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The Potential for Transformation in Second Generation Afghan Women Through Graduate Education

Mahmud Yusuf

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THE POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION IN SECOND GENERATION AFGHAN
WOMEN THROUGH GRADUATE EDUCATION

A Dissertation

By

MAHMUD YUSUF

Presented to the School of Graduate Studies of

The University of the Incarnate Word

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The University of the Incarnate Word

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Abstract

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Dissertation Chair: Dr. Richard Gray

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2007

This dissertation examines the educational experiences of Afghan women in graduate education whose parents are Afghan immigrants. Afghan immigrants are from one of the smallest ethnic groups in the United States and have only started arriving here after the 1980s. Their participation in the educational system has gone largely undocumented. Afghan Americans have been educated in the American system by immigrant parents who have had little experience with this system. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Afghan American women about education, family, ethnicity, and relationships. The women's experiences are discussed in the interconnected contexts of the Afghan American experience, the educational system, and in particular graduate education. Being raised in an immigrant home has influenced the women's encounters with education and the decisions they have made. Issues of resistance and assimilation are considered in this study. Findings from this research include the discovery of five themes that lead to four roles which the women adopt in order to survive graduate school.

The women develop these roles in order to find ways to approach their graduate work while maintaining the relationships in their personal lives and their cultural identities. Recommendations are made for further research and applications of research findings.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Context of the Study

Afghanistan's history, its internal political development, its foreign relations, and its very existence as an independent state have been largely determined by its location at the crossroads of central, West, and South Asia. Waves of migrating peoples poured through the region in ancient times, leaving a human diasporas to form a mosaic of ethnic and linguistic groups.

Although it was the scene of great empires and flourishing trade for over two millennia, Afghanistan did not become a truly independent nation until the twentieth century (Grau & Gress, 2002). For centuries it was a zone of conflict among strong neighboring powers, and the area's heterogeneous groups were not bound into a single political entity until the reign of Ahmed Shah Durrani, who in 1747 founded the monarchy that ruled the country until 1973. After his death, the absence of a strong successor who possessed a strong military and political skill resulted in the temporary disintegration of the kingdom he had created, a frequent pattern in the area's history. Just as it was in the arena of conflict between the Mughal Empire of India and the Safavi Empire of Iran in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, Afghanistan in the nineteenth century lay between the expanding might of the Russian and British Empires. It was in the context of this confrontation that Afghanistan in its contemporary form came into existence during the reigns of Dost Mohammad Khan and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (Grau & Gress, 2002).

Afghans make up a diversity of ethnic groups that have differing physical features and numerous languages. Essentially, though, they are predominantly Muslim Indo-European speakers of Caucasian descent (Dupree, 1980). Dupree points out that at least 20 distinct factions that have separate languages and cultural traditions live in the multiple landscapes of the country. The primary languages are Persian (Farsi, Dari) and Pashto; the Pashto ethnic group has been the monarchical class for the past 150 years. The fundamental social and economic unit is the extended family. Afghan society is highly stratified and hierarchical based on class, age, gender, and family background. More than 90 % of Afghans were agriculturists, herdsman, or both before the 1978 war broke out (Dupree, 1988; Shorish-Shamley, 1991).

In the great-power relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, Afghanistan was neutral until the late 1970s, receiving aid from both countries. In the early 1970s the country was beset by serious economic problems, particularly a severe long-term drought in the center and north of the country (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Maintaining that King Muhammad Zahir Shah had mishandled the economic crisis and in addition was a stifling political reformer, in July of 1973 a group of young military officers deposed the King and proclaimed a republic. The King's cousin, Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan, became president and prime minister. In 1978, Daud was deposed by a group led by Noor Mohammed Taraki, who instituted Marxist reforms and aligned the country more closely with the Soviet Union. Taraki was an important member of the Khalq faction of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). After the

Saur revolt left Mohammad Daoud Khan dead, Taraki became the President of the Revolutionary Council, Prime Minister of the country, and Secretary General of the PDPA. In September 1979, Taraki was killed and Hafizullah Amin took power. Amin was a prominent member of the Khalq faction of the PDPA, and eventually, after ousting Noor Mohammad Taraki, became the President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in September 1979. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan, Amin was executed, and the Soviet supported Babrak Karmal became president.

At the time Taraki's assuming of power a growing resistance movement among the different Afghan ethnic groups united to form the Afghan *Mujahideen* (freedom fighters) and, with American arms, began fighting a 13-year war against the former Soviet Union and the Afghan communist government. When the war began, the population of Afghanistan was approximately 16 million (Dupree, 1988). By 1985, two million of those were still refugees as a result of the prolonged war, making Afghans the largest refugee population in the world (Refugee Reports, as cited in Omidian, 1996). Because of this occupation, one million Afghan refugees lived in camps in Pakistan and the other million in Iran. Of the rest, about 100,000 were scattered across the globe, while more than 60,000 have settled in the United States (Voice of America broadcast reports, 1995).

Coming to America

Within Islam, there is a tradition dating back to the Prophet Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD of flight in face of invasion or persecution from non-Islamic forces, with the aim of preserving the faith (Hitti, 1996). As one of the poorest countries in the world, even prior to the outbreak of war, there has been a tradition of Afghan men (usually women have moved only as part of a family group) migrating to seek either seasonal or longer-term work in neighboring countries or the Middle East. The number of working immigrants in Iran, prior to 1979, was estimated to be between a half and one million (Strand, 2001).

The mass exodus of Afghan refugees, following the Soviet invasion of December 27th 1979 constituted one of the world's largest movements of people from one country. Most Afghans regarded the Soviet invaders as infidels and therefore considered that their presence in Afghanistan constituted a valid justification of exodus to neighboring Islamic states. During this time, an estimated 3.5 million refugees fled to Pakistan and 2.3 million to Iran where they were welcomed and supported (UNHCR, 1994). The families with connections and well constituted bank accounts made it to the West and settled in countries like the United States (Nawa, 2001).

Afghan refugees came to the United States seeking political asylum. Almost every Afghan family has a story about their flight to safety and the dangers encountered on the way to one of the transitional countries of Pakistan, India, or Iran before migrating to the United States. Many lost family members and relatives in the war. They came to the

United States disillusioned by tragedies and the loss of their homeland, paranoid from living under a police state (Omidian, 1996).

The initial group of Afghans who became American immigrants in the early 1980s was the urbanite educated elite. Many who came to America gave up government posts, professional positions, and family businesses in Afghanistan. As refugees in the United States, many Afghans received federal aid and some continue to collect welfare and disability funds (Omidian, 1969).

Afghans at first lived in various states in America, and a consolidated community did not develop until the last 16 to 17 years from 1982. Through the family reunification laws, many Afghans were able to sponsor their whole families to migrate to the United States, which included those that were less educated and from a lower class status. When immigration policies toughened, some paid smugglers to bring them to America (McGrath, 1982, p. 35).

Immigration continued throughout the 1980s and the 1990s and as of the late 1990, New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles follow the Bay Area as the cities with the largest Afghan populations in the country (Omidian, 1996). Mild weather and a high percentage of federal aid drew the majority of Afghans to California where population estimates, range between 3,000 and 40,000 (Omidian, 1996). The city of Fremont, with a population of 203,000, has the largest Afghan population in the United States. It is sought by middle-class families fleeing soaring Silicon Valley housing prices, and is home to 10,000 Afghans, part of an estimated 40,000 who have settled in the San

Francisco Bay area, the USA's largest concentration (Ritter, 2001). It appears likely that promises of entrepreneurship and the diversity of the New York City boroughs attracted the second largest population of Afghans, estimated at 15,000 to 20,000. From between 10,000 to 15,000 Afghans live in the Washington metropolitan area, which include parts of Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia (Richburg, 2004).

Afghan enclaves developed in these areas partly because the original group of refugees was able to establish successful small businesses such as pizza parlors and beauty salons. As a result, an economic network formed and many Afghans who may have been living in separate states moved to these three regions, either to open businesses or join their immediate or extended families. The enclaves are social units segregated from mainstream America and revolve around family parties, weddings, and picnics. In New York there is a large Pashtun population, while in California and Virginia the enclaves consist of almost every ethnic group. Afghans in different enclaves maintain frequent contact with each other and with relatives in Afghanistan and abroad (Omidian, 1996, p. 13).

Education and Cultural Change

A noticeable generational difference is that young Afghans are generally less educated in the United States than their parents were in Afghanistan (Barakat & Wardell, 2001). Their parents came here as refugees who were forced to leave their status and money behind. "The major employment for this generation is buying and selling goods at local flea markets, an activity that brings in cash while allowing families to receive Medi-

Cal and other benefits to which they have been accustomed” in the Bay Area (Omidian, 1994, p 107-108). Therefore, the younger generations of Afghans do not have the status, wealth, and resources to succeed in the United States that their parents had in Afghanistan.

For those young Afghans who immigrated before their teens, it was easier to learn English and to succeed in the American educational system. Some of those who arrived in their teens had some knowledge of the English language by taking English courses in either Pakistan or India, but most of the earlier settlers said that learning English in high school was the hardest challenge in adjusting to life in America (Nawa, 2001). This group tends to include many English terms in their conversations; however the sentence structure, main ideas and feelings are often expressed in Pashto and Persian. Another obstacle to higher education and professional careers was a shortage of money. Many of the early arrivals to the United States said they had to work during and after completing high school to help their family’s finances. In many Afghan families the children, parents, and extended family members combine salaries to make the lower-middle class income break in the United States (Rahmany, 1992).

Besides economic and language barriers, the teen immigrants also had to learn about the new educational system. They had to familiarize themselves with college preparatory courses, college application forms and standardized tests. Financial aid was only available to students who had taken honors courses and had received high marks in their courses. These refugee teens turned to community colleges and two-year vocational

programs for their future, and some teens overcame the hurdles and received a four-year college degree (Omidan, 1996). The women in this early group tended to have had less education than the men and even the women who worked in the field as engineers and doctors were educated in Afghanistan and had to go back to school to obtain the American license to work in the United States (Omidian, 1994).

Status of Women

Over the last hundred years the status of women in Afghanistan has varied widely. Education, while seen as improving the overall structure and power of the nation, was gendered because it was closely associated with women's roles as mothers and caretakers in the domestic spaces of home and family (Joseph, 2003; Kabeer, 1991; Liu, 1994). Women's inclusion into society through education and dress were as Ahmed (1992), Kandioyto (1991), and Najambadi (1997) argue linked to the fact that powerful countries (in Europe) educated their women. Therefore, the education of women was not seen as a means of increasing women's participation in civil or political society, but as an attempt to solidify the nation's power by emulating the society of the European (Imperial). Most notably, movements towards women's education in Afghanistan were based on notions that educating women would be good for Afghanistan but were not linked to women's equality with men. Women's education was therefore seen as a method for improving the state as a political and civil entity in the global system rather than on women's social and political mobility and power within the nation (Emadi, 2002).

Efforts to empower women often have been led by male political leaders as part and parcel of state modernization policies. These gender reform efforts have repeatedly been challenged and sometimes reversed by the conservative orthodoxy within the religious community and the rural population. The swings have been vast and complicated at times. Afghan women began to be sent abroad for education in 1928, with female teacher training beginning in 1957 (Amiri & Hunt, 2001). The 1964 Afghan constitution granted women full and equal rights to participate in all societal institutions including the right to vote. The last 30 years of political upheaval and war witnessed diminished tolerance for women. During the Taliban era women were entirely disenfranchised, losing even their most fundamental rights. While female literacy levels were typically less than 20%, as of 2001, some 4% of women were reported to be literate (Amiri & Hunt, 2001).

The Afghan community's fear of disintegration has sparked a campaign among the old and some of the young to hold on tight to the "old way" and forge the solidarity left behind in Afghanistan. But the young individuals are reexamining and reinventing the "old culture" and forming a new discourse.

Dupree (1988) notes that during the 1960s and 1970s, conditions for women varied widely depending on their socio-economic position and on whether they lived in an urban or rural environment. By the end of the 1970s, among the middle and upper class elite, many Kabuli women were able to move freely around the city without a male family member. They regarded education as their right, studied at a university, and expected to have their own career. However, Dupree also notes the reaction this produced among religious conservatives. There were violent demonstrations, particularly at Kabul

University, where unveiled female students in short skirts had acid thrown on them, and women themselves responded by demonstrating as a group for the first time.

Conservative religious reactions to women's education and emancipation were a key feature of the anti-government protests of the 1970s, which finally resulted in the leftist coup d'état of April 1978 (Dupree, 1998a).

World Bank statistics (2001) put female literacy in Afghanistan at just over 20% compared to a figure of over 50% for men. At the end of 1990s the report states that only 3% of girls are enrolled in primary school, compared to 39% for boys, and there are fears that female literacy will fall still further. However, the full impact of Taliban policies on female education is still not clear. The Report of the United Nations Secretary General on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan noted that in 1999 there was an *increase* in the number of community and home-based schools for girls in various parts of Afghanistan (WHO, 2001). With women comprising over 70% of qualified teachers in Afghanistan, the Taliban's ban on women working had a negative impact on boys' education, while ensuring a large pool of otherwise unoccupied women teachers was available to teach girls in the informal sector. There is some suggestion that the proliferation of such informal, home-based female education could well mean that more girls have had access to some form of education than before and although this certainly was not the intended outcome of the Taliban policy (WHO, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

Women from Afghanistan have experienced the process of immigration, cultural adaptation, and education in a variety of ways and in various aspects of their lives. Their experiences span different generational, religious, and regional points of view;

furthermore, their status as single, married or divorced women, mothers, sisters or daughters, and as homemakers or professional women, adds additional layers to their lives as students. Circumstances make their experiences different and yet similar to those of other women immigrants and their daughters. Gender role expectations form the foundation of the various struggles of women who have come to the United States of America from Afghanistan. While first generation parents want their children to adopt some aspects of western culture such as education or an occupation, they also expect their offspring to forego their foreign influence at will under other circumstances, especially in issues of dating and marriage. Thus, parents do not want their children to completely submerge themselves in this mainstream culture by adopting all western social patterns of behavior, referred to as cultural assimilations (Nawa, 2001).

These conflicting expectations put tremendous pressure on the second and subsequent generations to be Americans outside the home and Afghans inside the home. This pressure is especially felt by young women who, like most women around the world, are considered the bearers of tradition and thus are expected by their communities to preserve 'the culture' and pass it on to the next generation (Nawa, 2001).

The rapid increase in the population of Afghans living in the United States, coupled with the disproportionate levels of educational attainment for Afghan women, suggests a need to better understand the educational and transforming experiences of this group of adult Afghan women in order to provide more effective educational programs for those women who decide to pursue higher education.

Taylor (1997) makes the observation that some have used Mezirow's theory of transformative learning as a jumping-off point to examine ways adults transform thought

process and develop through other ways of knowing. In his critical review of empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative theory, Taylor (1997) writes that "there is almost no discussion about transformative learning theory as a viable model for adult learning or about implications for practice based on empirical studies. There is a real need to build upon the theoretical discussion and explore what empirical studies say about transformative learning" (p. 35). In addition, he writes, "adult educators are being encouraged to practice a particular approach to teaching toward an outcome (perspective transformation) and with a process that is inadequately defined and understood" (p. 54).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of Afghan American women motivated to pursue graduate education whose parents are Afghan immigrants to the United States of America.

The primary questions which guided the research were:

1. What experiences do the women consider most significant in facilitating their accommodations of traditional Afghan and the new American culture?
2. What were the significant barriers to development of their new bicultural identity and how were those barriers handled?
3. What are some of the motivational factors that encouraged these women to enter into a graduate program?
4. How are the educational experiences different than their earlier generations or parents?

Theoretical Framework

Transformative learning theory. This study utilized Mezirow's theory as Transformative Learning as a theoretical framework. The concept of transformative learning has been a topic of research and theory building in the field of adult education (Taylor, 1997). Although Mezirow is considered to be a major developer of transformative learning theory, other perspectives about transformative learning are emerging. As described by Mezirow (1997), transformative learning occurs when individuals change their frame of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implanting plans that bring about new ways of defining worlds. This, he terms as perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997). His theory describes a learning process that is primarily "rational, analytical, and cognitive" with an "inherent logic" (Grabov, 1997, pp. 90-91).

Perspective transformation as a learning process is that process by "which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6). Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of ...

... becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these understanding. (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6)

Mezirow and Marsick (1978) reported that women enter the transformation process at different points. The steps of the transformation process "do not follow an invariant sequence" (p. 16). The passage through a transformation is difficult to negotiate

and frequently involves “compromise, stalling, backsliding, self-deceptions and failure” (Mezirow, 1981, p. 8). Once a perspective transformation has occurred, the woman does not return to the old perspective, but she can stall, either temporarily or permanently, at any phase, but especially at two points. First, she may stall at beginning “when exposing one’s life roles and the feelings surrounding them to critical analysis [which] threatens a long established sense of order” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 16). Second, she may stall when “a commitment to action should logically follow awareness and insight but is so threatening or demanding as to be immobilizing” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 16).

Mezirow and Marsick (1978) described perspective transformation as a process, “more accurately thought of as a praxis ... in which understanding and action interact to produce an altered state of being” (p. 15).

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experiences. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understandings is the cardinal goal of adult education.

Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking (Mezirow 1997, p. 5). Since first introduced by Mezirow in 1998, the way to understand this concept is that over time, people take in or get used to the nature of things that they have grown-up with at home, their immediate communities, their cultural confines, the media blitz, and the friends they keep. Therefore, association is very important with reference to

transformative learning, and as we all bring some form of ideas, concepts, and thoughts to the table, they will be some form of learning. Further more, the issue of moral values with respect to transformational learning is legitimized by agreement and through dialogue. The positive values of truth, justice, and freedom that one finds in the realm of a more humanistic world, has been discovered to be more beneficial than one opting for their opposites. With the United Nations as a backdrop, and the standards of moral value being the mantra for a “better” world, it’s this declaration of human rights that needs to be observed and seen if everyone out there in this world of ours, has the ability to speak freely than this world of ours can become a much better place to live. Or in other words, a world made of positive values and feelings.

