue education is better than doing nothing if there is no profession to be secured. At least this way, they feel they are using their otherwise less structured time more effectively, they are continuing to be active socially and in society, and they are further enhancing their prestige in society.

## **Ethnicity**

Of the students interviewed, two commented on the clear social distinctions that tend to be drawn between Tehran-born-and-raised students and those who traveled to Tehran from other provinces to pursue their studies. The overwhelmingly common practice as depicted by both Tehranian and non-Tehranian students was that students from the capital stick together, and those from other provinces stick together, with neither having an interest in co-mingling. One obvious explanation is the logistical one – that students who do not live permanently in the capital have an opportunity to bond amongst themselves since most reside in dormitories. However, aside from that, there seems to be a clear cultural divide where neither accepts or feels accepted by the other. For example, Sayeh, the third year chemical engineering student at Sharif was from the Sari province and lived in the dorms. She says:

Students in the dorms interact with each other a lot. They're closer to each other. The dorm kids don't really get close to the kids from Tehran because we don't have much to say to them. We have our own issues and they have their own.

Leila, a fifth term undergraduate in the field of Education at Al Zahra University is from Tehran and has similar sentiments about the Tehran/non-Tehran divide.

I think the students who come from provinces view us in a particular way, like we're the "Tehrani"[from Tehran] kids. Actually our class is totally divided between the students from Tehran and those from the provinces. They always say, "You Tehranis have it easy. You Tehranis this. You Tehranis that." That's all they see. They don't see us fitting in with them at all. I think one of the differences is in terms of [financial] means. A lot of them have to travel long distances to come [into the city], and they don't have any means.

While neither student elaborated further on her thoughts on why such a divide exists, and neither really discussed the divide in terms of ethnic diversity, it is clear that a very clear and palpable cultural dynamic exists where each views the other as “the other.”

### **Brain Drain**

Of the 14 women interviewed, 3 mentioned a desire to leave Iran either permanently or temporarily, and/or discussed their friends' and acquaintances' desire to do so. Sayeh, third year Sharif University undergraduate majoring in Chemical Engineering, not only shared her preference to leave Iran, but also talked about two other acquaintances (both men) who were actively working on their visas to leave:

I want to leave Iran and go to Canada because a lot of things are assumed there that are not assumed here. There are so many freedoms. Here, there are such ridiculous restrictions that have to be tolerated because I live in Iran. I am in that category of women who really hate the idea of getting married. I really want to leave Iran, live alone, and continue my studies. But every time I talk to my mom about leaving Iran to go abroad, she says “no.”

Brain drain is a major issue in Iran. Many of the most educated Iranians strive to leave the country permanently, thereby shrinking the country's valued assets. It could be argued that if Iran did a better job of embracing its women into the workforce, it could significantly decrease the overwhelming desire of its brightest minds to flee the country. Furthermore, in an increasingly globalized world where macro trends and the discourse about them permeate across national borders, the pervasive desire to leave the country speaks to a clear awareness of what opportunities exist outside the country and how a more gender equitable environment might look.

## **Across Gender Lines**

One recurring theme in women's conversations made it clear that they are not the only ones with obstacles in the school system and beyond. Societal restrictions, inflation, joblessness, quotas, and a general hopelessness permeate young adults' reality and their impressions of advancement.

It is important to note, for instance, that defaulting into pursuing advanced higher education degrees is likely not only a reality for women, but also a viable second choice for men who cannot secure employment. The quantitative findings of this work suggest that men are not as likely as women to wish to pursue higher education past bachelors degrees, but in reality the economic climate and job market of Iran has been such that for the youth of Iran – women and men alike – securing employment can be a challenging undertaking, particularly when one is not well-connected.

Clearly, education is a high social value across gender lines and generations. For instance, just as women have high expectations of themselves in relation to their higher education, so too do they have an expectation of men, namely their future spouses and later on, their sons. Shirin, a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University describes the significance of education in a way that demonstrates it is infused in every aspect of her aspirations and goals, namely in her future husband's qualifications, with her future children, and even in preparation for having children. That is, she feels it is also important to become educated to undertake the job of parenting.

I'd like to have a family that is well educated. I'd like my husband to be both well educated and cultured. I want him to understand me. I want a small family. I don't want to have kids at all. I really don't like children—I hate them! And if I am to have children, I just want one. And one thing is really important to me: child rearing is a very difficult thing. You know many have kids without even considering this beforehand. In my opinion, if I'm to have

children one day, I will definitely do research on it four or five years beforehand.

Shirin, a third year Educational Management undergraduate at Al Zahra University has the following to say about the importance for a woman to marry an educated man:

Women say they want their husbands to have PhDs—this isn't just something to say--it's what she wants and needs. And the families won't get along if there is a gap in educational culture between the man and woman. It's very hard for a woman to live with an uneducated man.

Clearly, then, the value of education in its own right is not unique to women, but rather, one that permeates across gender, region, religion, and SES.

### **Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative Findings**

As mentioned above, there were many comparable findings between the qualitative and quantitative data collected, as well as some discrepancies, which is summarized in this section. Two of the themes that were mutually supported by both the surveys and the interviews were the overwhelming sense that education is a high value for women and men alike, and that families support higher educational pursuit regardless of gender. Also, some of the motivations for pursuing higher education, such as seeking knowledge in its own right, for the sake of social status and legitimacy, and in order to pursue more advanced degrees, were reasons cited in both surveys and in conversation. The varying responses to parental support/expectation to work after university and the complexity around the question of student's intention to work were also reflected similarly in both the qualitative and quantitative data. In other words, in both sets of data, the issue of work was complex, varied, and diversely addressed.

Some of the clear differences between the qualitative and quantitative data had to do with reasons for pursuing higher education. While finding a spouse and apathy ("there



was nothing better to do”) scored very low statistically, interviewees shared that these were two viable reasons to pursue higher education either for them or for other women. Another difference was the response of women to financial independence; women interviewed frequently discussed it as a strong motivating factor, while the quantitative data found this not to be as important a factor for women (although it was for men).

Another key difference between the qualitative and quantitative data pertained to the type of information collected. While the survey was exhaustive at seven pages, it asked many general questions about personal and family background, what students liked to do in their spare time, how they would rate themselves in a slew of skills as compared with the average student, etc. In the end, a great deal of this collected information was not utilized for the purposes of this study. And what arose out of the interviews – issues around institutional climate, the difficulties of securing one’s desired career, and the challenges and support mechanisms around degree and professional attainment, were not addressed adequately (or at all) within the survey. It therefore became serendipitous that a triangulated method of data collection was employed, where each form of data collection could capture information and nuances that the other did not.

## **CHAPTER VIII:**

### **CONCLUSION**

Despite the obstacles women face both in pursuit of and within the university system, and despite the joblessness and discrimination they face once they graduate with higher education degrees, women, their families, and society as a whole continue to place a high value on tertiary education for women and men alike. Women clearly communicated very strong academic aspirations, and felt supported in working to achieve these goals. However, once within the university setting, and with respect to professional attainment after university completion, as supported by the findings of this work and the national trends, the situation became more complex. The study set out to respond to the below research questions and objectives. A short synopsis of the findings of each of these questions follows each objective.

1. College women's reasons for pursuing higher education compared with those of their male counterparts – The study found that women and men's responses were somewhat similar, with women tending to respond more extremely on the Likert scale, and with a few variations. Both women and men were found to pursue higher education in order to improve their skills in their respective field, and to learn about the things that interest them as their top two reasons. Women's next most important reasons in order of importance was to prepare for pursuing advanced degrees, to be a more cultured person, to increase their social status and to get training in a specific career. Men's next top reasons were to get a better job, to have

higher income, to be a more cultured person, and to prepare for pursuing advanced degrees. The least important for both sexes in the same order was to find a spouse and to get away from family/home environment. Women's and men's responses were statistically significantly different in five dimensions of motivation: to learn about the things that interest them, to prepare for pursuing advanced degrees, to get training for a specific career, to become a better parent, and there was nothing better to do; women's scores averaged higher in all but the last indicator. The qualitative data supported much of the quantitative findings with some exceptions. For instance, women shared that going to university was a better option than sitting at home (similar to "there was nothing better to do"), and while they said it was not a motivating factor for them, they felt most women came to university in search of a spouse.

2. College women's perception of the institutional climate – Generally speaking, women were often apathetic at best about their feelings regarding the university vibe, their fellow colleagues, university policies, quality of instruction and testing, and professors. The obstacles discussed in interviews pertained to both aspects that were unique to their sex as well as more general challenges. The challenges they felt were unique to them as women pertained to societal expectations of them as well as sexist messages both blatant and implied. Some felt peers and professors alike saw them as or even treated them as inferior. With respect to more general obstacles, some interviews said the quality of their respective programs and their professor's style and content were lacking. Still others felt limited by the lack of support with course content, preparation for tests, or in their general aspirations.

