The Impact of Migration on Marital Relationships

(Gender Roles, Marital Power, Sexual and Intimate Relations)

Among Iranian Couples in London

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Abstract

In this study, I investigate the changes in marital relationships among Iranian immigrant couples in the United Kingdom. The transformation of attitudes, expectations, and practices regarding immigrants' sexual lives is explored by applying the assimilation interpretative framework and social-constructionist perspective on gender relations. The former recognises a multipath process and different patterns of immigrants' integration into the host British society. The latter conceives of gender roles, intimacy, and sexuality as social phenomena reshaped by the social circumstances of people's lives in a new diasporic setting. The study is based on 36 semi-structured interviews conducted with married and divorced Iranian men (15) and women (21) in London. As the findings of this study reveal, acculturation in relation to gender relations has affected the majority of Iranian immigrants in all socioeconomic strata and both genders. During their life in the UK, most of them have experienced significant changes in the division of roles in their families, the distribution of decision-making power and their understandings and practices of intimate and sexual relations, although the forms of these transformations differ by gender and class position. The study also shows how traditional religious immigrants, especially women, have been much more affected by the challenges of new/different gender and sexual norms and expectations encountered in the host society, compared with non or less religious, modern liberal couples who arrived in the United Kingdom with a considerable degree of advanced socialisation into modern/Western notions of gender roles and relations. Men, on the other hand, have experienced more trauma and alienation regarding their masculinity, stemming from the de-traditionalisation of gender relations as the outcome of couples' transplantation to the UK, which in some cases leads to separation or divorce.

Keywords: Iranians, Migration, Assimilation, Gender Relations, Marital Power, Intimacy, Sexuality

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Immigration from non-Western countries, particularly from Asia and the Middle East, such as Iran, has been on the rise since the beginning of the 21st century (Shakib, 2019). Iranian immigrants have formed substantial populations in European countries, including Germany, England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and France (Honari et al, 2017). The migration experiences of these immigrants and the formation of their gender identities in relation to modern sociocultural norms and values have become significant topics of discussion (Mehdizadeh, 2021; Roodsaz and Jansen, 2019).

Immigration is not just a geographical displacement but also a complex social phenomenon that affects various aspects of life, including practices, values, lifestyles, and beliefs (Nevins, 2022; Al-Hawdrawi, 2017; Shishehgar et al, 2015). Consequently, understanding how immigrants' perspectives on gender and sexual values evolve after immigration is a challenging task (Karimi, 2020; Roder, 2014). Research has shown that immigration can create obstacles and complications within immigrant families, particularly affecting the stability of marital relationships. Marital conflicts and divorces have been associated with the transformation of gender roles and relations in diasporic contexts and are often related to economic struggles and domestic violence (Darvishpour, 2002; Ho, 2006; Meares, 2010; Zhou, 2000; Cooke, 2007; Da, 2003; Lee et al, 2002; Yu, 2006, 2011, 2015; Shirpak et al, 2011; Wei, 2017; Zhou, 2012; Waters, 2010; Caarls and Mazzucato, 2015; Zhou et al, 2022; Umubyeyi, 2019; Chang, 2004; Donkor, 2013; Guru, 2009; Molina and Abel, 2010). Factors such as changes in occupational status, income, social support, gender roles, intimate relations, power distribution, and lifestyle contribute to marital concerns in the new cultural context (Andersson et al, 2015; Ben-David and Lavee, 1994; Caarls and Mazzucato, 2015; Darvishpour, 2002; Min, 2001; Shirpak et al, 2011; Zhou, 2012; Zhou et al, 2022). Moreover, the cultural gaps and interruptions experienced post-migration have an impact on immigrant couples' relationships and their responses to these gaps, often leading to conflicts (Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021). The experiences of male and female immigrants within the same family can differ significantly, illustrating a gendered process (Farahani, 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992).

Previous studies on gender in the Middle East and the Middle Eastern diaspora have predominantly focused on women, neglecting the experiences of men and couples (Bauer,

2000; Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, 2000; Khosravi, 2009). Consequently, there is a lack of research examining partners together, the construction of masculinity, and male and female sexuality within Middle Eastern contexts and in relation to immigration (Farahani, 2012). However, in Western intellectual discourse, the social construction of masculinity has gained significant attention over the past two decades. These discussions have been deeply ingrained with contrasts between Orientalist perceptions of Middle Eastern men as nationalist heroes and repressive or overly protective figures and Western ideals of gender equality (Mehdizadeh, 2021).

Therefore, cross-border migration as a global social phenomenon leads to complex changes in the relationships between individuals and social groups, including shifts in the dynamics between men and women. To gain a better understanding of couples' experiences after immigration, it is crucial to consider the diverse characteristics of the migration process that influence their marital relationships.

To provide some background on this topic, the following section examines Iranian society (including the role of women, education, and employment) and the UK (in terms of Iranian diaspora) in relation to gender relations and emigration. To provide the context of the study for the reader, the family structure and gender relationships in Iran will be discussed. Further, the evolution and alteration of gender roles in Iran across the pre-modern and modern periods, the Islamic Revolution, and the past two decades will be discussed, with emphasis on gender norms and sexual acts. The second sub-section covers the emigration history to the United Kingdom from Iran in a concise manner. This is followed by a discussion of the purpose of the research and its questions, an introduction to its conceptual framework, and an overview of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Context of Leaving: A Brief History of Gender Relations and Waves of Emigration

To further the knowledge and enrich the literature on Iranian immigrants residing in the UK, this section presents a detailed discussion of the history of sociocultural and religious changes, sex and gender roles over the last 40 years. The current section offers contextual information and is divided into two parts. The first part explains the conventional as well as the novel patterns emerging in gender roles and relations over time, in addition to changes in attitudes toward sex and behaviour that have taken place due to modernisation and exposure to electronic media such as the internet and social networks. This is followed by a

review of the volume, time, and socio-demographic composition of the emigrants from Iran to the UK.

1.2.1 Gender and Sexual Relations: Tradition and Change

This part offers a concise historical review of all the gender-related transformations and sexual relations in Iran across different time periods such as the pre-modern and modern periods, the period following the Islamic Revolution, and the period within the past 20 years. The literature available on sexuality changes has been limited to provide a deep understanding of all the transformations. This part has been segregated into a total of four phases as mentioned considering the remarkable modifications in Iranian gender relations (male and female gender roles and sexual relations), and the social conditions for women.

During the Qajar era (1794-1925), there had been a rigidly hierarchical social order, with a clearly defined class, ethnic and religious structure and an entrenched pattern of family obligations. Religious beliefs provide the basis for shared values (Afary, 2009: 6). Traditionally, in Iran, the gender relations of both sexes have been determined based on the religious and cultural ideology that men and women carry specific responsibilities in their respective public and private areas of life attributable to the differences in their creation. At the time, legally authorised heterosexual relationships were typically comprised of three types: i) slave concubinage; ii) temporary marriage or 'sigheh'; and iii) formal marriage or 'nekah' (Afary, 2009: 5). In this period, physical intimacy was pursued, rather cautiously and in secret, only in the bedroom shared by the couple as well as the children, who often were a source of interruption to intimate acts. Women were burdened with several pregnancies due to a lack of contraception and relatively high infant mortality rates. Therefore, for a woman, her connection to eroticism as well as the mutual engagement of the couple in the relationship is hindered by the norms set by society and is nudged towards gaining authority through motherhood and familial responsibilities. However, it is an oversight to believe that women held an inactive position (Afary,2009). By choosing to offer 'sexual services', they exercised power in their relationships with their partners (Shahidian, 1999: 196). Wives controlled the household and their children by holding the capacity to either grant or refuse favours. As per Afary (2009), although wives were obligated to succumb to the sexual intimacy demands of their partners, they had the choice not to participate in the activity. According to Shahidian (1999: 196), however, this power "was limited in a system that regarded sex as a marital duty and assumed women as men's property and objects of pleasure".

Modernisation was evident in Iran in the late 1930s and soon turned into the widespread transformation of lifestyle, particularly in the middle and upper echelons of society in the Reza Shah era. However, it is to be noted that compared to the European societies these changes were more rapid and dramatic in the context of social sex relations with respect to the gender relations observed in the pre-Islamic Revolution period in 1979 (Afary, 2009).

In the 1950s and 1960s, although marriages were encouraged only with parental approval, there was an increase in the active participation of younger people in deciding their partners. This was further promoted owing to the decline in the power of extended family members over personal decisions (Afary, 2009: 10). In addition, the existing norm of formal polygamy received less support as it involved multiple female partners 'aqdi', thereby resulting in the emergence of heterosexual monogamy (Afary, 2009: 9–10).

Simultaneously, women had more opportunities to explore the external world brought on by their changing social roles and an increase in employment. The establishment of youth cultural houses (khanehye javanan), learning opportunities for foreign languages, places of entertainment such as cinema theatres, discos, and commercial spaces such as restaurants, led to a rapid increase in unrestrained interactions among the younger generations, particularly between males and females.

Furthermore, "a dominant trend in the sociocultural development of Iran under the Pahlavis, especially Mohammad Reza Shah, was the increasing involvement of sex and the market" (Shahidian, 1999: 198). There has been a rise in the vivid portrayal of sexuality in the media with a special focus on 'interpersonal relationships' and 'sex' (Shahidian, 1999: 198), with Shahidian stating that "The changes in gender roles influenced women's assertiveness and invited revisions in sexual beliefs: sexuality, even female sexuality, gained implicit and explicit recognition" (200).

The modern societal aspects of consumer society were majorly adopted by women from the middle and upper classes and those who held education from universities and who were employed. These women chose their partners before entering the institution of marriage. In the event of a divorce, they were allowed to request child custody which was often granted by courts (Afary, 2009). In fact, "the pre-revolutionary developments in gender and sexual relations, which is characterised as a sexual crisis, created a paradoxical situation in Iranian society" (Shahidian, 1999: 200). By the middle of the 20th century, Iran's transformation

into a two cultures nation was unprecedented and the conservative and modern classes were incomprehensible to each other (Keddie, 2003: 102).

Upon the Islamic Revolution in the year 1979, “Iranian laws and social customs were intricately interwoven with the Sharia or Islamic law” (Arasteh, 1964: 190). The government adopted the previous regressive policies and re-established the Shari’a law based on Islamic doctrine (Hasib, 2004). To that end, the religious code (Sharia law) took the place of the family code, and sexuality became a legal issue under Islamic government control and surveillance. Iran began a period of strong sexual conservatism following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Khalajabadi-Farahaini et al, 2019). For instance, extramarital sex was made illegal. According to Article 637 of the Islamic Penal Code, if a woman and a man who are not married engage in illegal sexual intercourse, such as "Taghbil or Muza'ee'a", they will be condemned to whipping up to ninety-nine lashes. "Taghbil" refers to a man and a woman kissing without a marriage contract. "Muza'ee'a" refers to a man and a single woman having sex outside of marriage. Furthermore, according to Sharia law (Article 225 of the Islamic Penal Code), a woman who commits adultery ("Zena") is stoned if the crime is confirmed. "Zena" refers to a woman who has a permanent husband but has sexual relations with another man.

Among the Iranian people, women were severely affected by the imposition of the improved laws (Nevins, 2022) as the new teachings and policies inclined away from women’s legal rights and preached that women are obliged to perform their duties as per Islamic teachings (Keddie, 2007; Yektafar-Hooshvar, 2016; Osanloo, 2009). Several women’s rights were no longer valid and the first one to be withdrawn was the Family Protection Act, introduced in the Pahlavi regime (1925-1979). According to this law, women held similar rights to men on divorce and were eligible to apply for child custody in the courts. However, following the Islamic Revolution women's rights were invalidated, and complete rights were handed over to men.

In fact, after the Islamic Revolution, the reforms that offered benefits in terms of marital rights and divorce were revoked and the supreme power over reproduction and sexuality was rendered to men (Afary, 2009: 12). A new legal discourse on sexuality was formed, allowing men and the state more power over the bodies, sexuality, and reproductive processes of women. Arebi (1991) states that women are perceived differently from males in Islam and are often placed in a lower position in the social framework while men take

precedence. While women's sexuality is defined as an honourable and valuable aspect of femininity that must be regulated and protected, men's sexuality is portrayed as a natural and inevitable urge that must be satisfied (Amini and McCormack, 2021).

The new Islamic government attempted to revert the state to the older social order and the characteristics of modern-day approaches such as public display of emotions as well as open dating were made legally punishable offences (Hsu, 2018, as cited in Nevins). Polygamy, temporary marriages (sigheh), and easy divorce are available for men by Sharia law (Afary, 2009; Khalajabadi-Fahrimi et al, 2019). For women, the legal marriage age was decreased from 18 to 13, and for men from 20 to 15. Fathers commonly arrange marriages and romantic relationships are structured according to established patriarchal paradigms (Sharifi, 2018, cited in Amini and McCormack, 2021).

The Iranian Supreme Leader publicly condemned population control measures in 2012, describing parenting as a "sacred and essential role" for women (Khamenei, 2012). Following this speech, access to free contraception, the importation of male condoms, and all surgeries intended for permanent contraception were made illegal, with the exception of procedures performed for medical reasons. Strict penalties were also instituted for doctors involved in such surgeries (Karamouzian et al, 2014). There is little sex education available because sexuality is a taboo subject (Arjmand and Ziari, 2020; Rahimi-Naghani et al, 2016). Accessing educational material about sexual health is exceedingly difficult for unmarried couples, and the few available sex education programmes only serve married or engaged couples. As a result, Iran is dealing with rising rates of drug use, illicit abortions, and HIV and STIs (Lotfi et al, 2013; Mahdavi, 2008).

Women are held accountable for Iran's moral well-being, with women's sexuality being ingrained in public morals. This way of thinking explains why women are expected to cover their faces and why there is more control over their bodies (Najmabadi, 1993). Gender segregation is enforced in public places including schools, universities, public transportation, and sports facilities (Arjmand and Ziari, 2020). According to Shahrokni (2019: 4), gender segregation has become a major issue in post-revolutionary Iran, as the government "retains its role as the ultimate arbiter of gender boundaries by regulating women's presence in public spaces".

In Iranian society, sexuality is distinct for women and men and is often more inclined to devalue femininity and favour masculinity, and individuals are expected to strictly follow

the rules laid down with respect to masculinity and femininity (Karimi, 2016). The concept and experiences of sexuality are believed to differ between the sexes but complement each other. It is only considered appropriate to explore sexuality through marriage. These religious teachings permit natural vaginal intercourse while being against other forms of intercourse or pleasure-seeking activities such as masturbation.

Clothing and demeanour are other strictly regulated aspects for women. In this type of society, women are expected to show minimal interest in or be completely unaware of sex prior to their marriages to be considered chaste. The upbringing of girls is strictly supervised to ensure they grow into wives who can serve their spouses and satisfy the rules of morality and chastity.

The term 'good girl' is used to define females who lack knowledge of sexuality and exhibit disinterest in discussions or fantasies of sexual acts (Shirpak et al, 2008). On the contrary, according to Shahidian (1999), post-marriage women must be appealing to their male partners to oblige their marital responsibilities (vazayef-e zanashooii) and, if they cannot, their partners are allowed to deny the maintenance fee (nafaghe) (Mohaghegh-damad, 2005; Safaie and Emami, 2003). The males, on the other hand, are expected to demonstrate a strong desire towards sex, whilst virility is considered a key feature of masculinity (Shahidian, 1999).

The research on the sexual relationships of husbands and wives in Iran shows great variation. While some households adopted modern ideals of equality, others preferred conventional beliefs and were strictly against egalitarian approaches. In this culture, men are more likely to pursue the so-called 'pure' brides and are observed to demonstrate dominant traits in their relationships (Shahidian, 1999).

Amidst these regressive changes, it is to be noted that even in post-revolutionary Iran, the 20th-century practices of sexuality and gender are evident in the form of higher literacy rates and employment among women. Also, "the mean age of women at first marriage, which had reached 19 in 1976, continued to climb" (Afary, 2009: 12). Thus, the Islamist regime allowed for some modern ideals and appears to be tolerant of modernisation.

Sexuality is a sensitive topic in Iran and thus comprehensive research is limited in that aspect. However, the available literature so far reflects a dramatic transformation in both sexual attitudes and behaviours among young Iranian men and women in the last two

decades. The voices recorded by the Iranian population reveal the changes introduced by modernisation in terms of gender roles, the type of marriage (i.e., arranged or love-based), and familial responsibilities. It is estimated that this likely caused the spike in the divorce rate in the latest generations (Azimi Hashemi et al, 2015).

The study indicates that diverse socioeconomic backgrounds are not a hindrance for the younger generation to adopt the progressive path of open recreational spaces even while they are under an oppressive Islamic regime. The lifestyles of these younger populations reflect the significant social, cultural and sexual transformation.

Mahdavi (2008) states that since the Islamic Revolution, although modern ideals have been suppressed, thoughts and attitudes towards sexuality have endured. At present, youth speak openly and freely about sex-related topics and may attend parties, whereas two decades ago the moral policing of society restricted the movement of the youth.

Islamic rules are against the process of dating and are considered a serious violation of the rules of an arranged marriage, but a recent trend reveals a more liberal view and practice of dating rules among some Persian families. Tehranis present dating as a more socially acceptable practice thereby causing an attitudinal shift towards virginity. The stigma of sex before marriage has reduced and is being discussed more openly among the youth (Azimi Hashemi et al, 2015; Mahdavi, 2008; Varzi, 2006). It can be stated that among the newer generations, sex can be practised before marriage and is not only a part of matrimonial relationships (Shahidian, 1999).

Considering the strict regime and several restrictions laid down against the interactions among the young, most of these changes have occurred under the radar. In the case of the acceptance of premarital sex, the newer and older generations have shown a huge gap which is more prominent when considering the parents and the children of the same family. Sexuality-related studies reveal that despite the severe opposition faced by the young, they are engaged in a moderate level of sexual relations (Azimi Hashemi et al, 2015). Azad Armaki et al (2011) conducted a longitudinal study and presented a typology on the sustained premarital sex forms among the youth of Tehran, which include temporary marriage (Sigheh), boyfriend-girlfriend, cohabitation, liquid love-based relationships, and prostitution. These forms were observed to be increasing across the country.

Several factors actively contributed to these changes in young people's sexual attitudes and practices. The existing social conflict between the modern and traditional ideas of gender roles and their transition towards equality between the sexes is manifested through adolescent sexual behaviours (Mohammad et al, 2007). Through the advent of technology, particularly satellite technology, the youth are exposed to international media. Simultaneously, there is a significant change in family structure, socioeconomic conditions, expectations from a marriage, and fertility rates that are completely out of sync with the traditional values as implemented through strictly legal and religious codes (Mahdavi, 2008; Mohammad et al, 2007; Varzi, 2006). In addition, the current situation of the impending marriage crisis implies a transformation. At the same time, there has been an increase in the average age for men owing to their low economic status (Mahdavi, 2008; Mohammad et al, 2007; Varzi, 2006).

Attributable to the dramatic economic changes as well as the attitudes towards sexuality, there were instances of extramarital affairs among young married Iranian women (Mahdavi, 2008). In some instances, married women openly expressed their desire to keep a lover or a boyfriend. The advent of the internet has also created options for cybersex. The opportunity for expressions of sexuality over the internet has taken over society and is one of the important regulators of socialisation between the genders. The study by Mahdavi indicated that despite religious teachings, modern women adopted 'un-Islamic' ways to engage in pleasure activities such as masturbation and sex toys purchased through the black market (Mahdavi, 2008, p. 179). These acts demonstrate the empowerment of Tehranian women as they hold control over their sexual pleasure.

Furthermore, Mahdavi (2008) highlights that the current youth hold higher qualifications than their ancestors whilst being underemployed and are severely dissatisfied with the current regime that regulates the nation through sex. These youth intend to bring a revolution in terms of sex and sexuality and are currently seen to be sharing their views unabashedly. Not only their views are related to communication, but they also question the restrictions on social behaviour regulations, casual sex, group sex and multiple partners and therefore challenge the very moral fabric of the regime.

The study sample of this research is obtained from diverse socioeconomic groups, venues, and social circles, who possess roughly similar secular and anti-regime sentiments and also share educational qualifications. Though the behavioural characteristics of young people

from Mahdavi's (2008) study cannot be generalised to the entire young Iranian population, it is highly indicative of a) urban young adults' daily lives; b) the far-reaching effects of their behaviour on the state; and c) the existence of a social movement throughout the Islamic republic.

It is worth noting that despite the significant limitations on women's liberties, gender and feminist politics in Iran are complicated and changing. Afary (2009) details the development of Islamic feminism in the 1990s and its efforts to advance women's rights, including through pragmatism in politics (see Hoodfar, 1996; Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010). Feminist resistance is primarily manifested by contesting sexual norms and legislation in everyday life (Bayat, 2013). In 2015 over 60% of university undergraduate students were women (Rezai-Rashti, 2015), reflecting increased involvement in higher education. Due to gender segregation, conservative fathers and husbands may have permitted their daughters and wives to pursue higher education; however, this does not necessarily translate into equal employment opportunities, as women's representation in the workforce or parliament is among the lowest in the world (Tohidi, 2016). In addition, women are not treated equally by the law in matters like inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody.

In summary, it can be concluded that significant changes are evident over the past two decades in relation to gender, particularly sexual expectations and practices in the new generation – for women and men alike. It is worth noting that younger generations are more flexible in their understanding of the ambiguous and fluid interpretations of intimacy compared to their elders owing to the earlier notions that marriage, family and intimacy are equal. These new discourses are majorly built by secular and Muslim feminists, modern gay and lesbian supporters, and human rights activists, who are further supported by women's rights activists in various positions of power in the Iranian government. This is also supported by Iranian cinema (Afary, 2009). However, Hsu (2018) argues that although there has been active reformation occurring across the nation in the past few decades, the equality of women has not seen an expected degree of improvement and is still comparable to that of the Pahlavi regime (cited in Nevins, 2022). Iranian adolescents, although more inclined towards the expression of gender roles (Sharepour 2005; Shirpak et al, 2008), still majorly exhibit behaviours that are guarded by strict rules laid down for gender segregation (Shirpak et al, 2007). To conclude, these transitions of gender roles exist with the older approaches, with some young families entering into equal partnerships while others strictly reject

egalitarian relationship styles, adhering to conventional teachings (Qarooni, 2006, as cited in Shirpak et al, 2011).

1.2.2 Emigration from Iran

1.2.2.1 General Population Characteristics

Given the limited research, there is a dearth of socio-demographic data, on the settlement locations, education, and ages of the individuals, of Iranian immigrants present in the UK.

The understanding of the size of the diaspora in the UK is also poor. 'Iranian' is not offered the position of an ethnic category on official surveys by the UK government as the "Census or large-scale surveys such as the Labour Force Survey do not provide the necessary data" (Sreberny and Gholami, 2019: 6). However, the census data of immigrants in the UK based on the country of birth does reveal that Iranian immigrant numbers have been steadily increasing from 28,617 in 1981 to 32,262 in 1991, and 84,735 in 2011 (Census Data), respectively (Gharibi and Mirvahedi, 2021: 3). In addition to this, the studies reveal that annually Iranian immigrants comprise the major proportion of asylum seekers in the UK, with a 300 per cent increase in the number of Iranian refugees being reported in 2001. Cities like Newcastle, Glasgow and Sheffield have a large and increasing population of asylum seekers.

In Appendix A, Tables 4–7 present the information on the Iranian population for the years 2000 to 2015 based on the Annual Population Survey (APS), which was conducted based on just sex and nationality. Table 8 presents a comparison of the percentage of Iranian asylum seekers and other nationalities, based on the Home Office figures that show the highest number of asylum applications is by the Iranian immigrant population. Furthermore, Tables 9 and 10 present the region-wide Iranian migrant distribution in the UK, with London being the most popular settlement destination, based on BBC News.

1.2.2.2 Types of Migrants

Iran is known for its multicultural and multi-ethnic groups with diverse communities such as Assyrians, Turkmens, Azeri, Kurds and Armenians. The languages, religious affiliations and the types of lifestyles they practise are distinct and help identify the groups. The heterogeneity of the Iranian diaspora abroad is evident in terms of religion, gender, education, immigration timing and motivation, ethnicity, social status, language, political

affiliation, legal status and different residential positions (ranging from the economic and sociocultural to the political).

There is significant linguistic heterogeneity among the populations, with the official Farsi/Persian language existing in parallel to many other languages, including Turkish and Kurdish. There is a large religious divide between the Shi'a Muslim majority and the Christian, Baha'i, Jewish, Zoroastrian and Sunni Kurd minority groups (Hakimzadeh, 2006). In addition to these aspects, these populations also show significant variety in educational qualifications, socioeconomic status, ideological and political affiliations, and religion.

Iranians' motivations to emigrate from their home country vary based on their experiences of religious discrimination, politics, education, ethnicity, business and investment, difficult sociocultural circumstances, refusal to participate in the Iran–Iraq War and because of challenging economic situations. Iranian emigration is classified into five main categories: i) professional, ii) student, iii) asylum seeker, iv) businessman, and v) refugee.

1.2.2.3 The Waves of Iranian Immigration

Persian history records several waves of forced as well as voluntary immigration. Iranian immigration can be typically classified into two waves: pre-1979 Revolution and post-1979 Revolution, both of which are statistically and qualitatively distinct. Significant waves of immigration occurred in the 1950s. Those who migrated prior to 1979 were mostly college learners whilst a minority were economic migrants (Cohen and Yefet, 2021; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2011). The Iranian diaspora is an outcome of large and frequent waves of immigration provoked by the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and regressive societal changes (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 2013; Cohen and Yefet, 2021). As Gharibi and Mirvahedi (2021: 3) describe, "The post-revolution wave of immigrants included political refugees or exiles, Iranians who left the homeland because of religious or cultural reasons (such as Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Armenians and Assyrians) and educated Iranians, who settled mainly in the United States and Europe". During the first wave, many of the immigrants were from wealthy and well-educated backgrounds (Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2011; McAuliffe, 2016). and my best

By the early 1990s, the migration of refugees had declined. However, the degraded political and economic condition of the country encouraged Iranians to search for possible employment opportunities internationally (Khosravi, 2017). Following the first wave, the eight-year-long Iran-Iraq War sparked a second wave of migration from Iran.

During this period (1980-1988) a large number of academics, intellectuals, professionals, members of the left-wing political party, women wanting to evade "religious restrictions and gender-based persecution, and males attempting to avoid military service departed Iran" (Chaichian, 2012: 23). Unlike the previous waves of immigration, the second wave included settlers from rural areas as well as those from low-income families (Gholami, 2014: 66). Following this, the Iranian economy witnessed a further decline due to Western-imposed sanctions and contested presidential elections in 2009, thus causing further movement (Karim, 2013: 49).

According to Chaichian (2012, cited in Gharibi and Mirvahedi, 2021: 3), "the most recent Unlike past waves of emigration, those who have left since the mid-1990s mostly come from Iran's periphery and had a poorer socioeconomic background wave of emigration from Iran occurred in the aftermath of the presidential election in 2009, after which there was an increase in the number of skilled and educated Iranian emigrants as well as refugees and asylum seekers" (Chaichian, 2012, cited in Gharibi and Mirvahedi, 2021: 3), "driven by young Iranians' sense of a future deferred" (Sreberny and Gholami, 2019: 211), or "those who were mostly economically motivated to leave the country" (Gharibi and Mirvahedi, 2021: 3). Immigration in the following years appeared to be voluntary and lacked exilic identity, stressing the heterogeneity and the fragmentation of the Iranian immigrant community, as well as the lack of a comprehensive Iranian diaspora (Cohen and Yefet, 2021), which McAuliffe (2008: 66) defined as the presence of "Iranian diaspora/s".

To conclude, the large-scale emigration of Iranians has occurred in specific times and political and economic circumstances influenced by a wide range of sociocultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds, with reasons for migrating varying between sociocultural and political restraints and pressures, extreme stress from repressive laws, and national economic crisis. This representation of the categories of immigrants is reflected in this study's sample of immigrant couples with diverse sociocultural, religious and economic backgrounds with differentiated motivations for immigration. Of these, the prominent ones include striving for a better quality of life, security of children's futures, the political scenario, sociocultural pressures and constraints, economic crises, intent to set up and expand businesses, reuniting separated families, marriage, and study in UK universities.

1.3 Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to address the gap in existing research regarding the impact of immigrants' integration into the host society on their marital and intimate relationships, specifically among Iranian immigrants in the UK. While extensive research has been conducted on the civic-political and sociocultural orientations of Iranian immigrants in the US and Canada, limited attention has been given to understanding the dynamics of marital relationships within the UK context (as discussed in the literature review chapter).

As the number of Iranians residing in the UK continues to rise, it becomes increasingly important to examine how the process of adaptation to the host society influences the roles and relationships within Iranian immigrant marriages. This study aims to shed light on the continuity and changes observed in marital relationships, with a particular focus on gender roles, marital power dynamics, and the masculine identity of male partners among married Iranian immigrants. The research explores the intimate and sexual relations of Iranian immigrants in the UK as they navigate their multidimensional assimilation into the host society.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate how different modes of assimilation into British, and specifically London, society influence the transformation or endurance of marital relationships among Iranian immigrants. Additionally, the study aims to identify the main factors that contribute to or differentiate the observed outcomes. By examining various sociocultural contexts, the research intends to shed light on the diverse types of gender relations, roles, sexuality, femininities, and masculinities that emerge within these spaces. The study specifically explores the five key factors of gender roles, marital power, masculinity, sexuality, and intimate relationships in the participants' marital dynamics.

By exploring the intimate and sexual relations of Iranian immigrants in the UK, this research seeks to uncover how these individuals negotiate their marital lives while navigating the multifaceted process of assimilation into the host society. Through an in-depth examination of the experiences and perspectives of Iranian immigrants, this study will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding marital relationships within this specific immigrant population.

The findings of this research will not only enrich the academic discourse on migration and marital dynamics but also provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and community organisations working with Iranian immigrants in the UK. By identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by Iranian immigrants in their marital lives, this study aims to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support systems that can enhance the well-being and relationship satisfaction of this population in the participants' marital dynamics.

The study aims to explore the following main research question and five sub-questions. The main study question is: How do the patterns of Iranian immigrants' economic and sociocultural assimilation into the new society affect Iranian migrant couples' relationships? The sub-questions are:

- Does the distribution of power change among migrant partners after migration and, if so, how?
- What are the main factors contributing to the transformation of marital gender roles during the process of migration?
- How does migration affect experiences and perceptions of masculinity after migration?
- How do couples' understanding, and practices of sexuality change during the process of migration?
- How does migrant couples' marital intimacy change during the process of economic and sociocultural integration into the host/British society?

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is not based on a specific theoretical model but instead employs a set of concepts as heuristic guideposts to analyse and interpret the findings. These concepts include immigrants' assimilation into the host society, marital relations viewed through the lens of power, and gender role ideologies such as masculinity, intimacy, and sexuality. A detailed presentation of the definitions and debates surrounding these concepts can be found in the literature review chapter. Here, I will highlight the specific applications of these concepts to my research.

Migration and resettlement are viewed in this study as practices that bring about changes in gender relations, gender ideologies, power distribution, masculine identity, and sexual and

intimate relationships among husbands and wives through the process of immigrants' integration into the host society. To understand how this process influences marital relationships, the study adopts the multi-path assimilation approach, particularly the segmented incorporation model proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993). This model recognises the diversity of integration patterns, acknowledging different trajectories such as upward or downward mobility within mainstream society, as well as the blending of home and host country customs within ethnic groups. Additionally, it considers important social divisions such as class, gender, and other socio-positional factors that impact immigrants' integration trajectories. This approach allows for the examination of reversals in the integration process caused by adverse circumstances in the immigrants' lives or within the host society. Specifically, the study explores how Iranian immigrants' patterns of incorporation into British society evolve differently depending on the area of integration (e.g., economic or sociocultural) and the immigrants' social class (e.g., education, occupation, and gender).

Segmented assimilation theory is predominantly applied to second-generation migrants. However, in the case of this research with first-generation Iranian refugees, the justification for employing segmented assimilation lies in its conceptual framework and its applicability to understanding the complex processes of immigrant integration. While segmented assimilation has been primarily used to analyse second-generation experiences, its underlying principles can still be useful in examining the integration trajectories and outcomes of first-generation immigrants.

Segmented assimilation theory allows for the exploration of various dimensions of integration, including economic, sociocultural, and structural aspects, which are relevant to both first and second-generation migrants. By adopting this theoretical basis, the study aims to capture the nuanced processes and experiences of Iranian refugees in their adaptation to the UK, taking into account the intersecting factors of gender, power, and marital relationships.

It is important to acknowledge that the process of assimilation is not one-way and linear, which presents a potential limitation of the theory. Analysis deriving from this theory may not fully reflect the non-linear nature of assimilation, which is actually a dynamic and multi-directional process. It is important to address this concern by ensuring that the analysis considers the complexities and potential reversals in the assimilation process as experienced by first-generation Iranian refugees.

In investigating gender relations within Iranian immigrant couples, the study utilises the concept of individual gender ideologies. Scholars argue that individual gender ideologies, beyond individuals' resources such as income, play a significant role in shaping power dynamics, spousal role exchanges, and the division of gender roles within couples (Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980; Blumberg and Coleman, 1989; Fox and Murry, 2000; Ridgeway, 2009; Bittman et al, 2003; Coltrane, 2000; Ferree, 1990; Ferree et al, 1999; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Increased gender role division, responsibilities, and decision-making power equality are associated with more egalitarian gender attitudes. Hence, gender ideologies are considered not as response variables but as predictors of marital power and male and female roles within a cultural context. Power dynamics in family relationships are influenced by cultural and religious traditions, normative expectations of gender roles and identities, social arrangements, and resource accumulation and distribution, including economic capital, education, and social status.

While macro-social conditions do play a significant role in shaping individual gender ideologies, it is important to differentiate between the broader social structures and the individual-level beliefs and attitudes. Macro-social conditions provide a broader context within which individual gender ideologies are formed, but they do not determine these ideologies in a deterministic manner. Individuals have agency and can hold varying beliefs within the broader social structures they are situated. Therefore, when discussing individual gender ideologies, it is essential to consider the interplay between macro-social conditions and individual agency in shaping these ideologies. Gender has been a significant analytical framework within migration studies, with scholars examining how gender intersects with migration, identity, and integration processes. Koffman, Yeung, and Mu (2019) have contributed to the understanding of gender dynamics and migration experiences in the UK context. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and engage with existing gender-focused studies within assimilation theories and incorporate these perspectives into the analysis to enhance the theoretical grounding of the research.

Masculinity is understood in this study as a social construction, a cultural creation, and a historical manifestation, rather than a stable or essential quality. Numerous studies emphasise that masculinity is produced within specific historical and cultural contexts and is subject to continuous contestation and negotiation (Maclnnes, 1998; Morgan, 1992; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Sedgwick, 1985; Alonso, 1992; Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Gutmann, 2003; Kimmel, 2014; Connell, 2005; Gardiner, 2005; Itulua-Abumere, 2013). The

study explores the struggle of traditional masculinity across different cultures (home and host) under the influence of sociocultural and economic integration into modern society. It examines the impact of migration and assimilation processes on male participants' masculine identity, as well as their perceptions and representations of their experiences of sexual activities and masculinities.

Furthermore, the study draws on Farahani's (2018) standpoint, which emphasises the intersectional factors that shape sexuality and masculinity in diasporic environments. Farahani investigates the influence of social interaction, Iranian Islamic cultures, and migratory experiences on sexual behaviour and men's masculinity. The study considers how these factors may complicate participants' perceptions and representations of their experiences of sexual activities and masculinities.

By incorporating these concepts and perspectives, the study aims to provide insights into the impact of Iranian immigrants' assimilation into British society on their marital relationships, shedding light on gender roles, power dynamics, masculinity, sexuality, and intimacy within this context.

Furthermore, I adopt Farahani's (2012, 2018) perspective on the production of gender relations, including masculinities, femininities, and sexualities, in the diasporic context to focus on "theoretical and conceptual reflections regarding conditions of leaving, arrival, and residency" (Farahani, 2012: 159) among Iranian-born individuals living in London. According to Farahani, it is important to consider the influence of Orientalist stereotypes on the conceptualisation of Middle Eastern men as nationalist heroes or oppressive figures compared to Western men who are seen as more equality-oriented and liberated (Farahani, 2012: 159).

To analyse the gender relations of Iranian couples who migrated to the UK, I examine Iranian religious affiliations, socialisation processes, the impact of Orientalist beliefs, and the couples' experiences of diverse sociocultural conditions during the migration process. By exploring these aspects, I investigate how Iranian/Middle Eastern/Muslim women and men in the diasporic cultural context understand and conceptualise sexuality, femininity, and masculinity, and how these factors may complicate their sexual, masculine, and feminine performances, experiences, and representations.

This study also considers how gender relations frame the representations and practices of intimacy and sex among Iranian couples. Intimacy is viewed as a complex social construction that varies culturally and historically. Modern/Western notions of intimacy encompass a wide range of verbal/non-verbal, physical, and psycho-emotional acts and exchanges facilitated through everyday routines. The study acknowledges that Western cultural factors, such as fashion, ideas, expectations, and values, can influence migrant couples' intimate relations as they undergo sociocultural assimilation into the host society.

Two influential accounts of sociocultural and historical transformations in intimacy are considered in this study. The first is the liberation thesis approach proposed by McNair (1996) and Giddens (1992), which focuses on emancipation and democratisation processes leading to greater freedom from old constraints and regulations in modern intimacy compared to traditional or premodern intimacy. The second account emphasises individualism, the influence of commercialisation, and the rationalisation of intimacy discussed by Illouz (2007, 2012), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), and Hochschild (1983). This approach highlights the market's influence on intimacy. By incorporating these approaches, the study examines how immigrant marital intimacy has been freed to some extent from tradition and external controls, resulting in increased freedom from stereotypical gender roles within modern society. However, it also recognises the fragility of intimate relationships due to radical individualism and the rationalisation of intimate relations.

Bauman's concept of "liquid love" (2003) is relevant in understanding the inherent tensions of individualisation and the fluctuation of individuals' desires for security and personal freedom in modern human relationships. Although the literature on intimacy does not specifically account for changes in couples' intimate relations in the context of migration, the study utilises certain arguments to interpret the findings. The assumption of the socially constructed nature of intimacy and sexuality informs the understanding that couples' intimate relations are not fixed or static but can be influenced by migration as a strong factor when individuals face new economic and sociocultural positions during the assimilation process into the host society.

Drawing on current approaches, I consider sexuality as a crucial element in the negotiation of gender relations. I view sexuality as a historical and social construct that is continuously shaped and reshaped through everyday social practices within specific relationships and contexts. It encompasses gender identity, physiological traits, capacities, needs, desires, and

fantasies. From this perspective, it becomes evident that immigrants' understandings and practices of sexuality are not stable over time or across different cultural settings, such as transitioning from a traditional and religious home society to a modern and individualistic host society. These changes reflect a shift towards notions of contingency, fluidity, and subversion that underpin the postmodern sexual model.

To illustrate the impact of migration on migrant couples' sexual attitudes and practices, particularly when they come from a conservative and religious society like Iran to a society with a more liberal perception of gender roles, I employ Giddens' (1992) concepts that characterise the postmodern sexual model. These concepts highlight the idea that women's sexual understanding, expectations, and practices are no longer confined by traditional or religious restrictions and customs. In the postmodern society, female sexuality is no longer a taboo topic but is instead oriented towards a greater emphasis on sexual pleasure and feeling. This contrasts with conventional, reproduction-focused, and inequality-driven notions of sexuality. It also recognises that individuals' “process of self-realization" (Giddens, 1991:164) and lifestyle choices can be influenced by evolving power dynamics. The transition toward the postmodern sexual model, particularly for women, liberates them from the fear of pregnancy and positions sex as a source of enjoyment.

By employing these approaches, I can examine how new circumstances and social factors in the host society reshape women's socioeconomic position within both private and public spheres. These changes, in turn, influence sexual practices and significantly impact partners' understandings and expectations of sexuality.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis structure consists of an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction has provided a brief history of the transformation of gender and sexual relations in Iran, as well as an overview of Iranian emigration to the UK, the research purpose and questions, and its conceptual framework. Chapter 2 provides a literature review divided into two sections. The first section offers a comprehensive review of relevant literature related to the topic of the study including immigration, gender relations, masculinity, sexuality, and intimacy. The second section reviews existing research on migration and marriage relationships.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology employed in the study, highlighting its strengths and limitations. This chapter serves as a foundation for subsequent analysis and provides a background reference for understanding the study's approach.

The subsequent three chapters (Chapters 4 to 6) are dedicated to presenting and discussing the study's findings. In Chapter 4, the focus is on changes in gender roles, marital power dynamics, and the construction of masculine identities among Iranian immigrant couples. Chapter 5 explores changes in patterns of sexual relations within these couples, while Chapter 6 delves into changes in intimate relations among Iranian couples.

The conclusion summarises the findings and calls for further research that specifically examines different aspects of immigrants' marital relationships as a central dimension of their integration into the receiving society. It emphasises the benefits of integrating themes and approaches from various fields of sociological analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is divided into two main sections, with each focusing on a particular aspect of the study's interests. The first section provides a discussion of the latest theories and concepts regarding the incorporation of immigrants into their host societies. Additionally, the major themes and debates around the aspects of marital intimacy, sexuality, spousal power, masculinity, and gender roles in the family are discussed in the context of Western countries such as the United States. The second section provides a concise review of the existing literature on gender relations as well as migration events.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The current section provides a deep discussion of the existing scholarship with a focus on varying perspectives on gender relations and assimilation theory, which conveys the social process of the acclimatisation of immigrants into the host society. The first portion includes a discussion on classical, straight-line assimilation theory, the segmented class- and race-contingent assimilation process with a wide range of outcomes, and the impact of this progression on immigrants and their progeny as well as on the host society. The latter portion of the section discusses various theoretical tools at multiple levels, including macro and micro approaches to classical and contemporary gender theory, and concepts of masculinity and sexual and intimate relations.

2.2.1 Immigrants' Assimilation

According to Schneider and Crul (2010: 1143), "In all Western countries but particularly the US and Europe which have been the destination for large-scale migration over the past decades", the incorporation patterns of immigrants into the host societies have been heavily debated. The classical straight-line model was proposed based on immigration from Europe to the US. In the early 1920s, one of the earliest assimilation models was proposed by Chicago School sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess (1969 [1921]; see also Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927). They argued that the immigrants' cultural orientation, their 'foreign' identities, and their social bonds, show a gradual weakening upon entering the host society, which is attributable to their voluntary adoption of the host society's identity, character, and commitment. This was described as the 'melting' of the immigrants into the receiver society. Morawska (2011 [2009]) highlights that the melting of immigrants into the receiver society, through the disappearance of immigrants' orientation towards their own culture, social

bonds, and identities, leads to an eventual dissolution of the boundaries between various ethnic groups.

The popular Park's theory was severely criticised by renowned social scientists owing to its limited attention towards and lack of explanation of the completion of the integration process. This raises the issue of the non-feasibility of Park's 'differential views' evaluation. Lloyd Warner and Srole (1945) and Shibutani and Kian (1965) addressed these limitations by segregating differential adaptation trajectories in relation to the wide variety of ethno-racial groups and classes in society (Morawska, 2011 [2009]).

2.2.2 Segmented Assimilation

Social scientists challenged the view of the assimilation approach of immigrants by drawing attention to the diverse integration patterns demonstrated by non-European immigrants in the US. Contrary to the popular belief that immigrants are inclined toward integration, this observation provides adequate evidence of divergent behaviour, unlike the more recent immigrants who are invested in becoming integrated into mainstream society (Kivisto, 2012).

Consequently, Portes and Zhou (1993; see also Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) proposed an alternative theory in the form of the segmented assimilation model. This model is more aligned with second-generation, native-born immigrant children's experiences, whose integration is distinct from the classically defined upward direction, a single path into the middle-class white mainstream, as theorised by classical assimilation, towards a distinct 'three trajectories' pattern.

Thus, a synthesis of approaches is applied by segmented theory, which adopts a contradictory approach to the theory that emphasises only a single mode of integration into the new environment. Additionally, this theory considers the variables that may play a key role such as class, status, origin, the nature of reception by the host society, and the ways that integration occurs in distinct, segmented ways. Furthermore, it assumes that contemporary immigrant offspring are likely to take three incorporative trajectories. According to Portes and Zhou (1993), the first path replicates the conventional growing acculturation and parallel integration portrayal of immigrants into the white-mainstream middle class. The second path refers to long-lasting poverty and assimilation into the underclass, where the immigrants are assumed to adopt a mainstream downward trajectory. The third group adopts the ethnic group enclave trajectory and adheres strictly to the

immigrant community's core values through deliberate attempts to demonstrate solidarity even with rapid economic advancement.

Non-white ethnic minorities who are limited by their resources and human capital have been observed to be more likely to follow the path of downward incorporation into the underclass in the mainstream economy's secondary sector. These effects extend into subsequent generations. Furthermore, owing to the available employment opportunities and socioeconomic advancement prospects, large ethnic groups who are residentially concentrated may opt to remain within their enclaves (Morawska, 2017).