Education that fosters critically reflective thought, imaginative problem posing, and discourse, is learner-centered, participatory, and interactive, and it involves group problem solving. Instructional materials reflect the real life experience of the learners and are designed to foster participation in small group discussions to assess reasons, examine evidence, and arrive at a reflective judgment. Learning takes place through discovery, and the imaginative use of metaphors to solve and redefine problems. (Mezirow, J. 1997)

From the researcher’s understanding, learning as transformation goes to the heart of an age-old dilemma: the link between personal and social change and how we change ourselves to adapt to or challenge the circumstances that surround us. A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretation rather than act such understandings is the cardinal goal of adult education.

Research Design

The study included 10 personal interviews with Afghan American female graduate or professional students in various departments at colleges/universities in the United States of America. The women were first generation Americans, with both parents born in Afghanistan and immigrating to the United States after 1978. Although sharing a cultural background, the women did not necessarily share a common economic or social one. Each woman was asked to discuss their experiences in general terms as well as on a daily basis as students and as community and family members.

Qualitative research was the appropriate method for this research project for several reasons that will be briefly mentioned here and elaborated upon in the methodology chapter. For example Merriam (2002) writes about a basic interpretive and descriptive qualitative study that exemplifies all the characteristics of qualitative research. The researcher was interested in understanding how participants make meaning in a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome was descriptive. Moreover, when a researcher undertakes to conduct a basic qualitative study, the researcher seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis of the participants, and are analyzed to identify the repeating patterns or the common themes that show-up in the data. A wealth of descriptive findings is presented and discussed, using references to the literature that outlines the research study.

Levinson's and Levinson's (1996) study of women's development is situated in the literature on the adult growth and development. The authors interviewed 15 homemakers, 15 corporate businesswomen, and 15 academics. Findings of women's development patterns parallel their earlier study of male development in which 40 men in midlife were interviewed. Levinson and Levinson found that the basic structure or underlying pattern of a women's life evolves through periods of tumultuous, structure building phases altering with stable periods of development.

Through-in-depth interviews the researcher probed the women's views on various issues, both those that he believed at the start are significant to understanding their experiences and those which he discovered to be significant through his own discussions with them. This methodology allowed for the women's voices to be the basis of the analysis, an important point given that their voices had until now been silent in academic literature. The interviewing style the researcher used also permitted him to acknowledge and respond to some of the women's concerns and questions. There was also an opportunity with this methodology to recognize the role of the researcher in the process, and it would be inaccurate to ignore the role in this particular instance. These women were a self-selected sample in that they had chosen to attend graduate school while others with similar backgrounds did not. As graduate students, the women were a group familiar with research practices and process. They were articulate and used to express their opinions and views than the general population. In this sense the research data was rich and detailed reflecting these participant characteristics.

Significance of the Study

This study offered insight on how family, educational experiences, and culture, accompanied with adversity, affected Afghan women in higher education. Studying Afghan American women who had attained higher education provided a means for understanding the process by which these women exceeded various obstacles in their lives and their educational pursuits. A study of successful women who had pursued their educational goals without alienating themselves from social and psychological support provided insights for developing programs to educate the community, particularly women.

Previous studies had not specifically addressed Afghan American women who had overcome strong adversity. Studying the Afghan American women that have overcome severe odds shed light on what had motivated them to pursue educational degrees. The women offered important insights about their experiences and their strategies for success. Their voices helped the researcher to understand how and why members of this very new and underrepresented population had gone out and pursued education and succeeded. This insight and research has enhanced the opportunities for other Afghan American women to follow in the path of these women and join the educated classes in America. It was hoped that the women would contribute to creating an adult education environment that revolved around the program planning and the development in the experiences of the participants and in the recognition of the power relationship that existed in all aspects of the educational process.

The information gained from this study also had policy implications for more effective programming in graduate schools in order to attract and retain a diverse mix of students. This knowledge was ever more crucial due to the expected increase in the population of the Afghan American in America.

One of the many benefits of gathering the stories of successful Afghan women who had overcome adversity is to send a message to the women, their children, and their peers that what they have accomplished “matters.” Understanding the perspectives of Afghan American women who had succeeded despite the odds was a big step toward educational equity for other women and would be used to inform educational policies and practices.

The women were asked to consider how their relationships with others who had changed over their educational careers. Relationships with their families and how they perceived these relationships as influencing or being influenced by their educational experiences was a focus of this study. Finally, the researcher considered the relationship between the women’s role as students and family members. Therefore, the conclusion of this study was helpful to educators in their role as change agents who participated in the transition “process as that of helper, guide, encourager, consultant and resource” (Knowles, 1980, p. 37).

As both an international student and an immigrant to the United States, the researcher like most of his generation, grew up on the edge of two, often conflicting worlds. The boundaries between these worlds usually blurred, sometimes juxtaposed and

sometimes overlapped. The researcher had one foot planted in the traditional world of his early life in Pakistan, and the other rooted in the world outside my front door. The journey to adulthood and finding one's place in the world is difficult enough, but immigrants must also find a bicultural identity that will reconcile one culture with the other. This paper was inspired by his personal journey as a South Asian American man who grew up in the United States and struggled to build a bridge between several different cultures: South Asian, Asian Pakistan, Asian Afghan, American and Asian Pakistani/Afghan. This process continues into his adulthood and now takes on a new dimension as his family members and him try to transmit a meaningful blend of values, traditions, and culture to the second generation of his family.

The researcher undertook this research project for many reasons, both academic and personal. One's need is to rectify an oversight in academic literature, as with many minority groups, the education of Afghan Americans has not been a popular topic of study. A few studies had been carried out which looked at first generation Afghan American women (Rahmany, 1989, 1992). It was disturbing to the researcher as a South East Asian engaged in higher education to find so little documentation of these women's experiences. Therefore, through this research process, the researcher hoped to discover that this type of research endeavor was needed with respect to the presence of Afghan American women in academia. To counter a near absence of research about this group of women, the researcher hoped to alleviate their and other student group's feelings of being "invisible" in academic literature. Moreover, the relationship between school and home

or between public and private is one that strived to balance out. Understanding the barriers to graduate education that existed for some students and the strategies they used to overcome them informed the researcher the inner workings about graduate education for minority students in general. Many people who had embarked upon post secondary education would be likely to recognize some of the experiences of these women; though doubtless some individuals would be able to empathize more than others.

Limitation of the Study

It was noted that there were some limitations to this study based on the particular choice of sample. The sample was relatively small, although it included women in a variety of academic programs for example, the social sciences, medical sciences, life sciences, and language studies. Most of the women were based in the North East corridor, and Western States of the United States that housed many universities and a multitude of cultural groups represented. These factors had inevitably impacted the women's educational experiences and perhaps made it more likely that they would pursue a higher education than others living in smaller centers. Having said that this brought the study to another limit of the research: that is, it did not include a control group of either Afghan American women who had not pursued a graduate education or of graduate students from other cultures. These women were a self-selected sample in that they had chosen to attend graduate school while others with similar backgrounds did not. As graduate students the women were a group familiar with research practices and process, were used to articulating and expressing their opinions and views than the general population. In this

sense the research data is rich and detailed reflecting these participant characteristics. The Afghan American population was a new ethnic group that had only entered the United States the past 25 years; therefore, in studying them as an experimental approach to adult education, they had the potential to divulge and start a better understanding of the process of transformative learning and the meaning as a model to be used as the workings of a social change component.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

This review of the literature serves as a theory and research based foundation for the research. This chapter includes an exploration of perspective transformation theory with respect to adult development theory and learning theory. (Mezirow, 1996; Tennant & Pagson, 1995). I also will explore the specific learning activities that are presented in the literature as promoting perspective transformation.

Adult Development and Learning.

As educators try to understand the learning theory and apply it in practice, many different concerns are raised. Learning does not occur in isolation; learning has a context of the social, political and historical time-line, and it's based on a more personal foundation. In particular, adult learners bring their previous educational experiences, individual wants and the role of the family and community with them to the learning experience (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1980; Perry, 1970).

This view of learning brings to the foreground the psycho-social side of the adult. As an adult starts to learn, adult development may also be seen in progress. Adult learning and adult development are intertwined and go hand-in-hand up to this juncture of the process. With respect to their theoretical foundations, adult development theory has progressively moved towards a theory of perspective transformation. Different labels and names are used by various researchers: however, many of them are describing a very similar phenomenon (Taylor & Marienau, 1995; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991). One can find examples of these theories that focus on the cognitive development of the adult are Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1974). Jean Piaget is among the

first psychologists whose work is directly relevant to contemporary theories of moral development. In his early writings, he focused specifically on the moral lives of children, studying the way children play games in order to learn more about children's beliefs about right and wrong (Piaget, 1932). According to Piaget, all development emerges from the action; that is to say, individuals construct and reconstruct their knowledge of the world as a result of interactions with the environment. Based on his observations of children's application of rules when playing, Piaget determined that morality, too, can be considered a developmental process (Piaget, 1929).

Perry's intellectual and ethical development schemes (Perry, 1970) were an account of the cognitive and intellectual development of college-age students through a 15 year study of students in the 1950s and 1960s. Perry generalizes that study to give a more detailed account of post-adolescent development than did Piaget. He also introduces the concept of positionality and develops a less static view of developmental transitions. Perry further states that the sequence of cognitive structures that make up the developmental process may be described in terms of cross-sections of cognitive structures representing different stages in the developmental sequence. Each stage is construed as a relatively stable, enduring cognitive structure, which includes upon past structures (Perry, 1970). Stages are characterized by the coherence and consistency of the structures that compose them. The transition between stages is mediated by less stable and less consistent transitional structures.

Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1984) modified and elaborated Piaget's work. Consistent with Piaget (1932) he proposed that children form ways of thinking through their experiences which include understandings of moral

concepts such as justice, rights, equality, and human welfare. Kohlberg (1969) followed the development of moral judgment beyond the ages studied by Piaget, and determined that the process of attaining moral maturity took longer and was more gradual. On the basis of his research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels. Each level represented a fundamental shift in the social-moral perspective of the individual. At the first level, a person's moral judgments are characterized by a concrete individual perspective. As is Piaget's framework, the reasoning of Stage 1 is characterized by ego-centrism and the inability to consider the perspective of others. At Stage 2 there is the early emergence of moral reciprocity. Reciprocity is of the form, "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Individuals at Stage 3 are aware of shared feelings, agreements, and expectations which take primacy over individual interests, and define what is right in terms of what is expected by people close to one's self, and in terms of the stereotypic roles that define being good e.g., a good brother, mother, teacher. Stage 4 marks the shift from defining what is right in terms of local norms and role expectations to defining right in terms of the laws and norms established by the larger social system. Finally, the post conventional level is characterized by reasoning based on principles, using a "prior to society" perspective. These individuals reason based on the principles which underlie rules and norms, but reject a uniform application of a rule or norm. While two stages have been presented within the theory, only one, Stage 5, has received substantial empirical support. Stage 6 remains as a theoretical endpoint which rationally follows from the preceding 5 stages (Power et al., 1989). Kohlberg used these findings to reject traditional character education practices. These approaches are premised in the idea that virtues and vices are the basis to moral behavior, or that moral

character is comprised of a bag of virtues, such as honesty, kindness, patience, strength, etc. Kohlberg believed a better approach to affecting moral behavior should focus on stages of moral development. These stages are critical; as they consider the way a person organizes their understanding of virtues, rules, and norms, and integrates these into a moral choice (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). In addition, he rejected the relativist point of view in favor of the view that certain principles of justice and fairness represent the pinnacle of moral maturity, as he found that these basic moral principles are found in different cultures and subcultures around the world (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971).

Kegan's spiral stages of the emergence of self (1982) is concerned with three subjects: (a) meaning – that which the human organism organizes; (b) transformation – changing (going beyond, outside of, or on the other side of form; and (c) consciousness – the state or fact of being mentally aware. According to Kegan, we are makers of meaning; “it is not that a person makes meaning, as much as that the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making” (1982, p. 11). From our birth, and throughout our lifetime, we seek to make sense of what goes on around and within us. As we grow old and learn, the process of those sense-making changes; it takes on new, complex, forms. As we grow old, we do not just gain knowledge (the informational explanation for change and growth), but we also learn in a different way (the transformational explanation). Transformation or metamorphosis is a change that moves us beyond or outside of the previous form. As we change, we take on a new beginning and a much bigger form of knowing. Newman, in *The Idea of University*, described “that true enlargement of mind which is the power of viewing things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their

respective values and determining their mutual dependence” (p. 136). In Kegan’s terms, what we were once *subject* to now becomes *object* to us. We cannot take a similar perspective on our current self, because we are subject to that self. Eventually, perhaps, we will once again experience a qualitative shift in our complexity and flexibility of thought, at which point we will be able to see what will then have become our former limitations (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). Kegan’s model describes five transformations throughout the life span. The first, the shift in consciousness from infancy to childhood, and the second shift is from adolescence to young adulthood (1994, p. 195). We will start with the second shift, from adolescence to young adulthood, as a springboard to a more focused view of the major transformation of adults in modern Western society from third-order to fourth-order consciousness (Taylor, Marienu & Fiddler, 2000). The end of adolescence occurs when the young person’s perspective shifts from self-absorption to absorption of what Kegan calls the “psychological surround”. In other words, the young person absorbs the collective voice of those who define what it means to be an adult in society. From society’s perspective, this is an essential transformation—narcissism gives way to empathy, self-interest to mutuality, and amorality to the possibility of guilt. If it does *not* happen, there is increased likelihood of sociopathic attitudes and behaviors (Kegan, 1982). Kegan calls the *next* transformation traditional consciousness and this goes on for a while in the life of the young adult. Casually unaware that “there is no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception” and that it is our construction of this meaning that makes us who we are, “because we *are* the meaning-making context” (1982, p. 11). Societies that

summon peoples deeply held beliefs, and bring together the two groups that are opposite in their belief systems and than ask them to examine how they know what they think they know. If this growth takes place and also if there is enough support to balance the challenge these adults may adopt the bigger and more flexible forms of knowing that Kegan establishes as the transformation to fourth –order consciousness.

This shift echoes aspects of the Perry model, for example, the discovery that one's earlier perceptions were not truth, and that authorities have few, if any, answers. It also echoes *Women's Ways of Knowing*, in the realization that one is responsible to co-construct, or "authorize" knowledge, rather than to absorb it from others or to listen solely to one's "gut feelings." There is even an echo of the relational models, as those who have moved toward the forth order can engage in *connected autonomy* that honors both their individuality and their need for community and relationship (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1986).

The perspectives of women's ways of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986) was the research where the subjects were asked questions dealing with their background, gender, relationships, and "ways of knowing". In addition, the interviews included established interview schedules developed by W. Perry (1970), L. Kohlberg (1984) and C. Gilligan (1982). The work of these authors was chosen for their applicability in the areas of intellectual, moral, and ethical development. To access ways of knowing, the researchers explored how the subject knows what is right or true, reliance on expert's advice or knowledge, and experts disagree, and how the subject decides what is right. Since Perry's (1970) work was based solely on interviews with men, his stages of intellectual/ethical development do not coincide exactly with those that of Belenky

(Belenky et al., 1986), but are nonetheless adequate as a starting point. In analyzing the women's interviews, the authors categorized the women's perspectives into five major epistemological groups: (a) silence; (b) received knowledge; (c) subjective knowledge; (d) procedural knowledge; and (e) constructed knowledge.

Silence. The women were among the youngest and the most deprived of those interviewed. Common themes were feeling "deaf and dumb", disconnected, obedient toward authorities, and extreme sex-role stereotyping. They tended to describe themselves by the actions they performed e.g. "I am a person who likes to stay home" (p. 31) and reported childhoods of little play and dialogue.

Received knowledge. Many of these women reported that experiencing childbirth as a major turning point in their lives. Words were central to the knowing process, as listening was the vehicle. The authors compare this perspective to that of Perry's dualism. Their moral judgments conformed to that expected in their society. They looked to others for knowledge of self or for socially constructed social or occupational roles. This often created high expectations because they saw the need to live up to others' views of them.

Subjective knowledge. As a woman becomes more aware of her own internal resources for knowing and valuing; she begins to listen to the voice within her, and in doing so finds an inner source of strength. Half of the 135 women were in this category, regardless of education, class, ethnicity, or age. What linked these women together was their intuitive and private knowing. The majority of these women grew up in less advantaged, more permissive or more chaotic families. They often grew up thinking they were stupid and helpless. Another common thread was "failed male authority", sexual harassment, and abuse. In fact, within Belenky's sample one of five college women

reported a history of childhood incest. Also noted was an extreme anti-rationalist view—a stance rejecting the sanctity of science and sometimes equated with the male view. These women were characterized by their "walking away from the past" (p. 76). For instance, relationships were severed, obligations were rejected, and women moved out on their own. Stubbornness was a characteristic of most of these women, as they usually knew they would face loneliness or other challenges, but were steadfast in their direction in spite of minimal forethought and reason. The authors compare these women to the male "youths in fairy tales" who set out on their own to discover the world and themselves. Most of these women experienced fluctuations in their sense of self, but they valued this quality as it enabled them to be open to change.

Procedural knowledge. Most of the women in this category were students or had just recently graduated. The authors describe them as more humble and more objective than those in the previous category. They regularly practiced reasoned reflection. Most of them had knowledgeable "benign authorities" (p. 90) in their lives, such as a well-meaning art teacher, counselor or father. These women articulated that knowing requires careful observation and analysis. They also were careful in their responses, knowing that their first instinct may be incorrect. Women in this group believe that everyone views the world through a different lens and that we all construe the world differently. Some practiced "separate knowing" (p.103) which is one type of critical thinking. Others practiced "connected knowing" (p.112) which is based upon personal experience and oriented toward relationships.