3. Women's perceived obstacles and support mechanisms with respect to higher education pursuit and professional attainment – Students overwhelmingly indicated strong familial support (whether spouses, mothers, or fathers) in their pursuit of higher education. Women communicated this strong support even more intensely than men in the survey questionnaires, and the interviews unanimously also indicate this support. The data on familial support to work was more varied for women in both the surveys and the interviews, and the latter provided some insight as to why. For instance, some women shared that their parents worried about the safety of working in certain environments (i.e. among men). Other obstacles they foresaw was the lack of opportunity (due to their sex) to secure leadership positions despite their high academic achievements, and an unrealistic expectation that they fulfill all their traditional responsibilities as women first in addition to a career outside the home.
4. Women's goals and aspirations after university (professional or otherwise) – Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected indicated a very strong desire for women to work outside the home after college. They also conveyed high aspirations for their respective careers. Eighty percent of women (compared with 77 percent of men) surveyed said they intended to work after college. All the women interviewed also fully intended to work. Career aspirations included professorships, becoming the first female ambassador, securing managerial roles, directorships, starting a business, and other leadership-type roles.
5. How women's aspirations interact with familial and societal expectations of them as Iranian women –Women's academic aspirations seem to align with family and

societal norms and expectations. However, while the data shows a vast majority of college women have lofty professional aspirations, the actual number of women in the workforce does not mirror these aspirations. Slow and steady gains have been made since the early years of post-Revolutionary Iran, but at least for now, a significant gap exists between women's professional efforts and desires and their ability to secure these positions. One argument explaining this gap pertains to unemployment rates that exacerbate a trend to select male candidates over women. Another explanation could be that when women are faced with the less prestigious and desirable positions despite their qualifications, they self select to not enter the workforce rather than take a less-than-satisfactory position. In fact, in some cases it is generally deemed less desirable and actually lessens a woman's social status to work in certain less prestigious positions than to stay at home.

Finally, the data collected addressed the following two objectives of this study that are more conceptual in nature:

1. Whether college-going women's goals and actions align or deviate from a national/societal "Muslim Woman Ideal" -- This study argues that Iran's women effectively and strategically "toe the line" between alignment and deviation of societal norms and expectations of them as women. They have learned to work within an oppressive system while gently pushing the envelope in their favor. An explicit rejection of these national norms and expectations is risky at best and has the potential to earn women significant punishment.
2. Whether a newly articulated theoretical framework could better capture the dynamics of these women within the Iranian context – A new Iranian feminist

theoretical framework is proposed that takes into account the call from Iran's feminist researchers to take on a more holistic approach when considering Iranian college women's perceptions and aspirations. The significant role and power of women themselves, and particularly the outlying women who have succeeded in an inherently unfair system, must first be taken into account. Next, the framework proposes that societal expectations, national policies, economic climate, university climate, globalization, the family unit, and women's perceptions of all these factors need to be included in painting a more complete conceptual picture. University women's motivations and aspirations, then, are informed, influenced, and/or impacted by the limits and expectations they face on a macro/societal level; by the policies and laws that are unique to their sex and that confine them to second-class citizenship status; by the state of mass unemployment and joblessness that in turn favors men in the work force; by transnational discourse related to the rights of and equality for women; by the internal dynamics of their families; and of their perceptions of all of the above. This conceptual framework takes women's entire context into account to shed light on the national trends and the findings of this work.

One of the greatest advantages to having a highly educated female population in a nation like Iran is the increasing momentum toward change and potential for greater gender equity. Furthermore, because educational attainment and familial support of academic aspirations is not gender-specific, is not limited to the educated class, is not region-specific, or even class-specific, and is inclusive of ethnic minorities, change has the

potential of being far-reaching and profound, and indeed, has already begun to create shifts in attitudes and social and political practices. Shaditalab (2005) writes,

The interaction between education and change in the system of cultural norms and values is observable, especially in the share of girls' participation at universities from the most economically disadvantaged provinces and far from their home towns. In fact, the education that once was accessible for a small elite group, now has spread throughout Iran. The gap between elite and traditional women is declining due to the increasing trend of educated women, the decreasing share of housewives, and the dispersal of university students though out country and from different economic and cultural backgrounds. (pp. 53- 54).

The overwhelming presence and support of women in education will play a major role in bridging the gap between academic attainment and occupational attainment in Iran. Furthermore, tapping into the enthusiasm, drive, and intellect of 50 percent of the population would not only be advantageous for women, but for the betterment and advancement of a nation as a whole. Education has already played a significant role in better equalizing the playing field among socio-economic class and across regions, and while gender is far more controversial and political in a country like Iran, education can act as the activation energy that sparks the country toward a more desirable equilibrium.

On a more personal note, had I had the hindsight I have now at completion, I would have taken some different approaches to how I gathered my data. With respect to the survey questionnaire, I would have fine-tuned it to be more specific to education and professional aspiration and eliminated some of the questions that were more general. When I went into the study, I wanted to collect information about virtually everything, not wanting to limit myself to predetermined notions of what I thought I was looking for. However, that approach in turn produced a great deal of data I ultimately did not use, and left me curious to know more about questions that were at times only superficially

addressed. For instance, I would have liked for the survey to have also asked questions about the institutional climate, as well as the challenges, obstacles, and support mechanisms faced by college-goers in their pursuits. I would have also liked to know more about what specific plans women had (as in, what steps they planned to take) to achieve their lofty professional aspirations. Similarly, while a great deal of rich and insightful information was shared by women during interviews, at times I was unsure about how to delve more deeply or have them say more about a topic. Perhaps it was the language barrier (I am conversationally fluent, but at times lacked the vocabulary I needed to truly get to the heart of a matter.), but also, had I set up more than one interview with every subject, it would have helped build rapport and trust and possibly allowed for more disclosure.

This research topic would greatly benefit from more studies focusing on the gap between professional aspiration and professional attainment. I believe qualitative approaches to data collection would be more informative and rich, perhaps because by their very nature, they allow subjects to explore nuances and complexities that surveys simply can't. I would also be interested to interview the "outlier women" who do break through barriers to achieve their career goals to see how they articulate the challenges and support mechanisms they faced along the way. Further research could also be done on the institutional climate itself as a means of exploring areas that could better support women's aspirations.

This study was a deeply intimate journey for me as an Iranian women who left the country at three years old before ever entering Iran's education system. In some ways, sitting with these women and hearing their stories felt like I was experiencing what my



story would have been had my family and I not fled the country. I often found myself reflecting where I might be in my educational or career pursuits had we chosen to stay. I was born six months after the start of the Iran/Iraq war, and I have no doubt that had I grown up in Iran, the circumstances and environment would have molded me into a different person entirely, and quite possibly into a very different life course. During my data collection, what was most difficult to bear witness to was the intensity of these college women's desires coupled with the stark knowledge that they would never have equal and fair opportunity to access the highest echelons of their aspirations. The select few who would break through the barriers would be defying the odds and social conventions, making significant sacrifices, and working exponentially harder to achieve the same goals as their male counterparts. Going into this study, I knew these college-going women would be ambitious, but I was surprised at how strongly they felt about pursuing a career, and how nearly impossible it felt for them to secure the jobs they truly wanted.

One constant that seems to cut through all Iranian diaspora is the overwhelming value placed on education. The value for working persistently toward one's dreams was the same within me as what I saw reflected at me through each of the women with which I interacted, namely, the drive to pursue education (and a career) and the commitment to see it through as far as it will take you.

## CHAPTER IX:

### APPENDICES

#### Appendix A: Interview Questions

##### General/Personal

How do you spend your free time?

*Cheguneh vaghteh azadetun ra migozaranid?*

Where do you hope to be/how do you see yourself/what do you hope to be doing in five years? Ten years?

*Deletun mikhast dar cheh mogheyati budid panj sal az hala? Dah sal az hala?*

What do you envision your life will be like with respect to work? Family? Locale?

*Zendegiyeh khod ra cheguneh tasavor mikonin az nazareh kar? Khanehvadeh? Jayeh zendegi?*

Outside of school, what other responsibilities, if any, do you have?

*Bejod darss va karhayi keh be daneshgah marbut misheh, cheh massuliyat-hayi darid?*

Do you work? Where? Do you enjoy what you do?

*Kar mikonid? Koja? Az karetun razi hastid?*

What does it mean to you to be successful? How do you define success?

*Beh nazareh shoma, movafagh budan chist? Barayeh shoma movafagh shodan cheh mani'I mideh?*

##### The Institution

How do you like your college/university? Describe a typical day at college.

*Az daneshgahetun razi hastid? Az cheh lafaz razi hastid/nistid? Yek ruzeh mamool dar daneshgah ra Tossif konid.*

How do you like being a student? Describe being a student in Iran to a foreigner like me.

*Az daneshju budan razi hastid? Barayeh mani keh az kharej amadam va ashna'ii nadaram Daneshju budan dar Iran ra tossif konid.*

What do you most enjoy about college? What do you least enjoy?

If there was a way to change anything about college, what would it be and why?

*Agar mitavanestid chizi ra dar barehyeh daneshgahetun avaz konid, chi ra avaz mikardid va chera?*

Do you go to an all-girls or co-ed college? What is it like going to a/n [all-girl/co-ed] college? Do you prefer being at [all-girl/co-ed]? Why?  
*Daneshgaheh shoma zananast ya mard-va-zan baham? In no daneshgah raftan chetoriyeh? Tarjih midid in no daneshgah beravid? Chera?*

What is the most difficult thing about being a college student? How do you get through this difficulty?  
*Beh nazareh shoma, sakhttarin chizeh daneshju budan chist? Cheguneh in sakhtiha ra migozaranid?*

### **Professors**

What are your professors like?  
*Ostadhayetan ra tossif konid. Chetoriand?*

What kind of relationships do you have with your professors? Who is/are your favorite(s)? Why?  
*Cheh no rabete'i ba ostadhayetan darid? Kodama z ostadhayetan ra az hameh bishtar dust darid? Chera? Beh nazareh shoma cheh tip ostad az har ostadi behtareh?*

### **Colleagues**

What are your relationships with fellow students like? Do you spend time outside of school together? What do you do? (Hang out? Study together? Support mechanisms? etc.)  
*Cheh no rabete'i ba daneshjuyaneh digar darid? Birun as daneshgah ham digar ra mibinid? Ba ham chekar mikonid? (raft-o-amad, dars, hemayat/poshtibani az ham?)*

### **Family**

What does your family want for you? How do they feel about your current path?  
*Khanehvadehyeh shom barayetan chi mikhahand? Dar barehyeh massireh zendegitun chi fekr mikonand?*

### **Education**

How do you like your studies?  
*Reshteyeh khod ra dust darid? Chera/Chera na?*

How did you get to be in your field/major?  
*Cheguneh beh in reshteh resided?*

Why did you choose to continue your education after your diploma? (What inspired you to pursue higher education?)

*Chera darsetan ra ba'd az gereftaneh diplom edameh dadid?*

Will you continue your studies through a professional degree? Why or why not?

*Barnamatun ba'd az gereftaneh licensetun chist? Darsetan ra edameh midehid?*

*Chera/Chera na?*

Will your college education help you reach your personal goals? How?

*Fekr mikonid licensetun beh ressidan beh hadafhayetun komak mikonad? Cheguneh?*

## **Society**

Describe Iranian society. What do you think are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? How do these strengths and weaknesses affect you on a personal level? How do they affect you as a woman? How might they affect your future?

*Jame'eyeh Iran ra tossif konid. Beh nazareh shoma, khubihayash chiyān? Noktehayeh za'fash chiyān? In khubiha va sakhtiha cheh tahsiri ruyeh shoma mizarand? Cheh tahsiri ruyeh shoma beh onvaneh yek zan mizarand? Va cheh tahsiri ruyeh ayandehyeh shoma mizarand?*

## **Work/Career**

Do you hope/plan to work after college? What type of job would be ideal for you after you graduate?

*Ba'd az tamam kardaneh darsetan, barnamehyeh kar kardan darid? Cheh no kar barayeh shoma eedeal ast?*

## Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire (English)

- 1) Birth date
- 2) Gender
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
- 3) Marital status
  - a. Single
  - b. Married
  - c. Divorced, separated, or widowed
- 4) Number of children/dependents
- 5) University you are attending
- 6) What is your religious preference?
  - a. Christian
  - b. Jewish
  - c. Shiite Muslim
  - d. Sunni Muslim
  - e. Zoroastrian
  - f. Other
- 7) Enrollment status
  - a. Full-time
  - b. Part-time/Evening
- 8) Degree you are currently obtaining
- 9) Term in school
- 10) Field of study
- 11) Approximately how many kilometers is this university from your permanent address?
- 12) Where do you live while attending college?
  - a. Permanent Address
  - b. Dormitory
  - c. With relatives

- d. With friends
- e. Other

13) What was your average high school grade?

- a. 20-18
- b. 15-17
- c. 13-14
- d. 12 -10
- e. Below 10

14) If you have received your Bachelor's degree and are attaining your Master's or Doctoral degree, what was your average undergraduate grade?

- a. 20-18
- b. 15-17
- c. 13-14
- d. 12 -10
- e. Below 10

15) What was your best *Koncour* score?

16) Is this university your:

- a. First choice?
- b. Second choice?
- c. Third choice?
- d. Less than third choice?

17) What is your father's occupation?

- a. occupation\_\_\_\_\_
- b. He does not work outside the home.
- c. He is deceased/does not live with us.

18) What is your mother's occupation?

- a. occupation\_\_\_\_\_
- b. She does not work outside the home.
- c. She is deceased/does not live with us.

19) What was your parents' total monthly income (approximately)?

20) What is the highest level of education obtained by your mother

- a. Primary school or less

- b. Some or all of middle school
- c. Some High school
- d. High school graduate
- e. Some college
- f. College degree
- g. Some graduate school
- h. Graduate degree

21) What is the highest level of education obtained by your father

- a. *Dabestan* or less
- b. Some or all of *Raynama'i*
- c. Some High school
- d. High school graduate
- e. Some college
- f. College degree
- g. Some graduate school
- h. Graduate degree

22) What is the highest academic degree you intend to obtain?

- a. Associate degree
- b. Bachelor's degree
- c. Master's degree
- d. Doctoral degree
- e. Post Doctoral

23) What is your ethnic background?

24) For the activities below, please indicate which ones you did during the past year and what frequency.

Frequently/Occasionally/Not at all

- Attended a religious service
- Was bored in class
- Tutored another student for free
- Tutored another student for money
- Discussed politics
- Studied with other students
- Was a guest in a teacher's home
- Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do
- Felt depressed
- Discussed religion
- Performed volunteer work
- Played a musical instrument

Asked teacher for help or advice outside of class  
Overslept and missed class or appointment  
Discussed social issues  
Came late to class  
Visited an art gallery or museum  
Communicated via email  
Used the internet for research or homework  
Communicated via Instant Messaging  
Traveled within Iran  
Traveled outside of Iran  
Read a book for pleasure  
Read the newspaper  
Read a religious text  
Watched television  
Prayed  
Worked for pay

25) In deciding to go to college, how important to you was each of the following reasons? (Mark one answer for each possible reason)

(scale of 1-5) Very important/Somewhat important/Not important

My parents wanted me to go  
A mentor/role model encouraged me to go/had a positive effect on me  
I could not find a job  
I wanted to get away from home  
To be able to meet my future spouse  
To be able to get a better job  
To improve my skills in my field of study  
To increase my social status  
To become a better parent  
To make me a more cultured person  
To be able to make more money  
To learn more about things that interest me  
To prepare myself for higher educational degrees  
To get training for a specific career  
There was nothing better to do

Other: (please fill in if there are other reasons)

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26) Rate yourself on each of the following traits as compared with the average person your age.



Highest 10%/Above Average/Average/Below Average/Lowest 10%

Academic ability  
Artistic ability  
Computer skills  
Cooperativeness  
Creativity  
Drive to achieve  
Emotional health  
Physical health  
Leadership ability  
Mathematical ability  
Persistence  
Popularity  
Ability to deal well with children  
Public speaking ability  
Religiousness  
Self confidence (intellectual)  
Self confidence (social)  
Self understanding  
Spirituality  
Understanding of others  
Understanding of society  
Writing ability

27) What is your probable career occupation?

a. I plan to work outside the home. Here are some possibilities:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. I plan to not work and raise a family.

c. I don't know.

28) Please mark one response for each row.

Disagree strongly/Disagree somewhat/neutral/Agree somewhat/Agree strongly

Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in our society.

The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.

The pursuit of knowledge is a great reward

The pursuit of religious understanding is a great reward

Having a family is a great reward

Having financial security is a great reward  
I am satisfied with my current path in life.  
I enjoy my field of study.  
My parents support my educational pursuits  
My parents support my career pursuits  
I enjoy being a student  
It has been difficult to finance my education  
I am pleased with the quality of formal education I have obtained in college  
I am pleased with the quality of formal education I obtained prior to college  
My family expects me to work after completing my education

29) During the past year, how much time compared to an average student did you spend during a typical week doing the following activities?

Never/Below average/Average/Above average/Very Frequently

Studying/homework  
Socializing with friends  
Spending time with family  
Exercise/Sports  
Partying  
Working (for pay)  
Volunteer work  
Watching TV or movies  
Housework  
Childcare  
Playing video/computer games  
Prayer/meditation  
Taking other classes for pleasure (i.e. dance, language, instrument, religious)

30) Please indicate the importance to you personally of each of the following

Not important/Somewhat important/Neutral/Very important/Essential

Becoming an authority or accomplished in my field  
Influencing the political structure  
Influencing social values  
Helping others who are in difficulty  
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life  
Integrating spirituality into my life  
Improving my understanding of other countries and cultures

Please add any comments or clarifications here.

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire (Farsi)

پرسش نامه دانشجویان

1. سال تولد: \_\_\_\_\_ 13
2. جنسیت  
 زن  
 مرد
3. وضعیت تاهل  
 مجرد  
 متاهل  
 مطلقه، متارکه، بیوه
4. نوع قومیت: \_\_\_\_\_
5. تعداد بچه ها / وا بستگان (کودک): \_\_\_\_\_
6. دین  
 اسلام/شیعه  
 اسلام/سنی  
 مسیحی  
 یهودی  
 زرتشتی  
 غیره
7. دانشگاهی که در حال حاضر تحصیل می کنید: \_\_\_\_\_
8. وضعیت تحصیل  
 تمام وقت  
 پاره وقت/شبانه
9. مقطع تحصیلی  
 فوق دیپلم  
 کارشناسی  
 کارشناسی ارشد  
 دکترا  
 فوق دکترا
10. تعداد نیم سال (ترم) گذرانده شده: \_\_\_\_\_ ترم
11. رشته تحصیلی: \_\_\_\_\_
12. فاصله محل اقامت تا محل تحصیل (کیلومتر): \_\_\_\_\_ حدوداً کیلومتر
13. محل اقامت در حین تحصیل

- اقامتگاه دائمی
- خوابگاه
- منزل بستگان
- منزل دوستان/با دوستان
- غیره

**14. معدل تحصیلی دوران دبیرستان**

- 17 تا 20
- 15 تا 17
- 13 تا 15
- 11 تا 13
- 11 به پایین

**15. معدل مدرک کارشناسی**

- 17 تا 20
- 15 تا 17
- 13 تا 15
- 13 به پایین
- نا تمام

**16. رتبه قبولی کنکور: \_\_\_\_\_**

**17. رشته و محلی که اکنون در آن مشغول به تحصیل می باشید چندمین انتخاب شما در مرحله پذیرش بوده است؟**

- انتخاب اول
- انتخاب دوم
- انتخاب سوم
- انتخاب کمتر از سوم

**18. شغل پدر**

- بله : نوع شغل \_\_\_\_\_
- خیر/خانه دار
- فوت شده/ از خانواده جدا شده است

**19. شغل مادر**

- بله : نوع شغل \_\_\_\_\_
- خیر/خانه دار
- فوت شده/جدا از خانواده زندگی می کند

**20. آخرین مدرک تحصیلی پدر**

- فاقد مدرک
- تحصیلات اولیه
- دیپلم
- فوق دیپلم
- کارشناسی
- کارشناسی ارشد
- دکترا

21. آخرین مدرک تحصیلی مادر

- فاقد مدرک
- تحصیلات اولیه
- دیپلم
- فوق دیپلم
- کارشناسی
- کارشناسی ارشد
- دکترا

22. سطح درآمد متوسط ماهانه خانواده

- (پدر و مادر) \_\_\_\_\_
- (همسر) \_\_\_\_\_

23. بالاترین سطح تحصیلی که خواهان اخذ آن هستید چیست؟

- فوق دیپلم
- کارشناسی
- کارشناسی ارشد
- دکترا
- فوق دکترا

24. به موارد زیر با توجه به رده بندی داده شده پاسخ دهید.

همیشه	اغلب اوقات	گاهی	ندرت به	هیچ وقت	
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> کلاس خسته کننده است.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> تدریس داوطلبانه می کنم.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> تدریس خصوصی می کنم.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> در مورد مسائل سیاسی بحث می کنم.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> در مراسم مذهبی شرکت می کنم.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> با دیگر دانشجویان مطالعه می کنم.
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="radio"/> با استاد خود رفت و آمد دارم.

- |   |   |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ به دلیل مسئولیت زیاد دچار استرس شده ام.                        |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ احساس افسردگی می کنم/کرده ام.                                  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ در مورد مسائل مذهبی بحث می کنم.                                |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ در مورد مسائل اجتماعی بحث می کنم.                              |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ کارهای داوطلبانه (بدون درآمد) انجام می دهم.                    |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ ساز می زنم.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ خارج از کلاس از استاد خود راهنمایی می گیرم.                    |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ به دلیل خواب ماندن، از کلاس یا قرار ملاقات خود جا می مانم.     |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ در کلاس دیر حاضر می شوم.                                       |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ به موزه یا فرهنگسرا و یا نمایشگاه های هنری می روم.             |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ به کافی شاپ/ coffee shop می روم.                               |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ به وسیله نامه الکترونیکی/e-mail با دیگران ارتباط دارم.         |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ از اینترنت برای تحقیقات یا انجام تکالیف خود استفاده می کنم.    |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ از اینترنت برای تفریح استفاده می کنم.                          |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ با دیگران از طریق chat room ارتباط دارم.                       |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ مسافرت های داخلی می روم.                                       |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ مسافرت های خارج از کشور می روم.                                |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ کتاب های غیر درسی مطالعه می کنم.                               |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ روزنامه می خوانم.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ کتاب های مذهبی می خوانم (قرآن/انجیل/تورات/اوستا/مفاتیح و....). |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ تلویزیون نگاه می کنم.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ دعا می کنم.  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ○ کاری که بابت آن مزد دریافت کنم دارم.                           |

25. عوامل موثر در تصمیم گیری شما برای ادامه تحصیل درجه تاثیر

- | اصلاً |   |   | زیاد |   |                                      |
|-------|---|---|------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ خواست خانواده                      |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ تاثیر یک مربی/ معلم                |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ نبود شغل                           |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ دور بودن از محیط خانواده           |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ برای پیدا کردن زوج مناسب           |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ برای داشتن کار بهتر                |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ مقدمه ای برای مستقل شدن            |
| 1     | 2 | 3 | 4    | 5 | ○ برای تقویت توانایی ها و دانش تخصصی |

1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> راهی که به هر حال باید طی می کردم			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> برای بالا بردن شخصیت اجتماعی			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> برای اینکه پدر/مادر بهتری باشم			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> برای داشتن فرهنگ بالاتر			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> برای اینکه درآمد بالاتری داشته باشم			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> برای کسب دانش و اطلاعات مورد علاقه ام			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کسب پایه مناسب برای ادامه تحصیلات دانشگاهی			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کسب مهارت مناسب برای انجام یک کار خاص			
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کار بهتری برای انجام دادن نداشتم			
					<input type="radio"/> اگر دلیل دیگری در نظر دارید شرح دهید			
				5	4	3	2	1
				5	4	3	2	1
				5	4	3	2	1

26. رده خود را در مقایسه با متوسط جامعه (همسالان) خود در رابطه با سوالات زیر بر اساس رده بندی مشخص

سطح بالایی جامعه	بالاتر از متوسط	متوسط	پایین تر از متوسط	سطح پایین جامعه	
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی های علمی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی های هنری
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> دانش استفاده از رایانه
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> انجام کار تیمی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> خلاقیت
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> شوق کسب موفقیت
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> سلامتی روانی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> سلامتی جسمی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی رهبری
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> مهارت ریاضی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> ثبات قدم
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> محبوبیت
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی ارتباط با کودکان
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی سخنرانی در مجامع عمومی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> مذهبی بودن
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> اعتماد به نفس علمی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> اعتماد به نفس اجتماع
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> خود شناسی
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> معنویت

1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> درک دیگران
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> درک اجتماع
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> توانایی های نوشتاری

27. شغل احتمالی که در نظر دارید چیست؟

برنامه کار کردن دارم. مورد/موارد زیر را در نظر دارم.

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قصد کار کردن ندارم و می خواهم صرفاً تشکیل خانواده بدهم.

نمی دانم.

28. لطفاً مطابق رده بندی مشخص شده پاسخ موارد زیر را بدهید.

کاملاً مخالفم	تقریباً مخالفم	بی طرف هستم	تقریباً موافقم	کاملاً موافقم	
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> واقعیت این است که کسی توانایی تغییر جامعه را ندارد.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> بهتر است خانم های متأهل بیشترین زمان خود را در خانه بگذرانند.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> دانش، برای من به خودی خود بسیار مهم است.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> درک دین، برای من بسیار با مهم است.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> داشتن خانواده (همسر و کودک) برای من بسیار مهم است.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> داشتن موقعیت مالی سطح بالا برای من بسیار ارزشمند است.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> وضعیت کنونی زندگی ام مرا قانع می کند.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> از رشته تحصیلی ام لذت می برم.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> پدر و مادرم از ادامه تحصیل ام حمایت می کنند.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> از دانشجوی بودن لذت می برم.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> تامین مالی برای ادامه تحصیل ام دشوار بوده است.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> از کیفیت آموزشی دانشگاه ام بسیار راضی هستم.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> از کیفیت آموزشی دوران دبیرستان ام بسیار راضی هستم.
					<input type="radio"/> خانواده ام از من انتظار کار کردن دارند.
1	2	3	4	5	• پدر و مادر
1	2	3	4	5	• همسر

29. سال گذشته در مقایسه با یک دانشجوی متوسط برای فعالیت های زیر چه میزان وقت صرف کرده اید؟

اصلاً	کمتر از حد معمول	در حد معمول	بیشتر از حد معمول	خیلی زیاد	
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> درس خواندن
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> ارتباط با دوستان
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> ارتباط با خانواده
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> ورزش
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> مهمانی رفتن



1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کار به منظور داشتن درآمد
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کار داوطلبانه
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> خرید
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> تماشای تلویزیون/فیلم
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> انجام کار خانه
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> نگهداری از بچه ها
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> بازی های رایانه ای
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> دعا کردن/عبادت/مراقبه
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> رفتن به کلاس های متفرقه(رقص، موسیقی، زبان،.....)

30. لطفاً مشخص کنید از موارد زیر هر کدام تا چه حد برای شما اهمیت دارند.

فقد اهمیت	تا حدی مهم	بی اثر	خیلی مهم	ضروری	
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کسب درجه اعتبار بالا در رشته تحصیلی/کاری.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> تاثیر گذاری در ساختار های سیاسی.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> تاثیر گذاری در ارزش های اجتماعی.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> کمک به کسانی که دچار مشکل هستند.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> داشتن فلسفه مناسب برای زندگی.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> داشتن معنویت در زندگی.
1	2	3	4	5	<input type="radio"/> بالا بردن سطح اطلاعات ام از دیگر کشورها و فرهنگ ها.

خواهشمند است اگر پیشنهاد و یا نظری دارید بنویسید.

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## CHAPTER X:

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