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and Portes and Fernandez-Kelly (2008), in their attempt to establish the connection between the first and the subsequent generations, propose three factors that can affect societal incorporation: i) the immigrants' backgrounds and characteristics such as skills, education and advanced acculturation; ii) family structure contributing to parental human capital, which considers if the family is led by a couple or a usually female single parent (in some family types, gender significantly affects the differential socialisation amongst boys and girls); iii) the reception of immigrants by the state and by the native-born individuals.

Despite its capacity to provide a more nuanced understanding of the assimilation process, there is a wealth of critique against assimilation theory. One of the challenging characteristics of segmented assimilation theory is that it provides a dichotomous description of entry into the upper middle class or underclass which risks oversimplifying a more complex reality. Another persistent limitation of these assimilation models is that the different assimilation theories continue to be genderless, despite evidence of gender-specific patterns in certain aspects of the incorporation process (Morawska, 2011 [2009]). In contrast to class and race (see Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Anthias et al, 2013), gender has not been accounted for as an integral divider in the assimilation theoretical framework. Furthermore, this theory has failed to acknowledge that assimilation is a dynamic complex process dictated by various macro-level social conditions, such as structural inequalities, discrimination, and prejudice.

However, the claim that gender has not been applied in assimilation theories is not entirely accurate. In fact, gender has been a significant analytical framework within migration studies, with scholars examining how gender intersects with migration, identity, and integration processes. Gender has been applied in assimilation theories, and scholars such

as Eleanore Koffman, Yeung, and Mu (2019) have looked into the gendered experiences of immigrant communities in the UK, contributing to the understanding of gender dynamics and migration experiences. Thus, segmented assimilation theory offers a more nuanced understanding of the assimilation process, accounting for the complex interplay of micro and macro-level factors. This theory also facilitates gaining an understanding of the experiences of first-generation refugees and how they navigate new societies and challenges. It is crucial to acknowledge and engage with existing gender-focused studies within assimilation theories and incorporate these perspectives into the analysis to enhance the theoretical grounding of the research.

In contrast, segmented assimilation theory acknowledges that the assimilation process of migrants does not follow a uniform pattern across all immigrant groups and that different outcomes can result from micro-level assimilation behaviours in relation to macro-level social conditions. As such, this theory offers a more nuanced understanding of the assimilation process and recognises that immigrant groups can experience both upward and downward mobility in the new society depending on the macro-level social conditions they encounter over the course of their assimilation.

The concept of individual gender ideologies, as referenced by the candidate in the conceptual framework section, refers to the beliefs and attitudes that individuals hold closely about gender roles, norms and expectations. These ideologies may widely differ between different individuals and communities as they are known to be shaped by diverse factors, including cultural, social, and economic contexts. These ideologies may be part of the macro-social conditions that influence the assimilation process for some immigrant groups.

In summary, the previous studies conducted on immigrant migration and their integration into the host society were severely criticised for their notion that assimilation into the dominant culture happens in a linear fashion. More recent literature provides evidence that confirms that assimilation is indeed a multifaceted process and is governed by several factors such as discrimination against immigrants, the type of neighbourhood, and the socioeconomic status of the families. The segmented assimilation theory offers a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic process. This point of view identifies the possibility of varied outcomes in adaptation processes for different groups of immigrants in terms of upward mobility, downward assimilation, or cultural pluralism.

Thus, with a strong emphasis on the structural factors and the social contexts that determine immigrant experiences, this theory is a valuable resource in studying the experiences of first-generation Iranian immigrants. According to segmented assimilation theory, the assimilation process develops in a non-linear manner, and the approach also recognises that the multi-trajectory path is further influenced by and has an impact on the socioeconomic position(s), sociocultural practices, human capital and life orientations of immigrants and their offspring, as well as upon local and macro-level cultural, civic-political, and socioeconomic host society arrangements. The assimilation processes are justified by explanations that take account of different time- and place-specific combinations of segmented, bumpy, two-way effect approaches. Nevertheless, it can be stated that there is still scope for improvement.

One of the primary applications of the segmented assimilation theory in the current context is to study the assimilation process among second-generation migrants. However, it can also support a deeper understanding of the experiences of first-generation immigrants, such as Iranian immigrants. This is because the theory recognises that the assimilation process is not a one-way street and that different outcomes can result from various micro and macro-level factors. By applying segmented assimilation theory to the past experiences of first-generation Iranian immigrants, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how these individuals navigate their new society and the various challenges they face.

The current study seeks to contribute to this growing literature by examining the adaptation experiences of first-generation Iranian immigrants currently living in the UK, applying segmented assimilation theory as a standard theoretical framework. By analysing how various factors such as socioeconomic status interact with each other to shape these individuals' experiences, I aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of the adaptation process for this particular group. This study conducts an in-depth investigation into sexual and intimate relationship changes and provides an improved understanding of these among migrant couples. In fact, with a shift in the focus on the transformation of attitudes, expectations, and practices regarding immigrants' sexual and intimate lives by applying the assimilation interpretative framework and social perspective on gender relations, I attempt to bridge the gap between the study of migration and sexuality/intimacy. Additionally, policymakers can draw insights from this research to design more effective programs and services that support the successful integration of immigrant communities. Although there are several pieces of valuable information on the adaptation experiences of first-generation

Iranian immigrants shared through this study, the study is restricted by its limitations, which are important to acknowledge.

2.2.3 Gender Relations, Marital Power, Intimacy and Sexuality

The literature review presented here shows how sociological and empirical studies were extended in the first decade of the twenty-first century from the micro to macro levels in order to understand gender relations, i.e. power relations and the development of gender roles.

Sociological theories have addressed several questions regarding gender roles, the distribution of marital power among partners, masculinity, and intimate and sexual relations. Although in modern societies many people do not live in nuclear and extended family structures, this literature review focuses on theories and studies that consider men and women in the nuclear family structure in order to address the aims of this study. As previously stated, the main purpose of the study is to explore the impact of immigrants' economic and sociocultural assimilation on their marital relationships, including gender roles, marital power, masculinity, and intimate and sexual relations. Therefore, this portion of the review includes perspectives on these five aspects.

2.2.3.1 Gender Roles in Migration Contexts

The concept of gender is a social construction and is practised differently in varying societies (Kimmel, 2008). Thus, as West and Zimmerman (1987: 129) argued, "gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sorts". According to Moore (1994), within various societies and amongst diverse ethnic groups, cultural values differ significantly and influence the socialisation process involved in the learning of societal gender roles.

Therefore, gender norms and roles are often described as the expected patterns of tentative behaviours (Afrouz et al, 2022; DeBiaggi, 2002). Furthermore, these behavioural trends are determined by cultural and social factors and frequently influence the anticipated roles and duties of males and females. Contextually, gender activities differ, and men and women tend to act differently within similar environments based on the space, time and situation in which they operate as actors, a behaviour that is termed 'gender display' by West and Zimmerman (1987: 129). The distinction of roles played by women and men may result in varying functions, behaviours and features among both genders (March et al, 2016).

Migration as a process is a highly gender-oriented transition. Understanding the causes, processes, and exceptions in this transition will extend our comprehension and conceptualisation of diaspora communities (Farahani, 2012). The entry of migrants into a new sociocultural, economic and political environment influences people's interpretations of their cultures along with the interconnections they have with one another. Therefore, migrants' perspectives on gender stereotypes are not fixed and frequently change with their relocation and adaptation to a new society (Predelli, 2004). Migration from one sociocultural or economic setting to another can alter an individual's culture, which in turn modifies gender roles and introduces novel expectations, responsibilities, and obligations for family members, particularly impacting the couple's position and their respective conceptions of gender roles.

Diaspora, typically, does not imply only mere epistemic classes of analysis and is inseparable from interchangeable correlations between gender, sexuality, race and gender. In general, migration may bring distinct and unique experiences and implications as well for both men and women. In addition, aspects such as age, ethnicity, education and class have a strong impact on the relocation process for both genders. The familial environmental fluctuations can have a tremendous impact on the interrelationships in the families due to different structures of masculinity(ies) and femininity(ies), joblessness, invalid certification and education documents, and marginalisation. As a result, despite living in the same environment, the experiences and implications of women and men from the same household can vary (Farahani, 2012).

According to Hyman, Guruge, and Mason (2008), a couple migrating from a nation with different and separate strongly practised cultural norms regarding masculinities, femininities, and gender arrangements in comparison to the host country causes conflict. Therefore, it can be expected that a move from one nation to another, each with a unique cultural environment, gives rise to conflicts between the couples as one of them embraces and adapts to the new culture, but the other feels reluctant to transition away from the native nation's culture (Richter-Devroe, 2008).

Couples hailing from a relatively conservative society tend to experience more conflicts that will be more intense when immigrants hail from a conservative society with a more narrow perspective on gender roles, to a more liberal society. This trend tends to motivate women

to embrace the possibility of change and thus initiate appropriate actions to improve their lives in society.

In the diasporic context, migrant women are consistently encouraged to re-evaluate gender norms after experiencing diverse beliefs about gender (Afrouz et al, 2022; DeBiaggi, 2002; Umubyeyi, 2019; Smokowski et al, 2008). Richter-Devroe (2008) has expressed this process more clearly by claiming the development of new familial relationships by people after their relocation from their home nation. Several family norms and ideals that were beneficial in their native country may be rendered ineffective based on the cultural differences in the foreign culture and surroundings.

Although a culture's dynamism and its high adaptability to altering environments are commonly agreed upon, it is crucial to note that migration may cause difficulties for family members in guiding the transfer and practice of their cultural knowledge (Umubyeyi, 2019). Each culture has a distinct pattern of dividing labour roles within families, and the transformation of gender-based labour duties and obligations shifts power dynamics within the marital bond. The employability of migrant women in the host society might result in their increased absences from home, thus transferring expectations to share housekeeping duties like childcare and cooking onto the husband, particularly if they work only part-time or are jobless (Bui & Marosh, 2008; Suare-Orozco, 2001). Changes in gender-related labour distribution increased the workload further for both partners. The power dynamics inside the marriage will be impacted until the time one or both parties develop new methods or strategies to deal with the new workload (Umubyeyi, 2019).

By applying this approach, I can explain how immigrant's roles have been challenged in the host society due to the changes in women's economic and sociocultural position in the domestic environment.

2.2.3.2 Power Relations

The transition in power between partners is one of the main elements in exploring how immigration influences marital relationships in the diasporic context. Resource theory discuss the impact of economic resources, such as income distributed between the partners on couples' power relations. However, how power is assigned to partners varies among societies and depends on several factors other than financial resources. I apply modified resource theory to analyse the effect of couples' economic resources on their corresponding power in marital life in the framework of gender ideology.

The sociologists who closely studied family as a concept in the past have rigorously applied resource theory in order to develop an understanding of marital power. In this regard, Blood and Wolfe's (1960) 'resource theory' highlighted the power relationship between family members and within the family itself. According to them, the resources that men and women possess dictate the division of power within the family.

It has been observed that the majority of decisions are made by the spouse possessing higher value resources, exemplified by education and income, or where one partner possesses a higher economic status background, and therefore exerts more marital power within the relationship (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). In addition, some unquantifiable qualities that are considered resources, such as likeability, physical attractiveness, intelligence, love and comfort, have also been added by Foa and Foa (1980).

Moreover, the fallacy of classic resource theory has also been discussed by scholars, highlighting its pure neglect of ideological or cultural forces and their importance in society as a whole and the family system under study (Vogler, 1998; Blumberg and Coleman, 1989; Xu and Lai, 2002; Ferree, 1990; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980). They identify the non-suitability of classic resource theory to a larger population in the analysis of marital power within all societies, and their claim is corroborated by several studies asserting that even where earnings between partners are equal, or even where the female partner has a higher level of education and more income, this is not a sufficient condition for equally shared marital power among the couples (Amato et al, 2007; Randles, 2016).

Rather, according to various scholars (Diefenbach, 2002; Tichenor, 2005; Kulik, 2011), even when the female partner possesses more power within a relationship in general, they are still observed to perform more domestic chores. This is also maintained by Rodman (1972), who proposed a modified resource theory by considering the criticisms of classic resource theory and the findings of cross-class and cross-culture studies. Scanzoni and Szinovacz (1980) and Blumberg and Coleman (1989) developed this by situating power resource theory within the framework of gender ideologies.

According to Bittman et al (2003), family exchanges and decision-making are influenced by gender ideology in addition to the effects of income. Correspondingly, an increased equivalent division of decision-making power is related to a more egalitarian gender attitude (Kulik, 1999; Vogler, 1998; Xu and Lai, 2004; Shu et al, 2012). Thus, for optimal analysis, individual gender ideology is an important factor, analogous to the structural context of

gender ideology, which, according to Bittman et al (2003), significantly impacts marital power and family exchanges beyond the effects of individuals' material resources.

In this regard, various scholars (Fox and Murry, 2000; Ridgeway, 2009; Bittman et al, 2003; Coltrane, 2000; Ferree, 1990; Ferree et al, 1999; West and Zimmerman, 1987) discussed the impact of gender ideology on couples' power distribution. They further investigated the operation of socially prescribed gender roles and their subsequent effect at multiple levels: cultural, interactional, individual and institutional. Correspondingly, Xu and Lai (2002) showed that access to improved socioeconomic resources, together with the subsiding of traditional gender ideologies, has led to an ever-increasing rise in the bargaining power of women within a hitherto patriarchal family unit. Thus, within the family, the characteristic distribution of power can significantly vary in shaping and transforming gender relations.

This is supported by Darvishpour (2002), who argues that in a marriage, power distribution significantly impacts couples' gender roles, including housework division, decision-making processes, and money management. In summary, according to various scholars, (Rodman, 1972; Treas, 1993; Granovetter, 1992; Brown, 2002; Emirbayer, 1997; Mauss, 1990; Zuo, 2008), to explain the relationship of resources with the distribution of power between partners in non-egalitarian societies , in a traditional and patriarchal country, it is essential to consider the theory of resources in its cultural context and gender ideology.

The effect of socioeconomic resources on the distribution of power between partners is also explained by conflict theory principles, especially the concept of women's subordination, which has been applied by Engels (1972) to the family and explains the distribution of gender roles among partners. According to current conflict theories, transitions in power relations within families can lead to altered equilibriums, which may also facilitated by the gaining of economic strength through women earning a wage. Also, with a woman's increased strength within the organisation of the family, we can witness increasingly democratic arrangements, although the primary domestic responsibilities continue to reside with women (Hacker, 2003; Lindsey, 2011).

2.2.3.3 Masculinity

In the current research, how immigrant Iranian men perceive masculinity has been one of the main themes in understanding transformations in their marital relationships in the diasporic society. Prior studies conducted in the Middle East and Middle Eastern diaspora on gender roles have paid much attention to women (Bauer, 2000; Ghoussoub and Sinclair-

Webb, 2000). However, the past two decades displayed the emergence of concerns related to masculinity, particularly in Western studies (Farahani, 2012; Brod and Kaufman, 1994; Connell, 1995). Therefore, this section offers a deeper insight into the effect of immigration on men's masculine identity, how male immigrants challenge their masculinity crisis in the diasporic context, and how the changes in masculinity affect couples' relationships.

Since the mid-1950s, the sociological area of masculinity has been developed with various theories, including Marxism, critical structuralism, structural functionalism, psychoanalysis, and, more recently, post-structuralism and postmodern theories (Whitehead and Barrett, 2001). Clatterbaugh (1990) and Whitehead and Barret (2001) argue that biological predisposition or genetic coding does not necessarily structure male behaviour and therefore masculinity cannot necessarily be seen as a 'natural' concept. Instead, several studies emphasise that masculinity is a construct of historical and cultural contexts, and thus is a social product (Maclnnes, 1998; Morgan, 1992; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Sedgwick, 1985; Alonso, 1992; Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Gutmann, 2003; Kimmel, 2014; Connell, 2005; Gardiner, 2005; Itulua-Abumere, 2013).

In the past century, social reformations such as the women's equality movement have severely affected the perception of masculinity. In this, the notion of masculinity as men being able to claim superiority over women and as natural is highly contested by several prominent feminist theorists (Gardiner, 2005). The social construction of masculinity is highlighted by focusing on the specificity of historical changes and the differing possibilities for the enactment of masculinity and their potential for change (Alsop et al, 2002; Gardiner, 2005). According to Mangan (1997: 4), "masculine gender identity is never stable; its terms are continually being redefined and renegotiated, the gender performance continually being restaged. Certain themes and tropes inevitably reappear with regularity, but each era experiences itself in different ways".

Furthermore, the notion of the Orientalist stereotype of Middle Eastern males practising unequal gender approaches and as overprotective and repressive in comparison to equality-oriented and emancipated Western males is deeply ingrained in Orientalist discussions in Western societies (Farahani, 2012; Connell, 2002; Khosravi, 2009). Hence, it is necessary to consider and assess the influence of Orientalist perspectives on the identity construction of Iranian/Middle Eastern/Muslim males in the new sociocultural and economic context.

In summary, it is ideal to discuss the couples' relationships in the diasporic context with specific references to gender roles, masculinity, and sexuality as they can be influenced by Orientalist prejudices and the possibility of the introduction of normative principles and social behaviours encompassing masculinity into men's experiences. In addition, their articulation patterns can be observed through the lens of religious and sociocultural values of gender roles, masculinity, and sexuality in their discussions in the new contexts, and the effect of this new masculine individuality on their marital life. To comprehend the preferable subject of heterosexual masculinity in a new location, i.e., host nation and under different sociocultural environments, along with understanding men's efforts to contest, corroborate, and cope with these anticipations, it is necessary to review experiences gained the home country relating to class, ethnic, educational, and occupational background.

2.2.3.4 Sexuality

Another significant theme of the current research is related to immigrants' sexual relations. Through this review, I intend to gather information and understand the meaning and form of sexuality within diverse sociocultural contexts and how it has transformed over time. This may serve as evidence to show the transformation of the immigrant population's sexual attitudes and behaviours in their host society.

Generally, the term 'sex' is used to imply the actions and gestures related to sexual behaviour. On the other hand, the term 'sexuality' encompasses a wider range of aspects (Farahani, 2018: 2). In modern times, sexuality can be broadly defined by sexual acts, identities and any aspects of interaction or psychology that may have an erotic nature including desires, feelings, identities, relationships as well as practises. These, in turn, contribute towards others defining a person as sexual or not and how we also define ourselves. By understanding sexuality in a much broader context, one can identify that it is reflected in diverse behaviours and purposes. Majorly, sex-related research covers the components of gender, types of relationships, sexual attraction, attitudes toward sex, communication between partners, and values and roles of individuals in sex (Jackson and Scott, 2010).

Hence, sex encompasses more than sexual intercourse and is a fundamental aspect of building one's identity. Further, it is related to identity and gender, morals and ideals, embodied behaviours, masculinity and femininity, dress conventions, fantasies, desires, and emotions which in turn impact the development of an individual's identity (Farahani, 2018).

The concept of sexuality is not independent of the corresponding gender roles and the persistent inequalities, social norms and gendered sexual behaviours (Farahani, 2018), and thus sexuality, is crucial to conveying the identity and gender roles. Sexual practices and attitudes are shaped by the values and expected gender roles, which further reflect the notion that sexual desire is reinforced by a society's culture and conventions (Shahidian, 1999). Thus, a broader look at sexuality offers a definition beyond the 'normal', which exceeds the typical attraction between the 'right' genders to factors such as class, race, age, academic and economic ability, educational qualification, region, religion and ethnicity. This further reiterates that sexual acts as well as gender relations can be perceived differently due to these factors and may alter the normative image of partners. Thus, to correctly understand the sexual relationships of Iranian immigrants, Farahani (2018*:* 2) considers how "[male and] female and subjects reflect over their (un)desirability as a feminine and masculine subject in a diasporic context but also on (im)possibilities to meet (new) partners".

Naturalistic or biological determinants were the main theories for understanding and normalising sexuality until the latter years of the twentieth century (Vance, 1991; Richardson, 2007; Ngwena, 2018). In the 1960s, social constructionist theory, which is based on the phenomenological and interactionist sociological viewpoints, began to argue against the biologically given nature of sexuality. Foucault (1979) also rejects the essentialist view of natural (hetero)sexuality, emphasising its sociocultural and historical foundations. According to Foucault (1979: 105), "sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given that power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct". In fact, "sexuality as a historical construction brings together gender identity, physiological traits, capacities, needs, desires and fantasies. Sexual identities are then choices that individuals make in the context of what is historically available to them. But sexual identities also may indicate resistance and opposition" (Weeks, 1981: 41). Therefore, sexuality is viewed as a social rather than a psychological or natural phenomenon (Gagnon and Simon, 1974 [1973]; Jackson and Scott, 2010).

This theory states that the concept of sexuality is continuously redefined according to diverse social dimensions and is carried out in embodied daily living. To elaborate further, sexuality is not a pre-given entity. Rather, social definition and the order of erotic life produce sexuality, which incorporates all practices, identities and desires that are considered erotic (Jackson and Scott, 2010). According to Freedman and D'Emilio (2005) and Wagner (2009),

the postmodern sexual idea is founded upon contingency, liquidity and subversion. People in the postmodern era analyse their beliefs surrounding sexuality to developing self-understanding of themselves as individuals. As a result, they are likely to follow the rules that define societal boundaries, as they may believe that it is mandatory and that they have no choice but to behave otherwise. Thus, considering these perspective-driven notions of sexuality allows us to critically appraise the assumption that sexuality is biologically driven. The majority of multidisciplinary studies in a wide range of disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, feminism, history, and sexology, support "an understanding of sexuality as a socio-political category, in the same way, that the categories 'woman' or 'race' are understood as expressing more than biological dimensions" (Ngwena, 2018: 223).

After the turn and development in the nature and concept of sexuality, the majority of theories focused on the significant changes in sexuality that can be attributed to the 'sexual revolution' or the demise of Victorian morality (Jackson and Scott, 2010). Several factors led to the 'sexual revolution' in the 1960s including the feminist movement, the rising economic independence of women, the development of contraception, and other elements of social change inherent to the counterculture of this decade (Ramey, 1972; Comfort, 1974; Hawkes, 1996).

Giddens (1992), a social scholar, states that the traditional male sexual dominance model was overthrown by female autonomy which also paved the path towards building egalitarian relationships. Giddens was one of many who proposed the liberation thesis approach. He demonstrated how the association between sexuality, liberation and democratisation manifests. The first way is through the emancipation of sexuality, which ceases to be regulated by tradition and social order and is instead considered as a means of pleasure. The second way refers to women's feeling of empowerment and lack of fear of pregnancy, which allows them to be independent and attain an equal position in relationships. This has led to the democratisation of relationships and the transformation of sex as a source of pleasure for women. The third way involves the democratisation of sexual patterns, including liberation for 'sexual minorities' such as homosexuals. Sexual liberation therefore involves a progression from fixed mindsets regarding sexuality, particularly those that discriminate against diverse sexual relationships such as those between homosexuals (Musial, 2013b).

In other words, "heterosexuality is no longer a standard by which everything else is judged" (Giddens, 1992: 34). This approach is employed in this thesis to explore how a shift from a

male-dominated, oppressive, conservative and religious society to a more equality-oriented one influences the sexuality of immigrant couples in the context of the Iranian diaspora.

2.2.3.5 Religious Views on Masculinity and Sexuality

To understand and investigate the modifications of gender roles, masculinity and sexual relationships among immigrants, one must consider several factors such as religion. This holds for those hailing from a religious society. Historically, the effect of religion on inter-sexual relationships has always been considered a conservative force (Ahmed, 1992; cited in Farahani, 2012). According to Farahani (2012: 161) Islamic ideologies on sex, gender, and sexuality, like those of other religions, are inextricably linked.

Thus, it is crucial to address 'Islamic' definitions of sexuality and masculinity while studying gender relations and roles. Islam as a religion, with its policies acting as a disciplinary authority, is a strong shaping force of gender identities. Despite the limited literature, this approach to sexuality and masculinity in Islamic cultures may provide a comprehensive idea of how these aspects are produced in complicated ways under diverse discourses (Farahani, 2012; Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, 2000; Bouhdiba, 1998; Khosravi, 2009; Najmabadi, 2000, 2005; Bilgin, 2004).

Despite the significance and authority of Islamic gender and sexuality regulation in Iran, it is to be dealt with separately from the monolithic Orientalist claims that religion is solely responsible for the formation of gender identity, masculinity/ femininity, and sexuality, particularly male and female sexuality. To establish the parameters of this study, it is important to note that sociocultural and political ties are specific to the community and also consider the vitality of Islamic ideologies. As Shahidian (2002: 17) also acknowledges how "other aspects of social life, such as class, ethnicity, nationalism, and political orientation", play a key role in the development of the notion of sexuality besides religion. Therefore, the norms and rules of religion that are constantly discussed and navigated should be contextualised, and historicised, specifically when they relate to different genders, amongst other factors like ethnicity, age, level of education, age, and class background.

Additionally, it is important to note that in countries that experience greater sociocultural, political and economic changes such as Iran, the meaning of some concepts changes rapidly. For instance, for the last four decades, the use of the term 'religious' to describe a person has held different meanings within different political situations. In Iran, for the past two centuries, sexual arenas have been set up that dictate that heteronormativity is intrinsic to

modernity, which therefore promote the elimination of premodern homosexuality and homoeroticism (Najmabadi, 2005; Korycki and Nasirzadeh, 2013).

In this study, I intend to facilitate extensive procedures of sexual identity construction of female and male immigrants within diasporic space, as well as their discussion of subjectivity and sexuality as they travel through various boundaries within historically unique. Furthermore, I intend to investigate the possibility and the degree of influence of immigration on understandings of sexuality, masculinity, and femininity. The purpose of this is to reveal the conflict and the extent to which male and female participants incorporate adjustment strategies to negotiate, question, seize, reject or accept, modify, affirm, and cope with the dominating social order and the conflicting cultural norms that govern their (sexual) lives.

In addition, the analysis of both male and female participants' stories of their experiences helped me track the influence of the discussions of Iranian Islamic, especially (early) post-revolutionary, legal activities, on men and women's comprehension of their sexual identities, specifically regarding their perception of these practices and attitudes towards sex and sexual pleasure. Moreover, considering an Orientalist perspective in the analysis of data allows me to examine the effect of Orientalist thoughts and values on the forming of diasporic immigrants' sexual identities.

2.2.3.6 Intimacy

Lastly, this study focuses on the element of marital intimacy and the effect of migration on it. The literature was investigated to gain some insights into the sociological approach towards the concept of intimacy and its meaning and the factors that may influence the transformation of marital intimacy. The existing sociological and psychological theories focus on the aspects of quality, type and intimacy transformation between various kinds of relations such as friends, children, parents and couples in Western society. These theories further suggest significant variation in the extent of intimate relations, their ways and meanings both within and across various societies within different cultures. The studies suggest that needs, wants, and expectations are complex social constructions and differ based on culture and history (Jamieson, 1998).

In the modern world, the quality of intimate relationships is addressed using a wide variety of terms, for instance, 'self-disclosure' (Giddens, 1992), or 'disclosing intimacy' (Jamieson, 1998). This form of intimacy between individuals may be characterised by emotional

exchanges, silent moments of intimacy, and intense interactions. Jamieson (1998) emphasises the need for individuals to reveal their thoughts and deep feelings to their partners to achieve mutual disclosure. Further, she highlights components of intimacy such as deep knowledge of each other and the sharing of privileged information. On the other hand, she also states that these components alone can be inadequate for achieving intimacy. Over time, the core dimensions of intimacy such as caring, love and sharing resources were found to evolve. However, she further states that to satisfy the category of an intimate relationship, it is not essential to meet all the criteria.

Therefore, another dimension such as bodily intimacy is also often brought up which may further enhance and contribute to self-intimacy. Jamieson (1998) describes this as 'deep knowing' through non-verbal approaches, for example, by partners sharing quieter moments where they remain in close proximity, referred to as silent encounters. Thus, in addition to self-disclosure, offering physical support and care, 'intimacy' is manifested through the mere presence of partners to express their love and care.

According to Layder (2009), the idea of 'deep knowledge intimacy' involves psychological, emotional and physical association. His ideas are distinct from 'disclosing intimacy' or 'self-disclosure' by Jamieson (1998) and Giddens (1992). He stresses that in order to sustain intimate relationships, a deep and mutual (psycho-emotional) knowledge of each other is essential. The statements by Giddens and Jamieson contradict this approach as they differentiate between self-revelation resulting in deep knowledge and disclosure between couples that may occur sporadically and superficially (i.e., transient moments of intimacy). Thus, the degree of intimacy and ways of self-disclosure differ significantly in the modern day. I intend to apply these to further explore and define the close relationships in the context of the Iranian immigrant diaspora.

Social theorists have attempted to explain the changes in intimacy patterns using concepts related to social movements such as second-wave feminism (Castells, 2004[1997]); individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gersheim, 1995); the structure of late capitalism (Hochschild, 2003); and globalisation and the liberalisation of attitudes (Giddens, 1999; 1992; Plummer, 2003). These sociological approaches have enabled the documentation of dramatic transitions from traditional or premodern to modern social forms.

There are two notable accounts that consider modern intimacy transformations. According to Musiał (2013a: 158), "The first account, represented mainly by Anthony Giddens (1992)

and Brian McNair (1996), concentrates on the processes of democratisation and emancipation; simply speaking, this approach suggests that modern intimacy contains a higher amount of freedom than the pre-modern one". Musiał (2013a) termed this account the 'liberation thesis approach' (Musiał, 2013a: 158). According to Musiał (2013a: 159), "The main claim of the 'liberation thesis approach' is that intimacy and its instances become released from the regulation of custom (emancipation), and that participants of intimate relationships became more equal (democratisation)". This approach therefore describes the relative liberty and freedom enjoyed by partners in liberal societies when compared to conventional or premodern intimacy, which is characterised by fixed responsibilities and traditional values (Giddens, 1991; 1992; Musiał, 2013a).

Giddens (1992:3) states that in Western societies changes in the definition of intimacy transformed the interpersonal domain shared by the couple in synchrony with democracy in the broader public domain. Using the ideas of 'confluent love' and the 'pure relationship' (1992: 3), Giddens has analysed the democratisation and emancipation of intimacy. A typical 'pure relationship' demands equal participation in terms of self-disclosure and status: "This relationship is continued only insofar as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens, 1992: 58). Thus, it can be seen that in contemporary society, the 'pure relationship' signifies an increasingly fragile relationship that has lost its external anchorages (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Layder, 2009).

The second account of modern intimacy transformations is known as the 'colonisation thesis approach' and explains intimacy as dependent on the capitalist market (Musiał, 2013b: 158). Social scientists like Eva Illouz (2007; 2012), Hochschild (1983), and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) present this view. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), although intimacy is presented as free from tradition, unlike Giddens and McNair, they believe that stereotypical gender roles and customary regulations still dictate the intimacy of relationships. Illouz (2007) presents the depth of the emotions associated with economic relations with a stress on the increasing political and economic models of exchange, equity and negotiation involved in describing close relationships. Illouz (2007: 5) describes this as 'emotional capitalism', in which "emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other".

To this end, Illouz suggests that individualisation often leads to isolation, where people may distance themselves leaving no room for warmth or intimacy, and this may also hinder an individual from making sacrifices that are a part of traditional family-based relationships (Musiał, 2013c: 125-130). Therefore, although psychological and feministic reformations supported the pursuit of freedom and equality, they also caused restraint, control of love and family, coolers of passion, and 'rationalisers' of love (Illouz, 2012: 177–184; Musiał, 2013b: 124).

Plummer (2003) looks at the changes in the intimate life of individuals through the lens of globalisation in the late modern world. He proposes that globalisation has influenced the choices of private lives subjecting them to differentiation, pluralisation as well as fragmentation. The changes in the spheres of personal lives are due to changes in familial norms and the emergence of novel types of families. These novel patterns of intimacies are particularly evident among families with members living as a nuclear family abroad, such as immigrant couples who are geographically distanced from their families, live across nation-state borders, and may have one or both of the partners working in different cities. Therefore in the late modern times, as Plummer (2003: 119–120) describes, "the globalisation embedded within vast social and cultural flows have had some consequences for individuals' intimate life. They created the struggles for individuals' national identities with more globalised sexual and gender identities".

Bauman (2003), on the other hand, assesses the current state of society through the strength of the bonds among family members and estimates them to be frail given the prevalence of conflicting desires and insecurities. Bauman proposed the term 'liquid love' to define modern relationships, where there is neither a sense of stability nor is there any risk. This concept explains the transition from the desire of people to find stability in a relationship towards personal freedom and thus emphasises the tension associated with individualisation.

Reibstein (1997) presents the idea of upward and downward spirals of intimate relationships which either do not carry any stable form or fluctuate between phases over time. The dramatic events are referred to as 'transition points' in which 'unavoidable obstacles' may cause a downward spiral of a relationship. For instance, in the child-rearing phase, an 'abnormal crisis' includes illness, death, unexpected severe financial losses or disabling accidents. With respect to childbirth, Reibstein states that with the arrival of a baby, the number of times the couple engage in intercourse may be negatively affected, leading to the

weakening of the intimate bond. This may further cause the couple to emotionally grow apart and the male partner is more likely to be willing to part with their wife.

Chavez (2017) researched Mexican immigrant women living in the United States as they navigated through their close relationships, particularly marriage, and related expectations while living in the host society. The study's findings state that these women routinely encounter highly conflicting norms and expectations within their households and external society. Traditional Mexican gender roles demand females to be submissive towards their partners and encourage male dominance in the household. However, being immigrants, these women face the pressure to conform and accept the gender roles of American society that promote equality and individualism, which can create confusion, tension, and conflict in their intimate relationships. Chavez states that considering this information, there is an urgent need to highlight immigrant women's experiences and gain a more nuanced understanding of the cultural identity of the immigrants and the influence of gender in their intimate relationships.

Kitiarsa (2008) has extensively worked on the changing dynamics of intimate relationships in Thailand. He has explored the different ways Thai Buddhist couples negotiate their gender roles in their relationships within the context of changing social and economic conditions. He revealed that while traditional Thai gender roles, based on Buddhist teachings, emphasise male dominance and female submission, the new generation of couples are more inclined to practice egalitarian relationships. One must note that Buddhist teachings and cultural values in Thailand still possess a strong hold on the social expectations and dynamics of close relationships. Kitiarsa further states that a deeper insight into the intersections between culture, religion, and economic conditions is essential to understanding the changing dynamics of relationships.

Another social scientist, Bloch (2017), worked on the experiences of Orthodox Jewish couples in Israel, with a special focus on the influence of their religious beliefs and practices in intimate relationships. In Orthodox Judaism, traditional gender roles are emphasised, and values such as mutual respect, emotional intimacy and open communication are adhered to by couples. Bloch proposes that the interpretation of religious teaching determines the dynamics of relationships. Hence, to promote healthy and fulfilling relationships, understanding the dynamics of intimate relationships within religious communities is essential.

Overall, the research conducted by Chavez (2017), Kitiarsa (2008), and Bloch (2017) highlights the complex ways in which cultural, religious, and economic factors design the dynamics of intimate relationships within specific communities. These studies highlight the significance of the cultural and social contexts that facilitate the formation of relationships and places of negotiations and the various ways individuals navigate between conflicting norms and expectations in these contexts. Thus, by offering a closer view of the individual experiences within specific communities, these studies enrich the knowledge of intimate relationships and the cultural norms and expectations that shape these dynamics.

In addition, Deborah Boehm's (2012) work *Intimate Migrations* offers a valuable perspective on the experiences of immigrant families and the role of intimate relationships in the migration process. Boehm argues that intimate relationships are central to how families navigate the challenges and opportunities of migration and that these relationships are shaped by a variety of factors, including gender, race, class, and legal status.

To incorporate Boehm's insights with research conducted by Chavez, Kitiarsa, and Bloch, it is pertinent to explore how the experiences of Iranian immigrants and their families are shaped by intimate relationships, and how these relationships are influenced by factors such as gender, class, and legal status. It is also important to highlight the complex ways in which cultural, religious, and economic factors design the dynamics of intimate relationships within British society.

I attempt to connect all the theories discussed above and apply these to demonstrate that couples' intimate relations are not stable and fixed but develop and transition into various forms during the process of immigration. As Reibstein (1997) points out, the upward and downward spirals of close relationships have no stable form at any point in time. Moreover, by applying Bauman (2003), Plummer (2003), Illouz (2007; 2012), Hochschild (1983), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), McNair (1996) and Giddens (1992), I consider immigration as a transition phase, which challenges immigrant couples' intimate relationships. When immigrant couples emigrate from a traditional country to a Western and modern country with liberal ideals, the couple's intimate bonds become increasingly fragile, exercising the existing insecurities. This happens because immigrants experience relatively higher freedom in the structure of modern intimacy in modern society as compared to traditional or premodern intimacy, which was regulated by fixed rules, traditional values and several other external criteria. Therefore, the transformation of individuals' intimate lives can be

understood through the individualisation process in modern society which leads to couples growing distant from each other, causing intimacy to weaken and undermining the traditional self-sacrificing commitment to family.

Moreover, by drawing on Boehm's ‘intimate migrations’ framework, I hope to offer a novel perspective on the shared experiences of Iranian immigrants and their families, emphasising the importance of intimate relationships in shaping the migration process. This could provide a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of migration and valuable insights for both policymakers and practitioners who work closely with immigrant families. Additionally, incorporating Boehm's work into understanding theories of modern intimacy may help to situate the research within the broader context of scholarship on migration, intimacy and family dynamics.

Boehm's framework can also be used to study the intersection of intimate relationships of Iranian immigrants with broader macro-social conditions in the UK and examine how these relationships may further contribute to the immigrants' adaptation process. For instance, the framework of ‘intimate migrations’ can be used to examine how gender dynamics within Iranian families may shape the adaptation process of refugees in the UK, exploring in particular how within the same migrant population Iranian women's experiences of migration may be completely different from Iranian men's experiences, and how gender norms and expectations within Iranian families may influence refugees' access to various types of resources, employment, and social networks in the UK.

Furthermore, the framework helps investigate the impact of legal status on the intimate relationships and adaptation processes of Iranian immigrants in the UK by studying the influence of refugees' legal status on their family relationships, including their access to essential resources such as healthcare, education and other social services. Additionally, the 'intimate migrations’ framework assists in decoding how the legal status of refugees may design their experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, and how this may further impact their relationships and adaptation process in the UK.

Overall, incorporating the framework of ‘intimate migrations’ into my current research offers a novel and nuanced perspective on the experiences of Iranian immigrants in the UK and also provides a valuable contribution to the scholarship on migration, intimacy and family dynamics, offering insights into the complex and multifaceted experiences of immigrants and their families in the context of migration.

2.3 Studies on Migration and Marital Relationships

In this section, an overview of the existing literature on immigrants from diverse backgrounds is presented, with special attention paid to their lives and interpersonal relationships after their movement into a Western country. The previous studies did not suffice in their focus on the objective of the current project and there are considerable gaps which I intend to closely examine. One can say that the literature so far has failed to cover the major components of marital relationships such as sexual relations, the power dynamic between the couple, gender roles and marital intimacy. Studies with varied methodologies have been included in this section, as have studies focusing on individuals from diverse nationalities such as Chinese, Iranian, Ethiopian, and Korean who recently immigrated to Western countries like Canada, Sweden, the UK, and the US. Some of the studies considered comprised only either males or females while others focused mainly on couples. The focus of this thesis is on the impact of the migration of Iranian people on their marital relationships. After a thorough review of the preliminary works on the effect of migration on marital relationships, followed by critical appraisal, it is evident that existing studies focus on changes in the role allocation and power dynamics between partners and do not pay attention to intimacy within the relationship. This research aims to address this gap.

The available literature highlights that marital relationships and migration are strongly associated. Academic views on this subject are broadly divided and contradict each other. Some academics argue that migration can be a source of excessive stress and strain attributable to cultural differences and can thereby increase the likelihood of identity crisis. Immigrant families may face life-altering questions about their beliefs, responsibilities, and conventions, and may experience frustration and conflicts (Richter-Devroe, 2008). Some highlight that these challenging circumstances may escalate existing conflicts within these families, particularly due to the strain of sociocultural assimilation into the host society (Umubyeyi, 2019). For instance, the challenges in the new country may include learning and conversing in a foreign language, adopting the new culture, and settling down in stable employment. Thus, it is estimated that migrant couples are more likely to experience conflict than other couples (Agbaw, 2009; Lee, 2015).

In contrast to the previously stated views, some studies reveal the possibility of a positive impact of migration on relationships. In Guruge's study (2007), it is stated that immigrant couples are unlikely to receive support from their own family and may be isolated. However,

this may act as a catalyst for them to strengthen their relationships by requiring them to lean on each other for emotional, social and financial support (Guruge, 2007; Hyman et al, 2008). For instance, "the absence of an appropriate close kin, such as a grandmother, to take care of the children and do housework, when the wife is doing small jobs for a family to survive, results in non-traditional patterns of chores in which the husband is called to assist the wife in such activities" (Hyman et al, 2008: 150). Further, immigrant couples are often encouraged to collaborate in decision-making and thus are highly likely to offer each other additional support (Umubyeyi, 2019).

As per the review conducted, some of the studies subscribe to both views. They strongly state that culture has a significant effect, either positive or negative, and may have both direct and indirect effects on a couple's health (Agbaw, 2009; Lee, 2015; Hyman et al, 2008; Guruge, 2007; Guruge et al, 2010). A study by Guruge et al (2010) closely examines both views and states that migration may have an explicit and implicit impact on the wellbeing of the couple. The discord or negative effects are most evident when the gender roles of couples in the host country differ from those in the home country. Thus, the couple is forced to integrate the new culture and may be coerced to alter their previous gender roles.

2.3.1 Marital Conflicts and Immigration

Several studies so far have focused on the migration impact on marital conflicts among migrants from developing to developed countries. Darvishpour (2002) states that gender roles and intimate relationships between men and women have undergone a transformation due to migration. These changes were attributed to cultural shocks that might create a sense of conflict, particularly regarding shared responsibilities, which would have been unlikely to occur in the home country. According to Darvishpour, the ways gender roles are understood in Sweden are different from the ways migrants from Iran understand them, and therefore both men and women struggle to understand and adjust to this new context. Fisher (2013) concurs with Darvishpour, arguing that for a typical Iranian migrant the dominant role of the husband is accepted as the norm, but this changes with migration. Although the current study does not present information on marital conflict in migrants' original countries, it focuses on the particular case of the socio-economic conditions of Australian migrants. In their home country, the men enjoyed their status as sole breadwinners but lost this position in the new country. It has been observed that this causes great anxiety and frustration among these men and results inevitably in conflict between intimate partners.

Hyman et al (2008) conducted interviews with Ethiopian migrants who at the time were residing in Toronto. The authors identified that couples were unable to renegotiate their desired roles in the new environment and that being subjected to new cultural expectations led to several challenges. For instance, men perceived certain activities as only for women and refused to perform these. Women, however, were willing to perform the dual role of breadwinner and caretaker, which resulted in divorce or separation. Darvishpour (2002) claimed that a rise in divorce rates is one of the main effects of migration. Both Darvishpour and Fisher (2013) state that men are likely to retain their traditional role as the breadwinners and sole decision-makers of the families, and hold the position of head of the family. In this type of setting, women are expected to submit to their husbands. Therefore, a shift in the role of women away from conventional standards is perceived by their husbands as a neglect of duty (Darvishpour, 2002). Maciel et al (2009), in their observational study, noticed a change in men's behaviour when they observed that women have more protection, status and resources in the new societal context. Men who fear legal consequences and social norms tend to modify their behaviour towards women. Sometimes, however, this excessive restriction and decline in power held may result in excessive aggression and other forms of dominating behaviour.

The majority of the existing research on migrants focuses on familial cultural background as a significant factor in marital conflict (Hyman, Guruge, and Mason, 2008; Richter-Devroe, 2008; Predelli, 2004; Baltas and Steptoe, 2000; Richter-Devroe, 2008; Smokowski et al, 2008). Richter-Devroe (2008) state that when people transit from one type of socio-economic environment to another, they are expected to enter a new family setting. Many family traditions that are normal and acceptable are no longer valid and feasible to practice in the new environment. In addition, according to Hyman, Guruge, and Mason (2008) and Predelli (2004), emigrants entering into new societies that may change their perceptions of gender stereotypes may experience conflict in marital relationships. In fact, the degree of cultural differences between two societies (home and host) affects the intensity of the changes in migrants' values, attitudes, and acts (Baltas and Steptoe, 2000). These cultural differences can cause a rift, with one of the spouses choosing to adopt a new culture while the other intends to preserve the culture of the country of origin (Richter-Devroe, 2008). Culture is dynamic and adaptable to diverse circumstances. However, during times of transition among couples, it is challenging for them to find a common ground to direct their cultural understanding (Smokowski et al, 2008).

Migration offers unique experiences and implications for both men and women. Aspects like age, class, ethnicity, and education, along with other criteria, also substantially impact the relocation process for both genders. As a result, although women and men share the same household, they tend to have different relocation experiences (Farahani, 2012). Hyman et al (2008) observed that the pattern of adaption of the roles and responsibilities was distinct for men and women for Canadian migrants.

According to Mahdi (1999, 2001), women are likely to adopt new roles and responsibilities much faster than men and this is particularly evident in the case of Iranian women who demonstrated greater distance from their original perspectives. They have achieved this by adjusting to greater gender equality in the US. While on the other hand, the Iranian men had difficulty adjusting to life without their former social and economic standing in the diasporic context. With these developments, Iranian women have been observed to publicly demand equality in several areas, including household duties, child-rearing, decision-making, family property ownership, and even sexual practices. Mahdi also comments that there is a recent increase in the percentage of males taking part in domestic tasks. However, the rate of change is slower than in other developments. Mahdi's study revealed the contrasting nature of the two societies in terms of the culturally, socially and religiously ingrained roles of women and the degree of patriarchal rules (Mahdi, 1999).

Moreover, Rapaport and Doucerain (2021) highlight post-immigration disparities and differences in the cultural adaptation of spouses as a significant part of their research. Baltas and Steptoe (2000) observed that women migrants were more integrated into the new society than men. Darvishpour (2002) reveals that these discrepancies are due to the greater increase in women's access to resources and their enhanced empowerment when compared to their partners. Some of the facilities provided by the state include subsidies and support, gainful employment, high-quality life standards, gender-equal legislation and norms, and higher social status. In modern society, men are relatively more financially dependent on women, with the proportion of women dependent on men having considerably declined over the past decades. In developed societies, women's rights are perceived as positive by female immigrants, especially by those hailing from countries with traditional values and where gender roles are unequal. According to Naghdi (2010), women in the host country have better lives than their partners as they tend to be more observant and accepting of the nations' norms and regulations.

Migrant couples can struggle with disparities in occupational status, life and job satisfaction, wealth, and legal status (Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021). Language is a crucial tool for smooth integration into the new society and can cause competition between partners. Women with stronger language skills are better equipped to face the challenges in the host society than men (Naghdi, 2010). Rezazadeh and Hoover (2018) discovered that women are more willing to learn the language of the host country with an intent to enhance their social life and the quality of networks.

Overall, gender roles, household income, marital interactions, and household responsibilities alter after immigration (Zhou et al, 2022; Hyman et al, 2008). One can state that a move from one sociocultural setting to another dramatically modifies gender roles, expectations from individuals, family obligations, and perceived roles (Hyman et al, 2008). For example, Afrouz et al (2022) state that the migration of women from a society with narrow perspectives on gender roles towards one with a more liberal perspective is highly likely to motivate women to embrace cultural changes. For instance, an Afghan woman's idea of gender roles can be dramatically changed as they encounter endless possibilities and opportunities in Australian society. It is a common phenomenon, in the diasporic context, for female migrants to request the same changes from their spouses regarding the perception of women in society (Afrouz et al, 2022; DeBiaggi, 2002).

Tension in marriages is bound to increase among immigrant couples without proper handling of the pressures and inconveniences of migration (Umubyeyi, 2019). Shirpak et al (2011) demonstrated that gendered marital roles are challenged in new societies by focusing on Iranian men and women residing in Toronto, Canada. They identified three major themes from their data: challenges to gender ideologies and norms; obstacles in the workplace; and the effects of them on couples' roles at home. The study revealed that employment opportunities that are attributable to equal gender ideologies can have a significant impact on marital relationships. Men have been shown to struggle with new gender roles more than women in the host country. Shirpak et al's study sheds light on the issues that Iranian immigrants in Canada experience in relation to gendered marital roles and relationships, as well as how they attempt to manage them. They showed that immigrant's reactions depend on their gains and losses in the new society.

Migrant women's status usually undergoes a transformation in the transition to the host country and this can also affect their behaviour (Hugo, 1987). The social status of women is

impacted by the process of migration in diverse ways. In a majority of cases, gender equality and financial independence empower immigrant women in the host society. The cultural environment of the diasporic society differs from their home country, impacting their relationship with their husbands (Nwabinike and Tenkorang, 2015). Afrouz et al (2022) suggest that freedom in a new nation motivated several Afghan women to pursue additional opportunities and enhance their current living standards as well as encouraging them to transcend predefined gender norms, stereotypes, and prejudices. In Australia, education is crucial in the promotion of women's autonomy and self-confidence.

Several empirical studies, particularly those focused on migration, have repeatedly emphasised the role of women's economic independence in enhancing household equality (Hirsch et al, 2002; Gonzalez-Lopez, 2004; Grzywacz et al, 2009; Guruge and Mason, 2008). In a study by Hyman, Guruge and Mason (2008), most of the female participants who were newly employed stated that new occupational positions provided them with several benefits in addition to extra income, such as reduced isolation, better adaptation to the new society, and more autonomy.

2.3.2 Power Dynamics among Immigrants

Some studies explore the complicated associations between the power of gender stereotypes and women's efforts to transcend them. These studies contribute to a deeper comprehension of women's conceptions of gender roles and options after migration. A move towards an egalitarian gender attitude increases the sense of equality in decision-making processes (Kulik, 1999; Vogler, 1998; Xu and Lai, 2004; Shu et al, 2012). This change in the equilibrium of power in the family questions traditional gender roles (Afrouz et al, 2022). Davishpour (2002) revealed that Iranian families' immigration to Sweden altered the families' power dynamics and their impact on marital tensions, which in many cases has led to separation or divorce. He further adds that Iranian immigrant women who assumed a more powerful role in society challenged the roles of men. This negatively impacted the traditional family structure, often resulting in separation or divorce due to a collapse of family cohesion. As Darvishpour (2002) demonstrates, these novel changes in power dynamics have allowed women to choose to leave marriages that are a source of concern. Moreover, the power dynamics within marriages also shift as a result of changes in gendered labour roles and obligations.

Every culture holds a distinct pattern of familial labour division and the transformation of gender-based labour obligations shifts power dynamics within the marital bond (Bui and Marosh, 2008; Suare-Orozco, 2001). The employment situation in the host country can involve women working two jobs and may therefore be unable to attend to household duties, which can require their husbands to perform duties such as cooking and childcare (Bui and Marosh, 2008; Suare-Orozco, 2001). Maciel et al (2009) state that a decline in power at home may cause men to act aggressively and display dominance to compensate for the loss of power. Umubyeyi (2019) explains that the burden of changing power dynamics tends to remain until the active engagement of the couple resolves their circumstances. Where the men attempt to preserve their prior dominance, the conflict only increases. In extreme cases, men may resort to violence to retain their privileged position at home (Suare-Orozco, 2001). To gain a better insight into the changing power dynamics of couples and gender roles, it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the couples' coping mechanisms. While some couples are capable of successfully adjusting to two cultures, others may suffer (Hyman et al, 2008). In fact, conflict in marriages can result from the two partners playing different roles.

Maciel et al (2009) examined the experiences of migrants from Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Barbados, Puerto Rico, Guyana and Trinidad living in the US with a focus on gender and power issues, as well as how spouses deal with shifting social structures and different cultural situations. The study's findings demonstrate "how the couples manage a delicate balance between the push for the gender change and avoiding too much conflict as male power is challenged" (2009: 9). Although the likelihood of women challenging the family structure is relatively low, the awareness of women's rights may cause husbands to consider alternative ways of relating to their wives. Rezazadeh and Hoover (2018), with a focus on the positive aspects of immigration, state that for some women, migration offered them increased authority in decision-making, autonomy and financial freedom. Hyman et al (2008) state that an increase in the role of women in the decision-making process has a positive impact. For instance, it leads to an increase in mutual dependency between the couple. They further contend that migration encourages individuals to view their partners as a trustworthy other and can therefore build closeness and harmony. These favourable changes enhance the quality of their lives after the migration (Hyman et al, 2008). This increase in harmony and dependency within the nuclear family might aid migrant couples in adjusting to the new culture (Umubyeyi, 2019).

2.3.3 Sexual Relations and Immigration

The second body of research that is relevant to my work investigates immigrants' sexual issues after immigration, the changes in their sexual attitudes and behaviour, and how these changes affect couples' relationships. Studies in this field often confirm the changes that migrants' sexual patterns undergo when migrating to other countries highlighted above. They also analyse the possible changes in sexual activities induced by moving from a traditional, religious, and patriarchal country to a liberal and secularised country (Ahmadi, 2003; Farahani, 2007, 2018; Abdolmanafi et al, 2018; Roodsaz and Jansen, 2019; Tinarwo and Pasura, 2014**).** For instance, Shahidian (1999), by undertaking an analysis of the shifting in Iranian Muslim immigrants' understanding of sexuality and gender relations in Canada, investigates how spatial displacement affects gender and sexual relationships.

Culture in general has a significant impact on people's sexual ideas, attitudes and ideals, as well as their capacity to enjoy the act of sex and experience sexual pleasure or discontent. Therefore, one can state that culture may play a critical role in forming ideas, attitudes and values about sexuality, as well as support the significance of cognitive-emotional characteristics in determining immigrants' sexual practices in a new society with a different culture (Abdolmanafi et al, 2018). For example, Ahmadi (2003), with a focus on Iranian immigrants, demonstrated that Iranian immigrants' perspectives on sexuality have been influenced by their exposure to Swedish culture. He believes that the formation of a person's sexuality occurs in a variety of settings and scenarios. These are highly unique to the individual and might carry different meanings at different times over the course of life. Ahmadi shows that a change in sociocultural context can affect the immigrants' views on sexuality. Therefore, this research offers valuable information regarding the natural transformation of Iranian immigrants' sexual views and practices, which has not been adequately covered in previous migration studies. Changes that can occur in immigrants' sexual relations have also not been analysed in the framework of migration theories, such as the assimilation approach. Another limitation involves the lack of information on the impact of changes in immigrants' sexual attitudes and practices.

Recent studies on the Iranian diaspora confirm the desire and capacity of Iranian immigrants to accept modern ideas of gender equality, sexual freedom and individual self-satisfaction. These studies observe that Iranian immigrants are able to transition from a conventional past to a contemporary present while also determining the degree to which they wish to integrate

into the host society. For instance, Roodsaz and Jansen's (2019) study introduces the idea of sexual self-fashioning to investigate the diasporic speculation of the concept of sexuality in several didactic applications of modernity. This study demonstrates that modernity has a role in the changes that occur in diasporic sexual customs, especially among Muslim populations living in Western nations.

Instead of perceiving modernity as a measure of the Islamic migrants' and refugees' assimilation, Roodsaz and Jansen's (2019) present it as a claim-making tool, allowing them to interpret expressions of sexuality as techniques for sexual self-fashioning. They also investigate how sexual identity is effectively negotiated and constructed by accepting, rejecting and transgressing modernity, allowing individuals to place themselves in various areas of sociocultural or religious affiliation. Shahidian (1999) also claims that social reformation allows some immigrants to reform their gender relations and sexual perceptions and practices. Gender and class identities both have a strong impact on these shifts. Shahidian claims that individualism and individual rights in modern society have provided suitable grounds for development after immigration.

Some researchers, for example Farahani (2018), argue that immigrant women may act on their sexuality in the face of limits, contradictions and paradoxes imposed on them. Her findings reveal that immigrant women demonstrate a self-reflective practice in the host society, questioning their past/present and home/foreign dualism regarding sex and sexuality, marriage, love, and virginity. The researcher investigates the gendering, historicisation and cultural construction of diasporic sexuality by examining the experiences of several Iranian female immigrants residing in Sweden. Accounts of the characteristics that make a desirable (hetero)sexual feminine subject in the new social contexts are combined with consciously reasoned analysis based on the "Foucauldian concept of discursive practices in normalisation process of sexuality" (2018: 4). Through this, Farahani demonstrates that the theoretical understanding of socioculturally developed sexuality is communicated through constructive and considerate scholarship. With a special focus on Swedish Iranians, she closely examines the types of challenges and conflicts created during the process of (self)disciplining a woman's body and the tactics women employ to cope with these tensions. She thereby reveals the effect of migration experiences on sexuality and also demonstrates that sexuality is a component of migratory activities.

In addition, the newfound status of immigrant women in modern society with strong economic status, as well as a rise in the feminisation of migration, has allowed these women to challenge unequal gender roles and "redefine established codes that organise and give meaning to gendered and sexual identities" (Tinarwo and Pasura, 2014: 529). According to Tinarwo and Pasura (2014: 521), "Sexuality has been decoupled from traditional marriage and is often expressed in non-normative sexual relationships". These different gender and sexual identities among Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom are not entirely British or Zimbabwean. Immigrants living outside the family gaze are given unusual circumstances that encourage the formation of these fluid, hybrid forms of relationships, which might be read as an appropriation of some of the various family types in the UK (Farahani, 2007; Shahidian, 1999; Tinarwo and Pasura, 2014). According to Shahidian (1999), settling in Canada provides opportunities for Iranian married men to become involved in extra-marital relationships with significantly less social and family control.

In this regard, Farahani (2007) presents a much more complicated strategy in her study of changing sexual culture, in which change occurs more in terms of the sense or perception expressed by the study subjects rather than a phenomenon witnessed by the researcher. Farahani (2007: 261) investigates complications, dilemmas, compromises and coping strategies implemented among Iranian Swedish women involved in various power dynamics, revealing a hybrid sense of 'Swedishness' and 'Iranianness'. The study revealed that during this process the women became less conservative and more emancipated.

2.3.4 Masculinity and Immigration

A review of existing research also identified work that focuses on 'masculinity issues' during migration processes. One of the key themes of my research is crises of masculinity, and I aim to explore how male Iranian immigrants cope with this challenge to their identity.

Masculinity, like femininity, is a contextual trajectory built through a continuous interplay between broader social systems and human agencies (Mehdizadeh, 2021). The issue of masculinity and the changes it undergoes during migration has been confirmed by numerous studies. For instance, Maternowska et al (2014) highlight the varied effects of migration on masculinity. According to Khosravi (2009), geographic relocation affects male identity, as well as how men approach and respond to the problem of decline in the masculine identity. Men flaunt their manhood and demonstrate their conception of masculinity, but this is influenced by the transition to new sociocultural and familial settings which hold an altered

view of gender identities. Gender roles established in their home countries, their roles in matrimony, and the legal norms of the host culture are important factors (Mehdizadeh, 2021). The perspectives on masculinity held by immigrant males are also influenced by shifts in gender ideologies. Khosravi (2009) revealed that in the homes of Iranian families, male masculinity was challenged by wives who attempted to gain equal roles at home and who were supported by Swedish media. He shows that "ethno-sexual frontiers against Iranian men are constructed through media, politics and popular culture, in short by the dominant Islamo/xenophobic gaze in the Swedish society" (2009: 596). According to Khosravi (2009), while Iranian women have gained more equality and freedom, men still undertook activities that expressed their masculine dominance and attempted to maintain their previous level of control over their spouses and daughters. Therefore, the challenge to traditional male gender roles threatens the identity of men who have difficulty sustaining control within the home and power within decision-making processes (Maternowska et al, 2014). Ehrenreich (1995) has also argued that these changes represent a "decline of patriarchy" (Shahidian, 1999: 201).

Farahani's (2012) study, meanwhile, emphasises several intersecting factors that build and develop the concept of sexuality and masculinity in various diasporic environments through the conceptual and contextual observation of the circumstances of departure, arrival and residence among Iranian-born men from three different cities: Sydney, Stockholm, and London. She uses an ethnographic method to closely investigate the influence of social interaction, Iranian Islamic cultures, and migratory experiences on sexual behaviour and men's sense of masculinity. Further, Farahani (2007) concludes that masculine subjectivities are multitudinous and dynamic: they reflect the complex interaction between class, tradition, modernity, race, age, self, society, religion, and politics, and the persistent articulation of identity. However, the research on the overlapping discourses of masculinity within communities of diasporic males is incomplete and neglects how these individuals have been overlooked, excluded, silenced, or empowered.

The new occupational status of men post-immigration is a major factor that determines their masculine identity. For example, Kimmel (1994) argues that downward occupation and unemployment are the foremost challenges faced by males because employment is one of the main prerequisites for masculinity. Economic achievement is considered to be the main indicator of a man's worth. Donaldson (1987: 167–168) in his study conveys in a nuanced manner that men's masculinity is often undermined by performing repetitive, boring and

humiliating work, while jobs that offer challenge result in an increase in male self-esteem. The importance of work among migrants is emphasised by Ramírez's (2011) observation that the experience or sense of masculinity is severely affected by immigrant men's new low economic status, which also changes gender relationships in the family. Shahidian (1999: 201) explains some of the reasons for the change in men's and women's roles in employment: "Men's marketability drops due to the incongruity of the qualification systems between the home and host society or to differences in the job market. Immigrant women, meanwhile, often take a prominent part in the economic recovery of their families – much to the chagrin of the Iranian male". Research shows that women's economic contribution within the family tends to grow following migration. This may cause emasculation and a sense of disempowerment among migrant men due to a lack of job opportunities and can, in turn, harm men's traditional perceptions of masculinity (Donaldson and Howson, 2009; Gonzalez-Allend, 2016).

Overall, this review reveals that there is limited research available on the gender roles and marital lives of Iranian immigrants residing in Europe, especially in the UK, when compared to the US and Canada. Moreover, the review presents the existing gap in the literature on Iranian immigrants and the challenges they encounter as intimate immigrant couples during their sociocultural and economic assimilation into Western culture. I could not find a study that simultaneously examined the effect of migration on gender roles, marital power, and sexual and intimate relations among couples. Therefore, my research contributes to this field by exploring the integration modes of immigrants and their acculturation into the host society (London), and the impact this has on couples' relationships in the new, modern society.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the design and methodologies utilised in this research study. It addresses the inherent difficulties and intricacies associated with the research process. Furthermore, it outlines the sequential stages and protocols involved in data analysis and interpretation, accompanied by introspective observations of the research.

3.1 Methods

This study utilises a qualitative methodology to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, attitudes, statements, lifestyles, and behaviours of individuals (Bennett, 2011; Henn et al, 2009; Harri et al, 2011). Qualitative research enables researchers to collect a wide range of information through structured or unstructured interviews with participants (Bennett, 2011). This study aims to explore the cultural and contextual factors that influence the relationships of Iranian married couples living in London, such as cultural influences, religious affiliation, gender roles, and economic and occupational status. These factors may impact the process of sociocultural assimilation among migrant households (Creswell, 2007; Mcfarlane, 2012; Berry, 2003, 2005).

Gabb (2009) demonstrates the usefulness of a qualitative approach in understanding the complexities of family intimacy and the influence of external sociocultural factors on private lives. She presents methods for observing participants and conducting qualitative studies to analyse closeness within families. Gab explores various sociological methodologies applicable to family-based research and their relevance to sensitive topics like intimate relationships among family members. She also highlights the utility of interview methods in understanding how individuals perceive and comprehend relationships.

Interpretative phenomenology is a relevant research strategy in qualitative research projects (Pietkiewics and Smith, 2014; Reid et al, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology focuses on the study of lived experiences of the life world as lived by a person and aims to uncover the essence and meaning of lived experiences within the context of a specific research topic (Al Balishi, 2016; Reid et al, 2005; Laverty, 2003). The interpretative phenomenology approach, as described by Reid et al (2005), aims to uncover the essence and meaning of lived experiences within the context of a specific research topic. It originated from the study of life experiences among migrants in diasporic contexts. Researchers are encouraged to

immerse themselves in the participants' worlds to better understand their experiences and perspectives on the phenomena being studied (Simon and Goes, 2011). Interpretive phenomenological studies aim to reveal the meaning behind specific actions or behaviours, such as increased marital conflict, while considering contextual, acculturative, and cultural effects on immigrants' lives. This method helps researchers comprehend the subjective experiences of individuals and groups, giving meaning to those experiences through the examination of participants' lived experiences, including attitudes, idiomatic phrases, and intentions communicated through language (Pietkiewics and Smith, 2014; Reid et al, 2005).

In the current study, I utilise semi-structured interviews to explore transformations in attitudes and practices related to gender roles, marital power, masculinity, and sexual and intimate relationships among Iranian migrants in the UK. The primary source of data are participants' experiences during the transition from their home country to the UK. Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the primary method because they make it possible to probe respondents for additional information and clarification as well as explore their perceptions and opinions on complicated and sensitive matters. The use of in-depth interviews allows participants to provide their own accounts of experiences, making this method thoughtful and centred on the participants (Valentine, 1997). The aim of semi-structured interviews, according to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), is to explore themes of the interviewees' daily lives from their own viewpoints. Kvale and Brinkman state that the interviewer documents, analyses and interprets both the content and the context of what is said. For instance, McKenzie (2017) employed semi-structured interviews to explore the emotional experiences and interactions of migrant couples, shedding light on their sexual and romantic relationships.

By using the semi-structured interview method, I was able to establish a general direction for the conversation while allowing flexibility for the interviewee to contribute and guide the discussion. This approach keeps possibilities open and does not limit the respondents' answers. To formulate the interview questions, an open-ended questionnaire was developed, allowing participants to share their personal stories, experiences, and perspectives on the specific subject matter and the occurrence of relevant issues, as well as how they personally ascribed meaning and understanding to them (Simon and Goes, 2011). The open-ended exploratory approach provides respondents with the opportunity to share their personal stories, experiences, and perspectives and explain how they personally ascribe meaning to

them while highlighting the level of agreement between partners' opinions. In addition, the viewpoints are recorded in their original natural forms, including nonverbal communication.

The study employs an interpretive phenomenological method to explore the participants' perceptions, lived experiences, and viewpoints (Smith et al, 2009). By allowing Iranian migrants to express their perspectives, interpretive phenomenology captures the nuances of culture and migration as they relate to marriage. This qualitative research approach involves thematic and in-depth examination, description, and interpretation of individuals' life stories. Utilising an interpretive research design can therefore be instrumental to exploring the transformations in attitudes and practices related to gender roles, marital power, masculinity, and sexual and intimate relationships among Iranian migrants in the UK.

3.2 Research Participants and Recruitment Strategy

Qualitative research focuses on gaining comprehensive knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than achieving a representative sample of the population (Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative inquiries, where individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of interest are deliberately selected (Polkinghorne, 2005). For this study, purposive sampling is the appropriate choice. While there is no specific number mentioned in the literature as an optimal sample size, researchers have suggested a range of 8 to 15 participants to obtain a deeper understanding of their life stories (Hill et al, 1997; Polkinghorne, 2005; Creswell, 2006)

The research sample for this study consisted of 36 first-generation Iranian immigrants, including 15 males and 21 females, aged between 30 and 73. Participants had to be born in Iran and identify as Muslim to be included in the study. They also needed to have resided in London for at least two years and be either married, divorced, or remarried. Another criterion was that the participants had been in a heterosexual relationship for at least one year in Iran before migrating to the UK. In the case of divorced participants, the divorce should have occurred in the UK. These criteria were chosen to ensure that participants had experienced marital relationships in both their home country (Iran) and the host country (UK), allowing for a comparison of their marital lives and an examination of the impact of migration on their relationships. Due to limitations in time and budget, individuals who identified as homosexual were not included in the study.

Recruiting participants in London presented challenges due to the limited pool of potential participants and their general reluctance to participate in academic research. This was likely influenced by their asylum-seeking experiences and shared nationality-ethnicity, which raised concerns about confidentiality. To overcome these obstacles, various recruitment strategies were employed. These included reaching out to Iranian clubs, schools, shops, supermarkets, restaurants, and marital counselling centres in London. Personal connections with Iranian friends and acquaintances were also utilised, along with snowball sampling. Additionally, the study was advertised in an Iranian newspaper. I also attended sociocultural and religious gatherings and meetings within the Iranian community in London to explain the objectives of the study.

3.2.1 Sample Socio-Demographics

Between December 2014 and June 2015, a total of 36 semi-structured interviews were conducted in London. The participants included individuals in various relationship statuses. Some were in relationships at the time of the study but were interviewed separately, while others were in relationships but only one partner participated in the interviews. Some participants were also separated or divorced.

To ensure diversity in the study, participants were selected from different educational, economic, sociocultural, and religious backgrounds. The majority of participants (26 individuals) were from Tehran, a cosmopolitan city with a population of nearly 15 million and the capital of Iran. Nine participants were from other large cities, while one person came from a rural area. With the exception of three participants, the majority had one to three children.

Most of the participants in the study came to the UK as refugees due to the political and sociocultural situation following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. However, a few participants immigrated to the UK as students in higher education or as independent migrants pursuing business and entrepreneurial endeavours.

Table 1 - Participants' Sociodemographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital status after migration	Children	Category of immigration	Arrival year	Education Status		Employment Status	
							Before Immigration	After Immigration	Before Immigration	After Immigration
Nahid	F	42	Married	3	Refugee	2001	Diploma	----------	Unemployed	Unemployed
Arta	F	30	Divorced	0	Study-related		Diploma	Masters	Teacher	Manager at an English company
Azam	F	43	Separated	2	Refugee		Diploma	----------	Unemployed	Hairdresser
Mitra	F	40	Divorced	2		2007	Bachelors	Short training course	Unemployed	Childcare
Mahta	F	34	Married	1	Family reunification	2012	Bachelors	Diploma from hairdresser college	Unemployed	Beautician
Sedi	F	52	Married	1	Refugee	1986	Associated degree	Short training course	Unemployed	Dental assistant
Nafise	F	34	Married	0	Skilled worker	2010	Bachelors	Short training course	Legal consultant	Manager at a law company
Maryam	F	44	Divorced	2	Refugee	1999	Diploma	Bachelors	Unemployed	Teacher

Fatemeh	F	37	Divorced	2	Refugee	2001	Diploma	Associated degree	Unemployed	Hospital
Azar	F	42	Married	2	Refugee	2000	Bachelors	Short training course	Accountant	Beautician
Simin	F	58	Divorced	2	Refugee	1985	Bachelor	Masters	Director	Family counsellor
Afsaneh	F	73	Married	2	Refugee	1979	Diploma	----------	Teacher	Sewer
Hengame	F	43	Divorced	2	Refugee	2001	Diploma	Diploma from hairdresser college	Unemployed	Beauty salon
Malihe	F	33	Married	2	Refugee	2007	Associated degree	----------	Driving instructor	Unemployed
Faezeh	F	47	Married	1	Business	2010	PhD	----------	University professor	Teacher
Parvin	F	38	Married	0	Family reunification	2012	Associated degree	Short course at college	Administrator	Accountant
Monir	F	44	Married	2	Business	2010	Diploma	----------	Unemployed	Works at family's company
Parisa	F	44	Married but considering divorce	2	Refugee	2010	Bachelors	Short training course	Nurse	Waitress

Massi	F	63	Divorced	3	Refugee	1983	Diploma	Short course at college	Primary school teacher	Designer at an English company
Lida	F	45	Married	2	Family reunification	2010	Diploma	Short course at college	Unemployed	Hairdresser
Marry	F	37	Divorced	1	Family reunification	2004	Bachelors	Short training course	Photography shop	Dental assistant / manager at Tesco
Davood (Parisa's husband)	M	51	Married	2	Refugee	2010	Diploma	----------	Director company	Part-time waiter Delivery
Aryo	M	44	Divorced	1	Refugee	1995	Associated degree	----------	Nurse	Driver / police officer
Amir	M	50	Divorced	2	Refugee	1995	High school	----------	Van driver	Pizza shop worker / Car salesperson
Reza	M	37	Married	1	Following - wife's study-Related migration	2008	Bachelors	----------	Computer engineer	Computer company
Sajad	M	48	Divorced	1	Refugee	2010	Bachelors	----------	Manager company	Unemployed
Shahryar	M	40	Married	1	Refugee	2010	Bachelor	----------	Manager company	Part-time delivery

Anush	M	47	Divorced	1	Refugee	2001	Associated degree	----------	Bureau of Customs officer	Car washer / instructor / sports trainer
Bahram	M	42	Married	2	Refugee	2001	Primary school	----------	Manager beauty salon	Manager beauty salon
Masood	M	51	Divorced in London, remarried	2	Refugee	1989, Sweden; 2002, UK	Diploma	Bachelors in Sweden before coming to London	Factory Worker	Engineer in Sweden / Driver in London
Zamyad	M	46	Married	1	Refugee	2006	Bachelors	Professional certificate from hairdresser college	Journalist	Hairdresser
Hamed (Monir's husband)	M	50	Married	2	Business	2010	Diploma	----------	Businessman	Businessman
Ali (Maryam's husband)	M	52	Divorced	2	Refugee	1999	Diploma	----------	Electrical shop	Delivery driver then unemployed
Jamshid	M	52	Divorced	2	Refugee	2000	Diploma	----------	Grocery shop	Pizza shop
Khosro	M	70	Separated	2	Refugee	2001	Bachelors from US	----------	Pilot	Unemployed
Behrooz	M	54	Divorced	1	Refugee	2001	Bachelors	----------	Accountant	Constructor

Table 2 - Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Sex	**Number**
Women	21
Men	15
Age	**Number**
30–35	4
36–40	6
41–45	10
46–50	6
51–55	6
56–60	1
61–75	3
Marital Status	**Number**
In a marriage	18
Separated or divorced	17
Divorced and then remarried	1
Origin in Iran	**Number**
Capital city (Tehran)	26
Other cities (Esfehan, Shiraz, Mashad, Rasht, Brujerd, Amol, Langrood)	9
Rural	1

Number of Children	Number
Three children	3
Two children	19
One child	11
No child	3

Table 3 presents the educational and occupational backgrounds of the respondents prior to their immigration. It is evident from the table that 13 women held diplomas or associate degrees, while 7 of them had obtained higher qualifications (Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD). Additionally, more than half of the women were employed outside of the home after marriage and held positions of high occupational status. It is noteworthy that even among women who came from traditional and religious families and who had husbands with similar backgrounds, some were able to pursue higher education and achieve significant occupational positions in Iran. Similarly, the majority of male immigrants, like their female counterparts, had attained good employment with a college education in Iran. Some even owned their own businesses and enjoyed success as entrepreneurs prior to their migration.

Table 3 - Migrants' Educational and Employment Status

Educational Status	Women	Men
PhD	1	0
Master's and bachelor's degree	7	6
Associate degree and diploma	13	7
High school and less than high school	0	2

Employment Status		
Housewife/unemployed	10	0
Teacher	4	0
Hospital	1	1
Self-employed and their own shop	1	3
Manager in his own company	0	5
In a management position	2	1
Driver	1	1
Construction and factory worker	0	1
Accountant	1	1
Journalist	0	1
Administrator	1	1

3.3 Research Procedure

3.3.1 Materials

Prior to commencing the fieldwork, I developed three materials: a semi-structured interview questionnaire (Appendix B), an "Informed Consent Document" (Appendix C), and the "Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants" form (Appendix D). I received guidance and support from my supervisor in creating these materials, and they were reviewed and approved by the University of Essex Research Ethics Board.

3.3.2 Ethical Challenges and Assurances

Qualitative research inherently presents ethical challenges due to the personal nature of interactions with participants and their involvement in the study (Dench et al, 2004). These challenges become particularly significant in the context of migration, where individuals may perceive their situation as unfavourable or unsafe. Firstly, participants may be hesitant to share their past experiences, placing responsibility on the researcher to balance information gathering with participants' rights and professional and scientific

responsibilities (Castles and Miller, 2009). Secondly, considering the sensitive nature of studying people's private lives, special attention was given to ethical processes, conventions, and protocols (Gabb, 2009). Therefore, when studying high-risk or hard-to-reach populations such as migrants, it is crucial to consider ethical issues related to privacy, confidentiality, security, and the sensitive topics involved (Stevenson et al, 1993).

To address these ethical concerns, participants were provided with the informed consent document before the interviews, which ensured their understanding of the study objectives, the interview process, confidentiality rules, and their rights as participants. The consent form also emphasised the researcher's commitment to maintaining confidentiality. All interview transcripts and materials were anonymised and pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participants' privacy. The informed consent form served as a guarantee of privacy and was thoroughly discussed with participants, allowing them to ask questions and seek clarification. Participants signed the consent form after agreeing to the terms of the interview. Furthermore, participants were assured that they could withdraw from the interview at any time.

3.3.3 The Ethics of Guaranteeing Anonymity

To maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Data and documents were password-protected to ensure their security. Safeguarding confidentiality becomes particularly challenging when studying multiple members of the same family, as their identities can be easily discerned through interview transcripts. Striking a balance between maintaining anonymity and preserving data authenticity is essential. In this study, participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, and any identifying details or sentences were replaced with more general phrases that conveyed the intended meaning while preserving anonymity. Participants were also given the opportunity to contact me if they had any questions or concerns during the research process.

Network confidentiality, a crucial concept in social research, involves keeping interview material confidential from the participants' family or friends (Hill, 2005). This is especially relevant when studying partners, children, and parents. In studies involving multiple family members, it is expected that the researcher does not disclose the contents of separate interviews to other family members. As relationships develop and trust deepens, the researcher may experience increased discomfort and psychological pressure (Vargas-Silva, 2012). I encountered such a situation during separate interviews with partners, where one

male partner inquired about their partner's feelings towards him. I had to refrain from responding to his question and explain the reasons behind my inability to provide him with that information.

3.3.4 Data Collection and Interview Process

The interviews began with a semi-structured interview protocol once the informed consent process was completed, and signatures were gathered. The semi-structured interview questionnaire, which served as a guide for the interview, was created by the researcher. Semi-structured interviews provide a series of questions to ask the interviewee and allow for flexible responses in which the participants utilise their own language and thought processes. A semi-structured interview methodology also allows the researcher and participants to address questions that are not included in the guide. Face-to-face interviews, according to Colaizzi (1978), are the best method of data gathering in qualitative investigations. It is suggested that researchers become acquainted with the participants' experiences and interpretations.

I designed and divided the interview schedule into three sections: socio-demographic questions; immigration questions, such as immigrants' integration into the host/British society and their involvement in the homeland/Iran; and a section related to questions of immigrants' spousal relations, including couples' gender roles, marital power, masculinity and their sexual and intimate relations (Appendix B). I drew a dividing line in questions between pre- and post-immigration feelings, attitudes, practices and experiences regarding gender relations and marital issues to explore the impact of migration on the participants' marital lives.

Interview items focused mostly on the respondents' and their partners' background information, economic activities, sharing of housework, distribution of power, gender-role ideologies, perceptions of new gender roles, migration motivations, type of marriage (traditional or modern), English language abilities, and familiarity with and acceptance of various dimensions of British culture.

Before going into the field, I completed pilot interviews with fellow PhD researchers to test the appropriateness of the language and sequencing of the questions, whether they elicited detailed responses, the time length of the interview.

Interviews with couples were conducted separately for each partner. This method helped the interviewer to understand the different outlooks of both partners and remove issues that may be faced during joint interviews such as the domination of one participant during the interaction (Seymour et al, 1995; Valentine, 1999). The technique employed was designed to explore the partners' unique views and perspectives while taking into account the context of their shared lives. It also allowed each pair to express their perspectives on potentially sensitive topics. To minimise the impact of the second partner's replies, the interviewer followed the interview process exactly for both parties. Furthermore, this method aided in examining the similarities and discrepancies between the viewpoints of the partners (Forbat and Henderson, 2003; Messersmith et al, 2015; Brannan, 1988; Lincoln and Guba, 1990; Morris, 2001).

Thus, all couples were interviewed separately to ensure that the presence of a partner did not influence responses. Though the respondents had the opportunity to speak in either English or Persian, they were all willing to be interviewed in Persian. Therefore, the interviews were all conducted in the Persian language and I carried them out personally. I conducted the interviews in public places such as cafes, pubs, malls, and parks. Occasionally, interviews were arranged in interviewees' homes. I allocated 2 to 3 hours for each interview, with each interview lasting an average of two and a half hours (150 minutes). The length of each interview depended on the willingness of the interviewees to tell their life stories in detail. With the respondents' permission, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed. I provided a gift card valued at £15 for participants in compensation for their time. The interviews were transcribed verbatim in Persian and then translated into English.

3.4 Data Analysis

A thematic method and interpretive analysis within a framework approach was employed in this study. The chosen framework approach is known for its adaptability and compatibility with qualitative methods, aiming to establish themes based on existing concepts rather than create new theories (Gale et al, 2013; Ward et al, 2013). This approach facilitates a clear and systematic process that integrates both pre-existing and emerging ideas (Gale et al, 2013). Thematic analysis allows for the creation of meaningful analysis that aligns with the researcher's theoretical knowledge (Guest et al, 2012).

Within this framework, the researcher's role is to organise and make sense of the data, selecting themes that adequately reflect the desired level of analysis and the textual data at

hand (Tuckett, 2014). Although it may appear that the data generate the themes, the researcher actively engages in the process, shaping the emergence of themes through their interactions with the participants (Ely et al, 1997). This approach holds the researcher responsible for data collection, analysis, and the final review.

The study utilises a set of concepts as heuristic guideposts rather than relying on a specific theoretical model. These concepts include immigrants' assimilation into the host society, marital relations viewed through the lens of power, and gender role ideologies such as masculinity, intimacy, and sexuality. The research draws upon the multi-path assimilation approach, specifically the segmented incorporation model proposed by Portes and Zhou (1993), to understand how Iranian immigrants' patterns of incorporation into British society evolve in different areas of integration and social class contexts. While segmented assimilation theory is commonly used for second-generation migrants, the justification for its application in this research with first-generation Iranian immigrants lies in its ability to comprehensively examine immigrant integration trajectories and outcomes.

The thesis acknowledges the non-linear nature of the assimilation process and the need to capture the complexities and potential reversals experienced by first-generation Iranian refugees. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is important that the analysis appropriately accounts for the dynamic and multi-directional aspects of the assimilation process. Chapter 2 also highlighted the significant contributions of gender-focused studies within migration scholarship, with some having been conducted in the UK. It has therefore been crucial to acknowledge and engage with existing gender-focused research and incorporate gender perspectives into the analysis to strengthen the theoretical grounding of the study.

Given these considerations, the thematic analysis method based on the framework approach was deemed appropriate for this study. This approach prioritises giving a voice to participants and constructing meaning based on their subjective experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It allows for the identification of similarities and commonalities within the data, enabling the researcher to draw conclusions and establish themes (Joffe, 2012).

3.4.1 The Process of Thematic Analysis

The objective of the data analysis procedure was to uncover meanings, patterns, and subjective experiences among the participants. Following the transcription of the study documents, a thorough review of the data was conducted, and the evaluation and interpretation process began. The analysis focused on sentences and words to identify data

segments and explore codes. Pertinent concepts and topics were then gathered to form overarching themes.

The data analysis followed the stages of thematic analysis identified by Ritchie et al (1994), Braun and Clarke (2006), and Bryman (2012). These stages encompassed the following steps: data familiarisation, identification of the thematic framework, development of a coding schedule, coding of data according to the schedule, consolidation of the data into a concise summary that aligned with the framework, and final data analysis.

3.4.1.1 Familiarisation with the Data

The initial stage of thematic analysis involved a comprehensive examination of the entire data set to identify potential themes. Prior to coding, I thoroughly studied each transcript to gain familiarity with the data and generate an initial list of ideas. During this process, I made comments in the margins of the interviews, noting emotional reactions, early interpretations, impressions of the interviewees' opinions and body language, and any other noteworthy observations. These remarks served as cues to identify key points of emphasis (codes).

3.4.1.2 Identifying a Thematic Framework

According to Ritchie et al (2013), “the thematic framework is used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categorise”. The main themes that were created at the beginning of the study were based on the research questions, the theoretical framework of the study, and initial coding pilots. However, new themes and subthemes were identified while the transcripts and field notes were being studied. This process enabled me to make a list of key concepts which included specific words and phrases used by the participants. These themes and ideas played a key role in the formation of the framework. In accordance with good practice advocated by Riessman (1993) and Bryman (2012), I transcribed the interviews myself. I heard and analysed each interview to immerse myself in the interactions. This process allowed me to understand some of the implicit meaning conveyed by the participants’ accounts. I referred to notes I had taken following each interview to help develop the concepts used in labelling the data. I also created conceptual tags for each transcript to identify the interactions and relate them to the themes. At this point I began to consider the relationship between the themes and codes and their various levels. I established theme categories and combined or altered certain themes. I then created sub-themes to classify and group the themes, which enabled me to develop my main themes.

3.4.1.3 Generating Initial Codes

After the main themes were consolidated, the formal coding process began using NVivo 10. The software proved useful by organising the data easily and quickly so that specific parts of the transcript could be accessed. While in the starting stages of the study the software may be perceived as useful (Bryman, 2012). I am appreciative of the assistance provided by qualitative data analysis software like NVivo. However, I was aware of its constraints and did not want to restrict the analysis (Basit, 2003; Blismas and Dainty, 2003).

The coding process included tagging the text so that the researcher could consolidate and compare related data. The coding was performed according to the principles expressed by Cohen et al (2011). They suggest that codes should be made for every two or three rows of data. In this study, codes were tagged to phrases or even individual words to obtain detailed results. The codes, tags, words, and sentences were created from transcripts for all the possible themes. The field notes and memos created during the interviews proved to be useful at this stage to provide more information.

3.4.1.4 Condensing and Interpreting the Data

The major themes that emerged were recorded in a Word document file. All the themes were studied to identify the theme categories from the interview data and to get a thorough understanding of the transcripts. Many of the same kinds of themes were consolidated and tagged again and every theme was finalised. I chose the most relevant codes and themes and analysed the ideas, outlook, and experiences of the interviewees.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Credibility

Whilst quantitative researchers think in terms of validity, qualitative researchers think in terms of trustworthiness and credibility (Armour, Rivaux, and Bell, 2009). The term ‘trustworthiness’ is frequently used to describe qualitative research quality requirements (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005). Scholars have recommended several criteria for ensuring the reliability and quality of qualitative research (Cope, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). Spencer and Ritchie (2012: 234) describe credibility as “The extent to which findings are believable and well-founded”. In other words, credibility considers the degree to which the research claim reflects the opinions of research participants, which is also a factor in trustworthiness (Cope, 2014).

Several methodologies were employed in the current study to ensure the reliability of the analysis. Careful documentation of the research process is one of the most important

techniques in assuring trustworthiness (Spencer and Ritchie, 2012). The current study's research procedure was extensively recorded through descriptive and interpretive analyses and the findings include important extracts from the participants' perspectives. The data analysis section has detailed descriptions of all procedures conducted throughout the analysis. In addition, I kept a thorough log of the exact actions I took to obtain and analyse the data.

Validation of the study findings was another strategy employed to establish trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005; Spencer and Ritchie, 2012). According to Morrow (2005), the qualitative researcher should consider whose reality is being represented by the study's findings. The current study included member checking, which involves presenting results to participants for comment on how the results compare to their experiences. This was done after all interviews were completed, to ensure that the research accurately represented the participants' lived experiences. To do so, I emailed each participant an account of their evaluated findings in order to gather comments and confirm the quality of the analysis.

The methodological validity of the research is another approach to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Spencer and Ritchie, 2012). Demonstrating the data and processes' reliability is one method (Cope, 2014). When the method of doing the study is checked and validated, reliability is attained. My principal PhD supervisor oversaw and checked all the research processes and levels of analysis. The study design's defensibility was further ensured by presenting a clear explanation of the epistemological framework, methodological approach, and analytical technique used (Spencer and Ritchie, 2012).

Finally, the concept of reflexivity was embraced as a new criterion for trustworthiness. Researchers attempt to analyse the influence of their background, beliefs, values, and theoretical orientation on the research process through reflexivity (Darawsheh, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Spencer and Ritchie, 2012). In the context of interpretive analysis, reflexivity refers to how the researchers' biases and prior experiences interact with the participants' viewpoints. It also clarifies the role of researchers' assumptions in the analysis and their influence (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). In the following section, I will review the study's reflexivity process and strategy.

3.6 Positionality and Reflexivity

Recent literature on the role of positionality in research, particularly regarding sensitive topics, emphasises the importance of acknowledging and critically examining the researcher's position and potential biases throughout the research process. It recognises that researchers' personal characteristics, experiences, and social identities can influence the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings. In light of this literature, I intend to reflect a more nuanced understanding of the researcher's role and its impact on the study.

Positionality is a crucial aspect to consider in qualitative research, especially when investigating sensitive topics such as intimate relationships and migration experiences. Scholars highlight the importance of reflexivity as a means of analysing and addressing the influence of the researcher's background, beliefs, values, and theoretical orientation on the research process (Darawsheh, 2014; Morrow, 2005; Spencer and Ritchie, 2012). Reflexivity requires researchers to critically reflect on their own positionality and biases and consider how these may intersect with the perspectives and experiences of the participants.

In the context of this study, reflexivity is essential in understanding the potential impact of the researcher's role as a facilitator of discussions on intimate topics. The acknowledgement of being mistaken as a counsellor by the participants raises important ethical considerations and highlights the need for a thoughtful examination of the power dynamics and potential expectations that may have influenced the participants' responses. While it is crucial to establish trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research, it is equally important to ensure that participants understand the researcher's role and the purpose of the study accurately.

To address these concerns, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process. This involved continuous self-examination and awareness of personal biases and assumptions that may have influenced the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I also reflected on the potential impact of my background and positionality on the participants' accounts of their experiences and took steps to mitigate any unintended influence. Open and transparent communication was maintained with the participants, ensuring that my role as a researcher and not a counsellor was clearly explained.

It is necessary to be mindful of the impact that the researcher's values, judgment and knowledge may have in the interviews before any fieldwork or writing is undertaken. It is also necessary to consider the outlook and perception of the interviewer towards the interviewee and the way they internally construct and represent 'others', which "depends in great part [on] their own personal situation and positionality" (Vargas-Silva, 2012: 118). In this respect, I was aware that I was in the position of translating the lives of the participants, which created an implicit power imbalance. In the context of positionality, I was aware of my ability to demonstrate bias during the interviews, the results of which could lead to misreporting. I tried to reflect on the outcomes of the interviews to avoid privileging certain points of view while silencing others.

The concept of positionality also requires self-reflexivity. To create knowledge in a qualitative study, it is essential to conduct self-assessment and continually investigate the researchers' history, background, and position. Thus, it is necessary to think about the influence of the identity of the researcher on the interaction with participants. Whether the interviewee is able to accept and trust the interviewer or not can greatly affect the outcome of the study (Vargas-Silva, 2012).

Before I go into detail about some of the problems and complications surrounding the subjects of my research, I will discuss some of the challenges I have had in my own function and position in this study. To begin with, I was concerned that the study participants might perceive my immigration background as a PhD student rather than as a refugee as a form of privilege. This could have created further power imbalance during the fieldwork, resulting in reduced access to the participants' private lives and experiences because the majority of study participants, though not all, came to the UK as refugees.

Secondly, I anticipated complexities and problems that could emerge from my position as an insider researcher. There have been several arguments on the pros and cons of being an inside researcher (Farahani, 2010). Merton (1972: 22) emphasises "that we are all, of course, both insiders and outsiders, members of some groups and, sometimes derivatively, not of others", because it is "the crucial fact of social structure that individuals have not a single status but a status set". This idea is supported by many scholars (Farahani, 2010; Geertz, 1973; Beoku-Betts, 1994; Bucerius, 2013; Lammers, 2007; McDonald, 2013). As a result, it is clear that the researcher's position is not fixed and stable, but is a fluid outcome of power interactions that may place them anywhere on a wide between outsider and insider at any

one time during the fieldwork (Farahani, 2010; Geertz, 1973; Beoku-Betts, 1994; Bucerius, 2013; Lammers, 2007; McDonald, 2013).

Following these observations, I avoided considering my position as strictly either outsider or insider during my interviews because I believe that the researcher's position is fluid and dynamic. As a result, participants frequently identified me as an insider based on our shared Iranian ethnicity, as well as an outsider due to my position as an academic researcher. As I discovered during the fieldwork, my positionality had both advantages and disadvantages during the study process.

My insider position as a woman of Iranian origin, with a similar background, language, and identity to the participants, had a positive influence on the interactions. When I described the goals and the benefits of the study to the participants, my research was perceived as positive and useful and conducted for the betterment of Iranian migrant families. This, along with my shared background, helped remove many barriers and provided easy access to the participants' stories. It made it easier for me to develop a relationship with the participants, which in turn helped to produce a rich and detailed conversation based on mutual respect, understanding and empathy. This also provided me with the advantage of getting direct details from my life experiences in the new society. I was able to use my own life experiences to draw more information from my participants. As a result, my insider position allowed me to access credible insider information that is relatively unreachable to outsiders. I also realised that Iranian immigrants feel more at ease in being interviewed by another Iranian from inside the Iranian community rather than by an outsider whom they may not fully trust. Furthermore, employing cultural understanding to create positive relationships, being mindful of cultural sensitivities, and including interviewees in the interview summary boosted confidence among the participants and improved the reliability and quality of the data.

I needed to be aware of my prejudices and position as a researcher with insider access. I also had to be mindful of any emotional affinity developing between myself and the interviewees. This may lead the researcher to consider only one side of a situation or to not reflect upon opposing views. Furthermore, due to the shared cultural background between the researcher and the participants, there may have been points where implicit understanding may have created gaps in the interview transcripts. For example, some participants thought that they did not need to clarify some aspects of their experiences due to our shared backgrounds. As

a result, during the discussion in the following chapters I will provide background information to help readers who may not be familiar with this unspoken knowledge and common cultural footing. In addition, I experienced challenges due to the sensitivity of the study's subject, which concerns couples' private lives, particularly their intimate and sexual relationships.

3.7 Further Self-Reflection on the Research Process

In this section, I provide further self-reflection on the research process and I share additional personal concerns, experiences, and struggles that I experienced during the fieldwork process. Before starting the interviews, I investigated different methods of interviewing couples and could not decide whether to interview the participants together, separately, or only one from each couple. At the beginning of my research, I wanted to recruit couples as participants rather than individuals. In practice, however, many of the prospective participants' partners were either unable or unwilling to participate. Some couples had recently separated and had no contact with each other. I would not have included those recently separated or not in proximity of each other even if I had determined to interview both partners in all cases. Therefore, although at the start of my research I had planned to include both partners in the interview process, I realised that this was not practical.

I eventually chose to interview partners separately because this strategy had the potential to capture more data than questioning the couples concurrently. This approach reduces the possibility of participants censoring themselves through fear of offending their spouse or because of a power imbalance. Some interviewees, for instance, requested that I not discuss certain issues with their spouses.

Before starting my fieldwork, I also hoped to organise group meetings with Iranian immigrants to discuss matters such as their business lives, social lives, marital lives and, particularly, the role of immigrant women in these activities. However, I had to cancel this part of my fieldwork due to limited time and financial issues, as well as difficulties in finding people who were willing to attend these focus groups. I discovered that it is not easy to find a gathering of Iranians who feel comfortable discussing their own lives with each other. I was aware that my informants came from a religiously conservative country, which would have been likely to influence the focus group discussions.

While gathering information about the characteristics of the Iranian group in London, I made a preliminary inspection of the Iranian organisational records. I tried to arrange for instruction in oral history basics for a small group of Iranian community members so that they could record their stories of transitioning to the new society. I intended to treat these stories as self-presentations that could direct me in further research. At the same time as gathering information, I paid attention to residential, economic and political patterns among Iranian immigrants to learn more about the sociocultural, economic, and religious backgrounds of those who had settled in London.

I also talked to members of Iranian communities and associations in London. To obtain more knowledge about Iranian people in the capital, I also connected with an Iranian church in the north of London, where most Iranian people in the city live, and talked to Iranian immigrants who converted their religions. During my research on Iranian marital relationships in the diaspora, I had the opportunity to visit the 'Islamic Centre'[1] , which turned out to be a significant incident that required further analysis. As I entered the centre, I observed diverse activities and engaged in conversations with community members, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of the role this institution plays in shaping marital norms and practices.

I also had a meeting with the director of the marriage and divorce department of this centre to gain additional information on the divorce rate of Iranian immigrants. I recognised that my position and physical appearance influenced women's willingness to engage in the study and share their stories. As a result, I had to wear a scarf, especially while attending religious meetings, to encourage religious women to share their stories.

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[1] The Islamic Centre of England Ltd (ICEL) is a Shi'a Islamic religious and cultural building in London, England, whose mission is "to provide services to members of the Muslim community, in particular, and the wider community at large", focusing on religious guidance and cultural issues. The centre was founded in 1995 by the representative of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and opened officially in November 1998.

Within the Iranian diaspora, the influence of political ideologies, such as nationalism or opposition to the Iranian regime, can impact marital relationships. These ideologies may shape individuals' perspectives on gender roles, expectations, and power dynamics within their marriages. Furthermore, exploring the intersections of power and gender in relation to Iranian marital lives can shed light on how patriarchal norms and structures are perpetuated or challenged within diasporic settings. It is important to investigate how power is negotiated, exercised, and resisted within marital relationships, considering factors such as economic resources, educational attainment, and social networks.

Wearing a headscarf, I immersed myself in the atmosphere of the Islamic Centre and participated in religious lectures and discussions on various topics related to marriage, family, and gender roles. It became evident that the centre served as a platform for the dissemination of religious teachings and provided guidance on navigating marital relationships within the context of religious beliefs.

Through my observations and interactions, I discovered that religious teachings within the Iranian diaspora carried implicit power dynamics, often emphasising traditional gender roles and hierarchical structures. Women were encouraged to fulfil their spousal responsibilities with obedience and submission, while men were expected to be the providers and decision-makers within their marriages.

These teachings not only influenced the expectations placed on individuals within their marital relationships but also shaped the dynamics of power and agency. It became apparent that negotiating religious and cultural identities within marriages was a complex process for many community members. They expressed a desire to strike a balance between adhering to religious teachings and pursuing personal aspirations for equality and mutual respect.

To further explore these dynamics, I had conversations and engaged in discussions with community members, allowing them to share their experiences and perspectives on the interplay between religion, power, and agency in their marital lives. They revealed the nuanced negotiations and challenges individuals faced as they sought to align their religious beliefs with their personal desires for more egalitarian relationships.

Through a more comprehensive analysis of the insights gained from my visit to the Islamic Centre, I aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the role played by religious institutions in shaping marital norms and practices within the Iranian diaspora. By highlighting the

complexities of navigating religious and cultural identities within marriages, my research seeks to shed light on the ways in which Iranian immigrants negotiate power dynamics and agency within their intimate relationships in the diaspora context.

I had some concerns before starting my fieldwork. One of my main worries and fears related to my gender, which may have been a barrier in accessing and engaging with some male interviewees and may also have affected their interview responses. It may have made a difference when interviewing men about questions regarding migrants' sexual and intimate relations. I was a relatively young woman, while nearly half of my informants were men who came from a society where Islamic laws are ruled by a conservative state. There is still strict gender segregation within Iranian society and talking about one's private life, especially concerning sex, in front of others is still taboo, especially with a young woman. Therefore, I was aware that sexuality was a complicated and sensitive subject, and that it might be difficult to encourage participants to speak about their private lives and could cause some embarrassment. It was not easy to capture relevant information about the couples' lives, especially regarding sex.

My assumption that women would be more forthcoming than men due to the presence of a young female interviewer proved to be wrong, as both male and female participants seemed to be more expressive while talking about their intimate and sexual relationships than I had anticipated.

I was aware that it was very important to establish trust in order to persuade participants to take part in the study, as well as to obtain dependable, trustworthy responses and produce the most credible study possible. There is general suspicion and distrust amongst Iranians towards interviews that include questions about personal information and individuals' private lives, which may reduce participants' willingness to cooperate, and might also affect the method and the results. I tried to establish trustworthy relationships with the respondents by creating a friendly and reciprocal rapport, and also by understanding participants' perceptions and expectations towards me as a researcher. I also talked about my own private life and answered their various questions.

To create a trustworthy and reliable atmosphere, I assured participants from the start that their personal identity and their stories would remain confidential and anonymous. I explained what anonymity is in academic research and how the privacy and confidentiality of the information gathered from the participants would be respected and guaranteed. I also

assured my participants that I would not raise any topic which may adversely affect their well-being. In certain cases, I also retained the privilege to omit sensitive information according to the participants' wishes and the appropriateness of the information for research purposes. I undertook the responsibility to keep the participants safe from harm, and therefore exercised caution when recording their information and interviews. To further maintain confidentiality, I allocated a code to each participant and deleted their names from my records.

Convincing participants to consent to audio recording was another challenge in this study. I recognised that I needed to clarify the confidentiality terms in greater depth. Many indicated that they did not want their names revealed and questioned why I needed to keep track of them. They felt more comfortable after I explained the anonymisation and data protection methods, and I finally convinced them to allow me to record the interview.

Another issue was that after designing the study questions based on the existing literature on immigration and sexual/intimacy studies, I realised that my questionnaire had become very long, and the interviews could take 2–3 hours, which might be beyond the tolerance of the respondents. As a result, I gave participants breaks if I sensed them becoming tired, or divided the questions into half and conducted two interviews on separate dates.

One of the problems that I faced during my interviews was that some participants, both men and women, did not understand the meaning of sociological terms such as assimilation, integration or acculturation. Some participants were also not well-equipped to provide clear answers to my questions. I therefore had to give explanations regarding my questions if they did not understand the meaning of specific words. However, I also tried to minimise the impact my feelings, beliefs and knowledge may have had on my participants' responses. I focused on remaining aware of the researcher's ongoing relationship with the participants, which is undoubtedly epistemologically beneficial.

As I was planning to do interviews with a sensitive population, I needed to find the best mode to approach and formulate sensitive questions in an appropriate manner. An inadequate question could have had adverse consequences, being perceived as an intrusion or even as an insult, and thus jeopardise the interview process. The selection of the questions therefore took into account the respondents' specific circumstances and spatial situation. In order to reduce tension and elicit good responses, I began the interviews with informal and broad inquiries about the participants' lives in London and their backgrounds. After

establishing solid communication and a closer relationship with the informant, I moved on to questions about their marriage. On some occasions, I formulated questions in a rather indirect form. This can be the best choice in formulating questions that might be sensitive for the participant. I also tried to formulate sensitive questions using indefinite terms (for example, “do you think someone?”, “have you heard about?” or “are you aware of?”) in order to make the respondent feel comfortable. I paid close attention to factors such as managing and interpreting body language, which are vital for the success of interviews.

Despite my reservations about asking questions on sensitive topics, I found that it was much easier for me to establish a rapport with the participants than I had anticipated. When talking to the participants in an interview environment I felt more relaxed and less stressed. While gender did have a modest influence, especially when it came to discussions about sexual practices, I found that I was able to establish similar levels of connection with both men and women.

Both men and women displayed a remarkable level of comfort when discussing sexual matters during the interviews. They openly shared intimate details about their sexual practices and issues within their marital lives. Interestingly, throughout these conversations, the participants perceived me not only as a researcher-academic but also as a trusted confidant. In fact, many of them viewed me as a counsellor, willingly sharing their secrets and relying on my discretion.

The male participants, in particular, exhibited a surprising level of openness regarding their sexual concerns. They openly discussed personal matters such as masturbation and sought advice, emphasising that I was the first person they had confided in. They felt comfortable treating me as a counsellor, seeking guidance on sensitive topics. Initially, I was apprehensive about this role, as it deviated from my intended research role. However, I soon realised that their perception of me as a counsellor fostered a stronger rapport and facilitated their trust in me. It did, however, present challenges during the interviews, as they often went into extensive detail about their personal experiences, straying from the research questions. I had to manage the interview time and maintain emotional distance while keeping the focus of the discussions on the core objectives of the study.

It is worth noting that recruiting Iranian couples, particularly male participants, for interviews was a difficult task. However, once they agreed to participate, they warmly welcomed me into their homes and workplaces. They demonstrated a genuine eagerness to

assist with my research and provided thorough answers to my questions. Despite my assurances that I could cover these expenses, many participants insisted on buying me coffee or other beverages, showcasing their hospitality. As a result, the interviews proceeded more smoothly over time, as mutual trust and rapport developed.

3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined detailed information regarding the qualitative method that I chose for my research. Moreover, I explained the semi-structured method of the interview as a means of collecting data during the fieldwork. I discussed the various recruitment strategies that were used to find participants. I also illustrated research procedures including ethical challenges and assurances, the ethics of guaranteeing anonymity, and the processes of data collection and interviewing. I then described the different stages of thematic analysis that I used to analyse and interpret the data. At the end of this chapter, I discussed positionality, the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider and outsider, and the process of reflexivity.

Overall, I believe that my study offers a valuable exploration and effectively contributes to the research literature on its subject matter. By adopting a qualitative method, I was able to produce a rich and complex understanding of the experiences and challenges people face in the diasporic context. I was also able to demonstrate the emotional messiness, uncertainty and fluidity that constitute relational experience.

The next chapter will present the findings of the interviews and the themes that emerged from the data analysis. I will discuss important points that contribute to the analysis and explore how the process of sociocultural and economic assimilation into the diasporic society impacts the transformation of Iranian migrant couples' gender roles and the distribution of power between partners. I will also show how these factors challenge and shape migrants' masculinity, femininity, and sexuality in the diasporic context.

Chapter 4: The Transformation of Couples' Gender Roles and Marital Power

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how the gender roles and marital power of migrant couples undergo transformation during their integration into British society. The chapter focuses on understanding the influence of immigrants' sociocultural and economic adaptation to their new environment in two key ways: (i) the decision-making authority within the family; and (ii) the division of household chores and childcare responsibilities. Additionally, I explore the impact of women's increased social status and rights in their new circumstances on the dynamics of gender roles and marital power. Furthermore, I delve into the effects of these changes on men's masculine identity. The chapter concludes with a comprehensive presentation and discussion of significant findings that contribute to our understanding of how migration shapes the transformation of gender roles and power distribution among couples. Notably, I highlight variations in the intensity, level, and direction of these changes among Iranian immigrant couples after their migration journey.

4.2 Gender, Power Relations and Sociocultural Adaptation into the Host Society

The cultural and religious factors of a society play a crucial role in shaping its gender ideologies, which in turn determine the distribution of power and roles within the family system. Understanding the challenges in the distribution and exchange of marital power and gender roles among couples in a diasporic society requires consideration of the dynamics of power, gender roles, cultural differences, and the impact of financial resources (Blumberg and Coleman, 1989; Scanzoni and Szinovacz, 1980; Rodman, 1972). Scholars have also highlighted the importance of individual gender ideology, alongside structural and cultural contexts, in influencing family dynamics beyond economic resources. Studies have found a positive relationship between the equitable division of decision-making power and egalitarian gender attitudes (Shirpak et al, 2011; Bittman et al, 2003; Kulik, 1999; Vogler, 1998; Xu and Lai, 2004; Shu et al, 2012; Zuo and Bian, 2005; Ferree, 1990; Xu and Lai, 2002).

In analysing the changes in gender relations (marital power and gender roles) among Iranian migrant couples during the process of sociocultural assimilation, it is necessary to consider

a modified resource theory within the framework of equal gender ideologies. It is expected that the transformation of gender relations among immigrant couples in new circumstances is influenced by exposure to a different culture and gender ideology, in addition to resources such as income and occupational positioning.

The data reveals that Iranian women tend to acculturate more into mainstream British society when compared to men. The sociocultural assimilation process leads women to have different experiences and undergo changes in their gender ideologies to their male partners. During socialisation in the host society, Iranian women internalise new images and perceptions of themselves as modern women, embracing assertiveness and autonomy within the context of egalitarian gender values and equal opportunities in the diasporic context. This newfound confidence and authority empowers women to discuss and challenge patriarchal and non-egalitarian gender ideologies. They question and reject their pre-migration lifestyles and unequal status at home, which also impacts the lives of male immigrants. The data suggests that the increasing power of women contributes to their demand for greater influence in decision-making processes and important household affairs. This is evidenced in some of the participants' comments. For example, a 44-year-old woman (Maryam) explained:

> After migration, I went to university and then got a good job. My confidence was increasing. I was familiar with the Western lifestyle and modern couples' relationships. I challenged our pre-emigration marital relationships. I couldn't accept an unequal relationship anymore in my life.

A 34 -year-old woman (Nafise) also claimed:

> After migration, I was interested in debates on feminism. I read some books and attended meetings in this regard. I discuss traditional and unequal gender relations with my husband.

The process of acculturation plays a significant role in shaping the attitudes and values of Iranian women, leading them to adopt new perspectives on gender roles and equality. Through various channels such as reading magazines, watching TV programs and movies, and engaging in social activities and workplace interactions with middle-class British women, Iranian women are exposed to different lifestyles and viewpoints. These experiences provide them with a portrayal of the modern Western woman who embraces egalitarian gender patterns.

Furthermore, Iranian women engage in conversations with their Iranian friends, with whom they discuss their newfound orientations in modern society. These discussions serve as a source of learning and information, exposing them to women's rights and the equal positions that women can hold both at home and in society. Through these interactions and exchanges, Iranian women develop a deeper understanding of gender equality and begin to challenge traditional patriarchal norms that may have been prevalent in their pre-migration lives. For example, a 43-year-old woman (Hengame) asserted:

> Being in society and making communication with native-born British people increases their knowledge regarding gender equality. Here I learned that women and men have equal rights and even sometimes women have more than men. Also, women can do everything as well as men can.

Thus, new diasporic identities have been built by Iranian-born women in a different sociocultural diasporic context. By discussing and questioning old perceptions and understandings of gender roles during the process of acculturation, Iranian migrant women build a different understanding of their femininity, which affects their behaviours and practices. This study demonstrates that the transition process shifts authority and the equilibrium of power in the family, putting established gender roles into question. The results are similar to Afrouz et al's (2022) findings that show the complicated linkages between the power of gender stereotypes and women's agency to transgress those norms, which contributed to a deeper comprehension of women's conceptions of gender roles and options after migration.

These findings align with previous research conducted by Rapaport and Doucerain (2021), Hyman et al (2008), Mahdi (1999, 2001), Darvishpour (2002), Naghdi (2010), Baltas and Steptoe (2000), Rezazadeh and Hoover (2018), Foner (1997), and Farahani (2012). These studies emphasise that within the same household, women and men experience unique and diverse processes and outcomes during the immigration journey. Immigrant women tend to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities more readily and embrace Western culture more openly when compared to men.

Mahdi's (2001) research in the United States, for example, highlights the transformation of Iranian immigrant women's gender ideologies. It reveals that these women are more inclined to distance themselves from traditional perspectives and embrace greater gender equality in their new environment when compared to their husbands.

Furthermore, the data from this study indicate that the most significant changes in attitudes and behaviours occur among traditional and religious couples, particularly those where the wife experienced oppression from her husband before migration. The couple's lifestyle in their home country plays a crucial role in shaping their adaptation, integration, and connection with the new society and their homeland. Women who faced unequal gender relations and oppression in their pre-migration marital lives demonstrate a strong inclination to question and challenge pre-existing gender roles upon establishing themselves in the modern society of their host country. They strive for equal roles, rights, and financial independence, refusing to tolerate oppression any longer. After migration, these women exhibit a newfound boldness, asserting themselves and demanding their rights from their husbands. As exemplified by the statement of a 37-year-old woman (Fatemeh) said:

> I had a patriarchal and religious family in Iran, and my father was the head of the family. After marriage, I followed this rule. But here [in London] my mind has been changed. I don't follow religious rules anymore and I want to have equal roles and authority at home.

As couples undergo the process of acculturation, their religious commitments may weaken. The direction and intensity of changes in couples' religious affiliations and commitments can also have an impact on their gender relations, potentially leading to marital tensions. A 43-year-old woman (Azam), for instance, highlighted the influence of Islamic rules on their gender relations:

> I remember that my mother thought that she, based on religious rules, should follow her husband, and consider her husband's satisfaction. She shouldn't do anything without her husband's permission. Unfortunately, I followed these rules in my own life and my husband, like my father, had power and decided everything. But here [in London] I don't follow Islamic rules as well as I did in Iran.

In societies like Iran, where rules and laws are rooted in religious principles, religion plays a significant role in shaping gender roles and authority within marriages. However, many women question and reject religious rules because they perceive them to legitimise and sanctify patriarchal notions of gender relations, which subordinate women to men. The study's findings indicate that some women participants even converted to Christianity, as they viewed Islam as conflicting with their personal freedom, authority, and autonomy.

Additionally, the data reveals that the diverse occupational integration of couples into the host society has indirectly influenced their evolving gender ideologies in various ways. The process of Iranian women integrating into the economic mainstream provides them with opportunities to engage in social, cultural, and recreational activities, fostering a stronger connection with native-born British individuals. Many Iranian female participants expressed that working outside the home not only boosted their self-confidence and independence but also exposed them to women's rights and the British way of life. Consequently, their perception of gender equality shifted, leading to an increase in their influence and power within their marital relationships. For example, a 44-year-old woman (Parisa) explained:

> I am talking about marital life with English colleagues and learning more about the modern lifestyle. But my husband is still in contact with his Iranian colleagues. He still thinks and behaves as before.

On the other hand, the majority of Iranian middle- and working-class men, who experience ethnic occupational patterns in the host country, tend to become more isolated from native-born British individuals. This leads to a greater engagement with their ethnic community and more interaction with fellow nationals. This ethnic segregation influences the acculturation process of Iranian men in the new society and slows down the transformation of their gender ideologies toward equal gender roles, especially when compared to women. Exposure to ethnic and cultural values and norms delays the adoption of equal roles and powers in household affairs and decision-making for men. Consequently, social and occupational segregation contributes to men's inclination to adhere to traditional ideologies that uphold gender inequality in the new society, which often clashes with women's rejection of such ideologies, leading to significant marital conflicts.

Thus, the contrasting integration patterns of men and women, particularly in terms of the direction, intensity, and speed of their acculturation into the new society, generate significant tensions and challenges among Iranian couples. The data demonstrates that women's expectations for a more equitable division of labour in household chores, childcare, and decision-making often result in separation or divorce. These findings align with other studies that highlight post-immigration disparities and differences in the cultural adaptation of couples as crucial factors in creating conflicts (Naghdi, 2010; Flores et al, 2004; Atzaba-Poria and Pike, 2007; Tsai-Chae and Nagat, 2008; Ying and Han, 2007; Farahan, 2012;

Hyman et al, 2008; Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; Rezazadeh and Hoover, 2018; Darvishpour, 2002).

However, the study's data also revealed that in certain cases an equal level of sociocultural integration between husband and wife into the host society can affect gender roles and powers in a different manner, leading to an improvement in gender relations and a move towards more equal roles and powers within the household. Further explanation of these cases will be provided in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.3 Women's Power in a Transformed Couple Economy

As discussed in the previous section, the socio-economic position of most Iranian women improved after immigration. The data of this study show that when Iranian women become wage earners in the host society, the majority of them gain influence inside the family structure and establish more democratic arrangements at home, despite men's insistence on maintaining control over resources and authority. This is evidenced in the comments of some women participants. For example, a 44-year-woman (Maryam) explained:

> After migration and becoming financially independent, I gain more power at home, compared to Iran. Although I faced the objections of my husband, my role in the decision-making process increased in the diasporic context.

In addition, a 43-year-old divorced woman (Hengame) said:

> I didn't work in Iran, and I had no income. So, I had no power at home and my husband was the main decision-maker at home. After migration, I was starting to work. My income was more than my husband's, which gave me the power to participate in the decision at home.

Thus, it is evident that Iranian women participants, through their engagement in the London labour market, have achieved upward occupational mobility in the host British society. This advancement in their occupational position has resulted in increased decision-making authority for women and reduced male dominance in their lives. These findings align with resource theory, which posits that the distribution of power within a family is influenced by the resources contributed by men and women, such as education level, income, and occupational prestige (Blood and Wolfe, 1960). Conflict theory also supports these findings, suggesting that the balance of power within the family undergoes a transformation due to women's economic strength derived from their earnings. According to conflict theorists, this

increased economic power of women can lead to more democratic arrangements within the household, even though women continue to bear the primary domestic responsibilities (Hacker, 2003; Lindsey, 2011). This result is consistent with recent studies that argue for the empowering effects of new occupational positions on immigrant women within the home (Afrouz et al, 2022; Gauthier et al, 1993; Webster, 1998; Darvishpour, 2002; Min, 2001).

It is worth noting that while the women participants experienced an increase in income in the new society after migration, many middle-class male participants who held white-collar jobs in their home country and possessed a high level of education faced a decline in their occupational status during the initial months of settlement. Factors such as non-transferable job skills, limited English language proficiency, and a lack of UK work experience contributed to their downward occupational mobility. As a result, they found themselves in low-skilled positions with lower wages, with some resorting to part-time work and others experiencing unemployment. For example, a 48-year-old man (Sajad) claimed:

> I have a high job position in Iran, but in London, I got a low-wage and level job. I have experienced a decreasing occupational position, mostly because of insufficient English language ability.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that a significant portion of migrant men who find themselves in low-wage jobs and who belong to the middle-class and working-class categories often arrive in the UK as asylum seekers or refugees. These individuals may face restrictions on their ability to work during the initial months or years of settlement. Some may also experience delays in obtaining a British passport, which further hampers their employment prospects. As a result, they may be compelled to work in the informal economy, accepting low-level positions with meagre wages. The findings of this study highlight the additional challenges and difficulties faced by couples in this particular group compared to upper-middle-class businessmen and women who have the legal right to work in the UK, are able to make financial investments in the host country, or engage in economic activities that bridge their home and host countries. For example, a 51-year-old-year man (Davood) explained:

> I came here as a refugee. I had no work permission in the initial years of residence in London. My undocumented position in London affects my occupational position, which contributes to increasing conflict in marital life.

The results show that most Iranian middle-class male immigrants who have experienced downward occupational positions lost their previous privileged positions and power at home, especially with the arrival of their partners into the labour force. This idea is evidenced in the responses of most men who had more authority than women in Iran due to the social structure and patriarchal system. To illustrate, a 52-year-old man (Jamshid) explained:

> I had power at home with a privileged status when I was living in Iran. I had the final word at home and the decision-making about everything was mine because the economic power was in my hands, and I was the main wage earner. But here everything has been reversed.

This is also demonstrated by the statements of a 52-year-old male (Ali). He spoke about changing his status at home:

> I had my own business in Iran, and I was the main breadwinner in the family. So, I had the final word at home. But my wife got a bachelor's degree, and she can find a good job after migration. I am losing my privileged status at home as a 'number one' because my wife's attitude, values and practices are developing into equal gender roles and marital power.

Furthermore, a 70-year-old divorced man (Khosro) also explicated these changes:

> I lost my job after migration. It was difficult to accept the new status and lost my power at home.

Upon migration, the increased financial contribution of women to the household enabled them to have greater opportunities and power to challenge gender inequality. The data reveals that Iranian men face challenges to their authority by their wives, particularly as they experience downward mobility in their occupational positions. This confrontation with the women's newfound assertiveness poses a challenge for Iranian men, as it conflicts with their traditional role as the head of the family. Many Iranian women participants perceived the decline in their husband's financial role at home and lack of success in achieving economic assimilation as a sign of diminished power. Consequently, this new male role altered the wives' perceptions of their husbands' authority within the family structure. For example, a 44-year-old woman (Parisa) explained:

> Unfortunately, my husband doesn't try to develop his own business. Realising his weakness caused me to change my mind about him. I feel that he doesn't

> have any creativity and an idea or plan for making a business. He has been disappointing completely. I don't like this situation and so we always have a discussion in this regard.

Since the majority of middle- and working-class couples have migrated as refugees, it is important to consider additional factors that contribute to changes in couples' gender roles and marital power. The support provided by the British state, such as housing and cost-of-living assistance, plays a significant role. This support system benefits Iranian refugee women, granting them economic independence even if they are unemployed in the diasporic society. The increased autonomy resulting from these benefits empowers women to engage in discussions with their husbands about their gender identity, roles, and status within the household. It allows women the freedom to make decisions according to their own desires and preferences. In most cases, refugee men blame their wives for their new position and practices at home. A 70-year-old male (Khosro) immigrant who had lived in the UK for 14 years and had been married for 25 years asserted:

> The British government's financial assistance to women offers opportunities for them to mistreat men because the authority has fallen into the hands of women and if a man resists, they will call the police.

The study data suggests that the UK welfare state can contribute to marital tensions and conflicts in immigrant families, as some refugee men express concerns about their wives' changing behaviour. These men perceive their wives as becoming more daring, abrupt, shameless, and rude, attributing these changes to the special power gained through the social and economic support provided by the British state. It is important to acknowledge that these perceptions and complaints may stem from the challenges and adjustments faced by both partners in adapting to a new cultural and social environment, including changes in power dynamics within the family. For example, a 50-year-old divorced man (Amir) explained:

> The legal and cultural barriers take control and limit women's practices in Iran. So, I had power in Iran, and I had the final 'word' and made decisions in the family. But government's financial support and women's rights in the UK led to their economic independence, which caused me to lose my authority at home and the power fell into the hands of my wife.

However, British state benefits sometimes contribute to a decrease in husbands' responsibilities for their families as breadwinners and, in turn, contribute to arguments

among couples. This is highlighted in the comments of some of the female participants. For example, a 44-year-old divorced woman (Maryam) explained:

> After migration, my husband became lazier and more irresponsible in our marital life. I think that most Iranian men who are refugees become irresponsible after migration. They think that if we have benefits for living and housing now, then why we should work every day? Of course, losing their high occupational position would be another contributing factor to their irresponsibility and disappointment.

The financial support provided by the British state has indeed contributed to the financial independence of Iranian refugee women, relieving them of concerns about the cost of living. However, the study data indicates that the decrease in authority and responsibility of migrant men within the family has often led to intense conflict and even marriage breakdown. Some female participants who experienced divorce after immigration have highlighted this issue. It is evident that the changes in occupational status, gender roles, and marital power affect male and female partners differently. Iranian husbands, particularly those from middle-class backgrounds, face challenges in accepting their new roles and the shift in power dynamics. They often resist and find it difficult to adapt to these changes. This aligns with previous studies on Iranians immigrating to Europe, North America, and Canada, which emphasise the significant changes in Iranian men's socioeconomic status in new circumstances.

However, it is important to note that the situation differs for upper-middle-class and some middle-class couples. In these cases, the male partners largely maintained their role and status as the main breadwinners within the family. This is exemplified in the comments of Monir and her husband Hamed, as well as those of Faezeh and Reza. For example, a 37-year-old man (Reza) described:

> I had my own computer company with some staff in my country and my wife worked in a hospital as a manager. We moved here because of my wife’s education. When I decided to come here, I brought money here for starting my own business in the UK like Iran. I now have the same occupational position similar to that in Iran and my wife is a PhD student in London.

Therefore, as has been reported by them, the authority of these businessmen has not declined because they have not experienced downward occupational mobility in the host country. Most of those with financial resources brought from the home country set up a new business

in the UK and some concurrently continue their business in the home country and travel back and forth regularly. Therefore, there is less influence on gender relations and marital power for these couples than for those with middle-class immigrant men who have not been successful in their economic assimilation into the new society.

The study data reveals that in addition to their increased economic roles and the shift in their gender ideologies towards equality during the process of acculturation, Iranian women benefit from specific rights available in the new society. These rights include the ability to divorce, obtain child custody, and receive social support from the British state. These factors contribute to an increase in women's bargaining power within their marriages. In British society, Iranian immigrant women have the autonomy to make decisions about their financial and work affairs, their children, their travel, and their clothing without the need for their husband's knowledge or permission. This is made possible by the economic and social support provided by the British state and the specific rights that they were deprived of in their home country.

According to some divorced women in the study, these opportunities and rights have empowered them, making it easier for them to make the decision to leave their marriage when they become dissatisfied with the relationship. This stands in contrast to the norms of their cultural backgrounds, which emphasised men's leading position and authority within the family and undermined women's freedom, independence, and authority. These newfound opportunities and rights challenge traditional notions of masculinity that were reinforced in their home country and allow women to assert their autonomy and independence within their marital relationships. For example, a 42-year-old woman (Nahid) said:

> After migration, everything changed. I can easily and at any time go out with my friends without the permission of my husband.

A 43-year-old woman (Hengame) also explained:

> Here I feel freedom and I realised that I have equal rights with my husband and even in some cases I have more rights than him. In fact, state benefits have offered economic and social assistance, as well as divorce and child custody rights, allowing me to easily confront unfair gender roles.

In this regard, a divorced 37-year-old female (Marry) explained the differences in rights between the home and the host society:

> Although I worked outside the home in Iran and our earnings were equal, my husband had more authority than I at home. In fact, decision-making power was in the hands of my husband. But here [in London] everything was changed due to women's rights, which have given Iranian women an increase in their authority to decide everything in the UK as compared with Iran.

Despite the influence of the modernisation process in the home country of Iran, which has helped to enhance women's occupational and educational position, many rights are still further accorded to men than women. This is largely because of social placement and rules still operating through traditional and patriarchal systems based on Islamic laws, which give more advantages to men. Unequal gender rights in Iran's Islamic and patriarchal system therefore favours men and places Iranian women in an unfair position in the home and within society. For example, Iranian women, regardless of their economic and social position, still require their husbands' permission to travel abroad. Therefore, the positive relationship between women's economic role and their authority in marital life is weakened by other factors in religious and patriarchal societies. Across diverse cultural contexts and societies, and under the influence of the framework of different gender ideologies, the relationship between income and authority is varied and affects the distribution of power among partners in different ways. This is consistent with Shahidian's (1999) explanation that Iranian women remain in a vulnerable position in Iran, due to the fact that more rights and benefits, such as divorce and child custody, are assigned to men. These findings also resonate with existing studies that highlight the importance of cultural context and gender ideology in understanding the distribution of resources and power between partners in non-egalitarian, traditional and patriarchal societies (Rodman, 1972; Treas, 1993; Granovetter, 1992; Brown, 2002; Emirbayer, 1997; Mauss, 1990; Zuo, 2008).

As explained above, Iranian immigrant women who embrace new opportunities and social support in the host country are starting to break their silence and express their dissatisfaction with the balance of power in their marital relationships. They are also beginning to protest against unequal rights that have hitherto defined women as a second gender. Iranian women know that whilst living in a society in which they have equal, or in some cases more, rights to men they are able to protest and have their voices heard by others, which leads to a decrease in their husbands' authority and an increase in their own power. As a 44-year-old woman (Maryam) explained:

> I never complained to him in Iran, and I stayed in an unhappy relationship because I knew my voice didn't reach anywhere because of the patriarchal system and the lack of women's rights. But here everything changed, and I broke my silence.

The data shows that Iranian women believe that their new socioeconomic position and rights in the host society have given them control over their marital lives. Most of them feel that they have been liberated and released from patriarchal and religious systems that limit them through male dominance and female oppression and that have prevented the development of women's social and economic situation. For instance, they learn that divorce is no longer a taboo, as it was in Iranian culture. They no longer feel obligated to remain in unsatisfactory marital relationships in the UK. For example, a 40-year-old divorced woman (Mitra) said:

> After migration, I feel free from all the traditional and religious rules and laws. My destiny is in my own hands. I can make decisions for myself without any fear and stress of losing custody of my children.

Thus, an increase in women's consciousness regarding their rights in the public and private spheres and the creation of new awareness and liberty gives them the freedom of choice to do everything based on their own desires and not according to the family's will or social and religious rules and norms. In the diasporic British society, some obstacles deriving from traditional and unequal social norms have been eradicated and Iranian women are free from restrictions based on religious and traditional customs. This provides women with many options for how to act within the marital sphere. This new situation increases women's empowerment, which helps them attain the ability to exert control over their own destinies. However, according to the study's findings, this transition of gender roles and marital power mostly affects couples' relationships negatively. It contributes to significant marital arguments and conflicts, which often lead to separation and divorce. This is similar to Korpi's (1987) view that the partner with less power is not usually in a position to protest. However, access to resources such as money, social support, education and rules and rights, based on the idea of equality, could provide these opportunities and allow women to break their silence and express their dissatisfaction. This is also consistent with Giddens' (1992) position which emphasises the increase in freedom of choice that individuals have in the modern era.

4.4 Shifting Household Chores and Childcare

The data reveals that the mode of economic integration of Iranian immigrants into British society is heavily influenced by gender. This means that Iranian women and men experience distinct effects based on their different paths of occupational integration into mainstream London society. These disparities often give rise to significant challenges and complexities in couples' gender roles and their responsibilities regarding household chores. According to the findings of my study, the primary determinant of varied economic assimilation trajectories is the immigrants' human capital, which encompasses factors such as professional skills, education level, and proficiency in the English language, either acquired prior to their arrival or developed during the initial months of settlement.

The level of human capital plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of immigrants' economic assimilation within the host labour market. A considerable number of middle-class Iranian immigrant women, who were previously housewives in Iran, seek employment in London due to the need for additional income for their families. The study's findings also indicate that compared to men many middle-class Iranian women exhibit higher levels of motivation and actively attempt to enhance their qualifications. By obtaining university degrees or professional certifications and improving their English language skills, women participants find it easier and quicker to integrate into the middle-class mainstream economy. This, in turn, contributes to a shift in their attitudes and expectations towards a more egalitarian division of labour within household and childcare responsibilities. For example, a 52-year-old divorced woman (Sedi) claimed:

> When I was living in my country, I had no job. But, after coming to London, I went to university, and I got a master's degree. My English language also improved. I can find a good job. While my husband doesn't like to improve his skills. My mind changed about household chores. I expected my husband to help me at home.

In addition, Hengame, a 43-year-old woman, commented:

> I was unemployed in Iran and my husband was the sole breadwinner at home. He never helped me at home. After migration, I improved both my English and developed my previous skills. I mean that I went to a professional college to learn hairdressing. I have now a beauty salon with some staff. My husband

> couldn't find a full-time job, so most of the time he is at home. Therefore, I expect that he shares the household chores and childcare.

The data suggests that the growing economic independence of Iranian immigrant women often leads to a shift in their self-perception and self-confidence. This newfound independence contributes to increased assertiveness and autonomy within their households, resulting in the transformation of traditional gender roles and household responsibilities. As women gain economic stability and establish themselves in the host society, they develop a stronger sense of agency and empowerment, which influences their active participation in decision-making processes and their ability to negotiate their roles within the family. This shift in dynamics within the household reflects changing power dynamics and challenges traditional gender norms, fostering a more egalitarian distribution of responsibilities and duties. As a case in point, a 30-year-old divorced woman (Arta) explained:

> I got bachelor's and master's degrees in London and then start working in an English company. After a while, I became a manager in that company. I had income more than my husband. Working in an English workplace increased my confidence.

Mitra, a 40-year-old divorced woman, stated:

> In Iran I was unemployed. After a short course at college, I got a job in London. Working and having income increased my confidence. Also, my perception on the distribution of household chores' has changed, which contributes to increasing arguments at home.

The study revealed a noticeable increase in marital conflicts among many Iranian couples in the diasporic context, particularly relating to the discussion of women's economic roles and the division of domestic duties. The findings reveal that a significant number of Iranian men still hold strong traditional beliefs that consider household chores and childcare as solely the responsibility of women. They are resistant to any changes in their roles and continue to adhere to traditional gender norms within their marital lives.

This resistance to gender role reversal and the husband's refusal to embrace a more equal division of labour at home often leads to intense arguments and ongoing marital tensions. The data suggests that the refusal of men to adapt to their new position and accept a more equitable gender role distribution significantly contributes to these conflicts. For instance, a

44-year-old woman named Maryam, who has been living in the diaspora for 15 years and has achieved middle-class mainstream economic assimilation, shared her experience:

> I was a housewife in Iran and all the housework was with me. We did not have any argument in this regard. After migration, I improved my English and then I went to university. I got a good job in London after graduation. Here we always argue about the division of household chores because my husband still believes that household chores and childcare are the domain of women.

In a similar vein, a 37-year-old woman (Marry) claimed:

> My husband still believes that household chores such as cooking, washing dishes, and childcare are the domain of women, and he should not be involved in these affairs.

Another 37-year-old woman (Fatemeh) stated:

> After immigration, I got a job at hospital. I have enough income and authority to challenge unequal roles and responsibilities in my marital life, which led to improved household equality at home.

Therefore, the transformation of Iranian women's occupational status and income following immigration has resulted in a shift in the balance of gender roles and power within the family. This change in gender roles and responsibilities often leads to arguments between couples. The departure from traditional gender roles as housewives and their integration into the mainstream economy significantly impacts marital relationships, leading to challenges and changes in partners' tasks and responsibilities at home (Hyman et al, 2008; Hirsch et al, 2002; Min, 2001; Mahdi, 1999; Ataca, 1998; Ataca and Berry, 2002).

Numerous empirical studies support these findings, illustrating that women's increased economic independence promotes greater household equality (Grzywacz et al, 2009; Hirsch et al, 2002; Gonzalez-Lopez, 2004). When wives work alongside their husbands and have economic autonomy, they gain the freedom and authority to challenge unequal gender roles and responsibilities in their marital life. Conversely, women who lack their own source of income face fewer opportunities to negotiate their husbands' dominance (Ataca, 1998; Ataca and Berry, 2002).

However, it is important to note that although women's economic contribution to the family often leads to increased participation by men in household chores and childcare, the data suggests that this equitable division of tasks is primarily a result of women exerting pressure or making threats rather than a genuine change in men's traditional attitudes and values regarding gender roles. Therefore, this sharing of responsibilities is not based on men's willingness but rather emerges as a result of external coercion related to women's increased economic power and independence (Hyman et al, 2008; Hirsch et al, 2002; Min, 2001; Mahdi, 1999; Ataca, 1998; Ataca and Berry, 2002).

As a 52-year-old male (Jamshid) explained:

> My participation in household chores is more here than in Iran because my wife works outside of the home, and she asks me to [be] involve[d] in them. In fact, I have to adjust myself to this new situation; if not I should leave home and stay alone.

A 43-year-old divorced woman (Hengame) had the following to say:

> Although my husband's participation has increased at home, he still thinks that [he] gives me a favour when he helps me at home. He nags continuously from morning to night.

As evidenced by these quotes, the compulsory participation in household chores by men in the long term led to serious acrimony across families. Men within this group are often unhappy with the new gender roles and they challenge them continually, sometimes preferring to leave the marital relationship.

However, some female participants reported that their responsibilities had doubled and that they still had to work at home as well as professionally, leading to major arguments and tensions. For example, as a 43-year-old female (Marry) explained:

> Although I work outside the home as well as my husband, he still expects that when I come home, I start my second job, which means household chores. We always argue about the sharing of domestic affairs.

Another 43-year-old woman (Azam) complained about her husband's responsibilities towards the family:

> I started to work when we came here more quickly than my husband. My husband is unemployed most of the time and he gets benefits from the British state. Unfortunately, he hasn't changed, and he always expects that I do all the household chores, childcare and shopping alone like in the past when I have been in Iran.

Indeed, despite women's active participation in the workforce alongside their husbands, the majority of household duties, including child-rearing, still fall on women's shoulders. This aligns with the perspective of contemporary conflict theorists who argue that true gender equality remains elusive in advanced capitalist societies. Despite women's productive roles and economic independence, they continue to bear a greater burden of household chores when compared to men (Smith, 1997). Engels (1972) similarly highlighted the unequal position of working-class women who are expected to juggle both work and domestic responsibilities, leading to an imbalance in spousal relationships.

The findings of this study are consistent with other research conducted by Ahmad-Nia (2002), Lapidus (1978), Elliot and Moskoff (1983), and Kiblitskaya (2000), which demonstrates that women's involvement in productive roles does not eradicate unequal gender roles within the home. Even when both spouses are employed outside the home and express a desire for equal roles and power distribution, women still carry the primary responsibility for domestic affairs.

It is important to note that the dynamics of household duties differ for upper-middle-class couples who are not refugees. The study reveals that the economic engagements of the majority of upper-middle-class businessmen, as well as a few middle-class individuals, across the UK and Iran result in reduced involvement in household chores and childcare. These businessmen frequently travel between the two countries to manage their businesses, while their wives and children reside in the UK. The absence of men at home has led to a shift in gender roles within these couples. A 44-year-old woman (Monir), for instance, acknowledged the changes in her own situation, stating:

> My husband's participation in household chores and childcare has become less than before migration because he continually travels back and forth to Iran.

Therefore, as this study's data shows, the impact of immigrant women's occupational position and the increase in the share in the family income on their roles and responsibilities at home has been different among couples and is influenced by various factors, including

class, immigration status, men and women's understanding of household equality, partners' communication skills, and men's attitudes towards equality. I will discuss this in the following sections of this chapter.

4.5 Masculinity and Gender Relations in the Couple

One of the main themes in my research concerns immigrant men's understanding of masculinity. In this section, I show the influence of transitions in the sociocultural and family setting on men's expressions of masculinity. I discuss how men's sociocultural and economic backgrounds may affect their masculine identity, how male immigrants manage their masculinity crisis after migration, and how the changes in masculinity affect couples' relationships.

The study's findings show that migratory experiences create difficulties and challenges for most Iranian immigrant men when navigating their masculine identity in the diasporic context. Most Iranian men are dissatisfied with equal gender roles, which challenges and questions their traditional views of masculinity. In the following discussion, I clarify some consequences of these challenges.

The results indicate that differences in the success or failure of gaining a high occupational and social position in the host country when compared to their spouse can cause men to lose power within the family. This has led to crises in migrant Iranian men's identity because most are not happy to accept women's equality and lose their dominant position in the family. For example, Khosro, a 70-year-old separated man, explained:

> I am not happy here. I lost my previous high position at home. My wife doesn't hear me anymore and she doesn't pay attention to my wishes and requests.

As a 44-year-old divorced woman (Maryam) explained:

> My husband lost his previous occupational position in London. But he didn't accept new equal roles and power at home. Although he tried to be a good and logical man, I think that Iranian men usually hardly desist from their traditional and privileged status. So, we had a serious argument. He felt that he had lost everything.

The findings of the study indicate that the shift in women's expectations towards equality in household roles, authority, and responsibility, as experienced by working- and middle-class

men who have undergone occupational and sociocultural assimilation, is perceived as a reversal of traditional gender roles. This shift undermines the sense of dignity they held before their emigration. These challenges and crises resulting from downward occupational mobility align with previous research conducted by Marchand and Runyan (2000), Bourdieu (1998), Donaldson and Howson (2009), and Gonzalez-Allend (2016).

The loss of masculine identity among many migrant men leads to a decline in their authority and confidence within the family unit, also leaving them more vulnerable in the host society. This loss is primarily attributed to the lack of employment opportunities, which results in a reduction in the earning potential of male partners. Consequently, men perceive themselves as emasculated and disempowered. The study's findings demonstrate that in such circumstances some Iranian migrant men relinquish their power, becoming indifferent and irresponsible towards their families, and sometimes choose to permanently separate from their families, as described by a 37-year-old woman named Fatemeh:

> After migration, my husband, with failing power at home, gradually relegated all household duties and childcare to me and eventually gave up his power and left his family.

The presence of female co-providers challenging traditional masculinity and the restructuring of gender hierarchies in modern society leads to significant marital conflicts and tensions. These findings align with existing theories that suggest that as women's increasing financial independence creates new and diverse roles for both genders, a "crisis" of masculinity has emerged in postmodern society (Beynon, 2002; Quek and Knudson-Martin, 2008).

Conversely, the crises in men's sense of masculinity can be attributed to the transformation of gender ideologies among Iranian migrant women in British society, who seek equal distribution of roles and power as part of the acculturation process. These shifts in gender dynamics create challenges within migrant couples' relationships. A 70-year-old separated man named Khosro shared his experience, highlighting the impact of these changes:

> I am usually dissatisfied with new circumstances. Because living in the UK has made my wife franker, more open and freer to do anything in her own way. I wasn't happy with my wife's new behaviour. She is ignoring Iranian cultural teachings, which mostly generates tensions in marital life.

Many men expressed their concerns about the emergence of immigrant women's newfound awareness, knowledge, and assertiveness in the new society, which they perceived as a threat to traditional masculinity. A common complaint among Iranian male participants was that life in the UK had made their wives more audacious. Jamshid, a divorced 52-year-old man, provided an example to illustrate this sentiment:

> The legal and cultural barriers control and limit women's practices in Iran. So, I had power in Iran, and I had the final 'word' and made decisions in the family. But women's rights in the UK and their economic independence have undermined my authority at home and the power fell into the hands of my wife.

According to the findings, most Iranian men believe that British laws favour women and force them to accept equal gender ideologies in the host society. This leads to continuous arguments in their marital lives and is evidenced in many participants' comments. A 51-year-old man (Davood) explained:

> Here I didn't have any power to protest about anything at home because I feared my wife calling the police and reporting her husband's violence. I had to accept and follow British laws regarding women's rights. But our tensions had increased, which led to our divorce.

Hence, there are distinct disparities in the perceptions of acculturation between males and females, as well as variations in the extent of acculturation experienced by each gender. Many migrant men are unwilling to confront and embrace Western masculine norms, perceiving them as incompatible with their traditional conceptions of masculinity. This discrepancy gives rise to conflicts and challenges within immigrant couples in the host society. These findings align with previous research conducted by Darvishpour (2002), Donaldson and Howson (2009), Khosravi (2009), Rhodes et al (2008), and Mahdi (1999). Maternowska, Withers, and Brindis (2014) have also confirmed that the transition of gender roles poses a challenge to traditional male gender roles and creates a crisis in their identification with traditional masculinity. Additionally, Donaldson and Howson (2009) and Gonzalez-Allend (2016) assert that men face difficulties in maintaining control in decision-making and exerting power within the household.

The challenges to traditional masculinity experienced by Iranian male participants align with Bourdieu's (1998; cited in Lewis, 2007) notion that traditional masculinity is questioned and contested in modern societies, as patriarchy becomes less accepted as the natural and normal

order of things. These findings are consistent with Farahani's (2012) study, which explores the factors that may complicate participants' perceptions and representations of their experiences of masculinities in the diasporic context. Mehdizadeh (2021) investigates men's assigned gender roles in Iran and the challenges and changes posed by the matrimonial and legal norms of the host culture.

However, it is important to note that this does not imply that men never acculturate into the host society. Iranian men do appreciate certain benefits of modern life, such as the increased involvement of women in contributing to family income and their corresponding gain of more personal freedom. It is interesting to highlight that men's mode of acculturation tends to be selective and often differs from that of their wives. Marry, a 37-year-old divorced woman, acknowledged this phenomenon:

> My husband was happy with our sharing of the family income, but in other aspects of life, he liked to follow a traditional and patriarchal pattern, such as in relation to decision-making, household chores, childcare, control of the choice of friends, social interaction, the kind of clothing to wear out, and so on.

There is an evident discrepancy and contradiction in men's actions and their adherence to gender ideology. This pattern aligns with previous studies that highlight how men's practices are not consistently based on equal gender roles. Nonetheless, they do exhibit changes in their values and attitudes towards more egalitarian gender relations during the acculturation process (Hochschild, 1989; Knudson-Martin and Mahoney, 1998).

The findings of this study indicate that some men experienced mental health crises such as depression and low self-esteem as a result of losing the traditional masculinity that affords Iranian men a privileged position in their home country. The loss of their previously elevated status leaves them feeling insecure and with limited power. This is further supported by the comments of certain middle-class Iranian refugee men who experienced a decline in their occupational position in the host society following migration. For example, Khosro, a 70-year-old man, voiced his perspective on this matter:

> Migration, without a doubt, has a negative effect on our marital relationships. Here I am unhappy with my new situation, and I am starting to feel anxious. I am depressed. While, if I lived in Iran, I wouldn't have to tolerate, for example, her style of dress, her interaction with other men, and so on. But I am in the

> UK now and I must accept it. In the UK, all laws, and regulations favour women.

In addition, Sajad a 48-year-old divorced unemployed man, said:

> Here I lost my job. My wife left me. I am depressed and I feel like a failed man.

At the same time, Shahryar, a 40-year-old man, described his situation:

> I lost my high occupational status in the new circumstances. I am now ashamed to say to my family what I do and where I work. Sometimes I think about suicide.

The findings of this study shed light on the detrimental effects of changing masculinity on men's mental well-being. The crisis in masculinity is evident in the profound depression experienced by men, stemming from the loss of their traditional role as the primary breadwinner. Conforming to Western masculine norms puts men at risk of developing depression, as highlighted by Maguire (1995), who emphasises the rise in suicide rates, violence, and abusive behaviour towards others as manifestations of the masculinity crisis. Similarly, Beynon (2001) argues that immigrant men find themselves caught between different masculine identities and norms, navigating the conventional versus Western notions of masculinity. The traditional understanding of masculinity is no longer in vogue, and the reversal of gender roles has contributed to a crisis in male identity (Oliffe et al, 2010; Coward, 1999; Alsop et al, 2002; Itulua-Abumere, 2013).

The study's data also reveal instances of domestic violence perpetrated by some migrant men against their wives, serving as a manifestation of this crisis in masculinity and the feelings of powerlessness experienced by some men. Azam, a separated 43-year-old woman, shared her account of such violence:

> After migration, my husband became more aggressive. I faced several verbal, mental and physical violence.

In response to this challenge, some men, particularly those lacking social and economic power, resort to expressing their masculinity through violent and aggressive behaviour, a phenomenon referred to as "protest masculinity" by Broude (1990: 103).

It can be concluded that the concept of masculinity among migrant men is constantly evolving. As they transition from patriarchal and unequal gender roles in their home countries to Western societies where gender relations are based on equality, many Iranian immigrant men face a crisis in their traditional understanding of masculinity. They struggle to confront and accept new roles that do not align with their traditional beliefs. This disparity in the levels of acculturation between men and women gives rise to significant conflicts and challenges within immigrant couples in the host society. These findings support previous research by Darvishpour (2002) and Mahdi (1999), who argue that sociocultural integration into the host society challenges the foundation of traditional gender roles for both men and women. This aligns with the contemporary understanding of masculinity as a socially constructed concept that is subject to change in response to broader cultural and social transformations. Masculinity is further challenged by the emergence of new perspectives on femininity and equal gender ideologies in both the workplace and the home (Bradley, 1996; Coward, 1999; Alsop et al, 2002; Itulua-Abumere, 2013; Edley and Wetherell, 1995; Barrett, 2001; Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Morgan, 1992; Sedgwick, 1985; MacInnes, 1998; Alonso, 1992; Gutmann, 2003; Kimmel, 2014; Ramírez, 2011; Connell, 2005; Gardiner, 2005).

Therefore, how men approach, respond to, and cope with changing sociocultural and economic dynamics within marital life plays a crucial role in shaping new gender relations within immigrant couples after migration. In fact, tensions between spouses often stem from husbands' varying responses and reactions to these new egalitarian gender roles, as well as their resistance towards accepting equality and greater power for their wives. The extent to which Iranian immigrant men embrace Western masculine norms depends on their pre-existing gender values, norms, and religious affiliations in their home country. The study's findings demonstrate that Iranian men who already believe in equal marital gender roles and have practised them in Iran readily accept the equal distribution of roles and power when transitioning to Western British society. As a result, they face fewer challenges to traditional male gender roles and experience less of a crisis in their identification of traditional masculinity in the diasporic society when compared to men who still adhere to religious and patriarchal values and beliefs.

4.6 Improved or Unchanged Couples' Gender Roles and Marital Power

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the transformation of gender roles and marital power among Iranian immigrant couples is not uniform. Many Iranian immigrant couples (24 couples in this study) face challenges and tensions in their marital lives due to differences in their integration processes, particularly in terms of the speed and level of acculturation and occupational assimilation. 18 of these couples divorced after migrating. The partners in 6 couples underwent similar patterns of acculturation and economic assimilation. These couples witnessed a positive shift in their gender relations, embracing new gender ideologies concerning the distribution of household chores and decision-making power within the family. In fact, the men in these couples openly accepted equal gender roles in their marital lives. They prioritised open communication and demonstrated tolerance by considering both partners' perspectives and granting equal influence in decision-making. Moreover, they share mutual responsibilities for household and childcare duties. As exemplified in the remarks of a 34-year-old woman named Mahta, Iranian husbands in these couples often take on household responsibilities without being prompted and without the need for discussion:

> My husband participates in household chores and childcare more than before because I am working part-time in London, and I have less free time. So, he does household tasks rather than waiting for me to do them. He understands and supports me more than before.

A 46-year-old man (Zamyad) also elucidated this:

> In my opinion, my wife has equal rights and responsibility in our marital life. I do not see her as inferior to me. After migration, I share in household chores more than before. Also, we both decide on everything.

Moreover, Bahram a 42-year-old man conceded:

> After migration, our relationship improved because here [in London] I learn my wife has the same rights in marital life. Thus, I follow a pattern of equality in doing household chores and making decisions.

Hence, as stated earlier, the way men respond and react to equal gender roles and power dynamics in their relationships plays a crucial role in fostering increased sharing of household responsibilities, childcare, and joint decision-making among couples. The

shifting expectations of men regarding their roles and responsibilities in marital life in the UK, as they integrate into British society and embrace equal gender relations, have led to a more open acceptance of household responsibilities and a greater recognition of women's economic contributions. Consequently, women feel more empowered to assert their desire for a greater role in decision-making processes. This is exemplified by the comments of a 42-year-old woman named Azar, who highlighted the increased involvement of wives in decision-making:

> Here the responsibility and share of household chores and childcare with my husband increased. Also, he paid attention to my opinion in the decision-making process.

It is worth noting that, in addition to the mode of economic and sociocultural integration into the host society, the variation can be attributed to the diverse types of marital relationships observed in Iran, which are influenced by religious and sociocultural laws and customs that establish the fundamental framework for gender relations in the country. Thus, the couples' economic, sociocultural and religious backgrounds in Iran, as well as their gender ideologies, lifestyles, and behavioural patterns, play significant roles in shaping their new gender relations in the host society. The dynamics of marital power vary across different social classes or subcultures within a given society. Individuals from diverse social and economic positions may exhibit a greater or lesser likelihood of embracing attitudes that support equal distribution of power. This aligns with previous research that highlights a shift in men's traditional notions of masculinity and attitudes towards the equitable sharing of household tasks and decision-making power during the acculturation process (Gonzalez-Allende, 2016). Studies by Quek and Knudson-Martin (2008) and Xu and Lai (2002) also suggest that men's changing attitudes towards recognising and valuing women's contribution to family income contribute to the gradual disappearance of unequal roles and responsibilities in marital life, as men relinquish their sole provider status.

The study’s findings emphasise that the absence of extended family presence is an additional factor contributing to the positive transformation of couples' gender roles and marital power post-migration. The absence of extended family has led to changes in family structure, enhanced autonomy, increased male participation in household chores, and greater involvement of women in making important household decisions. Evidence suggests increased mutual dependence among couples who remain together after migrating. These

immigrant couples have begun to rely more on each other for support and assistance, rather than relying on extended family and friends. As stated by a 46-year-old male participant named Zamyad:

> My sharing of household work has increased after migration, because of the absence of our family assistant here.

As also explained by a 42-year-old woman (Nahid):

> Here my husband tries to share everything in the absence of my parents. After doing his work outside, when he comes home, he helps me. For example, he takes care of our son and helps with our daughter's homework in his free time.

A 33-year-old married woman (Malihe) also reported an increase in her husband's participation at home:

> Of course, we had an equal distribution of roles and responsibilities in Iran. But in London, in the absence of extended family, my husband feels more responsible for household chores.

In the absence of extended family and limited access to networks of friends and relatives, therefore, immigrant spouses rely more heavily on each other for support during the acculturation process. Women in particular express a strong sense of bonding, support, and satisfaction in their marital relationships. This finding aligns with Shahidian's (1999) research, which highlights a shift in the domestic division of labour within families, attributed to a decrease in childcare assistance and other domestic tasks traditionally provided by the extended family. As a result, men are increasingly taking on greater responsibilities in areas such as childrearing and housekeeping.

Furthermore, the study reveals that a subset of Iranian immigrant couples (6 couples in this study), particularly those from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds, who are well-educated and not religiously affiliated, have not experienced significant changes in their gender roles and marital power. These couples indicate that they already embraced new gender ideologies and decision-making processes, treating each other as equals, even prior to migrating. Their modern gender roles and equitable distribution of marital power are evident in the comments provided by participants who share similar characteristics. An upper-middle-class 50-year-old man (Hamed) elaborated on this dynamic:

> We were married with love, we had equal power in our lives, and we did make decisions together in Iran. I didn't have any masculine attitudes in our marital life.

Although the majority of Iranian women and men tend to internalise traditional gender roles and religious obligations as dictated by family and society during the process of socialisation, it is worth noting that some Iranian couples demonstrate a willingness to embrace a more modern lifestyle. This inclination towards modernity is often influenced by factors such as access to the internet, satellite TV, and exposure to Western culture through studying abroad or regular travel to Western countries. These individuals have already undergone a process of acculturation prior to arriving in the UK and have actively pursued equal and contemporary gender relationships in Iran. This sentiment was expressed by a 37-year-old man (Reza) who stated:

> Although I was raised in a traditional and religious family, after studying abroad, my view, attitude, and behaviour changed regarding everything, including gender relations and religion, which are influenced by my friends and new circumstances. I always followed an attitude of egalitarian gender roles in my marital life. I help my wife at home, and we make decisions together about everything. So, our gender relations have not changed after migration.

In this group, women concede that there are times when husbands even trust their wives' abilities and accord more power to them. As a case in point, a 47-year-old upper-middle-class woman (Faezeh) explained:

> My marital relationship has not changed after migration, because we always followed equal gender roles and power in our marital life, and we were familiar with Western/modern culture and lifestyle before coming to the UK. I had the freedom to do everything without needing my husband's permission – managing family income, deciding, and organising our trips and so on – when we were living in Iran.

Men belonging to this particular group willingly grant certain rights to women, regardless of the prevailing societal norms and rules. It is noteworthy that a significant number of male participants who embrace equal power dynamics or allocate more power to their wives were raised in matriarchal families. Interestingly, husbands with more liberal gender attitudes are often willing to relinquish a portion of their legal rights and authority to their wives, even

within the context of a religious and patriarchal system. These findings align with previous research, such as that conducted by Azadarmaki et al (2000), which suggests that established norms and codes are being questioned and resisted by Iranian youth under the influence of modern communication technologies, including satellite TV and the internet. Furthermore, empirical studies conducted in Mexico and Israel have demonstrated the impact of global modernisation on traditional and patriarchal societies, leading to transformations in gender ideologies (Kulik, 1999; Oropesa, 1997; Quek and Knudson-Martin, 2008).

In addition to their advanced acculturation and adoption of equal gender roles within their marital lives, another contributing factor is that these individuals did not migrate as asylum seekers or refugees. Consequently, they face no limitations in travelling to their home country, Iran, allowing them to maintain their occupational positions there while simultaneously being able to work or invest easily in the UK. Therefore, they do not experience downward occupational mobility in the host society and have not suffered a loss of earning power within their families. This factor is often associated with the preservation of unchanged gender roles and marital power dynamics following the migration process.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter delves into key themes that support its central argument, including the division of household roles and responsibilities, the distribution of decision-making power, the transformation of traditional masculinity, and the impact of socioeconomic status and the rights of migrant women in the host society. The aim has been to thoroughly analyse how migration affects gender roles, power dynamics, and the understanding of masculinity among Iranian migrant couples during their sociocultural and economic integration into the host society.

The findings of this study contribute to the understanding that migration has influenced and changed the majority of couples' gender roles and responsibilities in terms of sharing household tasks, childcare, and decision-making power. The changes in gender relations have been more pronounced among traditional and religious couples, where wives were previously oppressed by their husbands in Iran. These changes in male and female roles and power in the family after migration are a result of sociocultural differences between the two societies, which have distinct roles, responsibilities, rights, and social statuses for men and women. Iranian migrant women have gained advantages and rights in the host society, leading to transformations in their attitudes, expectations, and practices regarding equal

gender roles and the distribution of decision-making power within the family. These women openly embrace new roles and positions and proceed in the acculturation process more quickly than men. However, their husbands often resist this reversal of roles and positions, leading to significant tensions in marital life. Men's resistance stems from the loss of their high and privileged status within the family and their diminished authority in decision-making processes. In the diasporic context, they no longer have the final say in family matters, further contributing to arguments among couples in their new circumstances.

Furthermore, differences in couples' economic integration into the host society also impact gender roles, power, and status within the family. Iranian migrant women are more easily absorbed into the middle-class mainstream economy than men, leading to changes in their attitudes and expectations towards a more egalitarian division of household labour and childcare responsibilities. As women gain more economic independence, they challenge men's dominance and privileged position within the home, questioning the pre-migration gender roles and marital power dynamics. They redefine their roles and actively engage in decision-making processes, gaining more control over their marital lives. Additionally, with the introduction of Western culture, Iranian migrant wives now have access to special rights such as divorce rights and child custody, empowering them to no longer tolerate oppression. They are more willing to leave unsatisfactory marriages, resulting in fragile marital relationships among many Iranian migrants.

Conversely, middle-class Iranian men, who have lost their position as sole breadwinners and their authority within the family, find themselves in a vulnerable position, leading to a crisis in their traditional identity of masculinity. The erosion of masculine identity contributes to their experience of occupational downward mobility in the host society, often leading to feelings of emasculation and disempowerment. The difference in economic assimilation between men and women is a significant factor in marital tensions following migration.

However, the impact of migration on gender roles and power within couples depends on two factors: their sociocultural and economic background and the type of marital relationship they had in Iran, and the male partners' reactions to their new roles and power in marital life. The data revealed that, in most cases, Iranian migrant men cling to unequal roles and power dynamics at home. Rather than accepting a greater sharing of household responsibilities and relinquishing some power to their wives, they prioritise maintaining their sense of masculinity. In many instances, when men are unable to exert control over resources and

decision-making authority, they shirk their responsibilities and leave the home, often resulting in long-term separation and eventual divorce. Therefore, the differences in couples' sociocultural assimilation into the host society contribute to ongoing conflicts among couples in their new circumstances.

It is important to note that the changes in attitudes and behaviours among couples are not uniform. While migration can have a negative impact on most Iranian migrant couples' gender roles and marital power, some couples experienced a positive development towards more equal gender ideologies without experiencing tension after migration. These couples share responsibilities in household affairs, childcare, and decision-making, as their modes and intensity of acculturation and economic assimilation into the host society align. Male partners openly embrace equal gender roles in marital life and actively participate in household chores, childcare, and decision-making processes.

On the other hand, there are migrant couples whose gender roles and marital power remain unchanged. The variation in marital relationships in Iran plays a significant role in determining how couples face and integrate into the host society, particularly in relation to adherence to laws, customs, religious rules, and restrictions that shape gender relations in Iran. Couples in this group typically come from modern, well-educated families with no religious beliefs, where gender roles and power are shared equally, and joint decision-making is practised. Moreover, they had already been exposed to Western culture before migrating to the UK. Additionally, they have not experienced occupational downward mobility in the host society and have not lost their economic roles and authority within the family. As they have not migrated as asylum seekers or refugees, they face no limitations in travelling to Iran to maintain their occupational positions there, while also being able to work or invest easily in the UK.

In the subsequent chapter, I will delve into how the process of sociocultural and economic assimilation into the host society influences the sexual ideologies, perceptions, and practices of Iranian immigrants. I will explore the main factors that shape individuals' views on sexual activities in the diasporic context. Furthermore, I will examine how migrants' occupational patterns impact their sexual relationships, considering the crisis in masculine sexuality faced by some men.

Chapter 5: Changes in Couples' Sexual Relationships

5.1 Introduction

According to recent scholars, the understanding of sexuality is not fixed and standardised in modern society. It varies between relationships and individuals and is shaped by values, norms, cultures, and religious beliefs (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Laumann et al, 1994; Seidman, 2003). Sexual values, meanings, and practices are socially constructed and subject to change over time and across different societies, cultures, and contexts (Parker and Gagnon, 1995; Vance, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Jackson and Scott, 2010; Mead, 1928; Mead, 2001; Seidman et al, 2006; Maskimowski, 2012; Shahidian, 1999). The concept of sexuality is constantly evolving historically and contextually (Foucault, 1979; Shahidian, 1999). It exhibits fluidity, leading to varying sexual meanings, practices, and pleasures across societies, cultures, and times (Freedman and D'Emilio, 2005; Wagner, 2009; Heath, 1982; Simon, 1996).

Gender roles and values play a significant role in shaping sexual practices and attitudes, which reflect society's cultural conventions and notions of sexual desire (Shahidian, 1999). Factors such as religion, ethnicity, class, academic qualifications, and region also influence individuals' perceptions of sexual activities and gender relations (Farahani, 2018). Therefore, in this study, I consider sexuality as a crucial aspect in understanding couples' gender roles, identity, and gender inequality. By exploring these ideas, this chapter demonstrates that the processes of sociocultural and economic assimilation into the host society deeply impact Iranian immigrants' sexual ideologies, perceptions, and practices, particularly when transitioning from traditional, religious, and patriarchal cultures to Western nations with more liberal approaches to sexuality.

The focus of this chapter is to examine how Iranian immigrant couples' sexual attitudes and behaviours have changed during their sociocultural and economic integration into the diasporic society. Since couples' sexual relations are a fundamental component of marital relationships, the findings of this chapter address the main question of the study and explore the impact of migration on Iranian migrants' marital relationships. I discuss the transformation of Iranian migrants' understanding and knowledge of sexuality at the level of both individuals and couples and its effect on immigrants' sexual relationships.

At the personal level, I highlight that women's understandings and practices of sexuality develop differently from men's. As discussed in the previous chapter, women's gender ideologies towards egalitarianism have shifted more quickly than men's when exposed to modern Western ideals of equality and individualism during the acculturation process. These changes, however, have not been uniform across all couples and have been more significant for those originating from traditional, religious, and patriarchal families.

To examine these changes, I first examine the transformation of male and female migrants' knowledge and general understanding of sexuality, as well as their sexual practices in the host country. Secondly, I will explore the effects of these changes on unsatisfactory sexual relations among couples during the process of sociocultural and economic integration into the host society. This chapter also focuses on the impact of transformed attitudes and practices towards extra-marital sex and marital rape on couples' relationships. Additionally, it investigates the influence of migrants' occupational patterns on couples' sexual relations, particularly regarding the crisis in male partners' masculine sexuality. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how migration affects couples' sexual practices in diverse ways by categorising couples into three groups based on their experiences of changes in sexual relations. Further exploration of these groups will be presented in the subsequent sections.

5.2 Knowledge and Understanding of Sexuality in the Diasporic Context

Many Iranian participants in the study acknowledged a lack of suitable knowledge about sexuality before they migrated to the UK. This lack of knowledge can be attributed to the absence of sex education programs in their home country. Participants mentioned that they had limited access to information about sex from their parents, educational programs at school, or through media channels in Iran. These findings align with a study by Shirpak et al (2008) which examined the availability of sex education programs for married Iranian women and found a scarcity of such courses in Iran.

Traditional, cultural, and religious barriers may have hindered the establishment of comprehensive sexual education programs for children by institutions or parents. It appears that many Iranian families do not consider sex education as a crucial topic to be addressed during the process of socialisation. While the initial sources of information play a crucial role in shaping individuals' understanding, attitudes, and values regarding sexuality, they can also influence an individual's sexual orientation in their future marital life.

In this cultural context, young people often acquire inaccurate and insufficient information from inappropriate sources and unqualified individuals. Many participants relied on friends, illicit books, and movies for early knowledge about sex. In such an environment, the majority of Iranian young people may develop misconceptions and engage in inappropriate behaviours related to sexuality. This trend is prevalent among both girls and boys, without significant differences based on social class or gender, due to prevailing ideologies and policies in Iran concerning sexual education within families. The lack of access to comprehensive sex education was evident in the comments of many men and women. For example, a 34-year-old woman (Nafiseh) shared her experience in the following way:

> I remember that my school had such strict religious rules. I have never learned anything about sexuality in school. Our teachers have never said what sexuality is. I obtained sexual information from unsuitable sources. Therefore, I was thinking that sex must be like an animal action and that it is a dirty thing.

A 45-year-old woman (Lida) described that:

> I got information regarding sexuality just from friends when I was in secondary school. I never heard anything about the subject of sex in the family or at school. In addition, there was no Internet and satellite TV when I was a teenager.

It is important to note that the findings of this study are specific to a generation (between 30 and 73 years old) who did not have access to modern technology during their formative years. They grew up in different circumstances to younger generations who have been exposed to Western sexual patterns through the internet, social media, and satellite TV during their youth. It should be acknowledged that these findings reflect the experiences of a generation that had limited exposure to modern sexual ideas and feminist perspectives. While some women in this study internally challenged traditional and unequal sexual relations while in Iran, they often did not feel comfortable expressing these views to their husbands, families, and friends.

Recent research on the younger generation, who belong to the digital era, indicates that there are significant differences in their sexual attitudes and behaviours when compared to the older generation. The younger generation has greater access to social networking, sexual education, and even pornography on the internet. Their religious beliefs may also be less influential, and they may be less bound by social norms and family culture. Some studies,

such as Mahdavi (2008), suggest that infidelity and premarital sex are common among young couples in major cities like Tehran.

During the process of sociocultural and economic integration into the host society, Iranian migrants have gained knowledge and information about sex through various sources in the new cultural context. They have learned from ethnic-national friends, British-native colleagues, magazines, and especially sexual training programs and movies on television, which openly discuss various aspects of sexuality. These changes in conceptions and practices of sexuality have been more significant among Iranian women than men. Many female participants, influenced by British values and gender-specific acculturation into mainstream society, have developed a new understanding of sexual practices that emphasises pleasure and desire as important aspects, rather than solely viewing sex as a marital duty or a means of reproduction. Working in Britain and engaging in social activities with British friends may have also contributed to their familiarity with British culture. More than half of the women in the study mentioned these changes in their comments. They acknowledged that, prior to migrating, sex was often viewed as a duty to fulfil their husband's needs and maintain the marriage, but after migrating, their perceptions of sexuality underwent significant changes. This transformation deeply impacted their sexual practices in the diasporic society. For example, a 52-year-old woman (Sedi) shared her experiences of sexual changes:

> Here [in London] I learned about sex from my friends, on the Internet, in movies and by studying. I no longer consider sex as a duty like other female duties.

In addition, a 42-year-old married woman (Azar) explained:

> After migration, the meaning of sexual relations changed. Gaining pleasure became more important than satisfying my husband in sex.

Female participants in the study also came to the realisation that sexual intimacy is a means of expressing love and deepening emotional connections with their partners. This stands in contrast to their previous understanding of sexuality. They recognised that sexual relationships should be mutual, with both partners having similar sexual needs and desires. They acknowledged their equal right to derive pleasure from their sexual encounters. Consequently, enjoyment became more significant than maintaining authority or using sex

as a means to prevent their marriage from breaking down. One respondent, a 37-year-old woman named Mary, shared her changed perspective and expectations regarding sexual relationships:

> After migration, my sexual attitude and values changed. I consider it much more to do with pleasure instead of just for procreation. Here, I do not think that I should be a perfect housewife (cleaning, washing, cooking and so on) and have sex with my husband just as a duty with no pleasure.

The majority of female participants in the study expressed positive attitudes towards sexuality and reported no negative feelings towards sexual relationships after their migration experience. They no longer viewed sexual intercourse as unnecessary, painful, or burdensome, as they had become acquainted with the new meanings and concepts of sexuality in their new environment. This perception is echoed in the comments of other Iranian women as well. For instance, a 38-year-old woman named Parvin shared her perspective:

> I think that sex is very necessary and useful for physical and psychological health and depression. Also, it develops and strengthens marital relationships. The sex act would be pleasurable if it is done in the right way.

In addition, Afsaneh, a 73-year-old married woman, stated that:

> Sex is the most beautiful and most private moment that can happen in privacy between men and women. In fact, sex can develop, and complete, love between couples.

Moreover, a divorced 30-year-old woman, (Arta) explained:

> My colleagues talked, regarding their sexual experience, openly in the workplace. I learned through them to see sex as a beautiful thing. Also, I talk about sex freely with my friends, while three years ago, I couldn't even say the word 'sex'.

A 44-year-old woman (Maryam) said:

> I think sexuality has two dimensions, including physical and psychological satisfaction. [It is about] loving and the feeling of belonging, which lets you put your own body in your partner's hands.

Following their migration, many Iranian women also gained the ability to express their sexual expectations and desires openly and without fear or shame, disregarding the judgment of family and friends. In their home society, female sexuality was often constrained and suppressed within family structures and educational institutions such as schools and universities. Similarly, mass media played a role in shaping societal attitudes towards female sexuality. However, as expressed by a 45-year-old woman named Lida, these constraints have been alleviated in the context of migration:

> I am now not ashamed to express my sexual desire. Also, I know how to behave during sex and how to enjoy it like my husband.

Several Iranian women recognise that in their new sociocultural environment, they no longer feel disconnected or estranged from their bodies and their sexual needs, as they did in Iran. They have developed a greater awareness of their own bodies, sexual identities, needs, attitudes, and practices. In their newfound freedom, they feel comfortable and empowered to openly express their desire for sex whenever they feel the need, as illustrated by the experience of a 34-year-old woman named Nafise:

> I came from a background where a woman's body should be covered, but here I don't worry that when I change my clothes, somebody looks at me. I became comfortable with my body after migration.

A 30-year-old woman (Arta) said:

> When I was a teenager, I was ashamed of growing my breasts. It was a strange thing, and I wore loose clothes in order to hide them. We didn't learn anything about our femininities, and we were never proud of it. But here I became familiar with my sexual identity.

Furthermore, the majority of Iranian women have become comfortable discussing sexual topics, both with their partners and friends. They have opened their eyes to a different world where sexual acts are treated like any other topic of conversation, openly discussed among people, in the media, and even in educational settings. This stands in contrast to Iranian culture, where discussing sexual matters is uncommon. If someone dares to bring up the subject of sexual relationships, there is often a sense of discomfort or silence. In Iranian culture, sex is considered something that should remain behind closed doors, shrouded in

secrecy. It is still taboo, and parents feel embarrassed to educate their children about it, as illustrated by the experience of a 40-year-old divorced woman named Mitra:

> Unfortunately, I couldn't talk to my husband or family about my sexual problems and needs when I was in Iran. But here my mind has changed, and I start to challenge them.

Another 52-year-old woman (Sedi) said:

> When I was in Iran I didn't talk about sex with my friends because I was ashamed, but here I talk to my Persian and English friends about sex without any shame and freely express my thoughts and sexual desires. Also, my husband also cares about my sexual desire and orgasm. I can now say what I need to do to improve the quality of sexual relations or ask to have sex in different ways and positions.

Arta, a divorced 30-year-old woman, said that:

> Here I learned to talk about sex from English colleagues. They talk about sexual experiences freely and comfortably.

Moreover, many women shared that they have learned to assert themselves and confidently say "no" when they do not want to engage in sexual activity, and they have found that men readily accept their rejection. This change in dynamics has allowed women to have control over their own bodies and decisions. A 52-year-old woman named Sedi described her own experiences with sexual changes:

> I can talk easily and openly about my sexual needs. Also, I can say 'no' easily when I don't want to have sex.

Additionally, many female participants in the study recognised that they had acquired knowledge and learned how to be active participants in sexual encounters. They have learned about ways to reach orgasm, how to take initiative in sexual acts, and even explored the use of medication to enhance the quality of their sexual experiences. This newfound understanding and empowerment has enabled them to take charge of their own pleasure and satisfaction. Mahta, a 34-year-old woman, expressed her experience in this regard:

> This new environment has affected my sexual view and it has caused me to think about sexuality differently. For example, when I was in Iran, I thought

> that using medicine to delay orgasm wasn't good and was unnatural, but now I am open-minded in this regard.

A 37-year-old woman (Marry) also said:

> Before migration, I never talked about sex with anyone. But I now openly with my friends. I gain more information about sex. It is interesting to say that I experienced orgasm for the first time after migration.

It is evident that in modern societies, migrant women in equal relationships are embracing more open sexual practices, regardless of their perception of these practices as positive or negative. This shift is driven by their desire for sexual autonomy and their expectations of romantic and intimate experiences, contrasting with men's traditional expectations and behaviours rooted in notions of male dominance and a traditional identity of masculinity. This aligns with recent research that views sexuality as a means of gaining intimacy, expressing love, and fulfilling sensual desires, rather than solely focusing on power dynamics, marriage, procreation, and control (Seidman et al, 2006). These findings are consistent with previous studies by Batisai (2016) and Tinarwo and Pasura (2014). They also parallel Shahidian's (1999) observations that Iranian women living in Canada engage in frank discussions about sex, and no longer perceive it as taboo and hidden as they did in Iran.

In contrast, the study findings indicate that most Iranian migrant men still perceive sexuality as a natural instinct and innate behaviour akin to eating and sleeping, as evidenced by the comments of many male participants. For instance, Behrooz, a 54-year-old man, expressed that:

> I believe that sexual acts are daily actions such as eating, drinking and so on.

My other male participants expressed similar viewpoints, indicating that Iranian men typically viewed sexuality as an inherent aspect of human biology and physiology, with women primarily seen as vessels for procreation. However, the study's findings revealed that some Iranian migrant men had undergone a shift in their perception of sexuality as a result of the process of sociocultural integration into the host society. These men believed that sexual behaviour is not solely an innate instinct but also required learning and understanding, akin to nourishment for the soul. This perspective was reflected in the comments of Anush, a 47-year-old man:

> After migration, my mind changed about the meaning of sex. I now believe that sexual acts are beyond daily actions such as eating, drinking and so on.

A 48-year-old (Sajad) man said:

> Sex is not natural and could be learned through social norms and values. It has now become sacred to me. I learned sex is the completion of love. It's necessary for the soul.

On the other hand, a 42-year-old man (Bahram) said:

> I thought that sex was an instinctive act before coming to the UK. It isn't needed to learn it from others. In the first stage of sex, physicality was very important for me, because you don't know anything about the mental state and spirit of your partner. But here I now understand that sex is not just a physical act, and also the aim of sex is not just procreation.

Some migrant men recognise that their understanding of sexuality has evolved following their immigration experience, particularly through educational programs on television and other sources. They have learned about the significance of foreplay and the importance of satisfying their partner's pleasure before engaging in intercourse, which contributes to an enhanced quality of sexual relationships. This is supported by the comments of a few female participants who have experienced this change. These men have gained knowledge about women's sexual psychology and various forms of sexual intimacy, as described by Bahram, a 42-year-old man:

> Here [in London] I learned how to pay attention to my wife's sexual needs through watching romantic movies on TV. I learnt how to prepare my wife for sex and pay attention to her desire.

In general, it is evident that the knowledge and understanding of sexual practices among Iranian migrants can undergo significant transformations in response to new sociocultural and economic contexts, subsequently impacting various aspects of their sexual lives. This finding aligns with Farahani's (2018) research, which illustrates how immigration shapes women's perceptions and values of sexuality and femininity. Similar results have been reported in other studies as well. For instance, Abdolmanafi et al (2018) emphasise the role of culture in shaping attitudes and values regarding sexuality, while highlighting the importance of cognitive-emotional factors in determining women's sexual satisfaction.

Roodsaz and Jansen (2019) also explore how modernity influences changes in diasporic sexual customs. Additionally, Ahmadi (2003) investigates the shifts in Iranian migrants' sexual patterns upon moving from a traditional, religious, and highly patriarchal society to a liberal and secularised country like Sweden, highlighting the impact of the transition on their perspectives on sexuality.

It is important to note that despite the individual benefits, particularly for women, these changes in couples' relationships can give rise to significant challenges and conflicts in their sexual and marital dynamics, which will be further discussed in the following section.

5.3 Sexual Ideology and Unsatisfactory Sexual Relations

Despite the individual benefits that arise from increased sexual knowledge and transformed understandings of sexuality, primarily for women, these changes gave rise to significant conflicts and challenges within 23 of the couples' relationships. Some of these couples had experienced divorce or were contemplating it. It is worth noting that conflicts in couples' sexual relations have happened to those who have experienced difficulties in their gender roles and the distribution of power after immigration. The extent of these challenges and changes varies among immigrant heterosexual couples, as they are exposed to new freedoms and diverse lifestyle choices in the host society, which allows for a more open exploration of sexuality.

This disparity can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, it stems from the sexual patterns that couples carry from their country of origin to the destination society. Secondly, it is influenced by the couples' varying degrees and modes of sociocultural and economic integration into the host country, which can either weaken or enhance the frequency and pleasure of sexual encounters within marital life. Consequently, problems and conflicts may arise if wives and husbands have undergone different changes in their sexual ideologies, interests, and expectations during the process of acculturation. Such discrepancies can diminish the quality and frequency of sexual relations, leading to significant tensions in couples' marital relationships after migration. These findings align with Shahidian's (1999) and Ahmadi's (2003) studies, which examine the shifting understanding and practices of sexuality among Iranian immigrants in the diasporic context.

These difficulties and challenges are particularly evident in the comments of Iranian women. They acknowledged that they had faced difficulties and tensions in their sexual lives after

immigrating to the UK, as their husbands still adhered to traditional notions of masculine dominance and control within sexual relationships. Any attempts by the wife to initiate discussions or express her needs were met with negative reactions from their husband, as this was perceived as a challenge to his masculinity. In fact, most Iranian men display little tolerance for changes that deviate from traditional masculine sexuality. Consequently, the transformation of sexual expectations can lead women to criticise men for their lack of attentiveness towards their sexual needs, pleasure, and orgasm, which can be attributed to the men's limited knowledge of female psychology and physiology. This sentiment is echoed by a 37-year-old woman (Fatemeh) with a traditional and religious background:

> My husband does not pay attention to my sexual desires, and he doesn't understand my sexual expectations. I think that men do not have any knowledge regarding women's psychology and sexual needs, so they don't know how to satisfy a woman in sexual relations.

In addition, a 43-year-old divorced woman (Azam) with a traditional and religious background, said:

> After immigration, my mind and values regarding sexuality changed. I think that I have the same rights as my husband in our sexual relationships and he should pay attention to my sexual pleasure and try to satisfy me. But he never cared about my desires. He always left me immediately after orgasm.

Hence, it is evident that female participants who previously experienced unequal and passive sexual relationships in their home country are now striving to take an active role in their sexual encounters and demand more from their husbands. Furthermore, the study's data highlights that the growth in women's sexual knowledge and access to special rights and opportunities in the new society has a profound impact on their sexual practices, empowering them both as individuals and within the dynamics of their marital relationships. They can confidently express their sexual expectations without fear, as exemplified by a 37-year-old woman (Marry):

> Here, I learned to challenge our traditional sexual relations and ask for a mutual and equal relationship. I think that women, as well as men, should take some physical and emotional advantages in sexual life.

A 37-year-old divorced woman (Fatemeh) also said that after gaining power women can challenge men's sexual dysfunction issues and openly express sexual matters:

> My husband suffered from premature ejaculation/premature orgasm. I thought that it is normal. But I learned in the UK that this is a sexual problem. So, I did not tolerate it and I asked him to go to the doctor for treatment, but he didn't care about it.

Thus, the clash between women's new ideas and understandings of ideal sexual relationships and men's traditional and patriarchal ideologies of sexuality poses a threat to the stability and quality of couples' sexual relations, leading to fragility in migrant couples' relationships and destabilising the family unit. This is in line with previous research, such as Gonzalez-Allende's (2016) findings, which report women's criticisms of migrant men for not considering their wives' sexual needs and for focusing solely on their own desires. It also aligns with other studies that highlight the challenges and difficulties faced by couples in redefining their sexual identities in the context of migration (Tinarwo and Pasura, 2014; Birger and Peled, 2017; Ahmadi, 2003).

The newfound assertiveness among Iranian women in the UK regarding sexual ideologies and matters prompts them to reassess their sexual attitudes, leading to a crisis in the traditional understanding of sexual dynamics. This aligns with Shahidian's (1999) research, which also explores the challenges and difficulties faced by couples in navigating their sexual identities in a new cultural context. As women's sexual identities and gender assertiveness evolve and improve, their self-image transforms. However, this transformation is not in harmony with the shift in men's gender ideologies.

It is important to note that, although most women in the study re-negotiated and challenged their previous sexual relationships, none of them explicitly identified with feminist ideals regarding their own sexual relationships after migration. They did not possess a comprehensive understanding of feminist concepts. However, there are exceptions, such as Nafise, a 34-year-old woman who, after immigration, developed an interest in learning more about feminist ideas and attending feminist meetings:

> In the UK I communicated with people who study gender relations and attended feminist studies courses. My thoughts and attitudes on sexuality were distinctly changed. In Iran, I learned that masturbation is bad, but why? Why is it bad? Why should we engage in vaginal intercourse? Maybe these recommendations

> are derived from the patriarchal system because this way, women are always dependent on men for sexual pleasure and for gaining orgasm.

However, despite her exploration of feminist ideas and questioning of heterosexuality, the female participant in question could not discuss these issues with her husband. She shared that she tried to find answers within feminist studies for herself, but that there was no open dialogue with her husband on these topics.

On the other hand, the study data reveals that most Iranian husbands have experienced a contrasting change in their sexual expectations compared to their wives. Some express frustration that their partners were unable to behave like Western women and openly express their sexual needs and expectations. Despite the changes observed in the sexual attitudes, values, and practices of most Iranian women after migration, according to some migrant men they still struggled to embody the behaviours of Western women. This included initiating sex, even for those women who enjoy their sexual relationships. Iranian women, influenced by their sociocultural teachings and backgrounds, often believe that it is the role of their husbands to initiate sex, and they are expected to accept it. Iranian men perceive that Iranian women have been socialised to believe that expressing their sexual needs is viewed negatively. The modesty instilled in most Iranian women, reinforced by traditional and religious norms, has hindered their ability to openly communicate their needs and concerns regarding sexuality. A 40-year-old male participant (Shahryar) explained this perspective:

> Although my wife is an educated and modern person and we had a premarital sexual relationship, she still never expresses sexual needs because she believes that it isn't good for women. Unfortunately, this attitude is internalised by her and even after many years of our marriage, it hasn't changed. I would expect and like my wife to behave like a Western woman.

According to the accounts of many Iranian migrant men, the sexual dynamics within their relationships are often dictated by their own desires, as Iranian women rarely express their own sexual needs. This leads to a situation where sex occurs only when the man desires it. Over time, women may start questioning why they should engage in sexual activity solely based on their husband's needs, forgetting that they had voluntarily given their husbands this right. One participant, a 44-year-old divorced man named Aryo, shared this:

> My wife was ashamed to express her sexual needs. I didn't know when she liked to have sex. It isn't good that all the time men ask for sex.

The findings of this study suggest that culture plays a significant role in shaping sexual pleasure or discontent among Iranian men and women. The belief held by most Iranian men is that this issue stems from the cultural context they come from. In Iranian society, expressing sexual needs is considered taboo, and cultural and religious barriers restrict the development and exploration of sexual practices in modern ways. This aligns with the findings of Afary (2009), who observed that Iranian women face obstacles in expressing their sexual needs and concerns due to societal expectations of modesty. Abdolmanafi et al (2018) support this notion, highlighting the influence of culture on individuals' sexual ideas, attitudes, and enjoyment of sex. Cultural norms and values can significantly impact people's capacity to experience sexual pleasure and shape their overall sexual satisfaction.

Furthermore, the influence of culture on sexual pleasure or discontent extends beyond societal expectations of modesty. It encompasses broader cultural beliefs, norms, and values surrounding sexuality. For instance, in traditional Iranian culture, the emphasis is often placed on procreation, marital duty, and the preservation of family honour, rather than on individual sexual pleasure and fulfilment. This cultural context may limit discussions and explorations of sexual desires, preferences, and open communication between partners. Consequently, individuals may internalise these cultural messages, leading to feelings of guilt, shame, or hesitation when it comes to expressing their sexual needs and seeking sexual satisfaction. It is important to recognise that cultural factors shape individuals' experiences and perceptions of sexuality, and addressing these cultural dynamics is crucial for promoting healthy and fulfilling sexual relationships among Iranian migrants.

Moreover, in line with the findings of Seidman et al (2006), the data from my study reveals that some male migrants show a greater inclination towards non-traditional and non-procreative sexual behaviours during the process of acculturation. These behaviours encompass a range of acts, including fornication, oral-genital sex, anal sex, and even bestiality. Such desires seem to be more pronounced among men who migrated earlier than their wives and had prior sexual experiences with Western women. Consequently, these men exhibit a heightened expectation and demand for these new forms of sexual practices, which may be met with resistance or hesitancy from the majority of Iranian wives who are not mentally prepared or willing to engage in such unconventional sexual activities. This disparity in sexual preferences and expectations further adds to the complexity and challenges experienced by migrant couples in their sexual relationships. For instance, a 37-year-old woman (Marry) explained:

> After four years, I joined my husband in London, but I realised that his sexual expectations and practices had changed. He liked rough sex, such as anal sex. I didn't like to do it because it was so painful and bothered me. After having sex, I cried a lot, but my husband didn't pay any attention to my pain. He believed that I am an old-fashioned woman in relation to sex and I had to learn new and modern sexual patterns.

Hence, it is evident that male partners, in comparison to women, exhibit a stronger inclination towards engaging in such sexual activities. Specifically, certain Iranian men, particularly those who have been exposed to traditional gender dynamics and adhere to conventional sexual practices in Iran, acquire knowledge of various sexual acts through pornography videos, the Internet, and adult magazines. This process of acculturation leads them to develop an attraction towards novel forms of sexual activities, often leading to instances of sexual violence and marital rape due to the absence of their wives' satisfaction and consent.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, the presence of open spaces for sexual interactions within British society, where there is less control over individuals' daily behaviour, limited influence from extended family members, reduced social pressure, and a lack of stringent rules governing individual, social, and sexual relations, contribute to increasing extramarital sex among immigrant couples. Specifically, Iranian immigrants, primarily males, adapt to and take advantage of the open intermingling of genders in the diasporic culture during the process of sexual acculturation. The data illustrates that these new circumstances provide Iranian migrants, particularly men, with the freedom to engage in extramarital sexual encounters. Consequently, many Iranian women, as evidenced by the comments of female participants, express complaints and experience significant tensions within their relationships as a result of their husbands' infidelity. For example, Massi, a 63-year-old woman with three children, shared her experience of divorcing her husband due to his adultery:

> I divorced six years ago because of my husband's infidelity. He came here to study alone for the first time, but when I arrived in London after six months, I understood that he had had a girlfriend in my absence. I think that there is less sexual control over individuals here and most Iranian men have more opportunities for cheating here than in Iran.

It is important to acknowledge that despite the greater sexual freedom Iranian men have compared to women in their relations within Iran, married men still face certain barriers that limit their extramarital activities more so than in British society. In Iran, married men are expected to adhere to defined norms and rules in order to maintain honour, respect, and a good reputation within their homes, communities, and social circles. This necessitates self-control and managing and concealing any sexual relationships outside of marriage. Conversely, in the UK, married men can take advantage of their relative anonymity and openly engage in extramarital affairs without the fear of social or legal repercussions.

While migration has also granted married women newfound freedom to engage in relationships with other men, immigrant women generally exhibit less interest in engaging in this behaviour. This observation aligns with Shahidian's (1999) findings, which explain that Iranian men in Canada, liberated from social and family surveillance, are more likely to experience extramarital sex in the host society. This pattern is also evident in studies involving other nationalities, such as Mexican immigrant men in the USA, who exhibit greater freedom in terms of extramarital affairs when compared to their counterparts in Mexico (Organista, Carrillo, and Ayala, 2004; Parrado et al, 2004; Sanchez et al, 2004; O'Brien et al, 2005; Maternowska et al, 2014). These findings are supported by Parrado and Flipper's (2010) study, which highlights how migration profoundly transforms patterns of sexual behaviour due to family separation and reduced social and familial controls within the new social context.

In relation to this, the majority of Iranian women in the study reported that the lack of social and extended family control in the new social context has contributed to an increase in their husbands' infidelity. They mentioned that under the strict monitoring of extended families in Iran, men would discreetly and temporarily engage in cheating while attempting to maintain their long-term marital lives. However, in the UK, men are more open about their affairs and can easily leave their wives without facing questions, punishment, or judgment from others. Azam, a 43-year-old woman, provided insight into this matter.

> As long as we were in Iran, my husband didn’t cheat on me, but everything changed after migration. He has betrayed me three times. At least, in Iran, he was mine, but here I don’t have any control over him due to the absence of family support and the lack of social constraints.

Furthermore, according to the findings of this study, a prolonged separation between spouses contributes to an increase in extramarital affairs among Iranian couples following migration. In certain cases, the husband had to leave his family behind in Iran in order to address residential and economic challenges in the host country. This geographical distance results in both partners experiencing distinct situations and encounters. The spouse who immigrated earlier begins the process of acculturation into the host society and becomes exposed to new gender ideologies, particularly pertaining to sexual matters, which differ from those in their home country. Consequently, the study data demonstrates that men are more inclined to engage in sexual relationships with other women in the absence of their wives, seeking new sexual experiences they had not previously encountered. These couples subsequently encounter difficulties and tensions in their marital lives when the wife joins the husband and discovers his infidelity. This is supported by the comments provided by some male and female immigrants, such as in a 47-year-old man named Anush's explanation:

> I came here alone. After a long time, I was able to bring my wife to London. But in the absence of my wife, I had a girlfriend. When my wife found out about it, she left me.

Furthermore, the data reveals that engaging in extramarital sex can lead to significant changes in men's sexual habits and practices, subsequently causing tension within couples when they reunite. These new sexual habits often diverge from the preferences of their spouses. For instance, men may adopt practices and orientations that involve non-vaginal intercourse, such as anal or oral sex, which may not be accepted by their partners. Marry, a 37-year-old divorced woman who joined her husband in London four years after him, provided an explanation in this regard:

> When I joined my husband, I realised that he had cheated on me in my absence. His sexual expectations and practices have changed because he has had sexual relations with many other nationality women.

It is evident that the increase in extramarital sexual activities among Iranian immigrant couples after migration is a significant factor that negatively affects their sexual relationships and often leads to marital tensions, separation, or divorce. This pattern of behaviour is not unique to Iranian men but has also been observed in studies involving married men from various nationalities who leave their families behind in their home countries. For instance, Vásquez del Águila (2014) discusses men's infidelity while they are living alone in the host

country, highlighting its impact on their marital relationships. Similarly, Magis-Rodriguez et al (2004) mention the difficulties and tensions experienced by Mexican migrant men in their marital lives after their wives join them, as there is social disapproval of men's extramarital affairs in the absence of their wives. Another study by Gonzalez-Allende (2016) highlights the perceived inability of Spanish men to control their sexual desires in the host country of Germany.

Overall, the increase in extramarital sexual activities among immigrant couples has detrimental effects on their relationships, often resulting in marital tensions and breakdowns. While this pattern has been observed across different nationalities, it is essential to consider individual perspectives and experiences within this complex phenomenon.

5.4 Women's Knowledge and Responses Towards Marital Rape

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the process of assimilation into the diasporic society, along with gender-specific assimilation and the transformation of gender ideologies towards egalitarian gender roles, have played a significant role. These factors have had an impact on women's newfound assertiveness and have prompted them to re-evaluate their sexual beliefs. The study findings demonstrate a notable increase in the understanding and awareness of the concept of marital rape among the majority of Iranian migrant women. This heightened awareness has resulted in diverse and intensified reactions, leading to significant tensions within couples. This is supported by the accounts of several female participants, including Mitra, a divorced woman aged 40, who explained:

> I now know what marital rape is and what acts are defined as such in sexual relations. I felt that my husband insulted and assaulted me when he pays less attention to my sexual desire and orgasm when we have sex. I was so angry, and I won't tolerate it. Previously I perceived these experiences as just an uncomfortable and unrewarding act, not as an act of sexual violence.

In addition, the Iranian women I interviewed have gained sufficient socioeconomic power and rights in the host society, which enables them to challenge instances of sexual violence perpetrated by their husbands. As a result, they refuse to tolerate any form of marital rape or disrespectful sexual behaviour. These women have come to understand that there exist social and governmental regulations that protect them from marital rape, particularly in relation to emotional and sexual violence. They have recognised that within the new sociocultural

context, which promotes gender equality, women are not obligated to fulfil their husbands' sexual desires under any circumstances solely to sustain their marital life.

As a case in point, Fatemeh, a 37-year-old divorced woman, mentioned about her husband's tendency to resort to sexual violence:

> I have experienced marital rape several times in my life when I was living in Iran. For example, when we had tension between us and we weren't talking to each other, he had sex with me without my permission. In fact, he didn't listen to me when I said I didn't want to have sex and he had sex with me even when I was sleeping. But I don't bear these behaviours anymore after migration because I have social and governmental support against this sexual domestic violence. I have no strains and obligations to keep my marital life in the new society.

Within this study, certain Iranian women recognise that they have experienced emotional distress caused by marital rape or disrespectful sexual encounters, where they were treated merely as sexual objects devoid of any enjoyment, both mentally and physically. However, during their time in Iran, these women felt unable to refuse or challenge their husbands' sexual demands. This sentiment was echoed by Sedi, a 52-year-old woman, who explained her experience:

> When I was in Iran, I did not have the courage to say that I didn't like to have sex. I feared him, and I had to accept him anytime he asked me for sex.

A significant number of women expressed that they no longer feel ashamed to openly discuss sexual matters with others, including family members, close friends, and even the police. Sedi, a 52-year-old woman, elaborated on this change in perspective.

> I do not hide my husband's sexual violence. I learned to talk openly about my sexual issues with my family and close friends.

Another divorced 43-year-old woman (Azam) described her situation:

> My husband didn't pay attention to my sexual needs, pleasure, and orgasm in Iran. He had sex with me when he needed and when I expressed my sexual needs, he refused it. I thought that is normal behaviour and I should accept it. But I now understand that these sexual acts are defined as marital rape in

> modern Western culture, and my husband abused me. So, I dare to challenge his sexual acts.

However, a few women point out that they experience marital rape during the first few months of residence in the new society. To illustrate, a 37-year-old divorced woman (Marry) stated:

> After joining my husband in London, I became physically sick and depressed because I felt that he raped me and that he had committed violence against me. After a while, when I became familiar with British rules and laws and I talked with my British female colleagues and friends, I did not allow it to happen again, and I resisted my husband's request.

Therefore, the empowerment of Iranian migrant women through the acquisition of certain rights, such as divorce and child custody, has enabled them to challenge their husbands' sexual coercion and violence within the diasporic society. This finding is supported by research conducted by Magis-Rodriguez et al (2004) and Batisai (2016), who acknowledge that women's authority to discuss sexual practices with their husbands increases when they break free from traditional norms and roles after migration. Tinarwo and Pasura (2014) also explore the economic and social status of Zimbabwean female immigrants, highlighting how their role as breadwinners and the feminisation of migration have allowed them to challenge unequal gender roles and redefine established gendered and sexual identities.

These findings align with Giddens's (1992) perspective on the dismantling of the traditional model of male sexual dominance and the development of egalitarian relationships through female sexual autonomy. Shahidian (1999) similarly reports that in a religious and patriarchal society like Iran, men are favoured by laws concerning divorce, economic power, and child custody, leaving women in a vulnerable position regarding physical and emotional sexual violence.

Unfortunately, this study lacks data or discussions from the perspectives of husbands, as they avoided addressing these questions and issues. Some female participants alluded to this issue in their comments. Importantly, the study's data demonstrates that immigrant Iranian women responded differently to marital rape before and after migration, displaying less intense reactions to marital rape in Iran compared to their experiences in the new environment. These women often remained silent regarding sexual violence, partly due to cultural shame associated with discussing sexual issues and the absence of social and

governmental regulations protecting them against marital rape, especially emotional sexual violence. Furthermore, traditional gender roles in Iran limited their ability to negotiate and challenge their partner's sexual practices in their home country. Another contributing factor is the lack of knowledge among Iranian women regarding marital rape and its definition within sexual relationships, resulting in their tolerance of violence by Iranian men.

Overall, Iranian women in Western societies have more choices, and their sexualities are influenced by non-traditional and non-religious values. Through their newfound authority, increased self-worth, and confidence, they realise that they no longer have to remain in an unhappy sexual relationship or tolerate sexual violence. They have the option to leave their partners without social or financial concerns, leading to an increase in divorces. After migration, they find the courage to break their silence and resist marital rape, rejecting uncommon sexual requests from their husbands. However, this shift in approach creates difficulties in their sexual lives and significant conflicts in their marital relationships.

These findings align with the perspectives of scholars such as Giddens (1992) and Layder (2009). The liberation of women from traditional customs and religious regulations in the postmodern era allows them to shape their relationships and self-identities, asserting their power in sexual relations within the context of gender equality in modern society. In contemporary times, marriage is perceived as a social contract between equal individuals who have the freedom to leave if they are not emotionally and sexually fulfilled. Consequently, it can be concluded that while immigrant women primarily benefit from liberation and power in sexual relations within the context of gender equality, their marital relationships become increasingly fragile after migration, losing their external foundations in the new circumstances.

5.5 Religious Commitments and the Transformation of Sexual Relations

Religion, in conjunction with cultural influences, can significantly influence an individual's sexual attitudes, values, and behaviours. In societies like Iran, where the constitution is founded upon Islamic Law, religion plays a prominent role in shaping patterns of sexuality. Gender roles and behavioural norms are deeply rooted in patriarchal power structures, gender segregation, and Islamic teachings. Religious upbringing within families contributes to the formation of distinct sexual values, orientations, roles, and practices for girls and boys. Notably, the social construction of Iranian women's sexuality tends to uphold the socioeconomic dominance of men within Iran.

Based on the findings of my study, it is evident that the religious beliefs of many Iranian immigrants, both women and men, have been undermined and weakened following their relocation to a new society with a different culture. The establishment of a secular and individualistic environment, where laws and regulations are not based on religious or patriarchal structures, has contributed to this transformation. This shift is reflected in the remarks made by some religious women. For instance, a 45-year-old woman named Lida, who possesses a religious background, mentioned:

> We learned from the family that a woman has an obligation to satisfy her husband's sexual needs in any situation and that it is a women's duty, based on Islamic laws. But after moving to London, my sexual values and attitude changed.

As a 44-year-old woman (Maryam) said:

> I was raised in a religious family, and I learned that I should have sex only with my husband. So, my aim in marriage was just to have sex. But after immigration, my religious beliefs changed, and I don't like to follow religious rules in my life.

Another 37-year-old woman (Fatemeh) also explicated this:

> I had a religious and traditional family. I think that the religious circumstances in which I was raised had a great impact on my sexual attitude. My mother didn't let me have relationships like other girls who had boyfriends. I learned that a good girl should not have contact with men until marriage. But here [in London] I learned more about the concepts of modern sexual behaviours.

Hence, the findings indicate that couples originating from traditional and religious families encounter more substantial and intensified difficulties in their sexual relationships when exposed to new male-female interactions. This disparity arises from the divergence in understandings of sexual concepts between the home and host societies. The immigrant culture exposes male individuals to a broader range of sexual matters, akin to the study conducted by Roodsaz and Jansen (2019), which highlights the notable shift in diasporic sexual customs among Muslim immigrants in Western countries. Their research explores how individuals negotiate and construct their sexual identities by accepting, rejecting, or transgressing modernity, allowing them to position themselves within diverse sociocultural

or religious contexts. These findings align with the outcomes of previous studies by Ahmed (1992), Bilgin (2004), Bouhdiba (1998), Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb (2000), Khosravi (2009), Najmabadi (2000, 2005), and Farahani (2018).

For example, Ahmed (1992) asserts that religion has historically played a conservative role, particularly concerning its influence on intersexual relationships. Similarly, according to Farahani (2012:161), religious ideologies, including those of Islam, are inherently interconnected with views on sex, gender, and sexuality, as observed in other religions. Thus, an examination of "Islamic" perspectives on sexuality and masculinity becomes crucial when analysing gender dynamics.

Nevertheless, the study's data indicates that the transformation of religious beliefs was not consistently aligned between husbands and wives. When religious beliefs shift in different directions and intensities, problems can emerge within marital relationships, particularly in the realm of sexual interactions. The data from this study reveals that certain Iranian men, particularly those who hold religious beliefs and have experienced unequal and traditional sexual relationships in Iran, acquire knowledge of and develop an attraction to various new sexual acts during the process of acculturation in the diasporic context. They are enticed and have expectations to engage in these sexual acts with their wives. However, this poses significant challenges to the couple's sexual life, as most female participants perceive such practices as insulting, constituting marital rape, and disrespectful towards women. Consequently, they reject these modern sexual practices. For instance, a 51-year-old divorced man named Masood provided the following explanation

> My wife and I were religious people when we were living in Iran. After migration to the UK, her religious beliefs became stronger and more intensive than before. In contrast, I lost my religious beliefs, and my sexual patterns were changed. For example, here I masturbate. This has caused serious tension between my wife and me because my wife doesn't like to have sex because she believes that sex is animal behaviour.

Therefore, it can be concluded that when both partners undergo a change in religious commitments in the same direction, it does not typically result in significant discussions or tensions within the couple, even if they both convert to Christianity following migration. However, substantial challenges arise between partners when the transformation of religious beliefs diverges in terms of direction and/or intensity. The findings of this study reveal that,

in such cases, one partner who no longer adheres to religious rules reshapes their sexual practices based on modern sexual concepts prevalent in the new society. This may involve adopting Western sexual patterns learned from watching pornography, experimenting with different sexual positions, engaging in non-vaginal intercourse such as oral or anal sex, and so forth. On the other hand, the other partner remains committed to their religious beliefs and struggles to acculturate to the host society and embrace modern sexual practices. Consequently, this dynamic generates significant marital tension and often leads to divorce.

These findings are in line with Farahani's (2012) research, which investigates the influence of social interactions, Iranian Islamic cultures, and migratory experiences on sexual behaviour and masculine identities among individuals. She explores how these factors may complicate participants' perceptions and representations of their sexual experiences and masculinities.

5.6 Occupational Status, Sexual Attitude and the Crisis in Masculinity

Based on the data from this study, there were variations in the level and intensity of changes in the sexual patterns of employed and unemployed women. Employed women, particularly those who are more integrated into the mainstream economy, have greater exposure to Western culture through their workplace interactions. This provides them with valuable opportunities to engage with native-born British colleagues and learn about modern concepts of sexuality.

This discrepancy between Iranian men and women can be attributed to differences in the direction, intensity, and mode of economic assimilation into the new society. For instance, many Iranian male participants experienced downward occupational mobility through an ethnic-path mode, where their attempts to establish themselves in higher occupational positions were largely unsuccessful. This loss of privileged status and the traditional role of breadwinner within the family led to a crisis in masculinity. Consequently, new gender dynamics emerged within Iranian immigrant families, placing men in a weaker position and decreasing their self-esteem. These circumstances often contributed to increased stress levels and deep depression among men, which in turn impacted their sexual desire while living in the host society. Arta, a 30-year-old woman who successfully assimilated into the mainstream workforce while her husband experienced an ethnic-path mode of economic assimilation, provided insights into this situation:

> After two years, our sexual relationship stopped suddenly. When I asked him why we didn't have sex, he became angry, and he didn't answer me. I tried to talk to him and ask him to go to a counsellor, but he didn't accept. I was confused, and I didn't know what happened. He became depressed and his sexual practices changed suddenly.

In contrast, women's increased financial contribution to the family, often achieved through their upward occupational positions in the mainstream economy, plays a significant role in enhancing their authority, independence, and social power within the new environment. This newfound empowerment provides Iranian women with opportunities to reconsider and discuss their pre-migration sexual patterns, leading to a redefinition of these patterns based on the norms and criteria of modernity. As a result, tensions arise in sexual relationships between the couples.

The economic power and independence of women have contributed to a rise in their courage and ability to challenge traditional notions of men's sexual masculinity. They question and negotiate the customary roles that have historically led to women's sexual oppression, all while managing their own new sexual relationships within marital life. Maryam, a 44-year-old divorced and employed woman, exemplifies this shift in perspective:

> After immigration, my authority increased by rising my financial contribution in the family. Our arguments about various subjects increased, especially on sexual issues.

The findings of this study indicate that many Iranian women no longer tolerate male-dominant dynamics in their sexual lives within their new circumstances. This shift in power dynamics can potentially threaten men's masculinity and sexuality. Men may feel uncomfortable when women take the lead in sexual encounters or when they fear being unable to satisfy their partners. Similar shifts have been observed in other studies examining significant changes in sexuality attributed to the "sexual revolution", which can be attributed to factors such as women's increasing economic independence, advancements in contraception, and broader social changes (Ramey, 1972; Comfort, 1974; Hawkes, 1996; D'Emilio and Freedman, 2012).

Furthermore, the crisis in masculine identity and the mental health challenges, including emotional stress and deep depression stemming from migration complexities and fluctuations in employment, can adversely impact couples' intimate relationships. These

factors can subsequently reduce men's sexual needs and desires. For instance, Lida, a 45-year-old woman, expressed her acknowledgement of these effects:

> The quality and frequency of their sexual relations reduce because of her husband's depression, and in a few cases, their sexual relations stopped.

Arta, a 30-year-old divorced woman, also explained:

> After one year of immigration, my husband was depressed. He didn't like to spend time with me and talk to me. He didn't even want to have sex with me.

Therefore, the shift in the understanding of masculinity in the host society and the emergence of a crisis of masculinity within the new culture leads to a re-evaluation of patriarchal power and its implications in marital life. Consequently, this creates challenges for men's sexual power and control. Many Iranian men have expressed dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the new dynamic of equal gender roles due to the difficulties and crises they face in defining their masculine identity, which in turn raises questions about their sexual abilities. These findings align with previous research, such as Gonzalez-Allend's (2016) study on Spanish migrant men experiencing a decrease in sexual appetite in Germany due to depression and insecurity resulting from a change in their status and breadwinner role. Similarly, Birger and Peled's (2017) work highlights how emotional stress and concerns about the future can lead to fatigue, issues in intimate relationships, and clashes with partners. The results of this study also support Faranhan's (2018) exploration of sexuality as a fundamental aspect of identity development, encompassing various factors such as gender, masculinity, embodied behaviours, moral ideals, emotions, and desires, all of which significantly influence the formation of new and different sexual identities in diasporic contexts.

5.7 Sociocultural and Economic Adaptation and Improved Sexual Relations

Six couples in the study acknowledged that their sexual relationships have evolved during their integration into British society. This transformation occurs when both partners undergo similar experiences in terms of sexual acculturation and re-evaluation of gender role ideologies pertaining to marital power and gender relations. As a result, these couples encounter fewer challenges in their sexual relationships and, in many cases, the quality of their sexual interactions improves after immigration. Such observations were expressed by both male and female participants, with Azar, a 42-year-old married woman whose

husband's involvement in household chores and whose influence in decision-making in marital life increased after migrationt, offering her insights regarding their sexual relations:

> We both learned to perceive the sexual act as a way of increasing intimate and close relations expressing love, mutual pleasure, and sensual desire, rather than considering it as a means by which they develop power, have a baby, manage marriage, and control each other.

Men of this group do not consider sex as a one-sided act means of obtaining sexual pleasure. On the other hand, women did not perceive it as a means of procreation. Men also pay more attention to their wives' needs and sexual pleasure. Sedi, a 52-year-old woman, said:

> I learned that sex was not a duty like other female duties nor is it equal to creating babies. I also learned how to get sexual desire and reach orgasm when having sex with a partner.

Couples within this group demonstrated a shift towards being more open-minded, as they actively sought information from various sources such as friends, colleagues, sexual training materials (e.g., DVDs), television programs, magazines, and movies. This increased exposure led to a reduction in shame when discussing sexual matters and needs, even outside the bedroom. Women, in particular, have become more comfortable with their own sexuality. Couples have learned how to communicate their sexual needs, with men in this group making efforts to satisfy their partners in bed. Furthermore, women gained the confidence to assert their boundaries and refuse consent when they were not interested in engaging in sexual activities, and men showed a willingness to accept rejection. Mahta, a 34-year-old woman, shared her experiences of these sexual changes:

> Here we learned about sex from our friends, on the Internet, in movies and by studying. I do not consider sex as a duty like other female duties. Also, my husband now pays attention to my sexual desire and orgasm more than before. We even now talk freely about various sexual positions and try them. Furthermore, I can talk easily and openly about my sexual needs. Also, I can say 'NO' easily when I don't like to have sex.

The majority of refugee couples from middle-class backgrounds recognise that the quality and frequency of their sexual relationships have improved in the host country. One factor that they said had an impact on this was that they had more free time to spend together

compared to their previous circumstances in the initial months of residing in the UK. Shahryar, a 40-year-old man, shared his perspective on this matter:

> In the new social circumstances, our sexual relationship was better than before. I mean the frequency of sex has increased because we have more free time to spend together without any stress. We became more comfortable with our sexuality and most of the time could talk freely about sexual matters. For instance, one of our entertainments after the migration was going to the sex shop, because in the first days we were curious to see these shops and really it was fun, while there aren't any sex shops in Iran, and we couldn't talk about sex comfortably.

In addition, a 42-year-old woman (Nahid) said:

> Here [in London] our sexual relationship became more beautiful than before migration. In Iran, sex is always a secret something even with my husband. It is not common to talk about sexual experiences. But here I learned that sex is a beautiful thing and important for the body and hormones.

Also, a 38-year-old woman (Parvin) explained her sexual relations in this manner:

> Although we had a good sexual relationship in Iran, here I am relaxed, and I don't have any stress. So, I can get pleasure during sex. Moreover, here we have access to the Internet and educational videos easily for learning and improving the quality of our sexual relationship.

It is important to note that some couples within this group acknowledge having had satisfying sexual relationships and possessing knowledge about sexual matters in their home country prior to migrating. As they were exposed to a new culture with different sexual norms, they incorporated certain aspects of this culture into their existing sexual patterns, leading to an improvement in the quality of their sexual relationships. Additionally, although some individuals in this group have converted to Christianity, their sexual relationships have not been negatively affected. This is because both partners have undergone these changes together, experiencing them with the same level of intensity and at the same time. Consequently, these couples express contentment with their sexual relationships in the new society. Furthermore, fluctuations in their occupational status have not had an impact on their sexual relationships. According to their reports, they are able to navigate occupational

crises by supporting and understanding each other, thereby increasing their resilience during challenging times.

5.8 Unchanged Sexual Relations

Based on the data collected, it was observed that seven couples, who were mostly upper-middle-class and non-religious, maintained unchanged sexual attitudes, values, and practices during the process of integrating into the new society. This can be attributed to the concept of advanced acculturation, where their acculturation process began before their arrival in the UK. These couples had previously experienced modernisation within their own country, facilitated by factors such as access to advanced technology like satellite TV and regular travel to Western countries. They embraced and adopted aspects of modernity, incorporating Western elements into their lives. Consequently, this facilitated their adaptation to UK society. The study's findings indicate that it is primarily non-religious, urban, and educated couples who challenge societal norms and expectations, as well as the Islamic Iranian government's policies regarding sexuality. These couples have experienced a shift in their sexual relationships, moving away from the traditional focus on reproduction and incorporating more individualised lifestyles. For example, Hamed, a 50-year-old businessman, acknowledged:

> Before migration, we follow modern patterns of sexuality. We behaved based on sexual freedom and considered sexuality as a means of mutual feeling, expressing love and an enjoyable act rather than just achieving power, control or marriage and children. So, after settlement in London, our sexual attitudes, values and practices remained unchanged.

A few participants in the study shared that despite being brought up in religious and traditional families, their religious beliefs and commitments had been weakened by various factors, including studying abroad. Consequently, they had not adhered to the norms and codes of sexual behaviour rooted in a patriarchal power structure, religious context, and gender segregation society. Their sexual relationships prior to emigration aligned with the sexual norms prevalent in their new society. This sentiment was echoed by Reza, a 37-year-old man, who as discussed in the previous chapter saw no changes to his gender role and the distribution of power in his marital life:

> Our sexual relationship has not changed after migration, because we had a modern lifestyle in Iran like here. We were educated and non-religious people

> and we didn't follow traditional norms and religious rules in our private life. Also, we could get any information about sexual matters by accessing the Internet. We also had a sexual relationship based on modern standards. I paid attention to my wife's sexual pleasure, needs and expectations. Of course, my wife also had knowledge regarding sex.

A 33-year-old woman (Malihe) explained:

> I had knowledge enough about sexual pleasure, orgasm, various positions at sex and so on. Also, we paid attention to our sexual needs, and we were satisfied with them. So, when we came here it didn't change anything.

Therefore, it can be deduced that the sexual attitudes and practices couples bring with them from their pre-emigration experiences have a significant influence on the direction and extent of changes in their sexual relationships. This finding aligns with previous studies that have observed resistance among urban, educated, and non-religious Iranians to conforming to sexual norms dictated by religious rules and values. Particularly, young women who face strict limitations imposed by the Islamic state and reject Islamic rules and values pertaining to sexual practices have been at the forefront of this resistance (Azad Armaki et al, 2011; Azimi Hashemi et al, 2015; Mahdavi, 2008). Furthermore, Shahidian (1999) has argued that traditional notions surrounding virginity are undergoing transformation, and young women are actively challenging gender role inequalities in intimate relationships, redefining sexual practices through a range of choices.

Additionally, while maintaining virginity and abstaining from premarital sexual experiences until marriage remain significant concerns within Iranian culture, it is noteworthy that a few couples in this group have engaged in premarital sex in Iran. This perspective was shared by Monir, a 44-year-old female participant:

> I had several boyfriends before marriage in Iran. I also gained great sexual experiences and I enjoyed them when I was in Iran. Virginity for my husband wasn't a serious matter. I didn't have to conceal my previous sexual relations from my husband. So, my sexual experience and practices have not changed in this new society.

Meanwhile, a 46-year-old man (Zamyad) explained:

> We were friends and we had sex before marriage. I think that virginity and keeping it until marriage is [completely] ridiculous. I believe that girls as much as boys have rights and they are equal in everything.

The response of couples towards modern sexual values and practices following migration appears to be influenced by their sociocultural backgrounds, educational levels, and religious beliefs. Specifically, couples who already adhered to modern standards, which are not foreign to Western norms, prior to their relocation, have not experienced significant changes in their sexual relationships as their views and behaviours align with their new cultural context. A sense of equality and mutual power exists within their marital lives. Women in such relationships actively engage in sexual acts, possess knowledge about orgasm, seek pleasure, and regularly achieve orgasm. They are not oppressed by their husbands in their sexual and marital lives. This challenges the notion that heterosexuality inherently perpetuates male dominance, as emphasised by feminist perspectives highlighting the role of heterosexual relationships in sustaining men's social and political authority.

It is worth noting that some couples have not undergone substantial changes in their sexual relations, not necessarily due to a balanced and harmonious process of acculturation or advanced acculturation. Rather, it is because both partners have not acculturated into the new society in similar ways. This is evident among a few traditional and religious couples who possess a high level of education. Faezeh, a 47-year-old woman with a PhD, exemplified this perspective.

> Our sexual relationship hasn’t changed since we moved to the UK, because my husband and I are religious people, and we both follow our own social and traditional norms and religious codes in London.

As a result, it can be observed that rigid adherence to religious beliefs can sometimes lead couples to maintain traditional norms related to sexuality from their country of origin even after they have relocated. While there may be variations within groups influenced by factors such as social class and family culture, it is crucial to highlight the significant influence of religious attachments in shaping and altering attitudes, behaviours, and norms regarding sexuality. This holds true for couples from different social classes, including those with higher levels of education and occupational positions as well as those from working-class backgrounds, who still adhere to traditional sexual patterns due to strong religious convictions.

Additionally, while previous research has highlighted a substantial generational gap in terms of sexual values, attitudes, and behaviours, particularly between younger and older individuals (as indicated by Mahdavi, 2008), this study does not provide evidence of significant differences in sexual attitudes and practices across different age groups. It appears that age does not play a significant role in the changes observed in couples' sexual relationships after migration. Other factors seem to be more influential in this regard, such as family, culture and religious attachments.

5.9 Conclusion

The results and discussions presented in this chapter provide a deeper understanding and interpretation of the central argument of this study, which explores how the sexual attitudes and behaviours of migrant couples change during the process of sociocultural and economic integration into the host society. These findings contribute to the overall argument of the thesis regarding the impact of migration on couples' marital relationships.

The study's findings reveal that the changes in couples' sexual attitudes and behaviours in the new social context are influenced by factors such as gender, social class, and religious beliefs. These changes have occurred in different ways for female and male partners after migration because of differences in the intensity and direction of men's and women's acculturation and economic assimilation into the host society. The study demonstrates the impact of women's socioeconomic empowerment and increased autonomy on sexual relations. Women in these couples gained assertiveness and autonomy regarding sexual matters, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations. This newfound power allowed them to redefine their sexual identities and seek fulfilling sexual experiences. However, these changes sometimes created tensions within the relationship as they clashed with men's traditional ideas of sexual relationships and masculinity. Moreover, the increase in the crisis in men's sexual masculinity, because of their experience of downward occupational status after migration and concurrently the increase of women's economic role in the family, has generated new gender relationships in the family, which places men in a weaker position. In some cases, this leads to a decrease in men's self-esteem, an increase in terms of stress, and a state of depression, which can reduce their libido and, in some cases, cause couples to stop sexual relations altogether.

The study also highlights the influence of Western culture on men's sexual patterns and desires. Exposure to Western values and practices, such as extramarital sex and non-

traditional sexual acts, led to shifts in men's sexual behaviours. However, these changes were not always welcomed by their spouses, who perceived them as disrespectful or even abusive. This discrepancy in sexual preferences and practices further strained couples' sexual relationships.

It is important to note that the direction and degree of changes in couples' sexual relations varied depending on factors such as sociocultural and educational backgrounds, pre-emigration sexual ideologies, and the intensity of acculturation into the host society. The study's findings reveal that different groups of couples experienced different outcomes, with some reporting a decline in the quality and frequency of sexual relations, while others saw improvements or stability in their sexual relationships. I identified three groups that have been influenced by immigration in different ways. First, immigration to modern society, like the UK, influences most couples' sexual relations in a negative way. It means that the quality and frequency of couples' sexual relations are increasingly becoming worse, which, in turn, has led to instability in marital relations after migration. This fragility of couples' relationships is evidenced by the fact that most of the participants divorced after migrating or were considering it. The second group includes the few Iranian migrant couples, mostly of middle class and less religiously inclined, who reported that the quality of their sexual relations had improved during their sociocultural and economic integration into the host society. It is important to mention that some couples in this group acknowledged that they were not alien to Western standards and that they had good sexual relations and some knowledge of sex before immigrating. When they were exposed to Western culture, they changed their sexual patterns, which helped them to have better sexual relations than before. In fact, both husbands and wives simultaneously revised, modified, and redefined their sexuality based on new equal gender roles in the sexual acculturation process. The last group includes mostly upper-middle-class couples who had already embraced modern standards and norms in their home country and who experienced less change in their sexual relationships upon migration, as their views and behaviours were already aligned with those of the new culture. These couples often had equal power dynamics within their relationships and placed importance on sexual pleasure and individual fulfilment. In contrast, couples with strong religious attachments tended to maintain traditional sexual patterns, despite the influence of the new society.

In the next chapter, the focus will shift to exploring the intimate relationships of Iranian immigrant couples in the diasporic context, specifically examining how marital intimacy

evolves during the acculturation process. The discussion will delve into the intricate dynamics that shape couples' intimate connections to further enrich our understanding of the impact of migration on their overall relationship dynamics.

Chapter 6: Changes in Couples' Intimate Relationships

6.1 Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter is to examine the changes and continuity in the intimate relationships of Iranian couples during the process of integrating into the host society after migration whilst considering sociocultural and economic aspects. The concept of "marital intimacy" is regarded as a key component of marital relationships, and the chapter aims to explore how the intimate relations of Iranian migrant couples evolve within the diasporic society. This investigation contributes to the central argument of the thesis, which explores the influence of migration on the transformation of marital relationships among Iranian migrants. In this chapter, I define and explore the notion of new/modern marital intimacy, emphasising its non-sexual aspects. The exploration encompasses a wide range of verbal and non-verbal expressions, including physical and psycho-emotional acts such as openly expressing feelings, demonstrating love and inner thoughts, engaging in effective communication, fostering mutual trust, respect, and commitment, spending quality time together (such as going to the cinema, park, restaurant, or parties), travelling together, watching movies together, understanding each other, exchanging gifts, being best friends, providing good company, functioning as a team, and supporting each other (Jamieson, 1998; Layder, 2009).

In this chapter, I initially provide a definition of intimacy as understood by immigrants. Subsequently, I discuss the various ways in which the migration process can affect the intimate relationships of Iranian migrant couples. I then present general findings regarding the continuity and change observed in the intimate relationships of Iranian couples during the process of acculturation. Additionally, I explore the impact of the couples' new economic roles on the weakening of marital intimacy. Furthermore, I examine the influence of geographical distance on partners' intimate relationships and the occurrence of extra-marital affairs on marital intimacy. In the final section of the chapter, I compare the transformation of marital intimacy among three identified groups of couples.

Group one includes couples who have experienced negative changes in their intimate relationships but have seen an increase in their overall intimacy after migrating. Group two represents couples who have experienced positive changes in their intimate relationships,

resulting in warmer marital relationships compared to before migrating. Lastly, group three consists of couples who have not experienced any changes in their close relationships and who have maintained warm and friendly relations after migration.

6.2 The Concept and Meaning of Intimacy among Iranian Immigrants

The findings of the study indicated that there were noticeable gender differences among the participants concerning the interpretation of certain emotions and behaviours as indicators of intimacy within marital relationships. Specifically, women emphasised the importance of receiving support from their husbands during difficult times and in daily life, as well as the husband's attentiveness to their needs, desires, and overall happiness. These behaviours were particularly significant for women in experiencing intimacy within their marital lives. Women perceived these actions as expressions of their husbands' love, and this sentiment was reflected in the comments provided by several female participants. A 37-year-old woman named Fatemeh expressed her viewpoint on this matter, stating:

> I was never supported by my husband in tough times in the new society. My husband doesn't care about my emotional needs and desires.

In addition, a 63-year-old divorced woman (Massi), explained:

> I think that feeling safe, secure, and supported by a husband in marital life is a main sign of intimacy.

Another 40-year-old divorced woman (Mitra) stated that:

> It is very important to talk to each other about everything. In my opinion, having a conversation with your partner increases close relations. But my husband often spent time with his friend.

The study's findings indicate that a larger proportion of Iranian women than men prioritise non-sexual practices, feelings, and emotions that signify security, care, and support within their intimate relationships. The data suggests that feeling safe, secure, and supported by a partner, as well as expressions of love, are the primary indicators of intimacy for more female than male partners. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Gabb et al (2013), which identified the absence of a sense of security as a sign of a lack of closeness and intimacy. Furthermore, it is consistent with the findings of Rizkalla and Segal (2019), who recognised the role of communication in fostering intimacy and connection among couples.

According to the data from this study, there is some disparity between how most men and women perceive marital intimacy and sexual relationships. Iranian women conceptualise these two concepts differently. Expressing emotions, engaging in meaningful conversations, and spending quality time together were not considered important by some Iranian men, or else they did not have a genuine understanding of these practices and did not view them as symbols of intimacy. This is evidenced in some Iranian women's comments. For example, a 58-year-old divorced woman (Simin) explained:

> My husband lacks emotional expression skills. He thought having just sex is enough to show his love.

The data from this study indicates that there is significant variation in the types and levels of intimacy both within couples and between different couples. This variation can be attributed to various factors, including diverse psycho-biographical engagements and experiences in social life, family culture, and religious background. The comments provided by some participants support this finding. These factors play a role in shaping the dynamics of intimacy within couples, highlighting the complexity and diversity of intimate experiences among Iranian couples. For instance, a 52-year-old man named Jamshid stated that his intimate relationships were influenced by sociocultural norms and rules.:

> Although we love and support each other in all aspects of life, under the influence of cultural norms we don't express our love to each other anymore. In fact, showing physical affection and expressing 'I love you' is not common and accepted behaviour among my family and society and these practices are not learned by society, media, and family.

As a 43-year-old woman (Azam) said:

> My husband never expresses his feelings and emotions because he has learned from his father that a man should hide his love and never reveal his feelings for his wife. He thinks that if he shows love, then the expectations and demands of his wife would increase.

A 43-year-old woman (Hengame) spoke about the impact of family background on the personality of her husband:

> My husband doesn't know how to express his love because he was raised in a cold family in which there are never intimate relations between family members.

Another educated 58-year-old woman (Simin) said that:

> My husband never expresses his feelings because he hasn't learnt it in his family. In fact, he was raised in a matriarchal family. His mother always humiliates him and there isn't any love and respect among the family members. His mother was always bossing him around, so he has never felt any love at home, and he hasn't had any chance to learn how to give love to others.

Indeed, the study's findings highlight the complexity of human feelings, needs, desires, and expectations, which are shaped by social and cultural factors that vary across different societies and historical periods. Social norms, cultural influences, and factors such as fashion, expectations, and values all play a significant role in shaping intimacy within diverse cultural contexts, permeating the everyday routines of life. This point is supported by various scholars such as Giddens (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), Malone (1997), Jamieson (1998), and Layder (2009).

In the next section, I will demonstrate how marital intimacy undergoes changes influenced by the sociocultural context following immigration.

6.3 The Different Effects of Migration on Marital Intimacy

Contrary to expectations that the transition from a traditional and religious society like Iran to a modern and individualistic one like the UK would negatively impact intimate relationships, the data from this study reveals that this is not true for all Iranian migrant couples. The transformation of marital intimacy varies in intensity and direction among different couples, and it changes in diverse ways, both negatively and positively. These variations depend on individuals' sociocultural backgrounds, family culture, couples' gender ideologies, their pre-migration history of intimate relationships, and the quality of their relationships in Iran. Additionally, the intensity and direction of occupational mobility and sociocultural integration into the new society play a significant role in shaping couples' intimate relationships in unique ways.

In the following section, I will delve into this topic in detail. Firstly, I will explore how exposure to equal gender ideologies in an individualistic society like the UK influences the

intimate relationships of Iranian migrant couples. Additionally, I will discuss the impact of the crisis of masculinity on the weakening of marital intimacy through the couples' new economic roles. Secondly, I will present examples of middle-class couples who reported that their intimate relationships not only endured but also improved during the migration process. In the final part, I will discuss couples who stated that their intimate relationships remained unchanged even after undergoing sociocultural integration into the host society.

6.4 Weakening Couples' Marital Intimacy and Western Gender Ideology

According to various sociological and psychological theories, the concept and dynamics of intimacy are not static and have undergone transformations over time (Gabb et al, 2013; Reibstein, 1997; Layder, 2009; Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2007, 2012; Musiał, 2013a,b; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992). Sociological analysis has particularly highlighted the shift from premodern (traditional) and religious societies, where intimacy was regulated by fixed rules, traditional values, and external standards (Giddens, 1991, 1992), to modern and late-modern forms accompanied by significant social changes. This transformation has influenced spousal gender relations, particularly in the context of marital intimacy (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Hochschild, 2003; Reibstein, 1997; Castells, 2004[1997]; Bauman, 2003). Reibstein (1997) also emphasises the absence of stable forms in close relationships during different periods. Consequently, the pressures of social transitions have led to changes in marital intimacy (Gabb et al, 2013). Therefore, cultural and social contexts facilitate the formation of relationships, whilst the various ways the individuals navigate between the conflicting norms as well as their expectations in these contexts affect intimate relationships (Chavez, 2017; Kitiarsa, 2008; and Bloch, 2017). Deborah Boehm's (2012) work *Intimate Migrations* offers a valuable perspective on the experiences of immigrant families and the role of intimate relationships in the migration process. Boehm argues that intimate relationships are central to how families navigate the challenges and opportunities of migration and that these relationships are shaped by a variety of factors, including gender, race, class, and legal status.

Based on this perspective, it is anticipated that migration from Iran to the UK could result in strain, crises, and tension among migrant couples, ultimately affecting their intimate relationships. The findings of this study support this expectation, as they demonstrate that the intimate relationships of 30 Iranian migrant couples did not remain stable during the process of socio-economic integration into British society. The pattern of their intimate

relations follows almost the same process as changes in their sexual relationships and gender roles. Most of them claimed that the quality of their intimate relationships affected their sexual relations and vice versa. The quality of intimate and sexual relations mostly depends on the husbands' acceptance of equality in gender roles and the changes and crises in their sense of masculinity in the diasporic society. 23 of these couples experienced significant challenges and difficulties in their intimate relationships, leading to a weakening and cooling of their connections.

The data from this study reveal that the changes have been particularly pronounced for couples who had unequal gender roles and less warm and close relationships in their marital lives in their home country. Migration, in these cases, acts as a catalyst and exacerbates marital conflicts, causing a deterioration in the closeness and warmth of their relationships. Some couples in the study noted that although they had less intimate relationships before migrating, their marital intimacy worsened due to differing levels of acculturation to Western gender norms. This sentiment is echoed in the comments provided by a 51-year-old man named Davood, who discussed the quality of his intimate relationships in his marital life before migrating:

> When we were living in Iran, we had unequal gender roles and less intimate relations in marital life. After immigration, our intimate relations became worse than before. My wife has become cranky and blames me for the behaviour that I had in the past. She doesn't let me touch her. We rarely have sex. She continually talks about divorce.

A 43-year-old divorced woman (Hengame) also explained:

> I had less close and warm relations with my husband. But after migration, our intimate relationships were worse than before, because we continually argued about new gender roles, rights and freedom that I got in the new society.

The study's findings suggest that this phenomenon occurs due to the transition from a traditional, religious, and patriarchal society with a strong emphasis on family-centred values (Iran) to a modern, individualistic society with modern gender ideologies and norms. With exposure to Western culture, the majority of Iranian women, through gender-specific developments, acculturate more rapidly than men into the modern society. They become more acquainted with Western/British cultural values, which provide them with extensive knowledge about various aspects of modern lifestyles, including the evolving concept of

intimacy. This is supported by comments from participants which indicate that Iranian migrant women have experienced significant shifts in their perceptions, thoughts, values, and expectations regarding intimacy.

With increased awareness and understanding of different forms of intimacy, women have been empowered to negotiate their pre-migration intimate relationships. For instance, companionship and open communication hold great significance for a larger number of female participants when compared to males following their migration. According to these women, engaging in conversations, expressing inner feelings, spending quality time together without conflict or arguments, and actively listening to one another are indicative of a healthy and warm relationship. The notion of being best friends with their partners and fostering mutual trust also ranked highly among women. A 43-year-old woman named Azam expressed this sentiment, stating:

> I here [in London] learn that talking about feelings, emotions and needs signified an emotional intimacy that allowed partners to express worries and discuss problems while also receiving support, counsel, and understanding from husbands. However, my husband has not still changed his attitudes, perceptions and practices in this regard, which contributes to increasing tensions between us.

Moreover, the data reveal that feeling safe, secure, and supported by a partner and expressions of love are the primary signs of intimacy for more female partners when compared to male partners. To illustrate, a divorced woman (Massi) explained:

> I expected that my husband would support me in 'tough times' after migration. I would like to pay attention to my emotional needs and desires, and he cares for my happiness. I believe that through these practices my husband can express his love to me.

In addition, a 40-year-old woman (Mitra) stated:

> I like to have mutual respect and trust for each other, talk together, and express emotions, kisses, hugs, and cuddles. But my partner did not care about my emotional needs.

Hence, it is evident that women participants placed greater emphasis than their husbands on practices, emotions, and feelings that signify security, care, and support. This shift in female

expectations and perceptions of marital intimacy has been influenced by media portrayals of lifestyles that promote gender equality in personal relationships. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Gabb et al (2013), which identified the absence of a sense of security as an indicator of a lack of closeness and intimacy. Lawson (1989) also supports this notion, stating that in the past century, television programs have played a significant role in shaping the modern culture of intimacy, love, and marriage through various formats such as talk shows, stories, and interviews that delve into individuals' private lives, even extending into living rooms and bedrooms.

However, the study findings reveal that most Iranian male partners struggle to adapt to the modern concept of intimacy, as they are still inclined to maintain traditional practices in their marital lives, which afford them certain benefits in terms of dominance. Consequently, the differences in partners' perspectives and expectations regarding the expression of intimacy in marital life have created a significant gap between their conceptions and expectations of their relationships, leading to difficulties and challenges in sharing values, attitudes, and emotions related to intimacy. This has resulted in frequent arguments and emotional detachment. For instance, a 51-year-old man named Davood described his relationship in the following way:

> We discuss everything far too easily. This happens because of our failure to listen to one another, and we are unable to have an open and friendly conversation without fighting.

As a case in point, a 43-year-old woman (Azam) stated:

> We always have discussions about everything, because there is a huge gap between my husband’s attitudes and expectations of intimate relations and mine. For example, I expected that my husband would talk to me, listen to me, show his feelings verbally, non-verbally and physically, share his thoughts, respect me, compliment my appearance and surprise me with a gift. I always showed him my emotions in different ways; for example, I talk to him all the time, tell him ‘I love you’, and say everything that is on my mind. But unfortunately, it was a one-way relationship in which I always gave without getting anything back.

Based on the study findings, it is apparent that a significant number of Iranian immigrant men lack an understanding of the romantic ideal of marriage that their wives anticipate.

Iranian women differentiate between intimate and sexual relations, whereas many male participants perceive these two concepts as synonymous. This disparity in perspectives has resulted in significant arguments and conflicts among couples. A 51-year-old man (Masood) described it in this way:

> I think having sex increases our emotional intimate relations. But different needs/expectations around sexual intimacy are one of the issues in our marital life after migration.

Meanwhile, a 52-year-old divorced man (Jamshid) explained:

> When I express my desire to have sex with my wife, it means that I love her. But she expects me to show my emotional feeling verbally.

The majority of couples in the study acknowledge that these differences in ways of expressing intimacy have hindered their ability to engage in meaningful and open conversations after migrating. As a result, they struggled to understand each other within the new and challenging circumstances and were unable to relieve the burdens and stresses they encountered during the process of resettlement. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Gabb et al (2013), which demonstrates that the meaning of sexual intimacy varies between males and females.

Consequently, this breakdown in communication has led to difficulties in expressing needs and a lack of effective listening skills, preventing the couples from resolving conflicts. In an unfriendly and tense home environment, couples find it challenging to engage in open dialogue, actively listen to each other, and maintain love for one another. As a result, their intimate relationships become colder. These gendered differences in understanding certain feelings and practices as symbols of intimacy, as observed among the study participants, contribute to significant arguments that further weaken and undermine their intimate relationships during the migration process. This observation is consistent with Jamieson's (1998) explanation that open communication involves sharing emotions, verbalising thoughts, and finding ways to build a shared life, all of which contribute to an intimate understanding.

Furthermore, the study’s data reveal that men's extramarital affairs have devastated and eroded trust between couples, which is considered a crucial component for maintaining marital intimacy. This situation leads to conflicts, arguments, and a decrease in marital

intimacy. Many women's comments, such as those of Massi, Mitra, Azam, Simin, and Marry, provide evidence of Iranian husbands taking advantage of their newfound freedom to interact with the opposite sex in the host society. For instance, a 43-year-old woman named Azam, who has a diploma and has been married for twenty years, shared her perspective by saying:

> Our close relations and trust for each other have declined after my husband's infidelity. I think that Iranian men can easily have sex out of the marriage without any fear of family rejection or social constraints and legal punishment here [in London].

Furthermore, a 40-year-old married woman (Mitra) explained her marital intimacy's transformation after immigration:

> Although we had no intimate relations in Iran in the sense that it is defined in modern societies, at least before migration my husband respected me, and we trusted each other. But here [in London] our close relationship is getting worse than before. He lies to me, cheats on me, and shows disrespect toward me.

It is evident that Western culture presents immigrant couples with new circumstances that challenge the stability of marital intimacy and make it more vulnerable. This instability is particularly pronounced and challenging for couples who come from traditional and religious backgrounds when they are exposed to new forms of interaction between men and women. The cultural differences between their home country and the host country are deep, which exacerbates the situation compared to couples who are more familiar with modern culture.

In the host society, the freedom and openness in relationships between the sexes make it easier for men to engage in infidelity, which can significantly impact the quality and level of intimacy within couples' relationships. As a result, many of these couples ultimately divorce, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

Furthermore, the study's data demonstrate that the intimate relationships of many Iranian couples become increasingly fragile after migrating. This is because they gradually emancipate themselves from the constraints, strict traditional norms, and external controls prevalent in their home society. In the new circumstances, they desire more autonomy in

decision-making within their private lives. This perspective is supported by the comments provided by some divorced women participants, such as a 43-year-old woman (Hengame):

> I no longer have to stay in a life that does not make me satisfied and happy. It is not rational to endure this life and sacrifice myself.

These findings illustrate that in an individualistic society like the UK, most Iranian couples, particularly women, come to realise that they should no longer sacrifice themselves for men and should not be unconditionally committed to them. Instead, they learn to become autonomous and independent individuals. Within the context of modern and egalitarian relationships, Iranian women who were not emotionally fulfilled in their marital lives or those who were compelled to stay in marriages due to social and family obligations in their home country quickly discover that they can openly and easily break free from the confines of their marriages. This aligns with the concept of "liquid love" proposed by Bauman (2003), which characterises modern human relationships as lacking stable ties. As numerous scholars argue, intimate relationships in contemporary times have become increasingly fragile, breakable, and weak as individuals emancipate themselves from external control, traditions, and predefined norms, leading to autonomous decision-making and the establishment of idiosyncratic rules (Gernsheim, 1995; Bauman, 2003; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992; Layder, 2009). This perspective also supports Illouz's (2007, 2012) notion that the process of individualisation and rationalisation leads individuals to distance themselves from others, resulting in colder forms of intimacy, a fear of commitment and an inability to make sacrifices. These findings align with other studies that highlight the increasing romantic stress experienced by migrant couples in diasporic contexts (Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; Umubyeyi, 2019; Santos, Bohon, and Sanchez-Sosa, 1998; Ben-David and Lave, 1994; Negy and Snyder, 1997). Rapaport and Doucerain (2021) also emphasise that there is a decrease in levels of emotional support and in time spent together between partners.

6.5 Transformation of Religious Affiliation and Marital Intimacy

The transformation of religious affiliation affects marital intimacy after immigration. According to the findings of this study, it is evident that Iranian immigrants, regardless of their social class and age, experience a gradual weakening of their religious commitments over time as they assimilate into the host society. While most participants expressed a strong attachment to Iranian culture and customs, they acknowledged that their religious beliefs

have become less prominent during the process of sociocultural assimilation. However, it is worth noting that a small number of couples underwent transformations in their religious affiliations, which they believed had contributed to a decline in their intimate relationships. This is supported by the comments provided by multiple study participants. For instance, a divorced and then remarried 51-year-old man (Masood) described:

> Before migration, we were a religious couple. But after moving to London our religious beliefs changed in different ways. I did not follow anymore many Islamic rules which clash with my wife's religious commitment. This difference created challenges in our marital life and our intimate relations became cold.

Another divorced man (Amir, 50 years old) claimed:

> My wife converted to Christianity after migration. I respect her beliefs and accept them. But I think that she changed under the religious teaching of the church, and this makes a great distance between us, which destroyed marital intimacy.

The transformation of religious affiliations following migration becomes a significant factor that can create conflict and tension among couples originating from a religious and traditional country who have resettled in a more modern society. When one partner maintains their previous religious beliefs while the other undergoes a shift in affiliation, it often leads to strain and distance between them, thereby affecting the intimacy of their relationship.

In summary, the gendered differences in the sociocultural and economic assimilation of men and women into mainstream society have predominantly had negative effects on couples' intimacy. The crisis in masculine identity, arising from the transformation and reversal of traditional male gender roles during the process of integration into the new society, has been a key factor contributing to marital conflicts and the deterioration of marital intimacy. Many Iranian immigrant men struggle to regain their previous positions within the home, exacerbating these challenges.

Therefore, immigration represents a significant decision for individuals, particularly couples, as it deeply impacts all aspects of their close relationships. The varying rates and degrees of adaptation to modern concepts of intimacy within marital life, experienced by

both men and women when confronted with new sociocultural circumstances during the process of individualisation, have played a role in the breakdown of their intimate relationships post-migration. However, it is important to highlight that the transformation of marital intimacy is not uniform across all couples, as it has occurred in diverse ways, which will be explored in detail in the final section of this chapter.

Furthermore, the study identified several factors associated with the weakening of marital intimacy among Iranian immigrant couples after immigration. For instance, some couples reported that the long working hours of one or both partners affected their communication and close relationships. When one or both partners are required to work long hours for the family's survival in the new society, immigrant couples encounter challenges in their intimate relationships. This situation, as also reported by Musiał (2013), results in couples spending less time with their families and creates significant problems within their relationships. A 52-year-old divorced man named Jamshid explained this issue:

> After migration, gradually our intimate relations were becoming cold. Maybe the main reason for this situation was the long hours working outside the home. Actually, I forgot her completely and I did not pay attention to her emotional needs and desires. So, I lost my marital life.

In this regard, a 63-year-old divorced woman (Massi) talked about the initial days of their arrival in the UK:

> After migration, we both start working because of financial concerns with long working hours. We did not have enough time to spend together. We had no conversation because we were both tired, which contributed to decreasing our intimate relations.

Correspondingly, a 45-year-old woman (Lida) lamented her husband's long working hours:

> We don't have free time to talk to each other. He is always tired. When he's back home he likes to go only to bed. Less communication with each other makes a big emotional distance and gap between us.

Another factor revealed by the study's data is that when one partner is compelled to migrate there are additional challenges for marital relationships, particularly in terms of intimacy. Some participants acknowledged that one of the factors contributing to the erosion of their marital intimacy is when one partner is forced to immigrate by the other partner. This

situation leads to disparities in the pace and intensity of their acculturation and results in the less engaged partner struggling to adapt to the new society.

Within this study, a larger number of female participants expressed their reluctance to migrate. According to the findings, some Iranian middle-class women who were coerced into immigration by their husbands often faced difficulties in cultural and economic integration into the new society. They encountered challenges in forming social connections with native-born individuals and difficulties due to other limited resources, such as inadequate English proficiency, low wages, and a lack of relevant skills in the new cultural context. Additionally, they experienced feelings of not belonging in the new culture, leading to isolation, loneliness, and depression. These emotional states of helplessness and hopelessness can further deteriorate marital intimacy. These women held their husbands responsible for their loss of social connections, friends, extended family, and social status. Consequently, they felt a sense of loneliness in the new society and developed resentment towards their husbands, which then affected their emotional well-being and marital intimacy. For example, a 44-year-old woman (Parisa) stated:

> After coming to the UK, our marital intimacy worsened. I didn't want to move here, because I had everything in my life such as [my] family's emotional support and a rich social network. We lost the emotional support of family and friends.

A 48-year-old man (Sajad) also explained:

> My wife doesn't it like here and whenever I look at her face, I see she is unhappy. She blames me for everything such as for losing her friendship network. Although we love each other, our tension and discussions have increased. The conflicts led to a decrease in our intimate relationship.

A 54-year-old man (Behrooz) opined:

> After migration, my wife was stressed and was sick all the time. She doesn't like it here because adapting to a new society is difficult for her. She doesn't even like to learn English. Therefore, our intimate relationship has been influenced automatically by these problems.

A 44-year-old woman (Maryam) said that:

> I try to adapt myself to my new circumstances and culture, but I can't do that because for first-generation immigrants the process of adaptation to a new society is very challenging. We had a good marital relationship in Iran. We were best and close friends with each other. Here I am sick all the time and don't like to talk to my husband. Also, after migration, conflicts and arguments have increased.

Therefore, both partners' consent to move is deemed imperative to sustain a marriage during the acculturation process. It is evident that a partner's dissatisfaction contributes to discordance and alters their feelings towards the other. In general, the study's findings demonstrated that the experiences of Iranian immigrant couples are shaped by intimate relationships, and that these relationships are influenced by factors such as gender, class, religious attachments and legal status. It is also important to highlight the complex ways in which cultural, religious, economic, gender, and class factors affect the dynamics of intimate relationships within British society. These findings are similar to the results of research conducted by Chavez (2017), Kitiarsa (2008), and Bloch (2017). These studies highlight the significance of the cultural and social contexts that facilitate the formation of relationships and the various ways that individuals navigate between conflicting norms and personal expectations. This is also consistent with Deborah Boehm's (2012) work *Intimate Migrations*, which offers a valuable perspective on the experiences of immigrant families and the role of intimate relationships in the migration process. Boehm argues that intimate relationships are central to how families navigate the challenges and opportunities of migration and that these relationships are shaped by a variety of factors, including gender, race, class, and legal status.

6.6 The Impact of Couples' Geographical Distance on Marital Intimacy

The study found that in some cases one partner, typically the man, migrated to the UK earlier than other family members for financial reasons, with the intention to facilitate the whole family's eventual arrival. However, prolonged periods of separation, sometimes spanning over a considerable length of time, severely damaged the intimate relationships of most of these couples. The absence of physical and emotional proximity emerges as a key factor in the deterioration of love and intimacy. The study's findings align with the results of other studies that explore changes in couples' intimate relationships following their separate living arrangements (Simon et al, 2010; Caarls and Mazzucato, 2015).

Furthermore, the fragmentation of many Iranian families and the extended separation of spouses result in divergent acculturation patterns within couples, contributing to marital tensions and a decline in closeness. The study's data illustrate that during this period the partner who migrated earlier is exposed to new options that may bring about changes in their values, attitudes, expectations, and behaviour patterns. In most cases, these couples do not make concerted efforts to maintain a sense of closeness while being apart. Additionally, some partners who arrived earlier in the host society engaged in infidelity, forming extramarital emotional and sexual relationships. This generates significant tension and undermines marital intimacy when the other partner eventually joins them. Alternatively, this separation can also lead to feelings of depression in the partner who migrated earlier, perhaps due to difficulty integrating into the new society and experiencing loneliness. As acknowledged by some Iranian women, this greatly impacts intimate relationships. For example, a 45-year-old woman (Lida) explained:

> My husband came to the UK earlier and we (my children and I) joined him after nine years. Unfortunately, I realised that his behaviour had changed. He doesn't talk to me a lot, and he likes to be alone. Moreover, this cold intimacy has affected our sexual relations and it has lessened in comparison to before migration.

A 47-year-old man (Anush) also described his situation:

> Although we were married with love and we had a good intimate relationship in Iran, this new society has severely changed my attitudes and expectations and I began to cheat on my wife. After seven years, when my wife joined me, she realised this. She went back to Iran, and we got divorced.

A 37-year-old woman (Fatemeh) commented:

> My husband migrated to the UK one year earlier than me. When I arrived in London, I expected him to give me a very warm welcome. However, he didn't care about me at all. He has changed a lot. For instance, he doesn't talk to me as much as before. He is so irresponsible towards me. In fact, he prefers to live on his own without me.

The study's data also reveals instances where couples live apart not due to the timing of their immigration to the UK, but for other reasons. For instance, some middle-class and working-class refugee couples acknowledged that they falsely presented themselves as separated

couples to the British state in order to receive additional housing benefits. They intended to secure extra income for the family through the illegal rental of a second property. However, as reported by some participants, this arrangement often led to situations where couples decided to live in separate locations, which coincided with a weakening of their intimate relationships. In some cases, the temporary physical distance between these couples eventually led to divorce.

6.7 Weakening Marital Intimacy and the Crisis in Masculinity

The prevalence of gender equality in the host society has a profound impact on male stereotypes and migrants' notions of masculinity. It challenges traditional ideas of masculinity that enable men to benefit from the subordination of women. This transition creates various difficulties and influences Iranian men's understanding of what masculinity entails in their new environment. These shifts in expectations and uncertainties lead to negative emotions, crises in the migrants' sense of masculinity, and feelings of insecurity. As a result, tensions arise within marital life, accompanied by emotional and physical violence. Mental health issues such as depression may also emerge, further eroding the intimate relationships between couples and creating an emotional distance between partners. For example, a 45-year-old woman (Lida) commented:

> After migration, my husband was stressed and depressed. Adapting to a new society and accepting equal gender roles is difficult for him. Our intimate relationship was gradually influenced automatically by these problems.

Additionally, the study findings highlight the impact of couples' new economic roles and the subsequent crisis in masculinity on the intimate relationships of Iranian couples after migration. The crisis in male masculine identity can render men unable to engage in rational discussions with their spouses to navigate the challenges they face in the new society. The data demonstrate that the lack of effective communication among couples often results in emotional distance and a decline in their intimate relationships. To illustrate, a 52-year-old man (Ali) explained:

> In Iran, we cared for each other more than here. But, after migration, my wife got a bachelor's degree from university and she got a good job in London. In contrast, I lost my job after migration. Everything has changed; she does not like to talk anymore and listen to me or express her emotional feelings.

Furthermore, the data reveal that some men experience depression as a consequence of losing their traditional breadwinner role and the associated status that accompanied it. This loss of identity and crisis in masculinity contribute to a decrease in marital intimacy, as men struggle to express their emotions and engage in open discussions about their concerns with their partners. For example, a 48-year-old divorced man (Sajad) said:

> I was an engineer in Iran, but here I am a driver. I am ashamed to say to my family what I do. I am stressed and depressed. I am also sometimes thinking of suicide. This disappointment and anxiety has affected my marital intimacy deeply.

Despite some Iranian migrant men choosing to stay and maintain their marital life, the study data indicates that they often become indifferent and irresponsible in their approach. This indifference arises when they experience a crisis in their sense of masculinity. As a result, these men pay less attention to their wife's emotions and provide less support than they did before migrating. The findings reveal that many female participants reported a lack of security and diminished emotional support from their husbands after migration, leading to a cold and distant intimate relationship in their marital life. For instance, a 40-year-old divorced woman named Mitra described her situation:

> After migration, my husband became indifferent to my emotional needs, and he was irresponsible in relation to his family as well. Eventually, he left his children and me.

On the other hand, many Iranian migrant women who actively participate in economic activities within the host society and hold established positions in the middle-class mainstream economy reported learning about new concepts and practices of intimate relationships through conversations with their British colleagues in the workplace. They have been exposed to discussions about their colleagues' close relationships with their partners. Consequently, these women unconsciously compare their own views of intimate relations and express a willingness to explore and experience new forms of intimacy with their husbands. These ongoing exchanges contribute to the gradual internalisation of new perceptions of intimacy as part of their personal identities and guiding actions. These perspectives often contrast with the norms and gender roles prevalent in their homeland and may not align with their partners' expectations of intimate relationships. As a result,

prolonged arguments and tensions between partners arise, leading to a gradual decline in their intimate relationships.

Furthermore, the destruction of traditional masculine identity and a reversal in economic gender roles experienced by many migrant men, primarily due to their inability to integrate economically into the middle-class mainstream society, create crises and challenges. This aligns with the observations made by Beynon (2001), who suggests that the masculinity crisis is characterised by men experiencing deep depression upon losing their breadwinner status. Similarly, Faludi (1992[1991]) argues that changes in women's economic position in the host society affect their consciousness, values, expectations, and practices related to intimacy. Additionally, studies by Oliffe et al (2010) and Hanninen and Valkonen (2012) recognise that conforming to Western masculine norms poses a risk factor for depression which, in turn, undermines marital intimacy.

Also, as discussed in Chapter 4, with the increasing economic roles and authority of many migrant women within their families, their voices have grown louder in demanding a renegotiation of the unequal power distribution in marital life after migration. This prompts resistance from men who adhere to traditional gender norms and who resist the adoption of egalitarian gender roles. Consequently, these clashes cause arguments among couples and gradually erode marital intimacy. This is supported by the comments of participants such as a 37-year-old divorced woman named Marry:

> We had always had arguments regarding new roles, equal power distribution and rights after migration because my husband is resistant to equal power and roles. These continual discussions caused the weakening and decline of our intimate and close relationships.

To illustrate, a 52-year-old man (Jamshid) asserted:

> After migration, my wife had more power than in Iran due to getting a good job. Also, her expectations have increased, and she is thinking more of her own interests rather than family interests.

The increasing economic independence of many middle-class women, coupled with the experiences of fluctuating job positions or downward occupational mobility among middle-class men in the host society, has led to the loss of men's traditional breadwinner role, authority, and privileged position within the home. This has posed a challenge to men's

traditional masculinity, resulting in arguments, tension, and ultimately a decline in close relationships.

However, the intensity of the masculinity crisis and marital tensions varies depending on men's reactions to women's new roles. The data reveals that Iranian migrant men exhibit different responses to their unsuccessful economic assimilation, role reversals, and shifts in the power dynamics within marriages. In some cases, men become depressed and withdraw from their emotional and intimate lives, struggling to adapt to new patterns of masculinity that involve the expression and disclosure of feelings. They find it difficult to cope with the new expectations and values that challenge their traditional masculine identities. These observations are reflected in the comments of some Iranian women, who note that their husbands rarely open up about their emotions or express love. These men often cling to the attitudes and beliefs of male superiority and female inferiority that are central to traditional masculinity.

However, the study's data also demonstrate that some male participants openly embraced equal gender roles and made efforts to adjust to their new roles. This willingness to adapt contributes to an improvement in their intimate relationships. Further exploration of this topic will be provided in the next section.

6.8 Improved Immigrant Couples' Intimate Relations

Seven middle-class Iranian immigrant couples reported an improvement in their intimate relationships during the process of acculturation. The data from this study suggests that this positive change can be attributed to two main factors. Firstly, couples in this group had a history of more equal and intimate relations in their home country before immigrating and their marital life had strong foundations. Secondly, both husbands and wives in this group were actively developing their gender ideologies towards a more egalitarian approach to marital relationships. They made conscious efforts to learn and adopt new types of intimate practices prevalent in the new society.

In this group, the male partners embraced and readily accepted the new equal gender roles, avoiding any crisis in their masculine identity. This contrasts with the experiences of couples in the first group, where disagreements over changing gender roles led to arguments and undermined their intimate relationships. As discussed in previous chapters, equality in gender roles and the distribution of marital power fosters a sense of harmony. The equal

sharing of decision-making, household chores, and childcare responsibilities contributes to warmer intimate relationships among these couples. This is supported by the comments shared by some male and female participants. For example, a 38-year-old married woman (Parvin) said:

> Although I had a good relationship with my husband, after moving to London, our relationship became more intimate. I think we both learned a lot in the new situation.

Couples in this group underwent gradual assimilation into the modern Western lifestyle by engaging with native-born British individuals in various settings such as the workplace and public spaces. They also gained exposure to Western intimate relationships through indirect means such as watching movies, reading books, newspapers, and magazines, and conversing with Iranian friends who are more familiar with Western culture. Through these experiences, they learned to openly and comfortably express their emotions through acts of affection like hugs, kisses, cuddles, and fondling, even in public spaces, which is not common in traditional societies.

Moreover, they adopted different forms of intimate disclosure, including emotional exchanges, deep conversations, and moments of shared intimacy, often integrated into their everyday routines. For instance, family meals can provide opportunities for meaningful connection and intimacy, as described by Jamieson (1998; 1999). The data from this study indicate that couples learn the value of shared time and discover that engaging in shared experiences, such as hobbies and pastimes, can enrich their relationship. One participant, a 42-year-old man named Bahram, expressed his experience in the following way:

> I gained useful experience here and I learned how to behave with women. I learned to express my feelings easily. After my wife arrived, we became closer than before.

The women in this group defy social norms that discourage them from expressing their erotic attachment to their husbands and cause weak emotional bonds between spouses. Similarly, the men in this group do not insist on adhering to unequal traditional values and customs. This aligns with studies by Steil (1997) and Gottman et al (1998), which suggest that emotional connectedness and intimacy in marital relationships increase when husbands accept their wives' equal participation in all aspects of married life. This is consistent with

previous research highlighting the positive impact of equal power distribution on marital intimacy (Steil, 1997; Quek and Knudson-Martin, 2008).

Furthermore, the results of this study align with research that demonstrates the positive effect of immigration on marital intimacy within the diasporic context. The process of immigration has been found to contribute to the development of emotional support and mutual trust among immigrant couples (Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; Pandya, 2021; Maciel et al, 2009; Hartman and Hartman, 1986; Cheung, 2008; Hyman et al, 2008; Hormozi, Miller, and Banford, 2018; Leblanc, 2020; Pandya, 2021). Shirpak et al (2011) also highlight that migrant couples in Canada are more comfortable expressing their feelings of love than in Iran.

The findings of this study demonstrate how participants compare their experiences of more reserved displays of affection in Iran to the more open displays of love and care they observe in the UK. These expressions of emotions contribute to increased marital intimacy and generate feelings of appreciation and satisfaction for both partners. A 40-year-old man named Shahrya expressed this sentiment in the following comment:

> Our intimate relationship became better than before migration because we learned how we can easily express our feelings in the new circumstances, such as hugging, kissing each other in front of our daughter and others [and] walking hand-in-hand on the street. In fact, we are relaxed here and aren't worried about people's judgment.

The findings indicate that couples in this group share similar perceptions of intimate relations and experience similar changes in their intimate practices after migrating. For instance, male participants in this group, like their wives, do not equate marital intimacy with solely sexual relationships. This viewpoint is exemplified by a 42-year-old man named Bahram, who expressed the following sentiment:

> I think that the concept of intimacy is wider than sex. In fact, they are not equal things, but sex is a small component of marital intimacy. Having an intimate relationship with your partner means that you can disclose your inner self and express feelings, thoughts, and concerns, you can enjoy time spent with her and so on.

Furthermore, unlike the previous group, this group has demonstrated the ability to engage in friendly and open discussions about marital issues, even in the challenging context of migration. They have learned how to openly share their problems with each other, leading to the resolution of issues and the cultivation of warmer and more intimate relationships than before. Effective communication has proven to be a crucial factor in maintaining long-term relationships, as emphasised by a 38-year-old woman named Parvin, who stated:

> We had a good relationship in Iran. We talked to each other every day and shared all of our problems with each other and openly and easily expressed our feelings. In the UK, our relationship became better than before, because we learned more about new meanings and practices of intimate relations in these new circumstances, and we followed them.

A 73-year-old woman (Afsane) described her relationship:

> When we came to the UK, we got closer to each other than before because we helped and understood each other under difficult circumstances. We shared our thoughts with each other. We talk to each other about our problems and attempt to find solutions to them. My husband is a perfect man, and he pays attention to all my needs, desires and expectations. We care about our happiness.

Women in this group observed an increase in their husbands' involvement in childcare and household responsibilities following migration. This active participation by husbands contributes to the development of intimate relationships and enhances feelings of satisfaction among couples. Despite the husbands working full-time and the wives being unemployed, husbands make an effort to share the burden of household chores and childcare. This support and understanding between partners in the host society, where they lack the family support they had in their home country, strengthened their intimate relationships. A 42-year-old woman named Nahid provided a comment that aligns with this finding:

> Although I am unemployed, my husband helps me with the household chores and childcare affairs, because our son has autism, and he needs special care all the time. He attempts to understand and empathise with my feelings and situation more than before in the new society.

Although there was variation in the couples' occupational statuses during their economic assimilation into British society, the study did not find specific evidence regarding the impact of downward or upward occupational status on marital intimacy within this group.

The majority of husbands in this group maintained successful occupational positions and did not experience a decline in their occupational status after migrating. They typically served as the primary breadwinners in their families. However, there were a few couples where the husbands experienced a downward occupational transition or prolonged unemployment after migrating. Surprisingly, the study found that the marital intimacy of these couples was not significantly affected by occupation. To illustrate, a 73-year-old woman (Afsaneh) said:

> Although my husband lost his job after migration for a long time and I worked for long hours during this situation, these tough times did not destroy our close relationship. We learned how to help and support each other in difficult times and overcome our problems and still love each other.

The findings indicate that couples in this group maintain close relationships in the new society without experiencing crises in masculine identity. This may be attributed to the companionship and mutual understanding they develop in challenging circumstances, as well as the high self-esteem of the male partner and their ability to remain calm in stressful situations. Another positive factor that influences intimate relationships is the absence of extended family. Without the influence and interference of extended family members, they are able to spend more quality time together and make decisions independently, leading to increased emotional dependence, and enhanced self-disclosure. Following their migration, the couples in this group developed stronger bonds with each other, as the ties with extended family were replaced by stronger ties within the couple. Furthermore, husbands felt a greater sense of responsibility as they recognised the lack of support from extended family and actively provided assistance to their wives and children. This is reflected in the comments of a 33-year-old married woman (Malihe):

> After migration, we got closer to each other because we had more time to spend in the absence of our extended family. My husband believes that when I have no family assistance here, I have to help you more than before. He feels more responsible towards his family, and he cares for his family more than before in absence of extended family.

A 42-year-old woman (Azar) said:

> My husband became more protective and caring than before migration. We make decisions together about everything, sharing our thoughts, talking to each other without any interference, while, In Iran, there were dozens of people

> nearby(family members, friends) who made decisions for you, offered feedback and recommendations on your selection, and disapproved or supported your choices. In fact, we didn't have any privacy. We are so much more open about our feelings.

In addition, a 42-year-old man (Bahram) who assimilated into a middle-class mainstream occupational position in London, stated:

> Here we are alone, and we do not have any family support, so we should protect each other during difficult moments and situations.

Couples in this group have developed strategies to face challenges and overcome them together during the process of acculturation. They have learned to make joint decisions and assert their independence from extended family influence, which strengthens feelings of intimacy and closeness. These findings align with previous studies (Guruge, 2007; Hyman et al, 2008; Umubyeyi, 2019), which highlight the importance of creating new forms of mutual support, including emotional, financial, and social support, when immigrant couples are cut off from their extended family.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all Iranian couples have the same experience. Some immigrants, particularly women who were emotionally dependent on their families and accustomed to spending time with them, may be more negatively affected by the lack of emotional support from their extended family. They may feel loneliness and, in some cases, experience depression. Iranian women, in particular, tend to be more emotionally reliant on their families and seek advice and support from them to resolve marital conflicts. Therefore, the loss of emotional support from the extended family is viewed as challenging and poses a risk to their well-being, closeness, and the stability of their marriage. This can lead to tension among couples and, in some cases, result in the erosion of marital intimacy. The comments made by Mitra, a 40-year-old divorced woman who has been living in the UK for thirteen years, exemplify this perspective:

> I think that if I had stayed in Iran, I would not have gotten divorced. One benefit of Iranian culture, in my opinion, is that, when young couples have marital strife, relatives typically assist them in finding solutions. You don't have similar support over here [in the UK]. There isn't anybody to trust and talk to about problems, while if we had been in Iran, I could talk to my brother-in-law. I think he could stop him to cheat on me.

A 44-year-old woman (Parisa) who has been in the UK for four years and has been married for twenty-one years, proceeded to comment further:

> Our intimate relationship has worsened after migration, and we have tension at all times. Although I wasn't satisfied with my husband when we were in Iran, I was happy with my family and spent most of my time at my father's home, so tried to tolerate him and continue my life. I mean that at least in Iran there was a place in which I could be relaxed and there is somebody that I could talk to about my problems, and they would support me emotionally.

A 37-year-old divorced woman (Fatemeh) commented:

> I don't like it here because I have lost the emotional support of family and a rich social network. I don't it like here because I feel lonely and have become depressed.

The absence of extended family support can have a significant impact on Iranian couples who are unsuccessful in acculturating to the host country. In Iran, family and relatives play a crucial role in couples' lives, providing emotional and financial support. Studies have shown that the absence of this support system can lead to feelings of loneliness and a loss of social and emotional capital (Shirpak et al, 2011). When couples face challenges or conflicts, having the support of the extended family can serve as a safe space for discussing personal matters and seeking help, ultimately improving marital intimacy (Azadarmaki et al, 2000; Mohseni and Pourreza, 2003). The loss of this support network due to geographical relocation can contribute to a decline in marital intimacy.

6.9 Unchanging Couples' Intimate Relations

The third group in this study included six couples, primarily middle-class, upper-middle-class, and non-religious, who reported that their intimate relationships remained unchanged after immigration. While there is no single definitive explanation for this, one possible factor could be advanced acculturation, as indicated by their comments. Considering their sociocultural backgrounds and the nature of their marriages, we can gain some understanding of why their intimate relationships have remained stable. Both male and female partners in this group emphasised that their marriages were primarily founded on love and a deep understanding of each other. It can be said that they embraced the ideal of romantic marriage, which aligns with the concept of individualism. Love and commitment

are the driving forces that have sustained their marriages. A 46-year-old man named Zamyad provided an explanation in this regard:

> We are best and close friends rather than a married couple after 20 years of marriage. Nothing has changed in our lives after migration. We express our emotional feelings by saying 'I love you' and by sending lovely messages to each other when we are at work. We are close to each other and have good communication in both the home and host societies.

As can be seen, male and female partners in open and romantic marriages express their feelings, maintain love and bring into the marriage communication, honesty, integrity and trust. In addition, the couples in this group report that becoming familiar with Western culture was the source of these practices. They had experienced modernity before coming to the UK by travelling regularly to Western countries and through the Internet and satellite TV. As a 50-year-old businessman (Hamed) explained:

> We value the notion of 'openness' in our marital life. We are unrestrained, and honest with each other at all costs for a proper flowering of our personalities. I believe that the ability to face unpleasant or difficult truths requires special maturity and communication. Because we both believe that talk seems the solution to all problems.

These couples attribute their successful intimate relationships to their pre-migration experiences and values. They emphasised that their marriages were founded on the principles of partnership, equality, and mutual respect, rather than domination or submission. They believed that passion, along with esteem and affection, played a crucial role in the success of their marriages. They viewed love as a catalyst for a thriving and fulfilling life together, even after their migration to the UK. Their familiarity with Western culture and adoption of modern lifestyles in their home country (Iran) before migration played a significant role in shaping their intimate relationships in the new context. An upper-middle-class woman named Monir highlighted the importance of these factors in her explanation.

> We follow an equal gender role in marital life when we were living in Iran. Our lifestyle was modern before moving to London. Thus, we both were familiar with life UK, and we never experienced a cultural shock after immigration.

Another factor contributing to the unchanged intimate relations in this group was the absence of downward occupational mobility after migration. These couples established themselves in the upper-middle-class, middle-class mainstream, or middle-class ethnic-path modes of economic assimilation. They continued to pursue similar occupations in London to those they had in Iran, often starting their own businesses using the financial resources they brought from their home country. Some individuals even maintain businesses in both their home country and the UK, frequently travelling between the two.

Furthermore, the women in this group, like their partners, actively develop their own personal skills throughout their lives in both the home and host societies. Despite these individual pursuits, their intimate relations and love for each other have remained constant. In these marriages, there is a shared expectation that through love, the partners will grow together and support each other in their journey of self-fulfilment. This sentiment is echoed in the comments of a 37-year-old man named Reza, who emphasised the importance of love in their relationship:

> I have a high occupational status here and the aim of our immigration was my wife's study in the UK. She is a PhD student here. Our lifestyle was modern in Iran and British society wasn't a strange new society and we were familiar with British culture. Therefore, migration hasn't affected our marital relationships, especially our intimate relationships.

Marriage is often viewed as a pathway to personal fulfilment and growth. It recognises the importance of continuous self-development throughout one's life. However, this perspective does not advocate for pursuing individual independence at the expense of the partner. Instead, it emphasises the possibility of maintaining individual autonomy while fostering interdependence and deepening love between partners. In the context of this study, couples in the third group have managed to avoid tensions and challenges related to gender roles and individual interests. This can be attributed to the fact that the male partners in this group have embraced equal gender roles, aligning their perspectives with those of their spouses. Consequently, their pursuit of personal growth and self-interests did not clash with the goals of their relationship, enabling them to experience romantic love within their marriage without encountering significant difficulties or challenges in modern British society after migrating. This concept of interdependence, as proposed by Cancian (1986), emphasises

that individual fulfilment and growth can coexist harmoniously within the framework of a mutually supportive and egalitarian partnership.

6.10 Conclusion

The analysis and discussion conducted in this chapter have shed light on the transformation of marital intimacy among Iranian migrant couples after migration and their process of sociocultural and economic integration into British society. The findings have shown that marital intimacy has been influenced by exposure to Western culture, changes in gender ideologies, and the crisis in masculine identity experienced by male participants due to occupational downward status. These factors have posed challenges and difficulties in many couples' relationships, leading to a decline in marital intimacy.

Furthermore, the differences in couples' responses to changes in power distribution and gender ideologies have generated discussions regarding male-dominated marital relationships. Women's increased expectations for emotional support and attention have not been met by most Iranian men, leading to fragility in couples' intimate relations. This fragility coincides with liberation from external constraints and traditional norms, resulting in autonomous decision-making.

Additionally, the context of modern and equal relationships in the UK has influenced Iranian women to become more autonomous and independent individuals. They no longer sacrifice themselves unconditionally for men and have the freedom to easily end their marital relationships if they are dissatisfied. This shift in women's empowerment and autonomy aligns with Bauman's notion of the fragility of human bonds in modern society.

Moreover, gendered differences in occupational success indirectly affect marital intimacy among Iranian immigrant couples. The economic independence and authority of some women contrasts with men's experience of downward occupational mobility, leading to a crisis in traditional masculinity. This crisis manifests in stress, decreased self-confidence, depression, arguments, and a decline in warm and close relationships.

It is important to note that the direction and intensity of the transformation of marital intimacy varies among couples and depends on factors such as social and cultural background, family culture, and the quality of pre-migration intimate relationships. Familiarity with Western culture and lifestyle in Iran also plays a role in shaping couples' intimate relationships. Additionally, factors such as age at immigration, cultural

internalisation, and migration goals need further exploration to understand their impact on the transformation of marital relationships.

In this study, three groups of couples were identified, each exhibiting different forms of relationship development and transitions. While most couples experienced a gradual weakening of intimate relations, some couples displayed a growing intimacy and emotional support for each other in the diasporic society. The second group learned to openly express their feelings and love, while the third group remained stable in their marital intimacy during sociocultural and economic assimilation. These differences can be attributed to sociocultural, economic, and religious backgrounds, as well as variations in the direction and intensity of couples' integration into the new society.

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes of diasporic identity formation in diasporic contexts through the lens of the construction of gender roles, masculinities, and sexualities. The study has demonstrated how diasporic space constructs different types of individual relationships. The main study question in this thesis was: how does immigration affect Iranian immigrant couples' relationships? In exploring my participants' marital relationships, I focused on the five key aspects of gender roles, marital power, masculinity, sexuality, and intimate relationships. In order to reach an adequate answer, I considered five sub-questions:

- Does the distribution of power change among migrant partners after migration and, if so, how?
- What are the main factors contributing to the transformation of marital gender roles during the process of migration?
- How does migration affect experiences and perceptions of masculinity after migration?
- How do couples' understanding and practices of sexuality change during the process of migration?
- How does migrant couples' marital intimacy change during the process of economic and sociocultural integration into the host/British society?

My study on the sociocultural and economic integration of Iranian immigrant couples in British society aimed to explore the varying trajectories of adaptation and acculturation, particularly in relation to gender roles and intimate and sexual relationships. The findings of the study strongly supported the expectation that gender played a significant role in shaping the impact of immigration on marital relationships among Iranian immigrants. Additionally, the study hypothesised that the effects of sociocultural and economic incorporation on relationships would align with segmented assimilation theory, where social class positioning influences the trajectory of incorporation. The results revealed that social class indeed determined the influence of integration dimensions on changes in marital relationships among Iranian immigrants.

The study also acknowledged that gender roles, power dynamics, masculinity, and sexual and intimate relations vary across societies due to sociocultural, economic, and religious

structures. The degree of similarity or dissimilarity between immigrants' culture, language, and religion and those of the native-born population played a crucial role in shaping assimilation patterns. This, in turn, redefined and reshaped gender roles, power distribution, and masculine identity within migrant couples in the host society. Therefore, it was essential to consider cultural differences between the sending society (Iran) and the receiving society (the UK) in understanding the changes in gender roles, power dynamics, masculinity, and sexual and intimate relationships experienced by migrant couples. This result is consistent with the interactionist perspective's emphasis on culture as responsible for determining male and female social roles by dictating norms (Lindsey, 2011). Moreover, the findings are similar to the results of other studies that have explored migration from a place where the cultural standards for masculinities, femininities, and gender roles are different to those in the host country, which can cause conflict between spouses (Afrouz et al, 2022; Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; DeBiaggi, 2002; Farahani, 2012; Hyman, Guruge, and Mason, 2008; Richter-Devroe, 2008; Umubyeyi, 2019).

The study found that the dissimilarity between Iranian immigrants' culture, language, and religion and that of the native-born population contributed to significant negative changes in gender roles, power distribution, masculinity, and sexual and intimate relations among most Iranian immigrant couples in the diasporic context. This finding aligns with the interactionist perspective, which emphasises the role of culture in shaping male and female social roles and behaviours (Lindsey, 2011). It is also consistent with previous studies that have explored the challenges faced by couples when moving from a cultural context with different standards for gender roles and norms (Afrouz et al, 2022; Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; DeBiaggi, 2002; Farahani, 2012; Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008; Richter-Devroe, 2008; Umubyeyi, 2019; Baltas and Steptoe, 2000).

The transformation of gender relationships among Iranian immigrant heterosexual couples did not follow a uniform direction. The study highlighted the diverse responses and perspectives of couples regarding modern gender roles, sexual values, and practices after migration, which were influenced by sociocultural and educational backgrounds, religious beliefs, and pre-emigration sexual ideologies and practices. The direction and intensity of sociocultural and economic integration into the host country, whether similar or different for both partners, also influenced the quality of marital life. Some couples successfully adjusted to both cultures, while others struggled to adapt to the new sociocultural context. This is concurrent with some scholars' claims that moving to a new nation can affect marital

relationships either negatively or positively (Umubyeyi, 2019; Agbaw, 2009; Lee, 2015; Shirpak, Maticka-Tyndale and Chinichian, 2011; Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008; Guruge, 2007; Guruge et al, 2010). This is due to some couples being able to adjust to two cultures and their relationship remaining unchanged, while others may not adapt themselves to the new sociocultural situation in the same way (Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021; Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008).

In summary, the study identified three distinct groups of Iranian immigrant couples with varying experiences of immigration. The first group consisted of couples whose marital relationships underwent negative changes due to religious and patriarchal backgrounds that enforce strict gender roles and power imbalances. The second group included less religious couples from the middle class, who reported experiencing improved intimate and sexual relations through a transformation towards greater gender equality. The last group comprised predominantly upper-middle-class couples whose gender roles and sexual attitudes remained unchanged, as they already upheld gender equality and challenged traditional norms. This is concurrent with some scholars' claims that moving to a new nation can affect marital relationships either negatively or positively (Umubyeyi, 2019; Agbaw, 2009; Lee, 2015; Shirpak et al, 2011; Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008; Guruge, 2007; Guruge et al, 2010; Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021). In the remaining content of this chapter, I explain in detail the results of the transformation of Iranian immigrant couples' gender relationships in this regard.

Chapter 4 explored the changes in gender roles, including the division of household chores, child-rearing responsibilities and decision-making roles, and the understanding of masculinity among Iranian immigrant couples in the diasporic context. The findings revealed that these changes are influenced by factors such as social class, gender, and religious affiliation, as well as interactions with British society and exposure to Western culture.

Gender has been a significant analytical framework within migration studies, with scholars examining how gender intersects with migration, identity, and integration processes. Gender has been applied in assimilation theories and scholars such as Eleanore Koffman, Yeung, and Mu (2019) have examined the gendered experiences of immigrant communities in the UK. In this study, gender differences were revealed to play a significant role in the adaptation process, with women often adjusting more quickly to their new roles and

responsibilities than men. Immigrant men face challenges in adapting to new gender roles due to the loss of their previous socioeconomic positioning. The declining male breadwinner role and downward occupational experiences contribute to a crisis in male masculinity and increased marital tension. This is consistent with the results of most previous studies on men and women who immigrate to Europe or North America and Canada. These studies emphasise the huge changes in immigrant men's socioeconomic status under their new circumstances (e.g., Zhou et al, 2022; Naghdi, 2010; Richter-Devroe, 2008; Fisher, 2013; Farahani, 2012; Hyman, Guruge and Mason, 2008; Shirpak et al, 2011; Ahmadi, 2003; Darvishpour, 2002; Ghaffarian, 1998; Hojat et al, 1999; Moghissi, 1999; Predelli, 2004; Shahidian, 1999; Mahdi, 2001, 1999; Rezazadeh and Hoover, 2018). For example, Rapaport and Doucerain (2021) highlight that migration brings distinctive experiences and implications for men as well as women because the pattern of adaptation to new roles and responsibilities is different for women and men. Furthermore, Darvishpour (2002) claims that more Iranian women than men have better opportunities during sociocultural and economic assimilation since men encounter more difficulties with new gender roles due to the loss of their previous socioeconomic positioning.

The process of immigration also brings about changes in gender relations and power dynamics within families. Iranian women gain greater autonomy and self-empowerment by challenging traditional gender roles and questioning pre-emigration lifestyles. However, navigating equal gender roles and power dynamics within marital lives can be challenging, especially with tensions arising from the crisis in male masculinity. This finding is similar to the results of studies such as Afrouz et al (2022) and Rapaport and Doucerain (2021).

These challenges often occur because of men's resistance to equality in decision-making power, their reluctance to adopt additional household responsibilities, and their inability to adjust to new patterns of masculinity. As the study's findings have shown, since most Iranian male participants engage more in labour obtained through Iranian networks because of a lack of success in the British labour force, they have less contact with British people than their partners and are less familiar with British culture. Most Iranian men, more than their spouses, are interested in keeping their homeland's culture, which is based on unequal gender relations. As a result of the tensions these changes generate in immigrants' family lives, these couples' relations have become quite fragile. This finding is supported by other studies which acknowledge that the most significant difficulties faced by couples are connected to disparities in occupational status (Darvishpour, 2002; Shirpak et al, 2011;

Umubyeyi, 2019; Rapaport and Doucerain, 2021). Darvishpour (2002) also claims that more Iranian women than men have better opportunities during sociocultural and economic assimilation because men encounter more difficulties with new gender roles due to the loss of their previous socioeconomic positioning.

Therefore, in the diasporic space, the degree of tension and challenges among most Iranian couples depends on how immigrant men respond and react towards equal gender roles and power in their relationships. Husbands' different responses and reactions to these new egalitarian gender roles and the level of resistance they have to gender equality within the household are significant factors in increasing marital tension or improving the quality of marital life, as well as in the equal distribution of responsibility in household affairs, childcare and decision-making. This is consistent with the results of other studies that explain that if immigrant men attempt to preserve their dominance and power over women marital conflict will increase and, in some cases, lead to men becoming violent against their partners (Suare-Orozco, 2001; Shirpak et al 2011; Umubyeyi, 2019).

Chapter 5 highlighted the complex interplay between immigration, sociocultural integration, gender dynamics, and sexual relationships among Iranian immigrant couples in the diasporic context. The study examined the negotiation and reformulation of sociocultural and religious values of sexuality among Iranian immigrant couples. The findings indicate that understandings of sexual relations and expectations regarding sexual practices undergo changes, with variations based on gender and class position. Influenced by Western culture, women perceived sex not solely as a marital duty but also as a source of enjoyment and sensual satisfaction. Men, however, tended to view sex as fulfilling their physical needs, reflecting a continuation of the views they held before migrating. This finding is consistent with other studies that show that immigrants' perspectives on sexuality have been influenced by their exposure to Western culture (Abdolmanafi et al, 2018: Farahani, 2018; Shahidian, 1999; Ahmadi, 2003). These studies argue that modernity plays an important role in shifts in diasporic sexual customs, specifically among Muslim immigrants residing in Western nations. They investigate how sexual identity is effectively negotiated and constructed by accepting, rejecting, and transgressing modernity, allowing interlocutors to place themselves in various areas of sociocultural or religious affiliation (Abdolmanafi et al, 2018; Farahani, 2018; Shahidian, 1999; Ahmadi, 2003).

Different sources of information and acculturation regarding sexual attitudes and activities also exist for men and women. Women drew lessons from media and conversations with British colleagues, while men learned from fellow Iranians and from sexual encounters with foreign women. These different sources of information can lead to divergent expectations and desires, contributing to tension in sexual relationships.

The study has also highlighted how Iranian women are empowered in the diasporic context, as they gain knowledge, autonomy, and control over their own bodies and sexuality. They feel free to reject unwanted sexual advances, refuse undesired sexual practices, and openly discuss sexual issues. It is worth noting that immigrant Iranian women have different reactions to marital rape before and after migration. They may have tolerated sexual violence in Iran due to cultural norms, their limited power, and a lack of knowledge about marital rape. However, in the diaspora empowered women are more likely to challenge and reject sexual practices that do not align with their desires and expectations. This is similar to the results of some scholars (Tinarwo and Pasura, 2014; Freedman and D'Emilio, 2005; Wagner, 2009) who acknowledge that immigrant women challenge and redefine sexual identities because of their specific economic and social status in the diasporic society. The diasporic space provides opportunities for married Iranian men to engage in sexual relationships outside of marriage, as there is less social and extended family control. Similarly, Shahidian (1999) acknowledges that the diasporic space provides opportunities for Iranian married men to become involved in sexual relationships outside of marriage because of a reduction in social and extended family control.

Social class differences also play a role in sexual acculturation. Middle-class immigrant couples, who previously adhered to unequal gender relations, experience more significant changes in their sexual lives after migrating when compared to couples from upper-middle-class backgrounds who were already exposed to Western sexual practices. This highlights the influence of class identity in shaping immigrants' reformulation of gender relations and sexual perceptions in the diasporic space. This is similar to Farahani's (2018) and Shahidian's (1999) studies, which both show that gender and class identity both have an impact on how immigrants reform their gender relations and sexual perceptions and practices after immigration. They illustrate how other aspects of social life, such as nationality, ethnicity, class, ethnicity, nationality, and political orientation, play a role in the construction of new concepts and practices of sexuality in the diasporic space.

The main argument of this study is that religious attachments have a significant role in shaping and transforming sexual attitudes, behaviours, and norms among Iranian immigrant couples. Regardless of variations in social class and family culture, religious beliefs have a profound influence on couples' sexual relations, surpassing the impact of social class. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the conservative influence of religion in sexual relationships (Ahmed, 1992; Bilgin, 2004; Bouhdiba, 1998; Ghoussoub and Sinclair-Webb, 2000; Khosravi, 2009; Najmabadi, 2000, 2005; Farahani, 2018). Moreover, Farahani (2012) suggests that religious ideologies, particularly Islamic notions of sexuality and masculinity, are closely intertwined and should be considered when examining gender relations.

In short, the study has revealed that Iranian immigrant couples negotiate and redefine their sexual identities and practices in the diasporic context. Women challenge traditional sexual masculinity, reject unwanted practices, and gain autonomy and control over their own bodies and desires. Men's experiences in sexuality are influenced by their exposure to different sources of acculturation. Social class and religious affiliation also play a role in shaping the extent of changes in sex lives after migration. The diasporic space provides opportunities for immigrants to reformulate their sexual practices based on modernity and individual agency, contributing to shifts in sexual customs within the Iranian diaspora.

Chapter 6 of this study concentrated on the transformation of marital intimacy among Iranian immigrant couples and addressed the final research question: how do migrant couples' intimate relations change during the process of economic and sociocultural integration into the host/British society? The findings of this chapter illustrate that intimate relations among a significant number of interviewed Iranian immigrant couples have become weakened, unstable, and fragile during the acculturation process. This aligns with Reibstein's (1997) study on the fluctuating nature of close relationships. Additionally, scholars such as Bauman (2003), Plummer (2003), Illouz (2007, 2012), Hochschild (1983), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995), McNair (1996), and Giddens (1992) argue that immigration serves as a transitional phase that challenges the intimate relationships of immigrant couples in modern society. They extensively document the impact of transitioning from a premodern to modern society on relationships.

The differences in couples' responses to changes in power distribution and gender ideologies have generated discussions regarding male-dominated marital relationships. The study has

revealed that female participants' perceptions and expectations of intimacy have changed through gender-specific developments during their sociocultural integration into the new society. This heightened understanding of different types of intimacy encourages women to renegotiate their pre-emigration intimate relations. However, Iranian men, for the most part, have not learned how to provide the emotional support and attention desired by their wives, leading to continuous arguments, poor communication, and a decline in marital intimacy. Therefore, women's increased expectations for emotional support and attention have not been met by most Iranian men, leading to fragility in couples' intimate relations. This fragility coincides with the liberation from external constraints and traditional norms, resulting in autonomous decision-making and the establishment of independent rules. This aligns with Chavez's (2017) study, which states that there is an urgent need to highlight immigrant women's experiences to gain a more nuanced understanding of immigrants' cultural identities and the influence of gender in their intimate relationships.

Moreover, the transformation of religious affiliations following migration becomes a significant factor that can create conflict and tension among couples originating from a religious and traditional country who have resettled in a more modern society. When one partner maintains their previous religious beliefs while the other undergoes a shift in affiliation strain and distance between them often increases, thereby affecting the quality of their intimate relationship. This is consistent with Kitiarsa's (2008) study on the changing dynamics of intimate relationships. Kitiarsa states that a deeper insight into the intersections between culture, religion, and economic conditions is essential to understanding changing relationship dynamics. Bloch (2017) similarly examines the experiences of Orthodox Jewish couples in Israel, with a special focus on the influence of their religious beliefs and practices on intimate relationships.

Furthermore, the growing socio-economic independence and authority of immigrant women coincides with men's experience of job fluctuations, downward occupational mobility, and the loss of their traditional breadwinner role. This crisis in men's traditional sense of masculinity results in stress, reduced self-confidence, depression, arguments, and the decline of close and warm relationships. This decline in intimate relations reflects the loss of security and stable cultural foundations regarding cultural norms, expectations, gender relations, and the understanding and practice of masculinity. Moreover, the results show that geographic distance and long-term separation further contribute to the deterioration of intimate relations,

particularly when one partner, typically the man, migrates early and encounters new options that may influence values, attitudes, expectations, and behaviours.

These findings align with research conducted by Chavez (2017), Kitiarsa (2008), and Bloch (2017), which highlights the complex ways in which cultural, religious, and economic factors affect the dynamics of intimate relationships within specific communities. These studies highlight the significance of cultural and social contexts in facilitating the formation of relationships and the various ways individuals navigate between conflicting norms and expectations. By offering a closer view of individual experiences within specific communities, these studies enrich the knowledge of intimate relationships and show how cultural norms and expectations shape these dynamics. In addition, Deborah Boehm's (2012) work *Intimate Migrations* offers a valuable perspective on the experiences of immigrant families and the role of intimate relationships in the migration process. Boehm argues that intimate relationships are central to how families navigate the challenges and opportunities of migration and that these relationships are shaped by a variety of factors, including gender, race, class, and legal status.

By incorporating Boehm's insights with research conducted by Chavez, Kitiarsa, and Bloch, I have explored how the experiences of Iranian immigrants and their families shaped different intimate relationships in the diasporic context, and how these relationships are influenced by factors such as gender, class, and religious attachments. It is also important to highlight the complex ways in which cultural, religious, and economic factors affect the dynamics of intimate relationships within British society.

However, it is important to acknowledge two caveats in these findings. Firstly, due to significant sociocultural norms and legal differences between the home and host societies, migration and the processes of gender and sexual acculturation introduce new expectations and practices into the marital lives of most Iranian immigrant couples. These differences often lead to arguments as couples strive to reconcile their old beliefs with the new ones presented by Western culture, resulting in separations and divorces. While many Iranian immigrant women view these transformations positively, empowering their sense of autonomy and self-empowerment, they also generate tension and frustration for male partners, impacting self-understanding and the couple's relationship dynamics. This finding highlights that immigrant resettlement involves more painful frustration and anxiety for men than women in this important dimension of human experience. However, the approaches of

Iranian immigrant couples towards gender relations (equal or unequal), their marital history in Iran, and their response to new equal roles and power dynamics after migration are significant factors that influence these changes. Therefore, the impact of immigration on Iranian couples' marital relationships varies based on the trajectories of gender and sexual acculturation and how immigrants navigate and resolve these challenges during their settlement in British society.

Secondly, even though Iranian women were shown to renegotiate and challenge their pre-emigration sexual relations and strived towards mutual sexual pleasure and satisfaction, their sexual orientation remained predominantly heterosexual. The majority of Iranian female participants still perceived heterosexual relationships as natural, normal, and socially acceptable, while viewing homosexuality with stigma as a deviation from societal norms in both the home and host societies. Therefore, although these women acknowledged that cultural norms, religious rules, and the patriarchal system, rather than nature itself, contribute to gendered differences in sexual attitudes and practices across different ages and social classes, they did not critically question or challenge the nature of heterosexual relationships from a feminist perspective. They did not perceive these relationships, in feminist fashion, as central to the maintenance of patriarchal domination and women's oppression.

7.1 Contributions of the Study

Immigration, as a global social phenomenon, has significant implications for gender relations within couples. To gain a better understanding of the experiences of couples after immigration, it is crucial to examine the diverse characteristics of the migration process that influence marital relationships. While some research exists on the impact of international migration on the civic, political, and sociocultural orientations and practices of Iranian migrants in countries such as the US and Canada, there has been limited investigation into the effects of various aspects of immigrant couples' integration into the host society on their marital dynamics, gender roles, power dynamics, masculinity, and intimate and sexual relationships, especially among Iranian immigrants in the UK. With the growing number of Iranians in the UK, it is essential to study the transformation of marital roles and relations within this group during their adaptation process in the UK. Thus, this study fills a significant gap in sociological knowledge by exploring an important yet under-investigated aspect of Iranian immigrants' integration into British society.

The findings of this study contribute to the convergence of research on migration and intimate relationships, both within the specific subject matter and in the interpretation of the results. Unlike many previous studies that have predominantly focused on either male or female migrants, this study centres on Iranian migrant married couples. By expanding the scope beyond previous research, the study has advanced our understanding of gender roles, power dynamics, masculinity, and sexual and intimate interactions within Iranian migrant married couples in a diasporic context. Additionally, by examining the role of sociocultural differences in shaping various forms of masculinities and sexual behaviours, this study addresses gaps in the existing literature on gender, sexuality, and masculinity within diasporic communities. Through an exploration of sexuality as a gendered, historicised, and culturally constructed phenomenon, and by analysing the experiences of first-generation Iranian men and women migrants residing in London, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the experiences of Middle Eastern, Muslim, migrant, and Iranian married couples in Western and British society. Consequently, this study challenges monolithic and stereotypical portrayals of Muslim, immigrant, and Iranian marital relationships in diasporic contexts, offering a valuable contribution to the literature on gender and migration.

Furthermore, by addressing the often-overlooked challenges related to sexuality and intimacy during the process of immigrant assimilation, this study seeks to contribute to knowledge by questioning prevailing assimilation theories. The study's findings provide a deeper comprehension of the processes of diasporic identity formation within a distinct sociocultural context, shedding light on the construction of gender ideologies, femininity, masculinity, and sexuality. As a result, the study enriches the literature on immigration and couple relationships. Importantly, the knowledge generated by this study may also inform policymakers, enabling them to gain a better and more profound understanding of the challenges and needs faced by Iranian migrants living in the UK.

7.2 Limitations of the Study

Due to the limited scope of this study, it only delved into a specific range of issues and was confined to a relatively short timeframe in the experiences of newly arrived individuals. Furthermore, the focus was exclusively on first-generation immigrant heterosexual couples who were married in Iran and settled in London, leaving other avenues of research on the sexual acculturation of diverse ethnic groups unexplored. Given the limited attention this aspect of newcomers' experiences has received from immigration scholars, further

exploration of the topics investigated in this study would undoubtedly contribute to the establishment of a more comprehensive understanding of this important dimension of immigrants' adaptation to the host society and the challenges it entails. Additionally, there are other aspects related to newcomers' sexual acculturation that were not addressed in this project, but which warrant investigation. There are several promising directions that future research could take, involving either single case studies or, preferably, comparative analyses across groups or countries. Firstly, future research may examine the challenges faced by immigrant men and women who bring their spouses from their home country compared to those who enter into marriages with individuals from the host society. Secondly, it may investigate the sexual orientations and practices of second-generation (native-born) children of immigrants. Thirdly, a comparative study could be conducted on the forms and content of sexual acculturation among second-generation immigrants following either mainstream or ethnic-adhesive trajectories, as well as between those who maintain or sever transnational connections with their home country. Fourthly, future research may explore the impact of immigration on immigrants' perceptions of and attitudes towards homosexual and transgender individuals. Finally, future studies may examine how the sexual customs from immigrants' home countries, particularly those who have integrated or intermarried, influence the mainstream host culture.

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Appendix A – Iranian Diaspora in the UK Demographics

Table 4 - Iran-born Population in the UK, Excluding Residents in Communal Establishments

Years	Total Numbers		Male		Female	
	Estimate	CI* +/-	Estimate	CI+/-	Estimate	CI+/-
March 2000 to February 2001	46000	9	23000	7	22000	6
March 2001 to February 2002	46000	9	26000	6	20000	6
March 2002 to February 2003	53000	9	30000	7	23000	6
2003-2004	54000	9	33000	7	21000	6
2004	62000	10	38000	8	24000	6
2005	53000	9	35000	7	19000	5
2006	61000	10	37000	8	24000	6
2007	59000	10	34000	8	25000	7
January 2008 to December 2008	60000	10	36000	8	24000	6
2009	61000	11	36000	8	25000	7
2010	70000	11	38000	8	32000	8
2011	83000	13	49000	10	34000	8
2012	74000	12	42000	9	32000	8
2013	74000	12	44000	9	30000	8
2014	80000	13	46000	10	34000	8
2015	86000	13	53000	10	34000	8

*CI+/- is the upper (+) and lower (-) 95% confidence limits.

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), ONS

Table 5 - Non-British Iran-born Population in the UK, Excluding Residents in Communal Establishments

Years	Total Numbers		Male		Female	
	Estimate	CI* +/-	Estimate	CI+/-	Estimate	CI+/-

2000-2001	26000	7	16000	5	10000	4
2001-2002	29000	7	16000	5	13000	5
2011	44000	9	26000	7	18000	6
2015	44000	10	28000	8	16000	6

*Cl+/- is the upper (+) and lower (-) 95% confidence limits.

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), ONS

Table 6 - Iran-born Population in the UK, Excluding Residents in Communal Establishments, by Nationality

Years	British National		Nationals of Country of Birth		Other Nationality	
	Estimate	Cl* +/-	Estimate	Cl+/-	Estimate	Cl+/-
2000-2001	20000	6	23000	7	2000	2
2001-2002	16000	5	28000	7	2000	2
2011	37000	8	42000	9	4000	3
2015	41000	9	43000	9	3000	2

*Cl+/- is the upper (+) and lower (-) 95% confidence limits.

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), ONS

Table 7 - Non-British Population in the UK, Excluding some Residents in Communal Establishments, by Country of Birth

Years	Born in UK		Born in Country of Birth		Other Country of Birth	
	Estimate	CI* +/-	Estimate	CI+/-	Estimate	CI+/-
2000-2001	c	c	23000	7	.	.
2001-2002	1000	1	28000	7	c	c
2011	2000	2	42000	9	1000	1
2015	1000	1	43000	9	0~**	1

*CI+/- is the upper (+) and lower (-) 95% confidence limits. **0~ = Rounded to Zero

Source: Annual Population Survey (APS), ONS

Table 8 - Nationalities with Highest Number of Asylum Applications, UK, Year Ending June 2016

Nationality	Asylum application	Change since last year	Proportion granted at initial decision
Iran	5,466	+2920	43%
Pakistan	3,980	+648	16%
Iraq	3,948	+2756	13%
Afghanistan	3,460	+1520	35%
Eritrea	2,818	-805	48%

Source: Home Office

Table 9 - Distribution of Iran-born Migrants in the UK

UK	**Total Numbers**	
Region	**1991**	**2001**
Whole of Britain	32,158	42,377
East Midlands	775	1,152
East of England	1,800	2,420
London	16,851	20,401
North East	748	1,529
North West	2,304	3,466
Scotland	911	1,588
South East	4,285	5,302
South West	1,437	1,959
Wales	652	579
West Midlands	1,069	1,890
Yorks & Humber	1,326	2,091

Source: BBC NEWS

Table 10 - Most Popular Areas Settled by Iranian Immigrants in London

		Total Numbers			As % of Area's Total Population		
Area	**Region**	**1991**	**2001**	**+/- %**	**1991**	**2001**	**+/- %**
Regent's Park	London	1,008	892	-11.51	1.25	1.23	-0.02
Acton	London	642	839	30.69	1.05	1.24	0.19
Finchley	London	440	837	90.23	0.75	1.15	0.40
Kensington	London	829	725	-12.55	1.60	1.15	-0.45
Golders Green	London	567	680	19.93	1.34	1.41	0.07
Colindale	London	430	643	49.53	0.73	1.09	0.36
Ealing Broadway	London	717	631	-11.99	1.47	1.18	-0.29
Hyde Park	London	839	584	-30.39	1.38	0.88	-0.50
Hammersmith	London	515	545	5.83	0.86	0.82	-0.04
Chelsea	London	540	462	-14.44	1.05	0.75	-0.30

Source: BBC NEWS (2001)

Appendix B - Interview Questionnaire

1. Sociodemographic information

-Gender

-Age

-Level of Education

-Residence in Iran (urban, rural)

-Length of stay in London

-Residence area in London (neighbourhood)

-Type (arranged, love-motivated) and length of marriage

-Number and sex of children

-Previous and present jobs (in Iran and UK)

-Emigration motivation (economic, political, cultural)

2. Socialization in Iran (acculturation through home, school, and media)

-What kind of family did you have in Iran and what kind do you have now in the UK (traditional or modern, religious or non-religious, patriarchal or matriarchal, nuclear or extended, close or distant)?

-Tell me about gender relations or gender roles within your family in Iran. For example, who had a strong role in your (parental) family and who controlled resources? Who made the important decisions for the family—mother, father, or both? Who was responsible for the house, the cooking, the shopping, and the care of children? For earning an income? Did your parents divide housework and childcare based on traditional gender roles? Had they liberal or traditional attitudes towards sex roles? Did they talk about these matters with the children? If so, what did they teach you (different for boys and girls?)

-Did your parents restrict certain activities of their children because of their sex? (For example, restriction on wearing certain clothing, on choosing friends, on watching TV program me, on reading books, on using the Internet)?

-Did your parents uphold the values of religion and patriotism in your upbringing?

- Have you experienced differential attitudes and behaviour from your parents towards sons and daughters? If so, tell me about it. How did your parents justify it?

-What kind of TV programmes could children in your family watch? How about other kinds of media for example, radio, newspapers, magazines…?

-Have these programmes inculcated any ideas in your mind? If so, what ideas? Did you discuss it with your school friends?

-Tell me about your school experience: for example, the kind of school, your teachers, content of your books, your friends and the impact of them on shaping your personality.

-Did your teachers and the rules of school emphasize traditional gender roles? Tell me about it. Did you find their justification of different roles for/expectations of boys and girls convincing? Did you talk about it with your school friends?

-Did your teachers treat boys and girls differently? If so, how did they justify it? Did you find this justification convincing? Did you talk about it with your school friends?

-Do you think your parents and school teachers provided you with similar experiences and opportunities to those available to the other gender? Did you ever discuss gender roles with your parents? Teachers? School friends? Did your views differ from theirs and, if so, how?

3. Immigrants' integration into the host society

-How long have you lived in London? In which part of London do you reside? Why did you choose this part of London? Who helped you to find your home?

-How/why did you decide to settle in London?

-Are your neighbors Iranian or British or another nationality? How are your relations with them? Do you know their names? Do you say 'hello' to each other on the street? Would you feel comfortable calling upon them should something bad happen to you/your family? Have you ever had any problems/conflict with them?

-Tell me about your present job/your workplace: What is the nationality of your co-workers? What are your relations with them (friendly, distant, ____)? Do you like your job/what do you like about it? Is there anything you don't like about your job? Your workplace? Your co-workers? Is the job you have now of similar level or status as the one you had in Iran? Do you have prospects of promotion? Would you consider changing employment? If so, why?

-For respondents who own a small business: are your employees Iranian? British? Other nationalities? Are your suppliers Iranian? British? Other nationalities? And your customers?

-Tell me about your spouse's job: what does he/she do; nationality of his/her co-workers, relations at work?

-How is your English (fluent, so-so, insufficient, ___)? And your partner's? If your English is insufficient, are you doing anything to improve it? If not, why not?

-When you find yourself in British public places (shops, offices, the workplace, public transportation), are you treated in a friendly manner? Have you ever experienced prejudice/discrimination on the part of the British? Anybody else? If so, in what circumstances/what happened? What was your reaction? Did you talk about it with your (Iranian) friends? Did they have a similar experience?

-What would you say you like most about Britain? About British people? And what do you like the least?

-Tell me about your social relations with Iranians, Britons, and other nationalities. For example, who do you usually spend your free time with? Do your relations with Iranians differ from those with Britons/members of other nationalities in London? If so, how? Has the composition (Iranians, Britons) of your social relations changed since you settled in London? If so, how and under what influence?

-Do you belong to any English clubs or associations? Iranian organizations? Do you celebrate English/British national holidays? And Iranian ones? Do you follow religious events in London such as "Ashoura"? Are you interested in British politics? And Iranian?

-Do you watch T.V. news and read newspapers? If so, British? Iranian (Farsi)? Both? Have your practices of/interests in the above changed in any way since you settled in London? If so, how and under what influence?

-What language do you speak at home? At your workplace? With your friends? Has your use of language in these settings changed since you've come to London?

-Do you cook Iranian and traditional foods at home? Which restaurants and supermarket do you usually go to? Iranian? British? Other? Is it your decision or your partner's or both? Have your culinary tastes/preferences changed in any way since you have settled in London? If so, how and under what influence? Do you plan/ would you like to return to Iran? If so, are these concrete plans or just a hope for the future? If not, why not?

-Do you think your general orientations (political, religious, values/aspirations) and lifestyle have changed in any way since you have come to London? If so, which orientations and behaviour, specifically how they changed, and under what/whose influence?

-Has your husband/wife also changed? If so, in what way? Have the direction/'contents' of these changes been similar for you and your partner? If your viewpoints/opinions now differ in new ways in comparison with how it was in Iran, what are these differences, do they cause problems/tensions between you, and how do you try to resolve them?

-How do you identify yourself: Iranian? Iranian-British? British-Iranian? _____? When you think of 'home,' where is it: Iran? Britain? London? Both?

-What, in your opinion, is the attitude/ behaviour of the Iranian government towards Iranian immigrants' involvement in their home country? For example, visits to Iran, management of the household at home, investment in Iran, voting at home?

4. Immigrants' involvement (economic, social, political cultural) in the home country

-Tell me about your contacts with your family, friends, and acquaintance in Iran? Do you connect with the phone or the Internet or in other ways? How often? How regularly? Do you send money or other things? Why? How often do you travel to Iran? Why?

-For respondents who visit Iran: When you visit Iran, do your family members/friends tell you that you have changed in any way? If so, what do they mean (changed in what way)? Do they mean it as a compliment or as a criticism? How important is it to you what your family members/friends in Iran think about you?

-Have you invested in Iran? Do you have business dealings with your homeland and, if so, what kind?

-Do you participate in any political activities or events in Iran? Do you follow political news in Iran?

5. Immigrants' marital relations

-How, in your opinion, do traditional/patriarchal and modern gender roles differ from each other? Tell me how you'd define 'traditional' and 'modern' ones.

-How would you define your relations with your husband/wife: traditional? modern? mixed? Please explain and give examples.

-Who in your household is responsible for housework, childcare, cooking, earning a living? Who makes important decisions in the family regarding finances, vacation plans, children's education, _____?

- Who has the final say in a number of decisions within the marriage, including selecting a car, home or apartment, vacation, doctor, husband's job, and whether or not the wife should work?

-Has this division of responsibilities between you and your wife/husband changed in any way since you have come to the UK and, if so, how and what influence? Do you discuss these matters with your partner? Is it causing any problems/tensions between you?

-Has your employment situation (positions/status) changed after coming here? I mean, after emigration, women work outside of the home and husbands don't have any job or have a lower position compared to their wife and women's income plays a key role in the family.

- How do you define marital intimacy and can you talk about your intimate relationships and tell about the changes in your intimate conceptions, expectations and practices?

-If you don't mind, tell me how/from whom you would you have gained information about sex/sexual relations for the first time? Did your mother/father talk to you about these matters? Your teacher(s) at school? Did you talk about it with your school/work friends in Iran?

-If you don't mind talking about it, do you think the main/only natural function of sexual relations for women is to have children? Or is it also to express/experience love, to enjoy it as a pleasure? Have your views in this matter changed in any ways since you have come to the UK and, if so, how and under what influence? Have your wife's/husband's views also changed? If your attitudes differ, do you talk about it? Is it causing problems/tensions between you?

-How do think about premarital and extramarital sex? What about homosexual, gay and lesbian? Do you know Iranian people who have changed their sexual behaviour after coming to London? Have your views in these matters changed since you have come to the UK and, if so, how and under what influence? Do you talk about these issues with your (Iranian, British, ___) friends?

-If your views, expectations and/or behaviour regarding sexual matters have changed since you have come to the UK and, specifically, if they became more liberal/open, has it impacted in any way –positive? negative? on your marital relations? Please explain what and how.

Appendix C – Informed Consent Document

Title of project/investigation: The Impact of Migration on Marital Relationships (Gender Roles, Marital Power, Sexual and Intimate Relations) among Iranian Couples in London

Name: Parvaneh Astinfeshan

Organisation: University of Essex

I give consent to take part in the project in the titled 'The Impact of Emigration on Marital Relationships among Iranian Couples in London'. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed and recorded (audio).

I understand that:

1. All data will be held securely. Some of the information that I give you may be used in reports and articles, but my identity will remain anonymous (my name will not be given).
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time during the interview without prejudice and without providing a reason.

Signature……Date……

(Participant)

Signed……Date……

(Researcher)

Appendix D - Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants

University of Essex

This application form should be completed for any research involving human participants conducted in or by the University. 'Human participants' are defined as including living human beings, human beings who have recently died (cadavers, human remains and body parts), embryos and foetuses, human tissue and bodily fluids, and human data and records (such as, but not restricted to medical, genetic, financial, personnel, criminal or administrative records and test results including scholastic achievements). Research should not commence until written approval has been received (from Departmental Research Director, Faculty Ethics Committee (FEC) or the University's Ethics Committee). This should be borne in mind when setting a start date for the project.

Applications should be made on this form, and submitted electronically, to your Departmental Research Director. A signed copy of the form should also be submitted. Applications will be assessed by the Research Director in the first instance, and may then passed to the FEC, and then to the University's Ethics Committee. A copy of your research proposal and any necessary supporting documentation (e.g. consent form, recruiting materials, etc) should also be attached to this form.

A full copy of the signed application will be retained by the department/school for 6 years following completion of the project. The signed application form cover sheet (two pages) will be sent to the Research Governance and Planning Manager in the REO as Secretary of the University's Ethics Committee.

1. Title of project:

   The Impact of Emigration on Marital Relationships among Iranian Immigrant Couple in London

2. The title of your project will be published in the minutes of the University Ethics Committee. If you object, then a reference number will be used in place of the title. Do you object to the title of your project being published? Yes ☐ / No ☒

3. This Project is: ☐ Staff Research Project ☒ Student Project

4. Principal Investigator(s) (students should also include the name of their supervisor):

Name:	Department:
Parvaneh Astinfeshan	Department of Sociology
Professor Ewa Morawska	Department of Sociology

5.	**Proposed start date**: Field work to begin in November 2013
6.	**Probable duration**: 4-6 months

7. Will this project be externally funded? Yes ☐ / No ☒

If Yes,

8.	What is the source of the funding?

9.If external approval for this research has been given, then only this cover sheet needs to be submitted

External ethics approval obtained (attach evidence of approval) Yes ☐ / No ☐

Declaration of Principal Investigator:

The information contained in this application, including any accompanying information, is, to the best of my knowledge, complete and correct. I/we have read the University's *Guidelines for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants* and accept responsibility for the conduct of the procedures set out in this application in accordance with the guidelines, the University's *Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice* and any other conditions laid down by the University's Ethics Committee. I/we have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my/our obligations and the rights of the participants.

Signature(s):

.....……
…

Name(s) in block capitals: PARVANEH ASTINFESHAN

Date: 25/10/2013

Supervisor's recommendation (Student Projects only):

I have read and approved both the research proposal and this application.

Supervisor'signature:

..…….……

Outcome:

The Departmental Director of Research (DoR) has reviewed this project and considers the methodological/technical aspects of the proposal to be appropriate to the tasks proposed.

The DoR considers that the investigator(s) has/have the necessary qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in this application, and to deal with any emergencies and contingencies that may arise.

This application falls under Annex B and is approved on behalf of the FEC

☐

This application is referred to the FEC because it does not fall under Annex B

☐

This application is referred to the FEC because it requires independent scrutiny

☐

Signature(s):

.....……..……
.

Name(s) in block capitals:

.....…….……

Department:

……..……
.

Date:

……
…

The application has been approved by the FEC

☐

The application has not been approved by the FEC

☐

The application is referred to the University Ethics Committee

☐

Signature(s):

.....……
…

Name(s) in block capitals:

….....…….

Faculty:

……...……
…

Date:

……
…

Details of the Project

1.	**Brief outline of project** (This should include the purpose or objectives of the research, brief justification, and a summary of methods. It should be approx. 150 words in everyday language that is free from jargon).
	Although the available studies of immigrant families acknowledge marital tensions, most of them focus on the impact of these problems on the affected individuals' well-being and on parenting and parent-child relations, rather than investigating the triggering mechanisms and functioning of these tensions in the framework of immigrants' assimilation into the host society. Outstandingly missing here are studies of these phenomena among the Iranian immigrants in Europe and, especially in the United Kingdom. This research aims to examine the modes of immigrants' adaptation into the host, British society, focusing specifically on the effects of their acculturation. The factors influencing the forms and 'contents' of these couple relationships to be considered in the study. The empirical part of the study consists of primary data including semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Iranian immigrant couples who living in London.

Participant Details

2. Will the research involve human participants? (Indicate as appropriate)

Yes ☒ No ☐

3.	Who are they and how will they be recruited? (If any recruiting materials are to be used, e.g. advertisement or letter of invitation, please provide copies).
	Individual interviews: The participants are Iranian immigrants couples who reside in London The study sample will consists of a total of 50-60 Iranian immigrants, aging from 25-50 who will be residents of London and are married, are divorced, and remarried. Couples must be married in Iran and must be divorced in UK. Also the period of informants' residing in London must be at least 2 years.

Since, I am from Iran and I have been in London for 1 year, I am familiar with the Iranian society and I have many Iranian friends who know and connect with some Iranian families. Thus, I will apply snowballing method to find participants for interview. See Project Information sheet attached.
Will participants be paid or reimbursed? Yes. I think to encourage my participants, I need to pay money or provide some gifts.

4. Could participants be considered?

   (a) To be vulnerable (e.g. children, mentally-ill)? Yes ☐/ No ☒

   (b) To feel obliged to take part in the research? Yes ☐/ No ☒

If the answer to either of these is yes, please explain how the participants could be considered vulnerable and why vulnerable participants are necessary for the research. N/A

Informed Consent

5. Will the participant's consent be obtained for involvement in the research orally or in writing? (If in writing, please attach an example of written consent for approval):

   Yes ☒ No ☐

How will consent be obtained and recorded? If consent is not possible, explain why. Prior information on the research will be given in writing, explaining the nature, and purpose of the interviews. The consent form will be provided to all participants before the interviews. The participants will be asked to provide written consent. The consent form will be signed by the participants indicating that they are giving their informed consent to participate in the research. They will be provided with a copy of the written consent, for their records. I will ensure that the participants are aware of potential risks and benefits, if any; associated with their involvement, by discussing any concerns the respondents may have about particular issues or

case studies. I will ensure that all participants are aware that their participation is entirely voluntary, and they are free to withdraw at any time participants have a right to withdraw at any time without prejudice and without providing a reason. If someone decides that they no longer wish to participate in the project, then this will be respected.

See consent form attached.

Please attach a participant information sheet where appropriate.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

6. If the research generates personal data, describe the arrangements for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality or the reasons for not doing so.

I will ensure confidentiality/anonymity in the storage, transmission and sharing of the data collected. The names or other secret information about the individual participants will not be included unless special permissions are obtained.

For example, participants' identity will be protected by using pseudonyms instead of their real names in the project. Each participant will be informed that they will have the right to withdraw easily from the interviews and discussions whenever and for whatever reason without explanation or consequences.

The procedures to safeguard anonymity will be explained carefully to participants and I will also explain that the use of the data will be for research purposes.

I will also work within the boundaries of the Data Protection Act (1998), University of Essex's ethical guidelines and British Sociological Association (BSA) guidelines.

Data Access, Storage and Security

7. Describe the arrangements for storing and maintaining the security of any personal data collected as part of the project. Please provide details of those who will have access to the data.

All personal data collected for the project will be digitally recorded. Recordings will be stored on password-protected University-provided PCs. This will be accessible only to my supervisor and me.

All transcriptions will take place in the UK. The transcribed data will be held securely on a password protected university computer server which is regularly backed up. The data will also be held on encrypted memory USB devices.

Personal information such as that contained in written consent forms and the anonymisation key will be held securely in a locked filling cabinet, separate from the data files.

It is a requirement of the Data Protection Act 1998 to ensure individuals are aware of how information about them will be managed. Please tick the box to confirm that participants will be informed of the data access, storage and security arrangements described above. If relevant, it is appropriate for this to be done via the participant information sheet ☒

Further guidance about the collection of personal data for research purposes and compliance with the Data Protection Act can be accessed at the following we blink. Please tick the box to confirm that you have read this guidance (http://www.essex.ac.uk/records_management/policies/data_protection_and_research.aspx) ☒

Risk and Risk Management

8. Are there any potential risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants or subjects associated with the proposed research?

   Yes ☐ No ☒

   If Yes,

Please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimise the risks:
Risks to the respondents: The anonymity of the interviewees will protect them from any risk.

9. Are there any potential risks to researchers as a consequence of undertaking this proposal that are greater than those encountered in normal day-to-day life?

Yes ☒ No ☐

If Yes,

Please provide full details and explain what risk management procedures will be put in place to minimize the risks:
Risks to the interviewer: There is a risk of conducting interviews in an unfamiliar place and environment. However, this risk will be managed through taking into consideration the following: •The interviews will occur in the public location and during the day time. • I will tell to my husband the location of the interview and maybe he would be around the place of interview. •I will have my mobile phone with me (in silent mode).

10. Will the research involve individuals below the age of 18 or individuals of 18 years and over with a limited capacity to give informed consent?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, a criminal records disclosure (CRB check) within the last three years is required.

Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

Date of disclosure:
Type of disclosure:
Organisation that requested disclosure:

11. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of the Faculty and/or University Ethics Committees

None