Constructed knowledge. Women belonging to this epistemological group attempted to reclaim the self by integrating what they knew with the knowledge gained

from others. Belenky et al., describe this group as engaged in "weaving together the strands of rational and emotive thought" (p.134). Common to these women was a high tolerance for ambiguity or internal contradiction. They saw the knower as an intimate part of the known. In addition, they were able to see the contextual nature of knowledge and envisioned knowledge as a constructive process. These women are described as empathetic, seeking knowledge passionately, and attempting to stretch the outer boundaries of their consciousness. The premise and research of Mezirow's (1978, 1991) theory of perspective transformation evolved from this and similar theory and research in adult development.

The relationship between adult development and learning may be viewed as adult development explaining adult learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 1995; Ginsburg & Oppen, 1988; Taylor & Marienau, 1995; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). "It is hard to imagine the field of adult education apart from the literature on adult development; many aspects of our thinking about adult learners and the learning process are shaped by our knowledge of how adults change and develop across the lifespan" (Clark & Caffarella, 1999a, p. 1). The literature on adult development in the past 10 years has grown particularly as it relates to adult learning. Theories about adult development have been grouped into four models: biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Clark & Caffarella, 1999a, b). Biological models, those that are concerned with how physical changes affect development, and psychological models, those that view development as either sequential, defined by life events or a series of transitions, or relational, have long been part of the adult education literature. Sociocultural and

integrative models represent new ways of thinking about the influence of adult development on adult education.

Sociocultural perspectives of adult development have as their primary focus the social and cultural aspects of adult lives. Factors such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are considered important aspects of development in these models, including how these factors intersect and affect how adults develop (Clark & Caffarella, 1999b). Integrative models examine how the biological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of adult development intersect and influence each other, but models that consider all three perspectives are rare. Because of their recognition of the complexity of the factors that influence how adults learn and grow, integrative models seem to hold the most promise for understanding adult development (Clark & Caffarella, 1999a). Rossiter's (1999) use of a narrative approach as a way to understand development through stories is an example of integrative approach, and other examples are contained in Clark and Caffarella (1999a).

Mezirow's (1978, 1991) explanation of the transitional steps that an adult undertakes in a perspective transformation is the ground work to adult learning. The central role of this concept may be seen when Brookfield (1995) explains critically reflective thinking in terms of "hunting assumptions" and uncovering hidden purpose and power. At this point in time, Brookfield is not only discussing critically reflective thinking, but also perspective transformation, and in broader terms, adult learning. This is one example of how Mezirow's work on perspective transformation has served as a basis for future thought in both fields of adult development and education (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 1994; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991, 1992).

The role of transformative learning in adult development is another area that has received a great deal of attention recently (Daloz, 1999; Hobson & Welbourne, 1998; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Transformative learning is about making changes through transforming one's perspectives of meaning; making senses of these changes frequently involves development (Dirkx, 1998). Daloz (1999) views education as a transformational process, suggesting it is a way that adults make meaning from their lives.

Transformation Learning

The researcher starts with the description of transformative learning, as it was used in this study and discussed how this description is an interpretation of Mezirow's transformative learning theory.

Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness in any human system through the transformation of the basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises. (Elias, 1997, p. 3)

Jack Mezirow (1991) is a leading theorist of adult transformative learning and has set the agenda for theorists and practitioners to work on expanding on his transformative theories. Mezirow (1991) uses the term transformative learning to describe the "development of adult's potential to reinvent assumptions, premises and modes of interpreting their life experiences through critical reflection" (p. 165). Two researchers who have influenced Mezirow's work are Paulo Freire (1970) and Jurgen Habermas (1971). Habermas (1971) writes about the three domains of knowledge (a) technical knowledge is information about cause and effect, (b) practical knowledge is making

sense or meaning between ourselves and others, and lastly (c) emancipatory knowledge revolves around critical self-reflection.

Mezirow (1991) uses Habermas (1971) work as his discussion board and names his domains: instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory. His main domain focus is emancipatory and it is different from Habermas (1971) in that he claims that emancipatory learning happens inside the domains of instrumental and communicative learning.

Mezirow (1991) writes that change through adult education is generated by transformation of meaning perspective, or our frames of references. He says,

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

In other words, he claims that the process of transformative learning is the awareness of one understands assumptions and a willingness to examine them. Mezirow (1991) is not willing to assure us that the process of increased awareness and restructuring is going to be enough to help produce the necessary actions to restructure human society. He further states that this kind of change is an integral and important part of transformative learning, and if we are not willing to adhere to this idea, there can be barriers built because of a number of psychological, situational, and informational problems.

Mezirow's critics argue that his interpretation of transformation theory is significant on a learner-centered, psychological level, but fails to situate the learner in the

context of his or her social environment (Collard & Law, 1989; Inglis, 1997). Mezirow wrote in a 1993 article,

Awareness without action is an abortion of the learning process ... The assumed values of adult education are those involved in an organized effort to assist individuals to learn to take action guided by a perspective which is more inclusive, discriminating, permeable and integrative of experience. (pp. 185-190)

In recent years Mezirow has responded to his critics in an essence to rightly clarify his research, and in responding to one critic, he says,

What I have tried, apparently unsuccessfully, to communicate is that learning is fundamentally social. Our frames of reference are, for the most part, culturally assimilated. Critical reflective insight and conflicting beliefs require discourse to validate them and to find common meaning of our experience. Distortions to communication are placed there by our culture and society. We learn to take social action. Where in all this is centering on the individual learner? Dichotomizing individual and society seems to me counter-productive in trying to understand the learning process. Learning is a social process, but it takes place within the individual learner. (1997, pp. 61-62)

In reviewing the statement, the theoretical and cognitive importance of the statement differs from what Freire (1970, 1996) had to say. To Freire education becomes part of the service of social action and believes that making us aware of the different forces that mold our life will eventually lead to a reshaping our belief systems. On the other side, Mezirow leans towards the cognitive side of learning and says that it changes individuals culturally assimilated frames of thoughts and will lead to the individuals learning to become part of the social action.

Development and understanding of transformative learning as a theory and practice

For several decades, adult educators and learning theorist have been exploring and developing process for learning transformation. A major contributor Mezirow (1991) was

influenced by Friere (1970, 1996) in his early years, and at the same time there have been many other adult educators and theorists who have contributed to explore and understand how to facilitate critical consciousness in adult learners. With this as a backdrop, the dialogue has found two topics of discussion regarding the social and psychological levels at which learning occurs. On one side of the discussion is learning that helps individuals, personal transformation. This topic lays ground to discuss transformative learning from a personal development, psychological perspective (Mezirow, 1991; Rogers, 1969).

The other topic talks about transformation theory perspectives of adult learning that include socially conscious and emancipatory forms of adult education that foster critique and development of democratic capacities necessary for social change. The central point of this topic is Perspective Transformation.

Perspective Transformation

The perspective transformation theory was originally identified among women re-entering higher education (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow (1991) describes the experience as “Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances by more diligently applying old ways of learning, (adults) discover a need to acquire a new perspective in order to gain more complete understanding of changing events” (p. 3). A similar view is represented by Brookfield (1986), “... significant personal learning might be defined as that learning in which adults come to reflect on their self-images, change their self-concepts, questions their previously uncritically internalized norms, and reinterpret their current and past behaviors from a new perspective” (p. 213).

Mezirow's original research (1978, 1991) described ten phases of perspective transformation: (a) A disorienting dilemma, (b) Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, (c) A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural or psychic assumptions, (d) Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change, (e) Exploration of the options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (f) Planning a course of action, (g) Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (h) Provisional trying of new roles, (i) Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and, (j) A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 168-169).

The dynamics of a perspective transformation involve the following steps:

1. A disorienting dilemma. A disorienting dilemma and the source of that dilemma can be caused either by an external event, such as the death of a spouse, a divorce or a loss of a job; or a "feeling that life is not fulfilling" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 13).
2. Self-examination. Self examination includes "an interest in the way one's history and biography has expressed itself in the way one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 5).
3. A critical assessment of personality internalized role assumptions and a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations. Through critical assessment one develops "an awareness of why we attach the meanings we do to reality, especially our roles and relationships" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 11).

4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.

For the process of perspective transformation to be shared, one must be "critically aware of the fact that we are caught in our own history and are reliving it and of the cultural and psychological assumptions which structure the way we see ourselves and others (Mezirow, 1978, p. 109).

5. Exploring options for new roles, relationships and actions. In seeking new

roles, relationships and actions, one recognizes that "adult education can be used to precipitate, facilitate and reinforce perspective transformation as well as to implement resulting action plans" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 109).

6. Building competence and self confidence in new roles. In assuming the new

roles, the learner builds "competence and consequently self-confidence (academic roles are often used as testing grounds for subsequent role experimentation)" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7).

7. Planning a course of action. In planning a course of action, the learner

recognizes that "a new set of criteria come to govern one's relationships ... and to represent conditions governing commitments as well" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 9).

8. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans. Through

"academic enrichment and practical, occupationally oriented courses, [the learner is provided] opportunities to take preliminary steps in implementing actions toward goals defined in the process of perspective transformation" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 8).

9. Provisional effort to try new roles and relationships. It is only through "new

insights [that] roles and values can be further explored and refined, and the feasibility of moving toward new goals tested realistically" (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 8).

10. A reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective. Reintegration into society is founded on “a new identity within a new meaning perspective entailing greater autonomy enhanced personal control and a sense of responsibility for their own lives” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 8).

Theorists, educators and researchers have openly discussed and criticized Mezirow’s works in order to further refine the perspective transformation theory (Cranton, 1994; Newman, 1994; Tennant, 1994; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Cranton (1994), Brookfield (1987) and Tennant (1994) have been prominent voices in the discussion of transformational learning in adult education.

A particularly important distinction has been delineated by Cranton (1994) as she highlights the four stages of “Learner Empowerment” that an adult experiences as they progress through the process of transformative learning: (a) initial learner empowerment, (b) learner critical self-reflection, (c) transformative learning, and (d) increased empowerment, autonomy. These stages are important because they focus the transformative learning theory on the empowerment of the adult. This empowerment is a classic result of the perspective transformation (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). Cranton (1994) provides many examples and discusses the ways that the educator may enable the adult learner to reach a level of increased empowerment and autonomy. Perspective transformation theory has begun to be converted in to action for the practitioner. Development and understanding of transformative learning as a theory and a practice activities that Promote Transformational Learning.

As these researchers/authors have specifically discussed in how to bring transformative learning in higher education (Brookfield, 1986, 1995; Cranton, 1994;

Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Taylor, 1996; Taylor & Marienau, 1995), their focus has been on developing curriculum that will promote transformative learning. The general areas of learning activities that were studied in this research are:

- critical thinking assignments,
- class discussions,
- student self-assessments,
- discovering one's voice, and support

These learning activities are now examined as they appear in the literature.

Critical thinking assignments. Critical thinking is the process of examining assumptions that underlie beliefs, values and ways of understanding (Brookfield, 1987, Dewey, 1933; Glaser, 1941). Brookfield (1995) and Cranton (1994) discuss at length the ways to empower the adult learner with the ability to critically assess their personal beliefs, values and assumptions. Cranton (1994) emphasizes the role of the educator in stimulating critical self-reflection and supporting the learner in the perspective transformation process.

The literature on the topic of critical thinking is now voluminous. Critical thinking is important because it is seen as being at the root of perspective transformation as it involves a learner's internal dialogue. Critical thinking occurs when "new ideas are compared to existing knowledge, hypotheses are raised and tested and there is a continual play between questions raised and answered" (Heiman & Slomianko, 1985, p. 37). Castelli (1994) also finds weight in the practitioner by letting him/her engage the student in order to affect this level of learning.

Cranton's (1994) many recommendations for learning activities that help develop critical thinking skills are grounded in theory and her experience as an adult educator. Some of the techniques that Cranton (1994) encourages are: (a) educators empowering learners by relinquishing some of their position power, (b) the educator empowering learners through discourse, the educator encouraging critical self-reflection, and (c) the learner being included in the decision making. By using questions effectively, Cranton (1994) states that educators may stimulate critical self-reflection in learners, by constructing conscious-raising experiences and experimental learning, using critical incidents, and using journaling in the curriculum.

There is a wide base of literature to support Cranton's statements (Brookfield, 1987, 1995; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Pierce, 1986; Shaw, 1993; Walden, 1995). Brookfield writes about his experience and recommends ways to encourage both critically thinking learners (1987) and educators (1995). Mezirow and Associates (1990) narrate and evaluate a wide variety of transformational learning experiences in diverse adult education environments. Pierce (1986) and Shaw (1993) demonstrate through their research that learning activities may be used to encourage the development of critical thinking skills. Finally, Walden (1995) describes the use of journals as an effective method for women students to learn critically reflective skills.

Brookfield's work (1986, 1987, and 1995) is distinctive because he concentrates on the role of critical thinking in adults in the process of perspective transformation. Brookfield (1986, 1995) offers many excellent methods and tools to facilitate the learning process. For example Brookfield's *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995) entails a very complete discourse on the use of critical incidents in fostering critically

reflective thinking. Critical incidents may serve as an impetus to challenge previously unexamined values, beliefs, and assumptions.

Critical thinking skills can serve as a basis for perspective transformation because it is in critical thinking that the learner examines the assumptions and beliefs. As discussed, critical thinking skills may be developed through several learning activities including: journaling conscious raising experiences, experiential learning, and critical incidents.

Class discussion. The learning environment in which class discussion takes place is critical to the adult learner. A welcome physical environment and a non-authoritarian teacher can break down the walls of hesitancy that many adult learners bring to educational experiences (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1980). The role of the democratic classroom is another key concept in Brookfield's work as it opens the way to learner empowerment. This environment helps to develop the intellectual and emotional platform that is necessary to support an honest assessment of one's values and assumptions. The learner is able to further use their critical thinking skills when a teacher effectively limits assumptions of power and hegemony in their teaching methods (Brookfield, 1995).

Students self-evaluation. Student self-evaluation or assessment is a student's evaluation of their own progress and/or learning (MacGregor, 1993; Taylor & Marienau, 1995). This learning strategy develops several skills: skills of self reflection, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Finley & Kusnic, 1993). In perspective transformation one needs to be able to do each of these; in this way one can see how student self-evaluation assignments could lay the groundwork for perspective transformation. Waluconis (1993) examines how student self-evaluation is a vehicle for the student to examine the learning

process. Waluconis's discussion (1993) is drawn from the experience at a Seattle Community College and is very rich to the contributions to the literature on self-evaluations; he gives many examples of how the self-evaluation process enabled the students to develop skills of evaluations and analysis.

Taylor and Marienau (1995) add a new dimension to the discussion on student self-assessment as they focus on role it plays in the development of the adult women with their book *Learning Environments for Women's Adult Development: Bridge toward Change*. The theory and principles of formative and summative self-assessment and how they affect the development and learning experience of women need to be examined and addressed in self-assessment techniques. K. Taylor (1995) examines how the learner is able to become aware of their own lenses of perception and the very process of making meaning through self-assessment. This is done "as she reflects on what she has learned, on her process of learning, on her perceived successes and failures, and on her awareness of her perceptions—expressing new and still forming ideas" (K. Taylor, 1995, p. 27).

A very specific application of self-assessments are the prior learning assessments that are used to award college credit for life experience; this is a substantive way in which the educational institution can demonstrate that it values previous adult experiences (Droegkamp & Taylor, 1995). In order for such credit to be awarded to the student, a format of self-evaluation is often in order. This experience is the same process as the classroom-assessment. It could also prove to be a perspective transforming experience for the adult as they reflect on their life experience in the context of academic learning.

Discovering one's voice. The self-assessment experience sometimes is the beginning of an adult learner's discovering their "voices" (Eaton & Pougiales, 1993); this

voice is an expression of self-understanding, identity, and acceptance. Daloz (1987) discusses how this is an important expression and validation for a newly transformed and independent adult. This substantiation of the need to change is especially evident in the beginning, “unsettling first steps” of a perspective transformation (Daloz, 1987). Discovering one’s voice in these precipitous beginnings provides the validation often needed and empowers the learner to continue along the journey of change.

Discovering one’s “voice” is described by many as being an especially empowering milestone for an adult learner as it is an indication that they have been able to discover and express their own beliefs and values (Cranton, 1994; Eaton & Pougiales, 1993). Belenky et al. (1986) documents the experience of many women progressing through the perspectives of knowing. The most life-changing transition may be seen in the description of women moving from their lives of silence to having a personal voice: “she must begin to listen to her own voice if she is to become clear and confident and move on in her life” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 51). Voice is a vivid integration of self-evaluation and empowerment; as such its possible contribution to perspective transformation will be examined in this study.

Support. Support may be viewed as a learning activity because it is the process of providing emotional, psychological, or physical assistance to the learner when needed (Bloom, 1995; Daloz, 1987). This support can mean the difference between a student moving on to a new understanding and perspective or staying where it is safe. Moore (1994) describes this conscious choice as a “price to pay that gives pause as students peer over the brink at a new way of viewing the world” (p. 61). The final step in the transformational learning is putting the analysis, critique, and decisions reached into

action (Mezirow, 1991). Brookfield (1986), Cranton (1994), and Daloz (1987) are among those who emphasize the need for the educator to support the adult learner through this phase of the learning process.

Learner support may be accomplished through a variety of means, including: the educator being “authentic,” a welcoming, non-judgmental class attitude, fostering group interaction, encouraging learner networks, mentoring and supporting the learner in their actions. Daloz’s (1987) thesis is the role mentoring that can play in guiding someone through this process of dealing with their changing perspective. In contrast, Brookfield (1986) emphasizes a more formal learning environment when he demonstrates the importance of appropriately facilitated group interaction. In adult education, such groups are a major medium for perspective transformation. Safety, respect, trust, and the codes of conduct are the important factors Brookfield (1986) delineates and they are consistent with Daloz’s recommendations. Together, these may be both the support structure and learning environments that will encourage perspective transformation.

Daloz (1987) states that an important contribution of his book to the support and mentoring of adult learners “is that it offers some new ways of asking questions of students and about them” (p. 90). The fundamental essence of supporting learners may be learning activities, an affirming learning environment and a human relations craft; it is an important area that could be further examined in view of a better understanding of its role in perspective transformation.

Research Studies

Little research (Merriam & Yang, 1996; Williams, 1985) has been done to empirically evaluate the many variables that affect transformational learning in its

application to higher education (E. Taylor, 1995). The emphasis has been on qualitative narrative studies and not on quantitative research per se. This is in part due to the fact that the authors on the topic are educators who draw from their own and the adult learner's diverse experiences in adult education (Brookfield, 1986; Cranton, 1994; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). They seem to know from their experiences in the classroom what facilitates transformational learning and what does not.

An example of such an educator and researcher is Patricia Cranton from Ontario, Canada. Cranton (1994) states that the delineation of activities that facilitate perspective transformation, are based on her experience with three groups of adult learners. These 51 adults were in college level courses when they were working towards a more self-directed learning style. Cranton provides descriptive information about how students experienced perspective transformation that is invaluable. However, Cranton's research, like most other work in the field, does not provide quantitative information on the cause, direction, or nature of such change.

Nonetheless, a more positivist approach to the topic will be valuable for both theory and practice. Although perspective transformation is rooted in constructivist theory, positivist research could demonstrate some of the commonalities in the experience. Such an approach could provide a greater body of research on transformational learning, evaluate activities that promote or inhibit it, and generate many new research questions. This is already evidenced in the few empirical studies that have been conducted to date such as those by Merriam and Yang (1996) and Williams (1985).

Matusicky 

Matusicky (1982) did an observational study of 600 family life educators and a survey of 336 adults enrolled in family life programs in Canada. This is one of the few studies conducted in the higher education setting. Matusicky's research purpose was to develop an instructional model that would be used for in-service training of family life and the educator's learning experience with the opportunity to experience perspective transformation.

Matusicky's (1982) primary data was gathered through in-depth interviews with participants in the program. Questions were asked regarding the activity of learning and the individual's goals for their instruction. Some data were gathered through surveys; this was primarily in the areas of demographics, vocational interests, expectations of the program and personal qualities of family life educators. The survey data were presented in simple table form with percentages or rank order; no further statistical analysis was conducted. The demographic data were used to portray a composite of participating family life educators.

Matusicky's (1982) work is valuable for this present study in several respects: it is based on transformational learning among adult learners in higher education, it has collected demographic data regarding the participants, it has used a survey format to gather such data, and it includes extensive notes on the process and content of the participant's interviews. The format and content of Matusicky's surveys and interviews have been consulted in the formation of the instrument for this research.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter is a description of and a reflection of the research process. The researcher reviewed his choice of methodology and considered how his own subjectivity and role as an “insider” influenced the research process. The researcher outlined specifically the processes of selecting a research topic, enlisting participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing interview data.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

“Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 1). Glesne and Peshkin continue by writing about the importance of beginning with one’s “personal stories” and this is what the researcher has attempted to do in this research project. The motivation for this research project came from having been a graduate student in the United States and noticing that not many women from Afghanistan were enrolled in graduate programs. Therefore, the researcher began to consider what propelled those women like him to do so. His interest in how these women reconciled their roles in the community, in their families and in education began to grow as he struggled towards this end himself.

As Glesne and Peshkin suggest, qualitative research attempts to draw out stories of people’s lives and relates them to each other and to the world around them. This is particularly significant in this instance, as the researcher wished to shed light on the experiences of Afghan American women in academic settings and to explore how these experiences had been shaped by their participation in a particular culture. The researcher chooses qualitative research as the means for their exploration because it allowed him to gather a multitude of details regarding these experiences and to include the women’s own

voices in his discussion. “A qualitative approach,” in his research study, “allowed for latent meanings, interpretations, and the dimensions of experience to be explored,” (Erwin & Maurutto, 1998, p. 56). Again, Glesne and Peshkin, in reference to qualitative research, discuss the “openness” of this type of inquiry and how “it allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7). The researcher’s aim was to do “justice” to the complexity of these women’s lives was strengthened by his own membership in this group.

Qualitative research also allowed the researcher to consider his role in this research pursuit, as well as the analysis. How to conduct himself in this role was an ongoing concern for him. Due to his association with the subjects because of the cultural status he shared, he struggled to keep out his own experiences in the analysis. To only rely on their words to the exclusion of his own seems unfair and unethical. The researcher encouraged them to share their experiences for inclusion in this project without also considering his own. He realized the emotional and intellectual exploration that was necessary to discuss this topic fully and he did not wish to ask them to undertake it while he simply recorded their views.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry also seemed to lend itself to this research project. Inclusion of personal narratives was an important part of this process. During the study the researcher kept a journal. This journal was kept at the interviews with him where he probed the same issues about which he asked the participants to reflect. If narrative inquiry is “the studies of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

then this study fit with this method of inquiry. In this study, the researcher attempted to use narrative and qualitative inquiry to speak about the Afghan American women's experiences. He told their stories as they related to the pursuit of a graduate degree. This type of inquiry appeared to be a meaningful way in which to approach the topic. As Stivers suggests:

The sense of self is an essentially narrative phenomenon; people conceive of themselves in terms of stories about their actions in the world, using them to make sense of the temporal flow of their lives. We find identity and meaning as a result of the stories we tell about ourselves or that others tell about us. therefore, a narrative approach to self-understanding is not a distortion of reality but a confirmation of it. (Stivers, 1993, p. 412)

Therefore, in using this approach the researcher hoped to portray the women's experiences in a manner that they would recognize and appreciate and which is most authentic to their own self-image.

Subjectivity

In his discussion of subjectivity Alan Peshkin makes the claim that "researchers should be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivity" and not simply "acknowledge their subjectivity" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). As the researcher had discussed in Chapter One, he had a personal attachment to this research, so the issue of subjectivity had been a constant concern of his. Peshkin claims that we should remain attentive to it, and he gives useful suggestions for researchers. He suggests, firstly, that subjectivity is not necessarily a negative factor but, "is the basis of researchers' making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18). Secondly, he suggests we "actively seek out

[our] subjectivity” in order to assess “its enabling and disabling potential while the data was still coming in, not after the fact” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 18).

The researcher attempted to consider his subjectivity at every stage of the research process. In this vein, he consistently kept field notes as well as a personal diary to record his thoughts and analysis of the data. He attempted to “resist notions of myself as an ‘objective’ researcher when what I research is so intricately linked to the life I have lived and continues to live” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 52). When the researcher undertook the interviewing process, analysis and writing stages, he tried to be aware and to incorporate in his research some self-reflection where he believed it is appropriate and it added value to the study. With participants in this study and in writing this dissertation the researcher identified his personal location from the start.

Research Strategies

Participants. The participants in this study were Afghan American women who were currently engaging in graduate studies or who had recently completed a graduate degree. The groups of women the researcher interviewed were born in Afghanistan and the United States and whose parents had emigrated from Afghanistan after the 1979 invasion by the Soviet Union or who immigrated to the United States at a very young age with their families during this period. As described in Chapter 1, the majority of Afghan Americans currently residing in the United States are those who immigrated during this period and their direct descendents. The researcher was interested in this particular group, then, firstly because of his own background but also because they comprise the majority of Afghans living in the United States and because their patterns of immigrations were distinct.

Membership lists from professional Afghan Organizations, local rosters of Afghan-American class list from graduate programs, medical and law schools were consulted in identifying potential subjects. In addition, key individuals were contacted at universities, medical affiliates, and judicial agencies and asked to nominate potential study participants. Personal nomination had the added advantage of providing an initial screen for background characteristics of the individuals.

Data collection. In the following section the researcher will describe how he went about gathering data from the study participants. How the researcher handled his role as an interviewer was an important consideration of the research. He was concerned about the power relations when they might naturally arise when one person guides the discussion and then he/she will be the one to take the words and document them. His goal was to avoid the “take the data and run” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) approach to research. There were several ways in which he achieved this goal. Firstly, prior to the interview he shared with the women his reasons for wanting to do the research and what he hoped to get out of it. He did not go into detail regarding his own experiences at the start of the interview as he did not want the women to shape their responses to his descriptions. He did not indicate to the participants his personal and cultural background. Secondly, during the interview process he did not share with the women his own experiences with education.

Oakley’s suggestions were also quite useful in thinking about the interview relationship. She states that:

The goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the

relationship. (Oakley, 1981, pp. 30-61)

She also suggests that the interviewer should share with the participant relevant aspects of her own life and respond to any direct questions of the interviewee to the best of her ability. In their research, which involved interviewing mothers, Griffith and Smith also discuss how they shared their experiences with their participants. They state that “we have deployed our own experiences as mothers to establish ‘rapport’ by indicating shared experiences and a common knowledge of typical situations, etc.” (Griffith & Smith, 1987). They too shared membership in a particular group with their participants, in this case motherhood, and found the sharing of experiences useful and appropriate.

Interview process. The interviews were arranged over the telephone with the women for a time and location that was convenient for both researcher and participant. The discussions were tape recorded and transcribed. The researcher made notes about their comments in his journal but did not intend to use their direct words from the conversations in any written report, although ultimately these discussions shaped his own thought process. As the instrument of the study and as an individual with close ties to the Afghan community, the researcher used his connections of finding a “*desrwahza baan*” or gatekeeper who helped him in securing the women’s interviews. He hoped and felt that the interview process was a positive experience for the women and they felt the research was worthwhile.

Designing Questions

The questions that were used for these interviews were designed in order to allow for an open-ended discussion with the women regarding their educational experiences. Questions were centered on the different stages of the women’s education from

elementary school onward to graduate studies. At each stage, the participants were questioned about their educational experiences, as well as about their relationships with others during their time in school. How educational decisions were made were also explored. Some areas for general discussions were geared towards their views about selected topics pertaining to their cultural and personal lives. Information regarding their age and their current educational pursuits was elicited at the start of the interview. In beginning with these questions, which are for the most part common ones in many people lives, the researcher hoped to get to know the women and also to make them feel comfortable. The primary questions, which guide the researcher, follow:

1. What experiences do the women consider most significant in facilitating their accommodations of traditional Afghan and the new American culture?
2. What were the significant barriers to development of their new bicultural identity and how were those barriers handled?
3. What are some of the motivational factors that encouraged these women to enter into a graduate program?
4. How are the educational experiences different than their earlier generations or parents?

Typical questions, which guide the researcher, follow:

Educational experiences.

1. What are some of the experiences that you remember from high school?
2. Did your high school prepare you for college? How?
3. How prepared did you feel you were for the rigors of college?
4. What were some of your best/worst academic experiences in high school?
5. How did you feel once you entered university?
6. What has your college done to make your experience successful?

7. How did you decide to go on to graduate or post graduate studies?
8. What is your area of research/study?
9. In general would you say that your experiences in graduate studies so far have been positive or negative?
10. What have you found most difficult about graduate work?
11. What is your relationship with faculty like?
12. Do you have a mentor within academia?

Social factors.

13. Who were the people who helped you the most to be academically successful?
14. How have they supported you?
15. How have you been involved in activities at school? And in the community?
16. Have your teachers and advisors supported your academic success? How?

Cultural factors.

17. How would you describe your relationships with your classmates in high school and your teachers?
18. How supportive were your teachers to your desires to attend college?
19. How did they help to prepare you for college?

Resiliency factors.

20. How did you handle any set backs that you may have encountered in school?
21. Were your high school experiences ever stressful? If so, how?
22. How did you handle that?
23. How did you adapt to the rigors of college preparation?

24. Have you encountered any problems adapting to life in college? If so, how have you overcome those problems?

Internal factors.

25. When did you decide that you wanted to go to college?
26. How did you formulate your plans to go to college?
27. How did you prepare for college?
28. What have you done to contribute to your academic success?
29. What have you learned about yourself through your educational experience?
30. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

The lines of questions were an important influence in collecting the data, and the researcher hoped it stemmed from the women's "desire" to tell their stories. He did not just simply ask the women about their graduate education, but also asked them about their personal lives as they had proceeded through their education. He allowed them, through verbal and non-verbal cues, to reflect on a broader picture of their educational lives, one which had included personal relationships outside of the educational context. As Munro (1998) discusses in her study of women teachers, it is important that in order to study women's lives we must include "aspects of their lives that have traditionally been dismissed" (Munro, 1998, p. 5). The researcher believes that by asking the questions about the women's relationships with their families, he captured in their stories details that had been easily "dismissed" that made him understand in a better way their educational decisions and experiences.

Journal

Journal writing is another method that the researcher documented the information and the ideas regarding his research. The journal entries were not necessarily only reflections on the activities of his research but also a place where he would make notes regarding his approach to the research. As a student, Glesne & Peshkin mention, often insights regarding the research topic do not arise while in the field or while one is actively considering it (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Often these thoughts occur when one's mind is wandering while doing something else and it is at these times that having a journal on hand can be useful.

Another manner in which the researcher feels the journal was useful is the unstructured way of writing and his own personal reading allowed him to write freely about aspects of his research which he might have been hesitant to write elsewhere. Areas around his personal feelings about the topic and his participants were not documented if he had not created this outline for himself. Journal writing or "Memo Writing" as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call it, will be productive and relevant to the research process to him. In preparing to write about his research he will reread all the entries and will remind himself about the many details which might otherwise have been lost in the ensuing time.

Interview Protocol

Protection of human subjects. Case study methodology, because of its intrusive nature, must be used by always making the rights of the informant as the primary concern. Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection he or she will also determine the integrity of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) warn, "most concern revolves around issues of harm, consent, deception, privacy, and confidentiality of data"

(p. 168). The researcher must be aware of the harm that he or she might cause the subject as well as the need to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The researcher must not deceive the subject nor should anyone become the subject of a study without giving his or her consent. While the need to protect the participants involved in a study is more obvious, there is also a concern that the reader of a study not be deceived by the researcher who presents his or her data in such a way to imply conclusions that are false, or who might evaluate his or her data in such a way that the reader is lead to false conclusions (Merriam, 1998).

Participant vulnerability is of a particular concern. Chase (as cited in Josselson, 1996, p. 46) concluded that “[t]h extensive use of individuals’ stories in narrative research clearly renders participants more vulnerable to exposure than conventional qualitative studies do.” It is important to clearly define who controls the power of interpretation and how the data collected will be verified for accuracy. To protect the participants, several safeguards were used before beginning the research:

1. Research objectives were explained to the subject both verbally and in writing (Appendix A);
2. The subjects were informed of how the data will be collected and used;
3. Written consent to participate in the study were obtained from the participants (Appendix B);
4. An application was filed with the Institutional Review Board at the University of the Incarnate Word (Appendix C) for approval to proceed with the study;
5. The subjects were informed of all methods of data collections;

6. Transcripts of interviews and data reports were made available to the participants and tapes of the interviews were kept secure and locked;
7. The informant's rights and interests as well as his or her wishes were always considered when decisions were made about reporting the data; and
8. Confidentiality was maintained (Creswell, 1994, pp. 165-6).

Data Analysis

Prior to beginning the analysis phase of the research the researcher had the opportunity to become intimate with his data. He conducted the interviews, he also transcribed his own interviews, and he kept notes written both immediately following an interview and during the transcription process. In coding he followed the "two different phases" outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Although their discussion is based on field notes it is relevant to coding transcripts. In the first phase or "open coding" the researcher read each transcript through "line-by-line to identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes or issues they suggest, no matter how varied and disparate" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 166). As he read through the transcripts of the interviews and highlighted certain sections of the data with a code word, he made a note of the word on a separate sheet and kept adding to the list with each new finding. He also referred to the list whenever he came across something that looked familiar and coded it with a code word previously used. In this manner, he was able to ensure that the data which will be connected could later be accessed together.

In the second phase, "focused coding" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 166), the researcher reread the transcripts and began to code eventually creating a code list which he used to code chunks of data in each interview. After the first few readings, he

began to code things more specifically and in more detail by using code words which reflected this deeper analysis. Once again, he felt themes begin to arise and he began to write about them using the women's words as a starting point. By collecting the themes together he was able to write about the women's experiences in a manner which provided insights to many important topics, for example, their early school experiences, their ongoing relationships, their experiences in graduate school and their ethnic identities.

Listening and Questioning

The questions that are prepared to guide the interviews were open ended, and the researcher was flexible in the order as well. Glesne and Peshkin caution the researcher with "At no time do you stop listening" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 76). The researcher listened to the participants and he hoped this did not cause a problem for him as he was interested in their responses. He listened attentively and his own fault in this area was perhaps losing his direction for the next question. By listening carefully he was able to see patterns arising by the interview of the participants and hoped this built his confidence in the questioning.

Glesne and Peshkin insist that one must be constantly "analyzing" throughout the research process including during the interview, which the researcher attempted to do. They also discuss being "naïve" in the research process. In becoming a "learner" one asks and probes areas which may already appear clear but which may be more opaque than suspected (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). There is a fine line between a "naïve" researcher and an insincere one. One must find a balance between asking questions necessary to gather comprehensive data and alienating a research subject with an obvious question.

Credibility

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of Afghan American women motivated to pursue graduate education whose parents are Afghan immigrants to the United States.

The criteria for establishing the validity and reliability in qualitative research are the subject of much debate among qualitative researchers. In qualitative research, validity requires the determination of the accuracy and the possibility of generalizations of the results of the study. In qualitative research, the concept of validity takes on different assumptions about reality and is concerned with insuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the knowledge produced from the study (Cresswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) feels that the concept of validity is relevant to qualitative research and discusses the issues of internal and external validity. Internal validity addresses the accuracy of the information and its congruency to reality. Merriam writes, "Validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented" (pp. 199-200). She describes some basic strategies that can be used in qualitative research to accomplish this (pp. 204-205). The researcher used several strategies as described by Merriam (1998).

Researcher's history: It was incumbent on the researcher, as the instrument of this study and as an individual with a close history and experience with the issues, to stay aware of and explicate his biases and assumptions as he conducted this research. The

researcher's conduct was sensitive and efficient. The researcher used his insights consciously, and stayed aware of the holistic linkages of the data to the 'bigger picture'.

Member checks: The researcher submitted the transcript to most of the women to check on the accuracy of the findings with their interpretations of their reality.

Committee and peer examinations: The researcher used his dissertation committee members as resources with whom to review the emergent findings.

Researcher's biases: The researcher attempted to clarify his biases, orientations and assumptions as he conducted the research.

Rich, thick descriptions: The researcher gives thick descriptions that allow the reader to understand the experiences of the women and determine if the meaning made in this study could be useful in his or her own context.

Typicality or model category: The researcher adequately described the research setting so that the reader can determine if the knowledge constructed through the study would be useful within the context.

Conclusion

The researcher felt through this ongoing reflection in the research process, he would gain many valuable insights. He considered various considerations regarding participant characteristics, ethics and interviewing techniques were addressed during this project. This reflection enriched the study by making him aware of how my role as a researcher and the research methods used can both influence and enhance results. He believes that this kind of reflection was very useful for the researcher. Furthermore, constant awareness of the research process and how the researcher's role is carried out led to a more ethical and thoughtful process. In particular, in conducting qualitative

research with a group where one shares a similar background or some other connection, consideration of one's role is especially significant. He also believed that a detailed discussion of not only one's methodology, but also some of the topics he reflected on above (researcher's role, selecting questions), provided important insights as to how the findings of the study were thought of. In the end, the researcher feels that this story maybe helpful to educators in their roles as change agents who participate in the transition "process as that of helper, guide, encourager, consultant and resource" (Knowles, 1980, p. 37).

Chapter IV: Results

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Afghan American women who were motivated to pursue graduate education and whose parents are Afghan immigrants to the United States of America. The qualitative research design included 10 personal interviews. Each woman was asked to discuss their experiences as students and as community and family members.

The primary questions guiding this study were: What experiences do the women consider most significant in facilitating their accommodations of traditional Afghan and the new American culture? What were the significant barriers to development of their new bicultural identity and how were those barriers handled? What are some of the motivational factors that encouraged these women to enter into a graduate program? How are the educational experiences different than their earlier generations or parents?

Findings came from personal interviews with 10 participants from various private and state colleges/universities in the northeast, southwest, and the western regions of the United States. These interviews were conducted at a variety of locations both on and off campus in settings that were suggested by the participants. The interviews ranged from one hour to three hours using an interview protocol that included open-ended questions exploring the participant's experiences both before and after entering the university. All of the students who were asked to participate in the research projects were enrolled in a variety of educational programs, including natural and medical science, languages and social science.

The criteria for participation in this program meant that all of the students interviewed were first generation Afghan American women who were enrolled in

graduate and post graduate programs at colleges/universities in the United States. While these students came from similar background and include both married and single participants, younger and older, they shared in common the desire to complete their graduate and professional degree either at the Master's or Doctoral level. Each of the participants who agreed to be interviewed received an email of broad topics that would be covered before the actual interview took place.

The Participants

To better understand the data collected, it is important to understand who the interviewees are. Included are short summaries of the 10 interviews meant to give the reader an insight into the background of each participant. All the quotations are from personal communications and the date of each interview is noted in Table 1.

Interviewee 1, Yasmeen. Yasmeen arrived in the United States at the age of two with her parents. She hails from a family of five siblings. Her mother and younger brother lived in California, so her parents decided to travel to the state to be close to him. Yasmeen's mother had been working for an American company in Afghanistan, and with her ability to speak English; she obtained a job in real estate and did fairly well. Her father worked for an air conditioning company and did well with his background as an electrician in Afghanistan.

Her elementary and secondary education was spent in the Los Angeles area public school system and she graduated from high school in the top 10% of her class. To get away from the daily rigors of her friends and partying, she applied and was accepted to a reputable university on the East Coast. She completed her undergraduate degree with an emphasis in pre-med. During her time as an undergraduate student she explains, "I

always knew that this medical degree was going to be difficult and I was prepared for the task ahead.” She kept busy working on campus in the chemistry department and during the summers, she would return to California.

Upon receiving her bachelor’s degree, she applied to various medical schools in the nation, but had her mind made up to stay in the Boston area. She was not successful in her initial application and as such decided to instead apply for her Master’s in Biology where she was accepted. Graduate school turned out to be difficult, and there were times when she was not very satisfied with her work ethic. She started partying a lot and that did cut into her time spent with her books and the library. She dropped out of graduate school and returned to be with her parents in California. She got a job in a hospital and settled down to a normal life once again. After a year of working and living at home, she decided to leave and is in her last semester of her completion of her master’s degree. She still wants to apply to medical. school.

Interviewee 2, Sabrina. Sabrina is in her late twenties and she has been working in the Houston Independent School District. She is studying for her Master of Arts in Teaching degree. She has enjoyed being part of the graduate program at a local Houston university, and it has given her the opportunity to grow and become a very positive minded person. She lived with her parents who both had not worked since they all arrived from Afghanistan in the late eighties. This past year, she felt it was time to move out of her parents’ home and find a place of her own close to work. This decision did not sit well with her parents and has created a thaw in their relationship. The main reason for this resentment is her parents believe since Sabrina is not married, she does not need to live by herself. Sabrina’s father comes from a conservative feudal family. Her father’s

traditional beliefs about females can be ascribed to his background. Although Sabrina's cousins wear more revealing Western clothes than she does and are allowed more social mobility, Sabrina's father has built a conventional reputation for his family. Sabrina feels that as time goes by her parents and especially her father will arrive at a comfort position where she will be accepted with her decision to move out.

Sabrina has always been very successful in her educational goals and has scored high in her exams. But, despite all of her achievements in the educational field, she feels she has not received the support that she was looking for when compared to her peers who were also part of a similar background. With this in mind, she decided to further her educational pursuits by entering the Master's program for teachers and eventually teach at a high school somewhere in the city. After she had finished her bachelor's degree, she had no interests in furthering her educational pursuits, but in time and after conversations with fellow employees at the HISD, she decided to apply for her Master's degree. She understood that her loving parents were in no state to offer her financial and educational help with her future, but they did understand that her new found profession would eventually help her mobility into a better salaried job, a home, and children. She looks back at her time spent in the US as one being of challenges and set-backs, but feels that she has come a long way, especially with respect to her parents understanding and love for her.

Interviewee 3, Anita. When Anita and I met in Boston for the interview, she had recently completed her Master's degree in Biology. We met at a coffee shop in the neighborhood where she worked and lived. She had been working at a local laboratory, but was looking forward to making the move into an academic position at a local two

year college. Anita was very clear about her goals and knew that once she had attained her graduate degree, she was going to leave the lab job and find a teaching position in academia. Since the completion of her high school diploma in Marshfield, Massachusetts, she went straight for her undergraduate degree. Upon receiving her bachelor's degree, she immediately pursued her Master's degree. Her employment history included part-time job at the laboratory and helping students within the Afghan community. Anita is very close to her mother and also has a close relationship with her academic advisor; she feels at ease within the American and Afghan cultures. Anita's father was killed in the early days of the war against the invading Russians. She has two brothers who have been married for the past few years and live in New York. With this in mind, Anita has been living with her mother and does not plan to marry in the near future. She is worried about her mother and her living alone even though her mother works at a clothing store as a seamstress and is not financially dependent. Anita worries about her mother being alone and feels she needs to be there for emotional support and physical help with the chores of the home.

Anita talked about the past few years as being hard and difficult especially with work and graduate school. While in the graduate program, she realized that finishing her degree would require setting aside a lot of energy and time towards her education. She used to spend time in the library with her school work during the evening hours and on weekends. This study time made it very hard to spend time with her mother and in turn her mother and family were not entirely supportive of her educational endeavors. The only real support she had during school was her academic advisor who helped her all along.

Anita's description of graduate education comes from the interaction she had with other American students who are free to pursue their studies with few other obligations. This type of life style is the formula that she would have really liked to follow and in turn believes, like other women within the Afghan-American community, they usually get short changed. Anita appeared to be a very intelligent and goal-orientated person who was geared for success.

Interviewee 4, Dina. Dina was in her late twenties and lives in the San Francisco Bay area. Our meeting was held in the school cafeteria of the university she was attending and throughout the discussion Dina came across as a very positive person despite the challenges of living in the United States and attending graduate school. Her father worked as a taxi driver and her mother worked in the healthcare field supporting Alzheimer's patients. Her siblings were enrolled in high school and also had jobs to support the family. Dina talked about her family as being very close and supportive and always together on weekends and holidays. Her parents were proud of her educational pursuits, especially her work towards a graduate degree. They supported her both financially and emotionally throughout her undergraduate and graduate programs. She continued to live at home with her family and had no plans to leave after she completed her graduate degree. Her graduate education had given her opportunities to pursue the major she had always been interested in and had also given her the freedom to travel.

During our conversation I noticed that she had made no close friends during her time in school and this in turn did not feel right to her. Attending a state school, she felt the extent of the place and the classroom did not help to foster close relationships. She felt that the other students in the program were very competitive and just concerned with

their own work and getting good grades. They were not willing to work in pairs and groups as a way to help their fellow students, but only did so when they were forced by the professor. She feels that this did not help her to make friends in the class room. With this in mind, Dina gave up the idea of pursuing a professional degree since she believed the students in professional school would be more competitive and this would not help her personal style. She informed me she does have a group of friends she has known since her days in high school and they come from a variety of back grounds.

Dina works at car rental agency and is also supported by her parents. She likes working at the car agency and likes her colleagues. Dina has had this job while in college pursuing her Bachelor's degree and is supported by her employer who provides her with a scholarship of \$5000.00 per year which goes toward her graduate education. Dina misses the opportunity to have her close friends be part of her successes in the academic field, but at the same time does not really mind their absence. She feels her life is divided into two segments, one social, and one academic and is very comfortable with her life style.

Interviewee 5, Samina. Samina has completed her Master's degree and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at a university in Dallas. She has been at this university for a number of years and feels very comfortable with her situation. In her years in the department, she has made many friends with the faculty and students and is very comfortable in approaching them for help and advice with her school work and her family life. Samina lives a hectic life. She is a full time graduate student, a teaching assistant and holds a part time job at a local Afghan restaurant. She lives at home with her parents and is also very involved with the day to day work at home. Both her parents are

highly educated and were working in the national airline company back in Afghanistan. Since their arrival in the United States they have been unemployed and have had a number of low paying jobs considering their educational background. They are presently employed at an Afghan friend's grocery shop and Samina has expressed her dislike for this situation. With this as a back drop, Samina works very hard to support herself in school, support herself with her personal needs, and also to help with the families day-to-day needs with food and car insurance. With all these challenges, Samina has no regrets about pursuing a graduate degree. She sees this as a way to a better life for both herself and her family.

Most of the discussions about education are held with her fellow students at the university. During her hours at work at the restaurant, she does not feel like she gets the support of her fellow workers with respect to her educational pursuits. They usually give her the impression that she is wasting her time and maybe it would be better if she married someone rich and raised a family. This feeling is also true when she meets with her extended family, but not with her immediate family. She tries to help the extended family members in many ways, but feels like she always falls short of their expectations. There is often the talk of settling down and getting married. They question what her education will lead to, and they feel she should spend more time with her immediate family. This causes her to become very irritated with some members of the extended family and has caused coolness in the relationship between her parents and their siblings. With all said and done, she still feels that graduate education is the way for her to succeed and her immediate family members are behind her 100%.

Interviewee 6, Fatima. Fatima arrived in the USA when she was five years old.

Fatima has attended all her schooling in the California school system. She did not complete her high school diploma the first time, but after a small break, went back to an alternative high school and moved to San Diego where she lived with her aunt for sometime. She was involved with her uncle's and aunt's restaurant, but did not like the food business as a whole and moved back home to Fremont, California. She enrolled into a public college and completed her bachelor's degree. She is now attending a private university within commuting distance from her home.

Fatima's parents were working in a clothing factory in the San Jose area, but were laid off. When they lost their jobs, they sent Fatima to the aunt's house in the San Diego area. She was not happy with the schools and the situation so she dropped out of high school and worked in the restaurant owned by her aunt and uncle. Most important she explains, "I missed my immediate family very much and did not get the attention I received at home or at the school in San Diego". Fatima has gone through some hard times and feels like she suffers from depression, she is a person who does not make friends easily. She explained, "The feeling of being left alone and not being part of a community really did not make it easy for me. I always was a loner and felt out of place in school and the community". Many of her friends did not finish high school and these included American and Afghan girls, but she chose to finish school. When she entered the alternative school in San Diego, she felt it was a place of her own. No one pushed the students to complete the homework; it all depended upon the students themselves. It was here she feels like she found many friends, especially from the faculty and some of the students. She completed her high school diploma with flying colors and then moved back

home and entered an undergraduate program. Her parents were now back at work at a different organization and they were living in a comfortable apartment. On the completion of her bachelor's degree, she decided to go for her Master's degree.

Fatima's success in college also comes from the fact that she developed a support system that included the faculty and some from the administration. Her parents are helping her with the tuition for college. Also, she has been working for a professor in her department who pays her a stipend for the 20 hours of work she puts in weekly. She has settled into a system of getting as much work done at the library at college as possible before she returns home. As she explains, "Once I get back home, I'm busy with helping my mother and sisters with the preparation of food and homework". She feels like with the education that she has received and the graduate education she is enrolled in, her life has been transformed in many ways. She explains, "Whenever I feel depressed and down, I look at my life, and see that how like I'm compared to the millions back home in Afghanistan".

Interviewee 7, Ayshah. Ayshah is the oldest of three children with two sisters and one brother and is the first in her family to go to college. She grew up in an immigrant family and traveled from New York to California where her parents eventually settled in Fremont. The travels of the family in her early years did not help her with her education, but once she settled down in California she explained to me, "It was hard at the beginning, but once I came to school here, I felt a big relief of knowing I have a place of my own". In Fremont she explains, "There were a lot of Afghan families who had migrated to the USA, this helped us in many ways and also, at times it worked against us". Ayshah started working during high school and has kept working all during college.

On the completion of her bachelor's degree, with the help of her college counselors, she applied to various state colleges in the area. She was admitted to a prestigious university and decided to live as a graduate student on campus. Once in graduate school, she found the faculty to be helpful, as she explains, "The faculties were my motivators and helped me all along with discussions, ways to receive scholarships and grant writing". She made many friends on campus, but unfortunately, she has not met many students from the Afghan American community. After her first semester in graduate school, she received a grant from the federal government that was written by her.

Ayshah also joined other outreach programs at college and found extra help a blessing. She has found help from her teachers and friends on campus and has enjoyed living on campus. She does miss living at home, but feels that this outside experience has made her a better and a more mature person. She is now responsible for her own actions and likes the challenge. She explains, "I always knew that they were my parents there to help me, but on living alone, I can tell you that I have taken on a dimension of life and I like the challenge and I can get it done". Just as her parents have always been there for her, she now feels the faculty and her immediate friends have helped her a great deal in her transition from home and a bachelor's degree to living on campus and a Master's degree.

Interviewee 8, Saeeda. Saeeda is a nontraditional student and graduated from high school when she was 17. The family moved from the Washington, DC area to Houston, Texas. She attended a public university for a few years, but explains, "I wasn't mature enough to continue college, and therefore, I quit and started working". While working, she started taking classes at a junior college in Houston, and completed her associate's

degree and also married. As she explains, “My parents were very upset with my decision to marry a non Muslim and in reality, asked me stay out of their lives”. She went through some very hard times in her young life and after a few years of marriage, she asked for a divorce. She caught her husband cheating with another friend of hers, and she felt it was time to mend the fence with her parents and move back into their home.

Her parents were supportive of her new found life and supported her financially to continue college and finish her bachelor’s degree. An Afghan friend of hers had just completed her Master’s degree and was working for a prestigious law firm. She told her about law school and helped her in many ways to apply and get enrolled into a state law college in Houston. She was offered a full scholarship for being an Afghan American and was also chosen to help with the federally funded Upward Bound program. She has been in Law School for the past two years and she feels that there have been a couple of professors who have helped her in school and also with her outside life. She explained, “The sense of being has been wonderful here in law school, especially with the support I have received from my advisors”.

This new found happiness has given her peace and one can see it clearly in her demeanor and speech. She feels her present success is a work in progress and a lot of it is because of her parents love and support. Being an Afghan, she feels compelled to continue to function in a successful manner for the sake of the name of her family.

Interviewee 9, Kahlida. Kahlida is the only child of her immigrant parents who hail from the eastern part of Afghanistan. The family has been living in the Los Angeles valley since they arrived back in the mid eighties. When Khalida was making decisions about moving away from home for college, her family was not happy about her wanting

to move far away. Finding a small university, away from a big city was what she was after. She was also interested in a nursing program. She eventually found a small private college in the Santa Barbara area and completed her Bachelor's degree in nursing in four years. After a few years of working in a local hospital in the Santa Barbara region, she applied and was admitted to a Master's program. Khalida is the kind of person who is involved in the day-to-day activities on campus. During high school, she was connected to students and faculty on campus and this she continued during her years in college. She explained, "I really liked being part and parcel of the campus life experience, and I liked being able to recognize and know everyone".

Khalida comes from a family of workers and is the first one to attend college. Her mother was in school in Herat, Afghanistan, but had to drop out as she became pregnant with her older brother who died during child birth. When I asked about her decision to go to college she said, "I always knew that I was going to go to college, and it was something that I knew I was going to do. I also felt like it was my responsibility to attend college and become successful".

During her early college years, there were a number of faculty members who played an important role in her classroom efforts and the decision to further her education. The nursing program was difficult and she spent many hours studying at school and at home. Khalida does not talk about mentors and role models, but does mention her grandmother who lives with the family as the one person she looks forward to being at home with and spending time with.

Interviewee 10, Raha. Raha is a 28-year-old art major who came to the United States when she was 8 years old. When she graduated from high school she decided to

move from her home in San Francisco area and attend a small college in the northern California region. Her father works for the city and her mother helps out at her brother's carpet shop. She explained, "I come from a very reputable Afghan family and my father plays a big role in the dealings of the Afghan community in the bay area". She has two older brothers who are working the high tech industry in Silicon Valley. Her parents and siblings are very supportive and want to see her succeed in her educational life. She explained, "They've [parents and siblings] given me a stable foundation. They've always been good listeners and supporters in my endeavors and have not once forced me into following their way of thinking".

Being the first in her family to enter graduate school, Raha feels a burden on her shoulders to accomplish this degree. Her experiences growing up in the San Francisco area has made her appreciate the smallness of her present university, especially when it comes to the classroom size and the people on campus.

She is getting her master's in business administration with a concentration in human resource management. She describes herself, "Someone who has always enjoyed doing her own thing". Even in high school she began seeing the differences between the races, but never took it upon herself to be the one to make judgments. She said, "I always wanted to do my own thing, like going to the movies, going to the city and other things like that. People accepted me for who I was and I liked this in my American friends".

Themes

Each of the interviews employed open-ended questions (see Appendix E) and sought to derive from the interviewee's factors that they identified as being important in their educational success. These included questions about the participants' educational

experiences both before and after entering college/university. Questions such as the following were asked during the interviews: Did your high school prepare you for college? How? How prepared did you feel you were for the rigors of college/university? How did you feel once you entered college/university? What is your area of research/study? What have you found most difficult about graduate work? Do you have a mentor within academia? How did you handle any set backs that you may have encountered in college/university? How did you adapt to the rigors of college preparation? How did you formulate your plans to go to college? What have you learned about yourself through your educational experience? These kinds of questions can produce answers that will help to identify the potential for perspective transformation that might contribute to one's success in college/university. These factors have been identified by researchers, such as Baird (1990) as important in the success of their educational discourse.

A careful analysis of the interview transcripts, interview notes made during the sessions with the participants identified reoccurring themes and functions these 10 women shared that played an important part in their educational experiences. These experiences the women acknowledged as important in their success. These included: (a) education, motivation, and challenges; (b) two lives; (c) change; (d) community; (e) Afghan identity.

Education: Motivation and challenges. The researcher will share with you some of the challenges the women faced during their early education and onto college and graduate education. All the women described themselves as “good students” throughout their educational experiences. Most of them were well mannered, studying was a joy, and

they were liked by their parents and professors. The parents supported them by helping them emotionally and financially. Anita talks about a situation that was typical for many of the women when asked if school was discussed in their early years:

Yes school and education was discussed many times during the week. I arrived home and talked about my time spent in school and the work I had to finish. They [parents] wanted to find out how I was doing and always asked me for my grades. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Anita's experiences were in many ways the same as discussed by the other participants. At family meals the talk centered around what the girls were learning in school and how they were doing with their grades. But in most cases their parents were not able to help with their homework. Many of the women, as Anita explained, would turn to their older brothers and sisters for help if it was available. A distinction can be made between the women who were the eldest in the family to those who had older brothers and sisters. In the case of Khalida, being the only child was emotionally stressed when she first entered school having had no introduction to this type of setting or the English language.

Most of the women worked hard and followed the rules of their institution. Often they first entered the institutions with little or no knowledge of the rules of conduct and worked diligently to understand what they must do to succeed. All of them showed a great desire to succeed and make their parents and professors proud. There were exceptions made by a few of the students, for example Khalida's describes her experiences of rebelling and wanting to make a change and the consequences that followed:

Up until class 9, I was a very good student. After a period of two to three years, I became a very rebellious student. My parents became

harsh and strict with me and to hurt them, I did not work hard in school and failed my 10 and 11 grades. Everyone in the family was talking about my failure and how bad a girl I was! I hated the fact that my parents always discussed my situation with their brothers and sisters and in a way they put a lot of pressure on me too. Until today I have still to receive the recognition for the work that I have accomplished during my college and graduate years. At times, I still feel very angry. (personal communication, March 20, 2007)

Although Kahlida's story is an exception to most of the women's stories, it does show how important doing well in school was to the women's position with the family. Further, as Khalida makes clear, failing to do well meant hurting one's family in many ways, and she looked at it as an action that was devastating for immigrant families who were making sacrifices to start a new life in this country. The mark of being immigrant families made these families push their children to do well in education and general life. Anita offers to explain why being successful in school was so important to her mother and why going to college was so important:

I believe that my parents had such a difficult life, and then with the death of my father, it made things worse. When we first came to the States, my mother was working as a maid and could not speak English; therefore, it became very important for my brothers and me to become educated. (personal communication, March 20, 2007)

Anita's declaration that education was the best present they could "give us" was true for many of the other participants. The idea was that only through education were these women going to succeed and build a life that was different from their parents. The parents believed that an education would give their daughters the opportunity to become part of the general society and to participate fully in it. The parents held on to their belief that education was the only way their children were going to attain a status in society that was better than what the parents had experienced as immigrants to the United States. It

was not an easy undertaking for the parents to be willing to take a chance by sending their children out into a system they knew little about for the good of their children's future, but they were willing to do that.

The story of Anita's mother's insistence to attend college is also shared by Raha who talks about how her mother pushed her to go to college:

My mother is not very highly educated. Like many parents I believe that my mother was living her life through me, and what I mean by this that they were times when she wanted me to become a doctor and I would tell her that I don't like being a doctor. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

Saeeda, like Anita, also felt that her mother's lack of education was a deciding point in her life to attend college. She started off on the wrong foot by getting married to a non-Muslim, but rectified the situation by becoming close to her mother once she was divorced from her husband:

My mother, back in Afghanistan, wanted to attend college, but her parents didn't want that of their daughter. My mother graduated from an all girls' school in Kabul with top honors but was not given the opportunity to attend college. I feel the missing link in her life was proved to come true by my entry into college and law school. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

This conversation was difficult for Saeeda as the researcher could see that she was crying while she was telling me the story of her mother's not going to college. From this experience, the researcher could see that most of the women in the study were emotional when it came to talking about their mothers and this affected me in many ways, too.

There is a strong sense of empathy for their parents whose education was cut short by the war or immigration to the United States. This desire to please their parents and to assure them their sacrifices have been worthwhile can be a conflict when it came to their decisions about their own lives. As the women feel a strong desire to be responsible and

loyal towards their parents, they are very much aware of the sacrifices their parents have made. By succeeding in life and education, the women want to make certain the sacrifices their parents made were worth the efforts they were putting into their own lives. Therefore, the support the women receive of their parents has played an important role in the women's own educational progress. From an early age the women were told education was important and they were encouraged to do well. This behavior of doing well from an early age throughout college helped the perceptions of their parents and professors to be of a positive one. At the basic level, the women were conforming to the rules of the school with their parent's support. As Raha pointed out, after a very tumultuous beginning, her parents worked hard trying to make a living and made sure to let her know that they did not want any distractions with their new life. Often the choices the women made in their lives were with the good of the family in mind.

Others also impacted the decision to attend college. These included fellow students and advisors in high school and in fact that most of the women were better than the average students. Some of the women were fortunate to attend high schools with a high academic standard. Since it was the norm for everyone to go to college it became an easy decision for them. Saeeda tells us about her decision to attend college:

I didn't think hard about my decision; it was kind of easy, especially with all that was going on around the school. Most of the students talked openly about college and their majors and the kind of work they would end up doing. And, also my family's sights were set on my entering college and making the best of the experience. This has paid off. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

The parents of the women in many cases expected them to attend college. The women were also influenced by older siblings and other members of their immediate and extended family in their decision to attend college/university. Many of the women share

their stories about their older brothers and sisters and also cousins who graduated from college before them. These were positive role models for the women. Overall, the women report that their decision to attend college was not a very hard one. The decision gave them a direction in life and in turn made their parents very proud. They knew they wanted to pursue higher education and for some, this was clarified by what they did not want to accomplish. As Samina points out:

There were girls in school that wanted to get married right after graduation. This helped me to continue with my higher education. I didn't want to get married at an early age and have children and settle down. This was not for me. (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

Baird (1990) writes that graduate students decide to attend graduate school for a number of reasons, but mainly because of a major of study that interests them. This pattern of study was seen to be at play in this study. Many of the participants talked about an interest in the majors they had chosen to study in graduate school and reiterated that they wished to complete the area of study first and then look at it as a future career choice. Practical matters also played a big role in the participants' choices to pursue graduate education. As Dina explains, "enjoying" the educational process and graduate school in general was also a subject discussed in the women's decision:

When I started looking at higher education, I knew from the start that I will further my education by going to graduate school. I also considered school to be easy and not hard at all and I had all the time in the world. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

Dina's remarks make clear a number of factors that were important in the women's decisions. They all enjoyed attending school at the undergraduate level and expected to also enjoy graduate school. They saw the positive results from the completion of a

graduate degree especially when it came to future career opportunities. The women were also confident that finances would not be a problem. Most lived with their parents, but there were a number of them who lived alone but still received some financial help from parents. All the women worked at part or full time jobs during graduate school, and this helped with expenses. Unlike Dina, some of the women took a break between undergraduate and graduate school. This smaller group finished their bachelor's degree and then worked for a few years before deciding to pursue a graduate degree. Sabrina talks about her decision to pursue her Master's degree part time while working full time in the HISD (Houston Interdependent School District):

When I decided to go for my Master's degree, I kept finding that I wasn't being provoked personally at my job. I have also felt job satisfaction was important to me and I needed that to happen at work and it didn't! I missed my friends that I had made in school (bachelor's degree) and I wanted to go back to be with them, and looking back at my decision, I think it was the best decision I have made and I have no qualms about it. The real world gave me a direct view of seeing what was out there and the rigors of the corporate culture and how people were acting and behaving in it. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

In the case of Sabrina, she did not use her Master's degree as a step to make a change in her career path, but as a road towards transforming herself to a challenging career. There were a few of the women who had a change in mind for their career paths. What is clear from Sabrina's and Dina's statements is that higher education was an enjoyable part of their adult lives, they were very positive about their accomplishments and had found graduate school very fulfilling and refreshing.

For a small number of women, the decision to attend graduate school was not their first choice. Their interest had been in pursuing a professional degree like medicine or

law. When they were not admitted to medical school or law school they choose graduate school. As Dina explains:

During my early years of college, I wanted to go to medical school, but I changed my mind after my third year after taking some of the pre-med classes. I didn't think I had the stamina to spend eight more years after my four year of college, and therefore, I opted for the easy way out and I applied for my master's degree. Looking back, I know I made the right decision and graduate school is not that hard. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

The one other important factor that played a role for some of the women to attend graduate school was the opportunity to side step the more traditional roles that might have been expected of them from their parents and the community if they had not attended school. Many of the women talk about the fact that they did not want to take part in an early wedding and having children. Once they entered college, education became their main focus and in many ways they rejected the more traditional expectations. Samina made this clear in her discussions about how she changed her friendships after high school, once she found out their interest after graduation was in getting married and having babies. Raha describes her decision to enter graduate school as a move against traditional values:

Once I completed my bachelor's degree, I could feel the pressures from my mother to get married. I really didn't want this for me and I kind of stood up against her for the first time. I was not interested in boys at the time, and I told her that I needed more time to think about this. In a short time, I applied to graduate school and I got accepted. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

Several of the women felt that their parents' traditional expectations and observations were made in keeping with the writings of Pichini (1987). He argues that in a new country, immigrant parents stick to their traditional beliefs about gender roles in an

attempt to maintain an identity. For Raha and the other women, continuing their education beyond the four years was seen as interfering with their parents traditional roles, and making this decision to attend graduate school is viewed by some of the women as an act of standing up for their rights. For these women of Afghan descent, pursuing a graduate education was the only way of gaining respect within their own immediate family and the community as a whole, but there were still some family obligations that remained.

Some of the women's families were not happy about their decision to attend graduate school. They held reservations about the time being spent and where this was going to lead. She experienced questions of this kind from her family and was asked on a regular basis, "where is this going to get you as in a future job and how long is it going to take?" While working at the Houston Independent School District with her bachelor's degree, her parents were pleased with her work, but once she started talking about her master's degree and the time it would take to complete, their reactions were not supportive. Fatima had a similar experience when she informed her parents she would be going back to get her graduate degree. She explained:

They were happy with my undergraduate education, but were kind of surprised when I informed them that I was going to pursue a master's degree. It took a bit of selling on my part, and in the end, I won my case to further my education. It was kind of disappointing to me for their lacking of support, but I know deep down that they loved me and supported me. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

The importance of the family in the lives of the women is obvious and sometimes these negative reactions were difficult for the women who wanted and need their families support. The family felt a sort of lost feeling when they decided to move on with their

educations or move out of the house and it showed in their behavior. When Sabrina decided to move out of the house she explains:

I made the decision to move out of the house and my parents thought I was crazy. Being a woman and alone in this country and they went on-and on, but I had made my mind up and moved out. I know that my parents were heart broken and it took a long time to settle the issues. I remember the day I called to give the message that I am moving back home; they were jumping for joy. (personal communication, December 27, 2007)

Being immigrant parents, they always felt kind of left out of the choices the women made with respect to education as they themselves had never experienced the same back home in Afghanistan. The parents worry that the women will change in a way that would be devastating to their relationships and this will hurt them. Annas (1993) describes how her family “didn’t understand much of” graduate education. While they showed joy at her decisions:

They did worry about whether I would become someone they didn’t know. And every time I came home to visit, at some point my mother says with relief, ‘Pam, you haven’t changed at changed at all’. She means this as; I take it as a compliment, though, of course, it’s not entirely true. I have changed. (Annas, 1993, p. 169)

Most of the women enjoyed the academic challenges they faced in graduate school. They were academically successful and were intellectually challenged. Yasmeen describes graduate school as:

The best thing I did to help myself for having a better future. I made friends with my teachers, who in turn helped me in my daily work load. I have enjoyed graduate school and have aspirations to continue with my doctoral degree. (personal communication, November 25, 2006)

Most of the participant’s wanted to be successful women in the community. The women enjoyed the majors they selected and some of them also mentioned continuing

with a doctoral program. Others talked about the need to find and start working after their graduation, but many focused how much they enjoyed the time spent in graduate school.

Anita's described the department where she was receiving her degree:

I was very lucky with my graduate experience as a lot of help was given to me by the faculty. Also, I noticed that the students and staff were very helpful. This experience was like being part of a big family or community, and I felt very comfortable in sharing my own personal stories and challenges with these friends. I don't think I would call it an intimate relationship, but more of a deep friendship with these people. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

As she suggests, Anita's experiences were very different from some of the women, but no harm was done in developing friendships with faculty, staff, and students. About half of the women had a similar experience described by Anita. They found working closely with faculty and other students in the program were very helpful since it allowed them to make their way through graduate school successful. By making it possible for the women to focus on their education, these friendships gave birth to numerous opportunities for them that others in the program didn't experience. For example, this group of women was likely to take part in extra curricular activities like attending academic conferences and taking part in community projects. Khalida's experiences were a little different than Anita's as she discovered information and help was hard to come by in her department. While she made an effort to meet and talk to her advisor, it was hard. As she explains, "Whenever I walk by the office, it seems as if there is no one there. I have left a number of messages with the office secretary and have not heard back. I feel very disappointed". Women who did not have a job on campus were particularly disadvantaged in this area because they often had to rush off after class and did not have the opportunities to develop friendships with faculty and students. When these women

first entered graduate school, they believed if they studied and did well in their studies, they would do well in graduate school. They were not aware that just going to school and getting the homework done was the only way of succeeding in graduate school. The women also had to partake in conferences and extra curricular activities on campus and in the community. Turner and Thompson (1993) discuss that minority women had fewer opportunities to develop academic and professional skills than other students. Becoming a professional is a major goal of graduate education, and these women were fighting an uphill battle to meet these standards. The women were good students and were keeping up with their class and homework and had good grades, but that did not help them in their socialization efforts in the world of academics.

The women were focused on doing well in graduate school for themselves and for their family members and also to prove to others that they could get this done. There was also a feeling among the women that they must perform well in graduate school. These women remained focused on their education. Very few of the women were part of groups on campus or in the politics of the university. Most of the women had jobs on campus or worked in regular paying jobs off campus. Raha was the student who was having a hard time in her studies, but she knew “she could never live up to herself, if she failed” or if she did not complete her degree. With respect to her current education she explains:

My friends have all made it out of school and are having a wonderful time with their lives. They have all found jobs that pay well and I look at them and sometimes feel kind of bad about my own situation. But, then I feel that this is the best thing for me and I will stay and complete my graduate degree. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

Anita talked about what it was like to grow up without a father and how her brothers had to deal with situations within the community and school:

My brothers and I always thought of our situation with not having a living father a little odd, because there were other kids in the community that didn't know about my father's death in Afghanistan and used to ask us when we first met them, especially at parties and outings. What kept us going was our mother's dedication and love and we all knew (siblings) that we had a job to do and that was to succeed. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Saeeda also talked about the need to have completed her education no matter what challenges she had to overtake:

At the beginning when I was married for that short time, I never knew that I would end up going to law school. But, once I got over my marriage and kind of saw my family as being the right choice and my real friends, I took it upon myself to get back into education and study hard and get in to law school. I cannot tell you how fortunate I am considering all that is happening in Afghanistan. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Both Raha and Anita felt that it was important to prove to themselves and to others that they could overcome the challenges and make it through graduate school.

The "difference" of being an Afghan American woman may be recognized on the surface, as Fatima describes the other students viewing her as a person of a certain ethnicity, but there is a lack of understanding of the implications for the women that this difference holds. Further more, the experience of being a graduate student and an Afghan American woman is not a union between the two, but one that often makes the women feel she is living two separate lives. The women did not have the opportunity to view others like them who were from a similar background and who also were enrolled in graduate school. In other words, the opportunity of not feeling the only representative of your entire community and the opportunity to talk about the experience of graduate

school with some from the same background was not there.

Two Lives

When the participants were asked if there was a harmony between their status of being a graduate student and an Afghan American woman, they responded by saying “no”. Throughout their educational experience, the women worked very hard to meet the demands of their educational and personal roles. These challenges are at work for all students in college as most of them live multiple roles. For the Afghan American women, some of the roles were in conflict and warranted excessive amount of time and energy.

Also, some of them felt guilty about not being able to meet all the demands. Anita explains that the reality of graduate school is not an Afghan American mainstay:

My family always was there for me, but at the same time it took up a lot of my time. Don't get me wrong, I'm there for my family, no matter what, but I guess, with the forces of education and independence colliding, I started looking at these demands a little differently. Again, my family comes first, but I had to and started to juggle my life in a manner that worked out for the two lives I was leading. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Anita and the women described their experiences in graduate school as being important and at the same time, being part of the family was also very important to them. They talk about the important roles they play in their families as drivers, caregivers, chaperones, translators, and friends. This was a given, but most of them felt very happy in being there for their family members. Samina talks about her role in the family as being the most amenable one and:

The person that is the motivator of the family, and I'm a jack of all trades. I do everything around the house and also get the outside work done without a hitch as I know my way around and my language skills are very good. (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

The women talk about how they like the role in helping their family members, but at the same time, the toll it takes on their energies and time. Dina talks about this situation, “Being an Afghan woman in graduate school at times was difficult to figure out what I’m expected to do with work from school and work at home ... complicated”. The women are balancing the two differing roles and at the same time working on doing their best.

Furthermore, the women talk about the tensions that are felt when it comes to helping their family members in playing translators and mediators. Ayshah talks about how this role has worked for her:

Being the senior member of my family (sibling), I was always asked and looked at as the connection to the world outside ... I did all the talking and writing when it came to issues regarding the welfare of my family. This was hard, but I took time to get the work done. (personal communication, March 15, 2007)

Along with the other women, Ayshah continues to undertake the role of being the provider and connector to the world outside for her family members. At times this role is difficult with the work she has to do as a graduate student. From the researcher’s conversation with the women, it is obvious that language is a huge problem for immigrant families, and the only connection the parents will have with the outside world is through their children. Therefore, how does the participant make time for her personal and educational future? How to do this is what the women’s stories tell us. They start adapting themselves by managing their lives, by making changes in their educational and personal commitments. They become selective in their choices, they make sure to pick the most important happenings in the lives of their family, like taking their parents to a funeral in the community and missing an event at school.

Several women mention that they do not discuss their graduate education within the family context, and there are some members of their family who do not know they are pursuing a master's degree. They chose to keep this part of their life a secret from some close friends and from extended family members as they themselves had not pursued higher education. As Saeeda explains:

When I found out from a friend that she was working for a law firm and was thinking of law school, I knew that I could do the same. For a long time, I did not tell my parents about my decision and at times I used to feel bad, but it was just the way I was. Once I got into law school and I knew I was going to succeed, I got the courage to tell my parents about my law degree in the making. They were happily shocked. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Most of their friends were content after receiving their high school diplomas. For most of the women this aspect of their lives was kept private so they would not appear as show-offs. Again, given the importance of their personal relationships with their families and the community, this part of their invisible life was shut off from people who were close to them. The affects of this closure in their educational life with their personal life as well caused them to live double lives.

Raha found graduate school to be fairly easy. She feels and explains, "As long as you attend the class lecture, you get the home work done and sit for the exams, no one should get a failing grade in college". Raha's parents never forced her to do her homework while she was living at home, but she has always had the drive to succeed in school. She realized in her early high school years, that her opportunities to succeed without an education were limited. She explained, "With the way life is structured today, you cannot get very far in life unless you are an educated person". Therefore, from the beginning, she always wanted to pursue an education and go on to college to receive her

graduate degree. Her business teacher in college was the one to motivate her to attain a business degree and eventually enter the MBA program. She explains:

I was motivated to succeed and at the same time, I knew life was different on the inside (home) and the outside. But, that did not bother me, as I knew I was going to have to live the two lives and make the best of the situation. I was in graduate school, and at the same time was an Afghan woman and that was wonderful. Think of the women in Afghanistan and how this could help the future of the country. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

Many people have supported her during her life in college, but Raha's mother was the one who helped her the most. In times of trouble, especially stressful in situations both at home or in the outside world, her mother helped her focus on what was really the correct way of looking at the situation. She explains, "She always used to tell me to settle down and stop doing a million things at once. Focus on the now and select one that you can accomplish and finish". Now that she is away from home, there are times when she has to talk to her mother about situations that come up. She also went on to say, "I have a good group of classmates who are always willing to help me when I'm stressed at school or work, but deep down I always rely on my relationship with my mother".

Raha attributes much of her success to the fact that she is self-motivated. Now that she is living away from home, she misses her family and the daily life of a hectic campus. She has to box herself away from the daily college life of a graduate student and get the work done by hook-or-by-crook. As she explained, "I have to motivate myself and focus on the present task that is a huge challenge to me, and I know I don't have anybody to help me". One of things she has realized on entering graduate school is that she has to apply herself and set time aside to get the work done. She went on to say, "I have realized

that it's all about how you go about doing the work, and once I make up my mind, over a period of time, I can get it done".

This life of selections or the dual role of the women not only affects their relationships with the family, but also impacts the relationships they have with their colleagues at school. Anita describes the life of a graduate student committed to academic success and what it takes to live up to this standard. In pursuing to reach this standard, the women, when in school, do not talk to their colleagues about what they are going through in their personal lives. Anita talks about the contradictions with her two roles as an Afghan American woman and a graduate student:

Yes, I have a double life, two lives of role playing. This is one life and then I live a very different life outside the hallways of this academic institution. Two contradictions and its like you don't undertake what you believe in ... a very tough way to operate. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Furthermore she talked about how she keeps her personal life to herself from her colleagues at school:

I don't like to talk about the fact that my father was killed in Afghanistan and also what goes on at home with my brothers and mother. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Also, Saeeda describes her silence at school with respect to her family life:

My friends at school (American) really do not understand my life at home and I don't make a big deal in trying to make them understand. I feel it's better to keep the happenings of the home to myself. They don't understand. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

This description from Saeeda's tells us the way in which many of the women manage their roles from one to the other without creating problems for themselves. Samina keeps her academic life separate from her outside life by explaining:

My friends in the real world don't understand what I go through at school and than the life that I have to live at home. These friends have been away from a formal education and also don't understand the work that goes into getting a degree. They just don't know and didn't care to find out from me. (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

Saeeda talked about the manner in which many of the women shift from one role to the other and often attempted to minimize the overlap. One woman described phoning home from college to check on a sick brother as feeling like an insulated booth had wrapped around her as she called, in reality separating her completely from her present setting and being transported to the home one. There is very little opportunity for the women to interject one role into the other, and this caution extends to those with whom they choose to discuss their graduate education. As in most cases, the women distinguish a certain group of people in their lives with whom they never discuss their education despite the fact that this is how they spend most of their time and energy. Samina keeps her college life separate from her life outside of the school because, as she explains:

From my group of friends from outside of the university, I don't think they know and understand what I'm going through, especially my work friends. It's been a long time since they have been in a class room and I can see a kind of resentment with my talk of my college work or the things that I'm involved in at the university. They feel my life is going to be always involved in higher education and eventually I'll end up teaching or working in the system. (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

The women keep the two worlds separate from each other as a strategy to deal with the different roles they have to play. There is an element of choice that the women

have to make, but from their point of view, it is a choice they feel they must make. As it is stressful to live a life like this and to maintain this separation in one's life, the women felt torn between their two lives.

Change

The Afghan American women had parents who had not attended and benefited from higher education and who in most cases were working for low paying jobs and were not professionals. Immigrant parents tend to feel left out of the world of education that their children have taken on, and in most instances, the only support that they can give their children is verbal encouragement and emotional support. As a matter of fact, these parents do not have the experience in their past and present lives to help their children in their educational endeavors. From the research of Fay & Tokarczyk (1993), the women believe that their experiences are different in some ways from other graduate students. One of the main ways they experience "difference" is through the dissonance they feel between their home and educational cultures. All through their educational life the women have had to manage the formal separation that is found between their personal lives and their educational experiences. Ayshah who traveled from New York to California, noticed differences:

I could see an immediate difference in the two States that is New and California. The immigrant communities seem to remain closer to their roots, whereas in California, there is more of a melting pot situation. I felt I could much easily assimilate and join the American main stream without a problem. Change was becoming of being in California and I felt good about it. The Afghans I have met here in California are much more down-to-earth and friendly, and in many ways much more nationalistic. Much more is done here with respect to keeping our *Waten* or homeland in mind and also I feel they are opportunities waiting to be had. (personal communication, March 15, 2007)

There is evidence from this research that the women's backgrounds have not prepared them to deal with the demands of their new academic surroundings and how their own lives continue to infringe on their educational dreams. Women raised in the Afghan American culture continue to carry on the burden of various roles with their families. At the same time their increased education moves them further away from the experiences of their parents. There are two important issues here, one where the Afghan American culture does not in many ways prepare them for graduate school and the second is how their experiences in graduate school often ends up causing problems in their personal lives. Ayshah further talks about her pursuit and change in thinking about education:

I always feared change and my awareness of the influences changing the Afghan community. I could see change was feared among the young and old and desire to enter graduate school took a lot of soul searching. I didn't know what I was getting into, and always felt the excessive freedoms allowed to us Afghan immigrants on entering the US was hard on many in the community. There is nostalgia to regenerate traditions and remain an Afghan, but at the same time with people like me, there was a desire to accept the challenge and take the plunge. It was very difficult at the beginning, I mean graduate school with keeping a job and the family in mind, and I stepped in and made it work for me. (personal communication, March 15, 2007)

Gardener (1993) refers to these women as members as a "transition class" because they are the first generation in their family to pursue higher education. The idea was that only through education were these women going to be able to have a life that was different than their parents. The opportunity to become part of the mainstream society and to participate fully in it was what parents believed a university education would offer their daughters. Mazzuca (1995) mentions how important it was to immigrant parents that their children do well in school. They clung firmly to the belief that education was the

means by which their daughters would reach a status in society that eluded them as immigrants.

As many of the participants noted, although they struggled with finding a comfort zone in the world of education they also realized that they had withdrawn from people close to them in their personal lives. As in the case of Saeeda, she says:

My parents were very sad and upset about my decision to marry a boy out of the Afghan community. I knew I was changing and liked the fact that I had become independent. But, over a period of time, I was having a hard time in getting my college work done and the complications of my married life, I could feel becoming distant from my parents and friends, and this change in effect was driving me crazy. I missed my mother and father very much and my idea of change I felt had backfired and made me an outsider. As you know, my marriage did not work and I got a divorce. It took a lot of guts and crying to get back on my feet and mend the broken fence and change back to life with my parents and the Afghan community. Don't get me wrong, I felt change was good to me, but one needs to get ready for the repercussions. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

In the women's conversations to further their education by attending graduate school, there is a vacuum of how these changes impacted their relationships with their parents and friends. It was only after entering graduate school they began to see the changes that were to come. Through their experiences of pursuing a graduate education their relationships have changed and at times they find it increasingly difficult to maintain both their roles as a graduate student and as a daughter. When they were making the decision to go to graduate school none of the women were aware of what changes were in store for them and how this transformation was going to affect them in their future lives.

As time went on, parents of the participants became better adjusted to the system and were able to help and guide their children in their educational pursuits. Difficulties

remained with the relationship and the main source was a lack of language skills.

Bourdieu (1986) refers to as “cultural capital” those taken for granted ideas of middle and upper class families that allow their children to be better prepared for an educational future and also life in general. Khalida talks about the difficulties:

It took a long time for my parents to get adjusted to this country, especially with their English language skills being completely at zero. It was not easy for them to help me with my education and relate to my wishes of continuing with higher education and graduate school. At home there was nothing much for them to do, like watching television or reading the local newspapers, but recently the Afghan community, has made an effort to start their own radio and Television stations and also have a local Afghan newspaper. This has helped in making my parents more adjusted to change and also gives them a view of the outside world from their own perspectives. (personal communication, March 20, 2007)

Afghan American parents had little to offer in terms of “capital” that would help their children transition to the world of the American school system. With English as their second language, the parents were not prepared to help their children with home work for school. For some parents, English was first heard in the classroom and this in turn made it harder for them to comprehend the educational system. For some students, language remains a challenge to this day as they have moved up the ladder of education to graduate school. Raha noted:

My career aspirations had always been very weak and this weakness was brought on by the fact that I did not have any direct contact with people in a professional field. My parents and friends were working class people and I was very aware of this kind of exposure would not benefit me in my own future professional aspirations. My parents could never help me with my homework and other academically challenging activities. My parents always provided us children with a strong sense of educational responsibility and commitment. School was always talked about as something very important and the strong wish for the children to succeed. My parents saw a successful future for the children only through the accumulation of knowledge from schooling. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

Change is a concept that has entered the lives of many young Afghans living in the United States. One sees numerous perspectives within the Afghan community and some are ready to break with old traditions. Many of the participants showed a conservative mind-set in their day-to-day dealings. But, overall the women showed a propensity for change and were in a transitional stage in their lives in these United States. There was a statement made by Ayshah:

As women, we want our freedom to be within the Afghan limit, or in other words, we of the younger generations are still very confused about our limits, but our parents tend to have a clear consensus about Afghan traditions and codes of conduct. The younger generation lives with a bicultural identity and life in general is vague and limits are determined by individuals and not by the traditional Afghan culture. (personal communication, March 15, 2007)

Also, one could see it in Saeeda's conversations and she said:

When I got married to a non-Muslim, my parents were devastated, but I hang in there and fought the change. It was time that made me realize my difficulties with-in and with-out the Afghan community and as such, I had to revert back to my traditional ways. I felt like I had neglected to provide for my family and that went against my Afghan values and my parents. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

The participants had their own separate notions of the limits placed upon them within the Afghan community, but the community itself did not validate this diverse thinking. As Omidian (1996) interprets this phenomenon, "The children have to translate the American culture for their parents, but they do not have the status within the family to make the knowledge work." The lawful judge of the family limitations is the family itself and no one else. Whatever is defined and made aware to the people within the family is the law of the land and made to stick. As Fatima explained:

For instance, if I'm the only one in my family of young women who likes wearing short skirts, I will be talked about and judged by the community, but if all the women in my family and community were involved in the same style of clothing, there would be no discussions and retributions to this change. And, the same is true with education and that is we as women have chosen to leave home and get an education. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

Therefore, there are different definitions of the Afghan behavior and lifestyle that exists in the community but it all depends upon the family itself and their belief systems. The women who live their lives within the parameters of their family laws and traditions are accepted, respected and loved by one and all, and this shows from their conversations. The ones who stand up and go against the wishes of the family have difficulties as Saeeda explained:

From the time I gave up my family and got married, I felt like I was banished and an outcast. It was not just my family, but the total Afghan community that did not respect my decision and I could see it clearly. I was a rebel and I was paying for my decision to change an old traditional value. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Some of the women talked about being protective of their family name and therefore found it hard to rebel against their families and their roles as good daughters. The only way they got away from this life style was to do so in private, or in other words, out of sight of the Afghan community. For instance, Saeeda said:

When I started dating my American husband to be, I was very afraid about being seen by someone within the Afghan community. I always had to find a hole-in-the-wall kind of a restaurant or mall where I knew I would not be seen or discovered. I was changing the way I was living and I was paying for the change. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Also, the threat of gossip is always very powerful and frightening within the Afghan community and the women talked about this situation. As Fatima talks about this:

I always was aware of my friends and what were they going to say about me. When I was living in San Diego with my Aunt, I did know many people within the community and as such, I was always scared about doing the wrong thing and word getting back to my Aunt. I hated it, but what can you do. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

Within Afghan families, whether conservative or liberal, one of the major ordeals is the generation gap between the parents and their children (Omidian, 1996). The main division is the parents' desire for their daughters to follow the traditional ways, and on the other side, the women's generation fighting for change and to break free from these barriers without upsetting their fathers and mothers' generation, an almost impossible task. The central factor leading to this division between two groups is the despairing attitude towards the Americanization of the Afghan culture and the competing values between the women and their parents toward higher education. The women talked about becoming integrated and exposed to numerous cultures and ideologies within academia and as a result, their beliefs of their identity and culture varied from their parent's generation. But, in most cases, the women talked about how their parents always encouraged them to excel and work hard in their education. As Dina says,

My parents were always very proud of my educational pursuits, especially her work towards a graduate degree. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

Therefore, the control the parents had over the women at the start of their entry into the American culture maze was minimized by this integration, and the Americanization of the women could be seen to come to life as time went by. What kind of higher education these women receive and how they comprehend and find their way

for success in this American landscape will be important contributing factors for them to understand that they are capable of change.

Community

What is the meaning of being an Afghan American women and what meaning do the women attach to their ethnic background? One of the women whose name was Sabrina answered, “Number one family, number two friend’s from my community.” (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

Yasmeen went on to say:

The meaning of being an Afghan in America is to start a new life and work hard in being successful. (personal communication, November 25, 2006)

These topics arose when the women described what it meant to be Afghan women. Throughout this discussion, we have seen the women describe the importance of family in their lives and the importance of the family is something they ascribe to their Afghan culture. Also, many of the Afghan friends they know maintain this kind of discipline. Family and friends from afar also play an important role in the lives of the women, while family friends, in particular, and are important for a family on arriving in the United States without any of the family connections or ties. Friends from the same town or village in Afghanistan, also living in the United States, step in and take over the central role of family. Throughout the discussion, for example, Yasmeen kept referring to:

For us Afghan’s to call a family friend an Uncle or an Aunt does mean a lot. They are really not a blood Uncle or an Aunt, but they play the role by having an interest in our well being and future. What I mean by this is that if I need help and my parents are not able to, I would not hesitate to call upon these family friends, and it’s not a problem at all. (personal communication, November 25, 2006)

Many of the women also talked about the importance of Afghan American friends in their own lives, when they were growing up and now as young adults. The women said they share a certain bond with these friends that they do not share with others. Furthermore, there is a profound understanding among these friends and a chance of retaining some of the language and customs of the Afghan culture. At the moment of immigration, "Groups of immigrants, by banding together, can be indispensable in helping with the practical problems of adjustment to the new society" (Reitz, 1980, p. 17).

Like their parents before them who immigrated to this country, these women are looking for a community which can support them, if not in practical matters but for certain emotionally. As Dina talked about this experience:

Our choice was to come here with our parents, it was not my own choice, and we were kind of forced into this situation. Now, what I'm saying is that there should be a community with the Afghan citizens to help and promote one another. This is very important. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

The question of who makes up this community for Afghan American women graduate students is not an easy one and is very different from the whole Afghan American women's community. According to the participants, the women did not always feel connected to other Afghan women in the community just because of their heritage and background, and talked about their shared goals and life choices as being important in defining a sense of community. Anita discusses these issues in these terms:

I do not know what it is, but it's hard for me to sit and talk with some of my friends who are not in higher education. There is a disconnect about our vision for the future, our ideas and regular talk. They are different and but are still my family and friends. They are not bad people, just different people. (personal communication, November 26, 2007)

For these women, the feelings of others about their decisions were important.

Having grown up in a community that held family in the highest regard, the women had learned to defer to the wishes of others first and think about how their actions would be interpreted by others. Many of the women decided to attend graduate school and had no input from their family members. As Sabrina explains:

As far as education, my parents had no expectations from me. I was the person that made those decisions. Looking back, they were happy about my education and didn't think that I was going to apply and enter graduate school. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

The women in the study were aware of their family obligations, but the decision to attend graduate school was made in spite of these obligations. In most cases, the women made their decision to pursue a graduate degree on their own and without the help of others, and once they had made the decision, they chose to inform the family. In many of the cases, this decision was one of the very few decisions they would make without consulting family members. For many of the women, their family members were very proud and happy about their decisions to attend graduate school, but were not the ones who had motivated them towards graduate education. Many talked about how their families were not aware of the hard work required to successfully complete a graduate degree. Often family members saw graduate school as merely an extension to their bachelor's degree and used to ask them when they would settle down into a real life. As Saeeda explained her family's push for a more traditional life:

It was difficult being married to an outsider. And, then the divorce didn't help at all, especially for the sake of my family and the community we live in. Graduate school for me was an extension and relief of kinds and they didn't understand the need for

it. But, once I was in law school, I felt a feeling of gratitude and this was good for me. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Several times during the discussions, the topic of hard work was brought to the forefront. The women stressed the amount of hard work carried out by their immigrant parents in order to provide a comfortable life for their families, and also their own part in the work carried out within the family and outside in their own private lives in order to be successful in the American society. All the women talked about a certain level of hardship both in their parents' lives and in their own where hard work had been the name of the game. This topic is part of what the women consider to be their ethnic identity, progressing both from the original culture and from the newly developed culture in the United States. As research tells us, most Afghan families originated from urban centers, where all members were involved in the day-to-day dealings of the family. But, on immigration to the United States, the type of labor carried out changed, and for most part, from better paying jobs or a better standard of living in Afghanistan, they were pushed into physical and menial labor. There was and in many cases there still is a sense within the Afghan community that only as a group is survival possible. As Sabrina tells it in her own words:

The idea of being an individual and making it in this country (USA), I mean to be successful, is very hard and difficult. Without my family and friends, there is no way I could get ahead and make it happen. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

Throughout the discussions, the women gave examples of how families came together in the United States as a way to stay afloat and survive. Afghan immigrant families upon arrival lived with their family members, family members bought homes

together, and families assisted each other in finding jobs. During their early childhood, many of the women were taken care of by their grandmothers, while others were looked after by other female members of the family. Indeed, the very act of immigrating especially in the case of Afghanistan was discussed as an effort to help and benefit the lives of the children and future generations. As Mazzuca (1995) states,

Immigration in my early study stated that their own parents had immigrated, bringing their families with them, for the sake of the children. The desire for children to have opportunities not available to them in the country of origin and the possibility of the parents making a better living to support the family were key incentives for immigration. (p. 163)

For most of the women, a sense of caring and support is still evident in their immediate families and it is less visible with extended families. Over the years as the families have become more self-sufficient and in many cases rich, there are fewer cases of mutual support. As Anita explains:

The lifestyle led by most of my extended family today makes it difficult to keep the same kind of relationships that we once had at the start of our journey in America. When I came to the US, I remember there was a lot of interaction between families, Afghan neighbors and the community as a whole. But, now that we have in a certain sense found our way around, applying for college, driving to work, speaking the language, watching English TV and movies and I could go on, has made a huge difference in the life styles. We are all very busy with our own lives, and it's just too hard to live like we used to. But, I remember one of my brothers' weddings, and the importance of the extended family and how they all helped my mother with the planning and the support of making the wedding a very successful affair. I guess, life in Afghanistan was much slower and had a wonderful and lovely pace to it, a way to stop and listen and a way to stop and smell the roses. Life is hard here and I just see it getting harder, but I'm fortunate to say that being an Afghan, I always know there will be some one from the family or the community to help when we need it. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

With respect to immigration, Novio (1993) states that they are; "more often a family rather than an individual enterprise, and are generally based on a clearly defined

family economic project. Material conditions favorable to 'having a family life,' to raise children, and provide them a future are invariably reported as the main reasons behind international displacements" (p. 67). In spite of the difficulties of keeping up with the extended family, most of the women did feel their relationships with their families were an important part of their lives and relationships are a part of how they defined their cultural identity. In their discussions, the immediate family occupied a major role in their daily lives. As the women become more educated and financially successful, the notion of the group being more important than the individual has not been removed. As Dina noted:

On buying our home in the bay area, the home became a kind of a bus station or train station as we always had family and friends coming through and visiting us. There was never a dull moment in the house and I remember it very clearly. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

Most of the women describe living in a communal sense, and the bedroom becomes a place to go to sleep and not a private hold-out for adults and children. Independence was also not a popular sentiment in their lives. A collective approach to life seems deeply imbedded in the Afghan mind-set. At various times in their lives, the women appreciated the group mentality of their families having afforded them with support and comfort throughout their lives. And again, Dina talks about the inner workings of being an Afghan:

Living and being an Afghan is staying close to your family and friends and it's beautiful. When you need the help they are there to help, but if you really wanted to walk away and be yourself, it would be very difficult and the family and friends that once loved you will turn their backs against you. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

Sabrina talks of the same situation of the culture:

I love being part of the Afghan community, but at the same time, I would say, sometimes, I cannot stand it. It gets on my nerves. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

Most of the women would agree with these descriptions of the Afghan family, and they definitely appreciate the sense of structure and support they have received over the years, but at times found the relationships a bit suffocating. Being contributing members of the family, the support comes with a price the women continue to supply to members of the family, and this mostly comes with emotional ties as well.

The concentration of family in the lives of the women has been proven throughout the discussion. They have benefited from the support of the family while fighting to meet the demands of higher education, and in this case, graduate school. Now, not only does this have a possible significance for them as they try to restore their cultural values of group unity with those of independence, but it also has a positive and a negative course of action in their lives. It places them on a pedestal of being expected to be independent scholars with few outside responsibilities while they are playing the role of daughters in the family.

The sight of the independent individual is strongly linked with professionals in many fields and the women talk about their struggles to compete and match this image. Glazer & Slater (1987) explain that, “successful professionals were objective, competitive, individualistic, and predictable; they were also scornful of nurturant, expressive, and familial styles of personal interactions” (p. 14). The women talked about the difficulties of being professionals in the competitive college setting given that their family life was based on a lot of help and support. As Egan (1989) has written about how important this process is in a student’s life and her success, she states that graduate school

plays a role to, “foster independence from fellow students, encouraging an atmosphere of competition rather than cooperation” (p. 202). During the discussions, the women talked about being upset with this atmosphere of competition as it goes against the very nature of the collective nurturing Afghan culture they have grown up in. As Fatima discussed this issue:

I hated the competition at school, and they were times when I changed my particular subject, as I saw this harming me in the long run. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

With regards to the discussion about the importance of relationships in the women’s lives, Fatima went on to say:

I know I would struggle with some of the demands of being independent in my work habits as a university student, but in the end, I know that I have a family and they will always be there for me. Or, in other words, “*It’s a family affair*”. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

The Afghan Identity

These women are from an Afghan background, and identity is an interesting subject to examine, as the women have been living in the United States since early childhood. Having lived in this country for many years, research shows the women lives were still connected in many ways to their *Waten* or Motherland. And, as such their sense of identity was anything but clear cut. Most of the women talked about the fact of being an Afghan first and an American second. As Anita describes:

I consider myself an Afghan American woman and yes, I identify a whole lot more with the Afghan culture. I guess it’s going to take a long time, maybe my children and their children for the clarity about being an American to come through. People like me have a lot of baggage and it’s going to take sometime to get rid of it. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

In the discussions, the women were clear about the fact of moving to the United States at an early age did not help them in identifying with being Americans. They were born in Afghanistan and at the same time, now immersed into the American culture. They were Afghan Americans and this was their home for now. As Dina talks about being an Afghan American:

I am an Afghan by my birth certificate, and it was the circumstances of the time in late 70s and early 80s that made my family to immigrate to the USA. We were kind of pushed out of our country and after having lived here most of my life, I still feel more Afghan than American. That's how I feel, because of my culture, tradition, language, religion, belief systems and I can go on, and on. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

At some level, the women did not have a problem with defining their identity. Some believed as children of Afghan immigrants, they were not quite Americans and yet having lived in this country for most of their lives, they still could not identify with the local citizens around them. Khalida explains:

Look, the thing is that I don't identify with my American friends, and that's the problem. My American friends in school and at work have no idea who I am or where I have come from. Yes, things have changed a lot since 9/11, but still there are a lot of questions. They (American friends) have never associated with an Afghan and for the first time in their lives they have no idea about our culture, religion and other things. I feel they believe that they as Americans are the best and everyone else is nothing. Whereas I believe I've come to appreciate other cultures. I still think of myself as an Afghan but I don't know if I identify with the Americans as yet. It's because I don't know many Americans and the ones I know I know I don't identify with them at all. (personal communication, March 20, 2007)

The question of identity is not a simple one for the women. Although many of the women think of themselves first as Afghans and then as Americans, and this social setting, they often strive with what it means to be Afghan Americans. For many of the

women, the absence of Americans to whom they can directly relate in their daily dealings and activities makes it even harder to define and find themselves. Raha expressed concern for the Afghan culture in America in general, as did many others:

A lot of things have kept us a part, I mean the Americans and the Afghans, and it has to do with customs and traditions. They (Americans) identify with their own traditions and we Afghan have our own. There is a big divide and gap to fill and it's going to take maybe two generations. Look at me, I'm first generation, I'm the first in my family to have made it here to America, and when I arrived here, I did not speak a word of English. It was only schooling and TV and time that made a difference in my language skills. (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

All the women worried about how the Afghan culture and traditions will remain alive in the United States. They worried about what kind of shape it would take in years to come. For some the upkeep of the language was the key to the future of their culture and they felt it was important to consciously make an effort to speak the language and also made sure to teach it to their children. For some other women in the group, the continued cooperation of family was seen as a bridge to maintain an Afghan identity in this country. There was awareness about the Afghan American culture that had come to life about 25 years ago and was a product of the Afghan immigrant experience and was influenced by the American context. It was also evident over time this culture would continue to be developed and reshaped. The women's views reveal culture was not seen as something characterized by a lack of movement, and several women talked about how different the American culture was than their own culture. As Saeeda describes:

I have lived here in these States for 20 years and I still feel like an outsider. I look at my American friends and I cannot connect with them and their life styles. Let me explain to the matter of family. You know I'm divorced and I have no kids, but that does not matter to me as I'm very close to my parents and they would do anything after all the trouble I have put them through to help me out. They are

there for me and will always be, and the same goes for me. I love them. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

The other factor influencing the participants' experiences of graduate school was the reality they were the only Afghan American in their classes. All the women lived in multicultural societies and had the experience of being around people from a multitude of cultures. Why should it make a difference if there were other Afghan American students in their classes is not an easy question. It would be easy for me to conclude that the women wanted to be around people with similar backgrounds for reasons like comfort and acceptance. Instead, it is easier to say the women were looking for support from people like them, especially women like them who select this type of journey and are successful in the end. When asked what was most difficult about graduate studies, Saeeda, an extremely confident and articulate woman who went on to earn a professional degree, talked about the fact of being the only Afghan American woman in her class. She did not mention the class work or the homework as a source of hardship; however, she found it difficult at times to be true to her cultural identity and remain an Afghan American woman. She describes this moment:

I used to sit in the class and wonder, "Why are there no other Afghan American women in this class?" I remember the first class when the professor asked the students to introduce themselves and after the introductions, I thought about the fact that I was the only woman from the Afghan American community. I thought it had to do with the program of choice and many Afghan American women did not want to get involved in this kind of a subject. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Saeeda's thoughts discuss two important points: One is her realization that she is the only woman from her community and her sense of disappointment. Second is the challenge of the scrutiny of the other classmates in the classroom. The second point was

also felt by other women in the group. They often felt they were providing the “Afghan perspective” which was not always their wish and desire and their presence was something of a novelty. Fatima had similar experiences when she went looking for others from the Afghan community:

My university always tried to support the fact that race, class and gender was embedded in all of their philosophies. When I arrived at the university, I walked around and looked at the students. At first, I was very happy at what I saw, as I felt that they were many others (students) like me, and what I mean by that, is Arabs, Iranians, South Americans, who in many ways, looks like my people. Once I got introduced to some of them, I could feel a difference with questions like, ‘Are you a Muslim, or are you an Arab’. I was not very happy about the questions, and after a while, I found my own type of people, and stuck to them. (personal communication, March 19, 2007)

Like Fatima, Anita also notes the lack of Afghan women in her programs and it disappoints her to be impressed about her university’s mandate of race, class and gender. In her mind and the minds of the other women, ethnicity belongs in that discussion, especially when you have to deal with issues of integration. Given the problems the women felt in getting to graduate school and then being successful once there, it is likely that many other Afghan American women did not make this decision. Anita’s remarks also speak of a bigger issue, which the other women also talk about, “Ethnicity is never really discussed.” Another participant also talks about the inconspicuous nature of ethnicity when she describes living with her widowed mother and the responsibilities she has fulfilled towards her and she says:

If you are a student who is living at home, like in my case, the professors and students see you as not being independent and a person who lives in the shadow of her mother. I feel that I have as much as responsibility as others especially of who I am, I mean that I did not really grow-up here in the States and being an immigrant is not easy. Most of the other students assumed that I was like them and when they found out that I’m different did not have the sensitivity to appreciate the difference. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Therefore, although the women discussed their ethnicity and their identity, they had a hard time determining a correct definition of their feelings. These findings are fluid experiences, both on a personal basis and as a group. Just as other cultures have arrived to the shores of this country, and developed a culture of their own, the women continue to define their ethnic identity in those terms.

When the women were discussing the present Afghan American community in the United States, the talk turned to the feelings of this group around education. The women expressed their thoughts on what value the Afghan community places on education. For the most part, the women think the pursuit of education is an important part of their growth and survival. In particular, their parents perceive education as the opportunity to build upon and a chance they never had in their own up-bringing. The possibility of being educated is not one they would like their children to squander. Despite the mind-set of Afghan Americans being supportive of education, many of the women also have some doubts about how far this appreciation would go. When asked about the attitude of Afghan Americans towards education, Samina responded:

This is hard, because I have some in the family/community who encourage me and then I have those, the conservation ones who want me to settle down and get married. But, with respect to education, generally speaking, they all look at it as a positive addition to ones life. (personal communication, February 21, 2007)

Anita talks about a similar opinion:

While most in the Afghan community believe education is important, they look at it as a practical tool in the development of the human being, and this is good. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Yet Ayshah suggests Afghan Americans as placing more emphasis on higher education:

I think the Afghans who live in the States have come to understand that education is very important. I remember my friends (Afghans) were always talking about how their parents were pushing them to go to college, but these friends wanted to go further and to a university. But, for some funny reason, their parents thought that just getting a college education, I mean two years like a community college was going to be fine. Looking back at my friends and remembering about what they were saying, most of them wanted to go onto to a university and higher education. (personal communication, March 15, 2007)

Saeeda talks about a social class with differing feelings about higher education:

Afghans of a middle class standing encourage their children to work towards achieving a university degree, but they don't see graduate education as being very important. Most of my friends in university are working towards professional degree, degree that makes sense to their parents. