



LUND
UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN GLOBAL STUDIES

Iranian Migration to Sweden:
Identity-Processes and Integration
Strategies Among Iranian Immigrant Men
and Women

Author: Tashina Alavi
Supervisor: Dr. Elsa Coimbra
Spring 2014

Abstract

Previous research has showed that Iranian immigrant women integrate easier and have a more positive attitude towards the Swedish society than Iranian men when they resettle here. In light of this, I employ a gender and social identity approach with the intent to understand the integration differences between Iranian immigrant men and women from Iran who live in Sweden. Gender and social identity theories have been used to understand why there is a difference in identity-processes between Iranian immigrant men and women. The analysis of these identity processes has then been applied to the acculturation model of Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking in order to understand the integration strategies and outcomes between the genders. The study utilizes a qualitative content analysis approach and draws on secondary data sources with emphasis on theory. The research discusses that Iranian immigrant men have a higher risk of going through an identity-crisis because of their gender and social identity being previously connected to a high-status, authoritarian, male-dominated position in society. The reaction of the different identity-processes that Iranian immigrant men and women go through during a resettlement can then result in retreatism or essentialism among the Iranian immigrant men, and engagement among the Iranian immigrant women. This results in a more positive integration among Iranian immigrant women and a more difficult integration among Iranian immigrant men.

Keywords: Identity, Integration, Immigration, Gender, Iranians

Word Count: 11 498

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1. Introduction

Under the 1950-1970's Sweden received many immigrants from countries such as Finland, South Europe and Turkey for labor (Regeringen, 2009). During the 1970's and 1980's Sweden began receiving refugees from Latin America, East Asia, The Middle East and Africa (ibid). As of 2009 there were around 14% immigrants in the country, and the number is growing (ibid).

As globalization is making it easier than ever for people to travel from one part of the world to another, so is the experience of living in a rapidly changing globe affecting people's view of themselves and others. Globalization here means: "An intensification of worldwide social relations that connects separate localities with each other in such a way that local events forms by occurrences that appear many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens in Darwishpour, 2004:174). On local level then, social contexts often relate to or become affected by processes that are happening in other areas, giving individuals a so-called glocal perspective (ibid). In this globalized world, an individual's sense of self-coherence is constantly under challenge, and this is especially true for immigrants who often come from cultures whose values, beliefs and norms differ from the Swedish ones. Since cultures are embedded in an individual's self-identity, an individual who come from a different culture is often faced with identity-challenges in the new country. The challenges faced can be both stimulating and devastating depending on how the individual manage their new identity-construction (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:56). With rising immigration rates in Sweden it is important to understand the identity processes that immigrants face when moving across borders and cultures as this is connected to their integration outcomes in the society. In this context gender also plays a major role as it can help describe why there exists different identity-processes among men and women and how this affects their integration outcomes in the new country.

Human development is the idea of "advancing the richness of human life" (Sen quoted in UNDP, n.d.). Mahbub ul Haq, the founder of the Human Development Report for the United Nations, has said that human development means to enlarge people's choices. This includes having a "sense of participation in community activities (Haq in UNDP, n.d.). The basic idea is the quality of life, which incorporates all aspects of individuals' well-being (World Bank, n.d.). Immigration in

itself can be a valuable source to accumulating human capital and economic development. At the same time the Swedish government realizes that the marginalization and isolation of immigrants can lead to consequences and backfire at the development of the society. This is why in the 1990's, the policies of immigration in Sweden changed to policies of integration (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:114). According to Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking this change emerged when the category of "immigrants" was increasingly being looked upon as too large and that it in fact widened the gap between notions of "us and them". Instead, the emphasis shifted to similarity and integration to reduce the marginalization of immigrants (ibid). Today, the government works actively to promote integration within a sustainable development spectrum. The goal is for all citizens to have "equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities" no matter ethnic or cultural background (Regeringen, 2009). This model of integration is embedded in the following principles: a corporatist policy-making style with a social democratic welfare model; diversity and combating racialised exclusion (Jorgensen, 2011:101). In the last few years following the right-wing parties' dominance in Swedish politics, the policy-making has taken a more neo-liberal discourse (ibid). The integration approach is to make immigrants more self-sufficient within the socio-economic spectrum, all the while respecting diversity and multiculturalism (Wiesbrock, 2013:6). Hence, the social cohesion in Sweden is based upon diversity and social development, which everyone should actively participate in, all the while having mutual respect for one another (ibid: 7).

As mentioned earlier, human development is the idea of advancing the richness of human life, which includes having a sense of participation in community activities. In this research human development will focus on individuals' identity-constructions. Having a sense of security of one's identity is an important part of an individuals' well-being in society and is strongly connected to aspects such as inclusion and integration in society. Subsequently, these aspects often play a major role in an individual's behavior in society. Hence, to have a sense of well-being an individual must feel they are part of the unification of a society. This is why integration in the form of social cohesion has become even more important in the policy-making today (Wiesbrock, 2013:6). As a step to advance social cohesion and development in the Swedish society in general, it is then important to understand identity-challenges that

immigrants face when re-settling as this is connected to the overall unification of society.

For a society to develop, inclusive integration is important because it fosters social cohesion and participation. Failed integration can have a number of consequences, such as increased segregation in terms of housing, economic marginalization, illegal economic activities, the formation of gangs and a culture of violence (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:113). On the other hand, a positive integration of immigrants in the society can have many good effects, such as better health and increased feelings of well-being, more harmony among citizens, less crime and violence and decreased governmental costs on immigration strategies. With successful integration the society overall will be a happier, safer and valuable place to live in. Hassan Hosseini-Kaladjahi writes; “integration is a reciprocal process. It concerns the native born citizen as well as the newcomer. A country is a construction under constant transformation, based on historical structures, but entirely dependent of everyone’s efforts to collaborate and mutually adapt (Kaladjahi, 2012:7).

Iranians are the second biggest non-European immigrant group in Sweden (Kaladjahi, 2012:9). As such they represent a large immigrant group who come from a culture that differs from Sweden. One major cultural difference relevant to this study is that Iran is a predominantly collectivist, male-dominated country. It is non-egalitarian, whereas Sweden is individualistic, and has one of the highest gender-equalities in the world (World Economic Forum, 2013). The cultural and ethnic background of Iranian immigrants are connected to their self-identity; however, as an individual’s identity is never fixed, but always a process of “being” or “becoming” (Jenkins, 2008:18), resettlement can change or modify the identity to new forms of “being” resulting in a new or different sense of “self.” It is during this resettlement that Iranian immigrant men and women’s identity-process can either make or break their integration in the new society. Some Iranian immigrants are successful in going through this identity-change. Others however develop an identity-crisis and hence their integration in Sweden becomes more difficult.

Thus, Iranian immigrants are an important group to analyze for a deeper understanding of integration development among immigrants who come from cultures that are not similar to Sweden. A deeper look at identity-processes among Iranian immigrants can help us understand how this affects Iranian immigrant men and women’s different integration-challenges and strategies. This group and topic is

interesting to research as I myself have an Iranian origin, but have lived in Sweden my whole life. Something I find particularly interesting is how individuals deal with identity-challenges, as for most of my life I have had to manage and balance an identity constructed by eastern and western influences.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

As previous studies have shown, Iranian immigrant women integrate easier in Sweden than Iranian immigrant men (Darvishpour, 2002; Khosravi, 2009; Asadulah, 2010). The aim here is to understand why Iranian immigrant women have a higher sense of satisfaction and integrate easier in the Swedish society than their male counterparts. Focus will be on identity-processes, as it plays one major role in the different integration outcomes of Iranian immigrant men and women. The specific aims of the studies described in this thesis are: To identify and analyze Iranian immigrants' perceptions of various factors that influence their identity; through different theoretical perspectives with focus on identity-challenges analyze integration attitudes and outcomes and; to study and explore integration-related factors among Iranian immigrants.

With this in mind, the research question is: *How can we understand the integration differences in connection to Iranian immigrant men and women's identity after their migration to Sweden?*

1.2 Disposition

Chapter one introduces the topic, the research aim and research question, literature review, definitions of some frequent words in the research, and background information; chapter two discusses the methodological theories of the subject, data collection and delimitations; chapter three discusses the theoretical framework for this research; chapter four is the analysis of the research; chapter five is the conclusion and; chapter six contains the list of the works cited.

1.3 Literature Review

Research of integration differences between Iranian immigrant men and women in Sweden is fairly new, but some research in this field has been explored earlier. Probably the most well-known and discussed research on this subject was made by Mehrdad Darvishpour in 1998 and further more in 2002. In these studies, Darvishpour discusses why Iranian immigrant couples have one of the highest divorce rates in Sweden. By using gender theory with a focus on power structures the author concludes that in many cases immigration to Sweden changes the power relations within Iranian families; whereas the Iranian men feel their status decrease, Iranian women feel their status increase, and this also provides them with greater opportunities to seek for divorce (Darvishpour, 2002). Sharaheh Akhavan confirmed this conclusion when her study on the health of Iranian immigrant women in Sweden showed that they often take the initiative to divorce in Sweden. In addition, they also feel they have better health after divorce (Akhavan in Kaladjahi, 2012).

Developing Darvishpour's study further, Fereshteh Lewin Ahmadi did a similar study of integration differences between Iranian immigrant men and women in 2001. By using social identity and gender theory with a focus on identity crisis on the former and Simone De Beauvoir's feminist theories on the latter, the author connected Iranian immigrant women and their professional position with personal and social identity, claiming that their access to the job market made them overcome their identity crisis easier than Iranian immigrant men (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001).

In another study based on Jeffrey Week's work on sexuality, Nader Ahmadi concluded that adult Iranians usually adopt a more open attitude on sexuality and dating after migration to Sweden. In addition, they also shift from a collectivist attitude towards a more individualistic one, but women in general have a higher attitude change and openness to sexuality and the new society in general than their male counterparts (Ahmadi, 2003). Another study using gender theory was published in 2009 by Shahram Khosravi in which he concluded that Iranian men's masculinity after migration to Sweden has been challenged and renegotiated on the one hand by Iranian women's struggle for liberation and on the other hand by the Swedish media, who many times stigmatize Iranian men (Khosravi, 2009). Finally, Asadulah did a general study on the Iranian diaspora in Sweden in 2010, in which he concluded that Iranian's in general have an easier time to integrate in Sweden than many other non-

European immigrant groups, mainly because of their educated and middle-class background (Asadulah, 2010).

A common conclusion among these previous studies are that Iranian immigrant women are more open to Swedish culture, laws and regulations, have a more positive attitude towards the Swedish society and have been more successful in getting into the Swedish system than Iranian immigrant men. However, most of the previous research on integration differences among Iranian immigrant men and women has focused only on gender and power structures between Iranian immigrant men and women. Although Lewin Ahmadi (2001) discusses identity crisis in her research, studies of how identity-processes after migration affect Iranian immigrant men and women's integration outcomes in Sweden are limited. My claim is that in order to understand the integration differences between Iranian immigrant men and women, we have to explore more fully and from different perspectives the formation and changes of identity that occurs after migration. This is not only important for the understanding of integration development, but also to understand gender differences and move beyond knowledge and discussions that have already been explored. Furthermore, no previous discussion has been made regarding the different integration *strategies* that Iranian immigrant men and women adopt because of their identity-process and/or identity crisis in Sweden, and how this affect their integration outcome. I will take this into account as well and discuss the different integration strategies and its outcomes with the help of Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking's model of acculturation.

1.4 Definitions

It is important to clearly define certain fundamental and frequently used concepts for clarity. Firstly, the notion of *integration* in this research will be used according to the definition by Toumas Martikainen (2005):

The processes by which individual and groups of immigrants are incorporated into various social arenas and segments of the new host society. Integration is a two-way process whereby both the immigrants and the host society adapt new features as a result of their interactions.

Secondly, the term *immigrant* here means a person born abroad of non-Swedish parents. *Iranian immigrants* are here limited to only first generation Iranian

immigrants that migrated to Sweden under refugee-status and as adults. This is because adults and children experience different paths towards integration in Sweden and face different challenges in the Swedish society (Åslund et.al, 2009).

Finally, *identity* can be defined as “the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their relations with other individuals and collectivities” (Jenkins, 2008:18). *Identification* is “the systematic establishment and signification between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities of relationships of similarity and difference (ibid). It is important to remember that identity is never fixed, but always a process of “being” or “becoming” (ibid: 17).

1.5 Background

Iranians are the second largest non-European immigrant group in Sweden after immigrants from Iraq (Kaladjahi, 2012:9). According to statistics from 2013 about 67 000 Iranian-born Swedes live in the country (Statiska Centralbyrån, 2013). Of these, 53 percent are men and 47 percent women (Khosravi, 2009:592). The largest group of immigrants came in the 1980’s mainly due to the Iran-Iraq war and the violent Islamic Republic crackdown on opposition forces (ibid). Sweden was chosen as a destination mainly because of its generous immigration policy before 1989 (Kaladjahi, 2012:10).

Iranians in Sweden can be found in many different cities, although the vast majorities, like most other immigrants, live in urban areas: Stockholm (36%), Gothenburg (16.9%), Uppsala (5.8%) and Malmö (5%) (Kaladjahi, 2012:9).

The majority of Iranian immigrants are between 30-55 (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:123). Although there are social and cultural differences within this group, there are certain characteristics that the majority of them share: They belonged to the upper and middle classes in the homecountry; they came from Teheran and other urban cities in Iran; they had graduated high school or university in the homecountry; they had experienced a Western/secular life before the Islamic Revolution; and they had left Iran because of their political or ideological beliefs, or their difficulties in adjusting to the social norms after the Islamic Revolution (ibid:123-124). In summary, the majority of Iranian immigrants in Sweden came from good economic backgrounds, had a higher education in Iran, had experienced a secular lifestyle and generally oppose the current Iranian government.

Ranking number 4 on the global gender gap index, Sweden is known for having one of the highest gender equalities between men and women in the world (World Economic Forum, 2013). In the same report, Iran ranks well below at number 130 (ibid). The country is patriarchal, as masculine norms are favored over feminine, a reflection seen in societies structure as well as the governmental laws which in many cases discriminate women in favor of men. Some examples are: the age of criminal responsibility for girls is 9 years and for boys 15 years; men can have multiple wives whereas women cannot; men have an incontestable right to divorce their wives, whereas women have a very limited right and; the testimony of a man often has twice the weight of that of a woman (Iran Human Rights, 2013). In many families men are still the main authoritative figures and breadwinners, while the women take on a more submissive role (Khosravi, 2009:592-594). The gender inequality between man and woman is also stated in the Persian language. Khosravi writes: “*Mardanegi* (manliness) is a metaphor for courage, generosity, honor, humanity, and rectitude. *Mardanegi kardan* (doing manliness) means to forgive, to be tolerant, and to aid people in need. A powerful and successful woman is described as “she is like a man” (*khodesh ye pa mardeh*)... *Namardi* (non-manliness) is a term referring to “immorality, infidelity and duplicity” (Khosravi, 2009:593).

However, migration has changed the gender roles among Iranian immigrant men and women; men often lose their superiority in status while women gain more freedom and independence (ibid). As they then are put into a new role in society, Iranian men and women’s sense of self-identity goes through a new, sometimes drastic process. This is especially true in Sweden due to its gender equality between men and women. Thus, the relations between the genders and their identity in society go through different processes, and this can cause differences regarding Iranian immigrant men and women’s integration outcomes in Sweden.

2. Methodology

Methodology is the investigation of concepts, theories and basic principles of reasoning on a subject (Moses and Knutsen 2007:5). It is concerned with how we obtain knowledge and answer the question “how do we know”? It also answers the question “What strategies can we use to gain that knowledge” (Halperin and Heath, 2012:26)? I aim to find out by doing a qualitative content analysis with social identity and gender theory as my theoretical framework. The empirical material will rely on secondary sources. Under this analysis, a systematic scrutiny and coding of previous literature on the subject of Iranian immigrants in Sweden and integration will be collected, used and analyzed. In other words, the analysis will be textual.

The term qualitative research here means research results do not derive from statistical procedures and that analysis is interpretative. This methodology fits the research question as the research aims to understand why there is a difference in integration between Iranian men and women in Sweden. Qualitative research methodology can help the researcher understand the nature of integration experience of individuals in society, as the researcher must find out what people are doing and thinking (Corbin and Strauss, 1998:11). Details about integration include “feelings, thought processes, and emotions” that are difficult to extract or analyze through mere statistics (ibid). Therefore I will use previous research in which interviews have been made with Iranian immigrant men and women in Sweden. In the interviews the thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions of the group studied can come out, and this can provide further depth and insight to the research. It is important to point out though that the research and the interviews are interpretative in the sense that it will be the interpretations of the interviews made by other scholars that will be taken into account. Emphasis will thus first and foremost be on a theoretical analysis. For this reason, qualitative research goes well together with the research aim.

The *epistemological* standpoint will be constructivist, in that reality is viewed as something socially and societally embedded, deriving from individuals own thinking (Grbich, 2007:8). Constructivists seek to capture and understand the meaning of a social action for the agent performing it. For constructivists, truth lies in the observer, and the patterns we study are of our own making (Moses and Knutsen, 2007:165). Furthermore, unlike naturalism, constructivism believes that reality is not independent

from us; it is rather something that we socially and actively construct (Halperin and Heath, 2012:45). In this methodology, social cases are socially constructed with their shape and form being imbedded with “social values, norms and assumptions” (ibid), and this notion is well connected to gender and social identity. The constructivist approach fits well with the research since the aim is to observe and understand the identity-processes that occur in regards to integration of Iranian immigrant men and women in Sweden, in which questions of norms, social values and assumptions are part of the research.

The researcher’s own views on the subject as well as how they have been constructed is of key interest here. When it comes to positionality, as a researcher, I need to be aware that my role as an Iranian immigrant woman means I will always have my own pre-thinking views when collecting research and applying theory, and this will undeniably affect the outcome. Thus, I am being self-reflexive in my double role as a researcher and Iranian, which is vital in qualitative research. Transparency is required throughout the study by a complete account of the research procedures as well as presenting the methodological as well as theoretical tools used.

An example of my positionality is that a single mother early on raised me. My mother is a strong and independent woman whom I look up to and who has inspired me to become an active actor in woman right’s issues. Inspired by my mother I also became a feminist in my adolescence and I am still today as I strongly believe and actively try to pursue equality between men and women.

Being an Iranian immigrant woman will also provide me the opportunity to access certain privileged information that could otherwise be difficult to gain as a foreign researcher, since I have good “inside” knowledge and understanding of the cultural subtleness of the Iranian community. In other words, as a starting point for further investigation, my familiarity with the context researched allows me to follow the data according to possible ideas or explanations made on the basis of limited evidence.

2.1 Data Collection

Since this thesis is very theory-based, research reply mostly from literature sources that covers integration and social and gender identity of immigrants, with a special focus on Iranian adult immigrants in Sweden. Historical and current data will be

utilized to analyze integration and its social psychological aspects. The data comes mainly from previous research on this subject but also government statistics. Other secondary sources previously used in scholarly research have been observed and analyzed so that I can take an independent stand and discuss my discoveries of the topic. Research articles will be mainly obtained from scholarly archives such as LUBSearch, Academic Search Elite and EBSCO. A number of printed literatures from different scholars on the subject of the Iranian community in Sweden as well as the theories used in the research will also be utilized.

By using different sources I will be able to get valuable insight in what the experts within my research field have already examined and the outcomes of those analyses. The different information I have collected will be useful when I examine and describe the outcome of my own analysis and will be further helpful when I take my own standpoint in the issue.

2.2 Delimitations

The lack of control over the type of information and dependency on other researcher's material will be a limitation as the original research design may lack quality and thus affect the current research negatively. The researchers might have biased views on the topic they are analyzing, and thus the outcome also becomes biased (Caplan and Caplan, 2009:28). Thus, when interpreting secondary research, caution must be taken, as I will have to critically analyze my data.

In addition, I cannot be absolutely certain that the results from my analysis will be representative of the whole Iranian immigrant population in Sweden, as the sources I gather my data from have samples which are not necessarily representative of the large group of Iranian immigrant men and women who live in Sweden. Thus it is important to address that not all Iranians face the same integration challenges even if they are from the same ethnic group. Likewise not all men or women face the same challenges just because they come from a particular gender. Of course aspects such as class, education and economic background make a difference in the variety of challenges men and women have to face in society. However, as a general picture, the research provided could serve as a good base showing the integration challenges and differences between Iranian men and women.

In addition, only certain aspects of the integration processes of Iranian immigrant men and women will be taken into consideration since I am using different bodies of theory as my framework. Hence, theoretical lenses both include and exclude information, but this is nevertheless necessary so that greater attention can be given to a certain aspect of the subjects being analyzed.

3. Theory

3.1 Introduction to Theory

In this section I intend to pull together the concepts and theoretical discussions, which will frame the data analysis of this research. However, before I introduce the theoretical concepts in detail, I will give an overall overview of the theories in this research, as well as a description of how the theoretical and analytical sections are structured. This, I believe is important in order for the readers to effortlessly be able to follow the analysis.

As previously mentioned, the research aims to understand the integration differences of Iranian immigrant men and women after migration to Sweden. From an analytical point of view, there are different ways one can try to understand and explain the integration differences between immigrant men and women. My approach in this research will be focused on identity, identity-processes and challenges and its direct relation to integration among Iranian immigrant men and women. To enrich the understanding of the very complicated human activity of integration, gender and social identity processes will be used to understand why there is a difference in migration from Iran to Sweden between Iranian immigrant men and women. The analysis of these identity processes will then be applied to the acculturation model of Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking in order to understand the integration differences and strategies between the genders.

The theoretical and analytical framework will have an overall collectivist approach. The theoretical framework will be structured as follows: Firstly there will be a general discussion of gender identity followed by social identity. The emphasis within this theory will be on ingroups, outgroups, lower and higher status groups. I

will then move on to a discussion of identity crisis and acculturation and finally discuss the relevance of gender with acculturation.

Theoretical schools of thought can be used to frame our thinking by linking multiple concepts to form a lens. Whatever lens we chose will focus our attention exclusively on a particular subject. This is necessary to make sense of a particular subject, since physically, humans cannot make sense of everything at once (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:38). Thus, by relying on certain lenses we can see some things in greater detail and our attention draws on what seems most relevant. Peterson and Runyan describe lenses like maps: “They frame our choices, expectations, and explorations, enabling us to take advantage of knowledge already gained, and presumably, to move more effectively toward our objectives” (ibid: 39).

I’ve chosen a combination of different theories instead of one because firstly I believe individuals or social groups can have multiple identities; and secondly, because multiple theories can give a wider analysis of the topic researched, thus expanding the possible outcomes of the analysis. As more and more people are living between cultures, so does the identities within them being exposed to different value systems. This creates an interaction between these identities which individuals manage differently. This phenomenon can be called “hybridities,” which is a concept used to explain “all those instances in which individuals or social entities are not either/or but instead both/and” (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:7). As with everything in society, individuals are not only part of the self, but also part of the larger whole – the collective. Hence, as we are part of a larger group, the interactions and group processes we are part of must also be taken into consideration. These group processes affect our sense of self just as much as our individual unique characteristics do.

Some scholars might find it peculiar that I am using gender theory to describe integration differences between Iranian immigrant men and women. However, I argue that the concept of gender and social identity is inseparable; gender is part of the collective as well as individual identity (Jenkins, 2008:82) and hence an important area of exploration within social identity theory and within an integration aspect. As Jenkins writes:

“In the institutional constitution of the human world and its rewards and penalties, an individual’s gender becomes interactionally real in large part because of his/her membership of a collective category...collectively, the sharing of similar life-experiences which may be powerfully embodied, also allows gender to be a principle

of group formation: this is the internal movement of collective identification” (ibid: 83).

Like social identity and its emphasis on similarities and differences, gender is rooted in similarities and differences between men and women (Jenkins, 2008:83). It is part of an individual’s identity from an early age and thus plays an important role in the social interactions and behaviors of the individual. Another important aspect of using gender and social identity together to describe gender differences is that whereas theories within social identity are mainly descriptive, gender theory can in addition to providing a descriptive analysis also give a prescriptive perspective. The prescriptive approach is important to bring forth here, as the aim of the research is not only to understand how things are but also how they should be. In other words, the prescriptive approach is important for the development of integration strategies for immigrants in Sweden. Hence, I believe gender and social identity can serve as a helpful tool to take a deeper look at integration and acculturation processes not only from a cultural point of view but from a gendered perspective as well.

I will now introduce the theoretical concepts in more detail.

3.2 Gender Identity

Gender refers to “the socially learned behaviors, repeated performances, and idealized expectations that are associated with and distinguish between the proscribed gender roles of masculinity and femininity” (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:2). In this sense, gender studies addresses the socially constructed categories of masculinity and femininity and inscribes them on not only female and male bodies but on other objects as well, such as groups and institutions. The theory also recognizes that cultural variations in society such as race/ethnicity, and sexuality shape gender identities. Thus, since the concept of femininity and masculinity are believed to derive from socially constructed norms, the standard of being masculine or feminine look different in different societies and cultures (Caplan and Caplan, 2009:6). The theory argues that gender is a major source of power predictions and inequalities in global affairs (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:3). However, discussing women and men’s position in society is the first step to expose gender divisions in regards to power and inequality (ibid).

Like the concept of identity, gender is an ongoing process as it continually produces and reproduces (Wharton, 2005:7). According to Spike Peterson and Anne Runyan, gender socialization begins from the early stages of childhood, and reinforces the stereotypes of masculine versus feminine roles (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:68). Like selfhood and humanness, gender is a primary identity, which Richard Jenkins refers as “more robust and resilient to change in later life than other identities (Jenkins, 2008:41). Gender shapes the identities and behaviors of individuals, the way individuals see themselves as well as how they see others. (Wharton, 2005:9). Gender also shapes social interaction and social institutions such as public sectors and personal areas of life (ibid). It is arguably one of the most influential identities an individual can have as it forms early on in life.

Gender identity refers to people’s own sense of themselves as males or females. It is “a fundamental, existential sense of one’s maleness or femaleness, an acceptance of one’s gender as a social-psychological construction that parallels one’s acceptance of one’s biological sex” (Wharton, 2005:36). According to Peterson and Runyan, confusion of gender identity can feel very intimidating because they make up such an important idea of who the individual is and how they are supposed to act (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70). Confusion of an individual’s gender identity can arise for example when an individual’s constructed identity is at odds with that of the new social environment.

3.3 Social Identity

Social identity is the meanings of the interactions individuals have such as “agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation” (Jenkins, 2008:18). Within social identity theory, individuals can view themselves either in what makes them unique compared to other individuals (personal identity) or compared to their membership in social groups (social identity). The key point is to maximize positive distinctiveness (Reicher, 2004:928). However, social group identities come in various forms. People can have group identities with their profession, for example as doctors, or with their gender, for example if they perceive themselves strongly of the identities of being a man or a woman. The norms, values and beliefs within an individual’s social identity guide their behavior (ibid: 934). However, as Reicher points out, “social identity is simultaneously something

intensely personal and important to [me as] an individual, but also something that, in substance, cannot be reduced to [me as] an individual but is rather a cultural and historical construct” (ibid: 929). History and culture thus shapes the social identity of an individual, and the blend of cultural and personal interaction becomes focus. The importance of history and culture can be connected to Roger Brubaker’s concept of “homeland orientation”, which he argues is one criterion for diaspora groups. Homeland orientation is the real or imagined orientation towards a “homeland” as a source of “value, identity and loyalty” (Brubaker, 2005:5). The homeland works as the ideal place where one should eventually return. In addition, the “homeland” can also become personal, as relating to it can shape one’s identity (ibid).

Within the social identities derives what Henry Tajfel called ingroup identities. Individuals categorize themselves and build their identities as members within these ingroups, as they find something that makes them unique in comparison to other groups, or outgroups. When social identity is important, the self-related actions derive from the collective self (ibid). Keeping and maintaining positive self-esteem is arguably one of the most important tasks of the collective self (ibid). Research suggests that the ingroup identity that comes from group members has its roots in the need to belong and be unique. Identities need to have a mix of distinctive and common attributes, so that members of that group can feel unique (Huddy, 2001: 136). Additionally, there is also a debate that ingroup identity can be fueled by the minority members’ sense of “threat” from the majority group (ibid). A feeling of diminished self-esteem is an example of such a “threat” to members of ingroups.

The emphasis in social identity is on social identifications, and the association of social categorizations that differentiate between one's own ingroup and other groups. These intergroup comparisons are based on differences in power and status (Skevington and Baker, 1991:386). Thus, among these different groups also exists the idea of high status and low status groups. Research has showed that members who belong to higher status groups tend to identify themselves more to the stereotype of their ingroup than members of lower status groups (Huddy, 2001:135). In addition, an individual’s social identity can be either diminished or empowered depending on whether they belong to a high status or low status group. In this regard;

“Social identity theory predicts that lower-status individuals may seek to change their position while higher status individuals will work to protect the status quo. The former have two options available to them: social mobility and social change. If membership in the higher-status group is attainable through individual effort, the

lower-status person may attempt to be upwardly socially mobile. However, if such mobility is blocked or impossible, social change strategies can be employed collectively to enhance the status of the overall group” (Skevington and Baker, 1991:386).

Hence, members of low-status groups can seek to change their position as subordinate through several ways. One is to try and change their position in those areas they have been defined as inferior; or to try and create “new dimensions on which they can be defined positively” (Reicher, 2004:932). Thus, in order to improve their situation, members of low-status groups have an easier time than members of high-status groups to break away from the identity of the low-status group they belong to (Huddy, 2001:140).

3.4 Culture and Masculinity

Since gender and social identity is a social, cultural and historical construct, the blend of cultural and personal interaction is of major importance (Reicher, 2004:929). Culture is a broad-reaching concept but in this research it is referred to behaviors (e.g., language, rituals) and indirect psychological proportions such as attitudes, beliefs, and values (Murray et. al, 2013:2). These commonly held values and their external expressions are vital for the construction of the image of the self (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:125). However, a new society might demand an individual to reconstruct his/her self-identity, since it has different systems of beliefs, values and lifestyles (ibid).

It is in the context of an individual’s and group’s social interaction that the differences between genders and their identity play an important role. Kinvall and Nesbitt-Larking argues that social reproduction is often linked to many migrant cultures, since it is a way for the cultures to survive generation after generation (Kinvall and Nesbitt-larking, 2001:72). Because of this, gender relations are often at the core of cultures (ibid), and since cultures are in direct relation to the individual’s self-identity, individuals find different ways to protect the identity. Some individuals successfully find different ways for their first-culture to be in harmony with the second culture, leading to a successful integration. Others find themselves lost in the process and develop an identity crisis. Peterson and Runyan state “because gender identification is so important for ‘knowing who we are’, and how to act, and for

securing self-esteem when we ‘do gender well,’ confusion about gender identity can feel very threatening” (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70).

It is within this heteronormative culture that hegemonic masculinity is seen as the ideal as it is connected to achievement, goal-attainment and breadwinning. It is seen as the dominant form of masculinity which men are expected to conform to while other men and women are supposed to consent to (Mcfarlane, 2013:323). Subordinated masculinities on the other hand represent the abnormal, non-conformist form of masculinity. This form of masculinity is believed to undermine or threaten the supremacy of hegemonic masculinity as it refers to behavior and social constructs of particular masculine identities that are defined as feminine (ibid). Hence, for hegemonic masculinity to thrive, it must oppose femininity. Being a “real man” then requires that the gender roles stay strictly apart. As Peterson and Runyan note; “Quite simply, in masculinist/heteronormative culture, men are motivated to enhance and exaggerate their masculinity by denying any commonality between themselves and women or gay men” (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70). Men who offend and show signs of subordinated masculinity are seen as not upholding responsibility and obligations towards their family and wider society, but they can also be thought of as marginalized and as a failed masculinity (Mcfarlane, 2013:324).

However, it is not enough to only achieve masculinity. Men also have to *demonstrate* their masculinity to distance themselves from everything defined as feminine (ibid: 71). This may be done by for example “exaggerating one’s rationality, competitiveness, and power, or encouraging assertive, tough, and even violent behaviors” (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70). In this sense, failure to perform hegemonic masculinity can be seen as a serious threat to an individual’s identity, which leads to an exaggeration of masculine-related characteristics such as power, authority, competition and violence. These behaviors can be seen as a way to escape the sense of failure and insecurity the individual feels of their self-identity and being “subordinate.”

3.5 Identity Crisis and Acculturation

Thus, when an individual's constructed identity is at odds with that of the new social environment, this can lead to an identity crisis. In regards to this, Lewin Ahmadi points out:

“An identity crisis is not only the result of lack of similarity between an individual's already constructed identity and the general value system of the new social environment. It is also an outcome of the individual's social interaction in the new society. In other words, the way the individual confronts the new social structure can play an important role in diminishing or enlarging the dimensions of the individual's identity crisis” (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:126).

Hence, an identity crisis may lead to the individual taking several strategies to manage the crisis. This is when the notion of acculturation plays a crucial role to understand the outcomes of the different identity strategies. Social scientists often use different terms to define the concept of acculturation. In this research acculturation means:

A dynamic and multidimensional process of adaptation that occurs when distinct cultures come into sustained contact. It involves different degrees and instances of culture learning and maintenance that are contingent upon individual, group, and environmental factors. Acculturation is dynamic because it is a continuous and fluctuating process and it is multidimensional because it transpires across numerous indices of psychosocial functioning and can result in multiple adaptation outcomes (Organista et al., 2010: 105).

Acculturation can occur through either a group level or individual level. At the group level it includes the changes in social structures, institutions, and cultural practices (Berry, 2005:698). At the individual level it includes the behavioral changes in a person (ibid). Psychological acculturation refers to changes in behaviors, attitudes, values, and identities of individuals (Zhou and Yu, 2011:95). In this research I will refer to psychological acculturation in connection to the experiences individuals go through when being exposed to a new culture because of permanent or long-term resettlement.

John Berry's model of acculturation has been used widely when researchers conduct analyses on immigrants and their transition to a new culture (Organista et. al, 2010:109). In this research however, Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking's model of acculturation will be used as it can give a fresh new contribution to the study within this field and also fits the research well. Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking argue for three

ways of acculturation to manage an identity crisis and other challenges that immigrants may face in Europe: retreatism, essentialism, and engagement. *Retreatism* is an identity strategy an individual uses when they avoid any commitment to the society they live in. They essentially make no demands on the society, and keep a low profile. In some instances, the individual might withdraw from society and remain passive. This form of identity strategy often comes from “experiences of isolation, displacement, and fear” (Kinvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:123).

Individuals who manage an *essentialist* acculturation on the other hand, try to influence society with their own values through opposition, rigidity, dogma, or separatism. In this form of acculturation, any questioning or loss of idealized personal or social identity is blocked, denied or attacked (ibid: 57). It is this form of forcefulness that distinguishes essentialism from retreatism. Essentialism may play out as a reaction to “modernization, secularization, alienation, and marginalization” (ibid), all of which can be seen as a threat to the internalized notion of self and identity within the individual. For the individual to secure their identity of self and sense of security in the world, ambiguity or problematization is forbidden in the culture or social structure. Hence, this form of strategy also requires a defense of clear-cut and exclusive categories of self and other. An absolute boundary is emphasized between the individual and the other (ibid). The process of othering involves a construction of national, religious or other stereotypes, in which an oversimplification and overgeneralization of “the other” is part of the securitization of one’s own self-identity. This is because only by an identification of the others can the individual identify him/herself (ibid: 59). From a gendered perspective, stereotypes provide clear-cut categories that give way to unreflective responses, which play a key role in legitimizing discrimination and reproducing hierarchical relations of power (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:47). In addition, their oversimplification and overgeneralization promote erroneous images, are resistant to change, and radically affect how we see ourselves, others, and social orders (ibid). Stereotypes also remove inequalities by naturalizing and essentializing negative images of subordinated groups as “inferior, undesirable or threatening” (ibid: 48).

Finally, in *engagement*, individuals try to blend their own values with that of the mainstream society. A willingness to open self to other, and to move from a monological to a dialogical citizenship strategy is required for this form of

acculturation (Kinvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:12). Dealing with cultural differences can be made through bargaining, openness towards the other, collaboration and dialogue (ibid: 160). In this regard, dialogue includes effective communication among citizens as well as within the individual's "dialogical self." Citizens want to feel that they have a voice and that they can make a difference. When they believe that their viewpoint matters, they will also be more engaged in society (ibid).

4. Analysis

4.1 Identity Processes among Iranian Immigrant Men and Women

As gender norms are socially constructed, the standard of being masculine or feminine is viewed differently in Sweden and Iran. In Iran the government institutionalizes strict boundaries between genders and the sphere between men and women is reinforced by visual modesty and concealment (Khosravi, 2009:593). The norm is the heterosexual man and gender roles and sexual relations are male-defined. Khosravi writes; "in this masculine moral geography, manliness is defined by emphasizing and sustaining these spatial distinctions and sex-segregation" (ibid). Sexuality in itself can be connected to power, identity and view of the self, as within the traditional Iranian Islamic context, sexuality and virginity can be used to serve men's power, interests and privilege over the control of women (Ahmadi, 2003:700).

In Sweden the standard between masculinity and femininity is not as clear-cut as in Iran, and activities that are traditionally defined as "feminine" are in Sweden carried out by men as well. The transition from Iran to Sweden then forces Iranian immigrant men to question and re-examine their masculine identity and the values and norms their identity is part of. As some Iranian immigrant men identify themselves with the clear-cut, heterosexual male norm from the home country, signs of ambiguity between masculine and feminine can lead to a confusion of gender identity. This is especially seen as a threat if the Iranian immigrant man's identity is constructed in relation to "the other." In this case, a clear-cut boundary between the heterosexual male norm (self) and women (other) is needed for the Iranian immigrant man to feel like a "real man" (Mcfarlene, 2013:325). In a study of Iranian immigrant men and women's sexuality after migration to Sweden, Iranian immigrant men

emphasized sex-segregation to a larger degree than did the women for example. In the study the women displayed greater signs of attitude-changes and adaptation to Swedish sexual norms than the Iranian immigrant men (Ahmadi, 2003). Since migration to Sweden can give Iranian women more power and freedom to decide over their sexuality, it is then not surprising that they show greater signs of adaptation to more liberal norms of sexuality, while the Iranian immigrant men whose sense of self is directly connected to the traditional, more conservative view on sexuality, see this as a threat to the securitization of their identity.

In addition, lack of social power such as unemployment, having a job that does not match one's education or being discriminated against can fuel the feelings of being inferior among Iranian immigrant men. In comparison to people born in Sweden, foreign-born individuals in general have a lower level of employment rate no matter age and gender (Statiska Centralbyrån, 2009:61). However, Statistics show that there is a difference in the number of employed among foreign born men and women; whereas there is a decline in the jobmarket among foreign-born men, there is a slight increase among foreign-born women in Sweden (ibid: 61). Discrimination in Sweden is common against people who do not fit the "Swedish norm". Studies have shown that a structural and individual discrimination exists in the job market even if immigrants have the same education, job experience, age and gender as "ethnic" Swedes; a foreign last name, darker skin color, a "foreign" accent, and different styles of clothing all contribute to the discrimination and segregation of immigrants in Sweden (Los Reyes, 2008). Both Iranian immigrant men and women are discriminated against in the Swedish society, but one can say that the discrimination strikes harder on the Iranian immigrant men since the discrimination changes their sense of self-identity radically. Apart from having a more dominant, authoritarian position in Iran, Iranian immigrant men in Sweden often come from well-educated, middle-class backgrounds (Asadulah, 2010), but a migration to Sweden often leaves them with a lower-status job that does not match their education. Whereas in Iran they were the subject, the "self", in Sweden they are suddenly being situated as the object, "the other", which makes their sense of "self" diminish (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001; Khosravi, 2009). This excludes them from the "Swedish" hegemonic masculine norm, and hence they become part of the "subordinated masculinity" group that they themselves try to take distance from (Khosravi, 2009). In addition, research has found

that men are more likely to think of themselves in gender-stereotypical terms when in minority, whereas women, who belong to the lower status group, do not stereotype themselves when in minority (Huddy, 2001:135). In this sense, immigrant Iranian men might feel a stronger sense of “threat” from the Swedish society than immigrant Iranian women who already belong to the lower status group.

For the Iranian immigrant women, discrimination does not affect their sense of self to the same degree as Iranian immigrant men, since in the home country they are already used to being discriminated and hence seen as “the other.” In the Swedish context however, as far as women’s rights are concerned, their situation has changed for the better as they now have more power, especially within the family. This power according to Lewin Ahmadi “functions very effectively from the psychological point of view because it is attained suddenly and looks like a weapon in the hands of someone who for a long time had lacked any possibility of protecting herself against enemies” (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:129).

As they are forced to question what it means to be a “real man,” some of the Iranian immigrant men will view the gender distinctions and norms in Sweden as a threat to the heterosexual male norm (Khosravi, 2009:593; Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70). Signs of weakness in relation to women, as well as a lower-status in society, can then lead to a damage of the Iranian man’s manliness, and they can experience shame and humiliation over the self. This was explained by a 40-year old Iranian immigrant man when he was seen doing a “feminine” activity on a visit to Iran: “When I visit Iran I have difficulties with how I am as a man. One night in a restaurant my little daughter was sleeping on my lap. A man passing our table said in an ironic tone: ‘are you mamma tonight?’ I do not care what others say but it is not easy. It is like being humiliated” (Khosravi, 2009:594).

Exaggerating and demonstrating an assertive, tough, and violent behavior might then be seen as one way for some Iranian immigrant men to regain a hegemonic masculinity, sense of “self”, and distance from everything seen as feminine (Peterson and Runyan, 2012:70-71; Mcfarlane, 2013:327). Violent behavior is predominantly related to men as criminal statistics in Europe, Australia and the United States show that men are responsible for 85% of all violent crimes (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2005:173). In Sweden there is also a higher criminality rate among men of immigrant background compared to men who were born in Sweden (Regeringen, 2014). Studies

have shown that when men are exposed to a threat against their gender, they show more signs of frustration and physical aggression (Stotzer, 2012:136). Studies have also shown that violence has the effect of strengthening masculinity (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2005:175). To deal with the threat of their sense of self, anger and violence may then be used as a strategy because it has impacted their perceptions of their own masculine characters (ibid: 141). Behaving violently against women or gay men is a way then of defending the Iranian man's sense of self: In this case, the Iranian immigrant man (the self) must control the woman or gay man ("the other") in order to reassert his identity (Mcfarlene, 2013:325). In Darwispour's study, a 44-year old Iranian immigrant man demonstrates this behavior when he explains how he tried to keep his wife from divorcing: "When you hit a single time, you are ashamed afterwards. But when it's repeated, you're not ashamed anymore and it becomes easier and easier to hit again. I've tried many times to keep her from divorcing but she doesn't listen. One dark night that I will never forget I hit her so hard so that she had to have an operation on her face" (Darwispour, 2002:284).

Hence, because of their gender and previously more dominant, higher status in Iran, the Swedish gender norms, segregation and discrimination strikes Iranian immigrant men's sense of self-identity radically more than Iranian immigrant women. Their chances of going through an identity-crisis increase, and thus their integration in Sweden becomes more difficult than Iranian immigrant women.

4.2 Acculturation

4.2.1 Retreatism

Because of their increased chances of going through an identity-crisis, one could argue that Iranian immigrant men use the acculturation strategies of retreatism and essentialism to a higher degree than Iranian immigrant women. As stated by Kinvall and Nesbitt-Larking, retreatism as a form of acculturation strategy often comes from "experiences of isolation, displacement, and fear" (2001:123). An engagement in society means the Iranian immigrant man has to give up his previously held authority and status to a more egalitarian society (Ahmadi, 2003:702). This can be problematic for some, as losing their previously held status means their sense of self-worth will reduce. Thus many fall into retreatism – they retreat, become passive or depressed and

have suicidal thoughts (Ahmadi Lewin, 2001:128). In Darwishpour's study, these feelings were brought out when some of the men described their life in Sweden. A man who had divorced his wife explained how unhappy he was with his life in Sweden, that he lived completely alone and had received mental health care for two and a half years (Darwishpour, 2002:277). Another man explained how he lived completely isolated, was unemployed and had no social contact with people (ibid: 286). Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking argue that citizens who feel that their perspectives are being heard will also become more engaged in the belief that they can influence the distribution of valued goods (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:160). However, taking this a bit further, one could argue that the motivation behind an engagement in society stems (among other things) from the belief that one will benefit and gain something from it. While migration gives Iranian immigrant women more power, they might then believe engagement in Sweden will increase their status. Iranian immigrant men on the other hand, might feel engagement will decrease their status, for example through a diminished sense of "manliness" and status. They then feel de-valued and this contributes to them remaining non-active in society.

4.2.2 Essentialism

A more "aggressive" form of acculturation might also take place for Iranian men who are feeling de-valued and/or going through an identity-crisis. When the Iranian immigrant man's internalized culture is not in line with the dominant culture of the Swedish society, an identity crisis might occur (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:125) in which one way for the Iranian immigrant man to manage it is through essentialism. Essentialism requires a defense of clear-cut and exclusive categories of self and other. Instead of drawing back and remaining passive then, Iranian immigrant men might try to influence society with their own values through opposition, rigidity, dogma, or separatism. In this sense, many begin to see the society and culture they live in as "the enemy" which must be opposed. Iranian immigrant men might then hold onto cultural norms and values from the home country as a way of securing their sense of self from the majority culture. This was subliminally expressed by two of the men who were interviewed in Darwishpour's study; one man complained that the Swedish lifestyle had made the family "unharmonious", that his wife was hanging out with

“loose” women, and that he wanted “real control” over the children, something he felt he was losing (Darwishpour, 2002:277). Another man complained that the freedom Iranian women received in Sweden had made them uncontrollable, and had led to the breakdown of the traditional family union (ibid: 283). Since cultures are in direct relation to the individual’s self-identity, Iranian immigrant men might then try and find different ways to protect it. The promotion of the cultural norms and lifestyle from the country of origin thus becomes a tool they can use for their cause.

The willingness of Iranian immigrant men to hold onto cultural values from the homeland more so than Iranian immigrant women brings the notion of homeland orientation to focus. As mentioned before “homeland orientation” is the real or imagined orientation towards a “homeland” as a source of “value, identity and loyalty” (Brubaker, 2005:5). As studies have observed, Iranian immigrant men hold on to “homeland” orientation much more than Iranian immigrant women. In Darwishpour’s analysis of immigrant men and women in Sweden, almost every single man in the report wished to return to Iran if situations would change. However, the answer among the women was the opposite as only one wished to return if situations would change (Darwishpour, 2002:278). For the women, a return could mean they would lose their status, but for the men it could mean they would improve their status. In this sense, one could argue that the men have a higher sense of keeping in touch with the premigration networks and cultures of the homeland (Brubaker, 2005:8). It could be argued that their desire to do so is a way for them to hold on to the status they previously had before migration, when the networks and cultures of the homeland provided them with the authority and identity they previously held. The “values, identities, and loyalty” to the homeland thus becomes even more important, not only as an opposing force against the mainstream culture, but also as a way of keeping their own previously held identity intact. As a report previously observed, in many immigrant families the men “tend to live in yesterday, the women in today, and the children in the future” (Darwishpour, 1998:22). Thus, while Iranian immigrant men hold onto ideas of “yesterday” the Iranian immigrant women try to adapt to “today.” However, this also increases the risk of having different opinions on various matters between the Iranian immigrant man and woman and also between the Iranian immigrant man and the general norm of society.

4.2.3 Engagement

As studies have shown, Iranian immigrant women are more engaged in a dialogical citizenship strategy; they are acculturating through engagement. For example, previous studies show that Iranian immigrant women are more open to adapt to Swedish sexual norms and couple-building (Ahmadi, 2003), have a higher enrollment in higher education (Darvishpour, 1998; Naghdi, 2010) and have an easier time to get into the job market (Kaladjahi, 1997; Darvishpour, 1998; Lewin Ahmadi, 2001). Regarding the education aspect, a report made in 2011 from Statistics Sweden showed that of the Iranian immigrant women who began their studies at the age of 25 in Sweden, the enrollment was 62% in comparison to 42% of the Iranian immigrant men (Statiska Centralbyrån, 2011:15). Education is known to be a powerful factor to decrease the differences but increase the tolerance between individuals. Education also provides individuals with better equipment to partake in social life and the job market (Regeringen, 2000). In addition, Iranian women have an easier time to get into the job market (Kaladjahi, 1997; Darvishpour, 1998; Lewin Ahmadi, 2001). In the home country, many Iranian women were excluded from certain areas in the labor market, or the jobs they had were not seen as valuable as those carried out by men (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:127). However, with migration comes the chance to change this subordinate position and thus unlike some of the men, the women accept jobs below their skill level and enter the market quicker, gain cultural competence and can further advance their career (ibid).

An important notion of the acculturation strategy of engagement is also that individuals who engage in this form of action believe that their perspectives matter. As Kinvall and Nesbitt-Larking points out “Where they (citizens) do believe that their perspective matters, they will be more prepared to engage and will do so in the belief that they are going to be able to influence the distribution of valued goods and the making of binding decisions” (2001:160). As mentioned before, in the home country, many Iranian women were excluded from certain areas in the labor market, or the jobs they had were not seen as valuable as those carried out by men (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:127). In addition, in Iran in both the private and public sphere women take on a more submissive role as the Iranian government and society in general values masculine norms over feminine (Khosravi, 2009). The governmental laws also discriminate women in favor of men (ibid: 592-594). However, with migration to

Sweden the chance to gain status increases. In Darwishpour's study of Iranian men and women's relations after migration to Sweden, several women confirmed the improved status immigration had given them. One woman described how she filed for divorce one year after immigration because she discovered she could stand on her own feet; another described how immigration made it possible for her to file for divorce because in the home country, doing so would mean losing custody of the children; and a third woman described how immigration made it possible for her to go out and socialize more, while her husband wanted to read books and didn't like the Swedish culture (Darwishpour, 2002:279-281). Hence, many Iranian immigrant women try to change their position in the family structure as well as the society to become less inferior, more independent and to create a new lifestyle that is seen more positively in society. In this regard, one could argue that the "new" freedom and increased rights that Iranian immigrant women receive when migrating to Sweden also increases their self-importance and self-worth. They might then believe engagement in Sweden will increase their status further.

As Iranian immigrant women already belong to a lower-status group, replacing or adjusting the "old" identity" with a new is easier for them. As studies have observed, individuals who belong to low-status groups are willing to leave their group identity and take on individual rather than collective solutions to the identity of the group, if given the chance (Huddy, 2001:140; Reicher, 2004:931). For the Iranian immigrant women, dropping their previously held identity is not as much of a problem since it would mean an improvement of their status. This in turn does not restrict them to hold onto old values and norms from the country of origin and thus it makes them more receptive and flexible towards other norms and values of the new country. Being receptive towards other norms and values thus shapes Iranian women's "new" identities, which can be more in accordance with the mainstream society (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:125).

One way for members of low-status groups to try and change their position in those areas they have been defined as inferior is to try and create "new dimensions on which they can be defined positively" (Reicher, 2004:932). Indeed, it seems to be the case that many Iranian immigrant women try to change their position in the family and societal structure to become less inferior, more independent and to create a new lifestyle that is seen more positively in society. An example of this can be that Iranian immigrant women have a higher enrollment in Swedish universities than Iranian

immigrant men (Statiska Centralbyrån, 2011:15) In addition, women accept jobs below their skill level and enter the market quicker, gain cultural competence and can further advance their career (Lewin Ahmadi, 2001:127). Hence, they try to change their position in areas they have previously been defined as inferior. This new position in society not only improves their position and self-image, but it also improves the image others in society have of them. The positivity of the woman's acculturation through engagement in the Swedish society makes the society's attitude towards her also more positive (ibid). Thus, the immigrant Iranian woman effectively creates "new dimensions on which [she] can be defined positively" (Reicher, 2004:932). Because of their willingness to open to society, they also integrate easier. Their improved position in society and the increased rights they are given in the new country gives them opportunities to change their situation to the better, and thus they develop a more positive attitude towards the new society (Darwishpour, 2002:277). In this regard they begin to engage in bargaining, openness towards the other, collaboration and dialogue not only between them and the rest of society but also within their dialogical self (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking, 2001:160).

5. Conclusion

This research has discussed and analyzed the ways that social and cultural contexts create internal battles among identity components and how it affects Iranian immigrant men and women's integration outcomes in the Swedish society. Gender and social identity theories have been used to understand why there is a difference in identity-processes between Iranian immigrant men and women. The analysis of these identity processes has then been applied to the acculturation model of Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking in order to understand the integration strategies and outcomes between the genders.

As the researched showed, Iranian immigrant men have a higher risk of going through an identity-crisis because of their gender and social identity being previously connected to a high-status, authoritarian, male-dominated position in society. The reaction of the different identity-processes that Iranian immigrant men and women go through during a resettlement can then result in retreatism or essentialism among the Iranian immigrant men, and engagement among the Iranian immigrant women. In this

sense, Iranian immigrant women integrate more effectively in Sweden because of their engagement in the society, whereas Iranian immigrant men integrate less because of retreatism or essentialism. In light of this, Iranian immigrant men to a larger extent hold onto notions of “yesterday,” while Iranian immigrant women live in “today.” This of course creates conflicts in terms of the Iranian immigrant man’s integration in society.

It is here important to point out that even if Iranian immigrants acculturate successfully, it does not necessarily mean their Iranian culture weakens. One culture doesn’t have to be removed to give “space” to another. For example, they can feel both Iranian and Swedish at the same time; the key though is to find a balance and flexibility so that both cultures can unite harmoniously. Another thing to keep in mind is that the “host” society, which in this case is Sweden, also goes through a process of acculturation as “ethnic” Swedes are exposed to new ways of thinking and acting when they come in contact with a group from a different culture. In this research, I have focused on integration strategies among an immigrant group resettling in Sweden, but genuine successful and long-term integration means the “host” society also has to become flexible and develop its norms, values and behavior in order for all residents to be unified and have an effective dialogue with one another.

The importance of adaptation and successful integration is especially true today as globalization is making it easier than ever for people to travel from one part of the world to another. As this globalization makes it almost impossible to avoid contact with different cultures and backgrounds, it inevitably affects individuals’ view of themselves and others. As a multicultural society, Sweden is enriched by the presence of multiple cultures where diverse groups share their beliefs, values, attitudes, and ways of behaving. Nonetheless, this makes it even more important for individuals to learn how to mutually adapt in this multicultural environment in order to develop social cohesion and participation towards a happier, safer, and more unified society.

Identity-processes during resettlement play a major role in the outcomes of integration, but it is of course not the only vital aspect within this field. As the concept of integration is a complex, broad and diverse field, research of other aspects within the integration processes among both immigrant groups and “ethnic” Swedes can help us understand and get a more holistic view of the underlying causes of integration differences and attitudes among Iranian immigrant men and women.

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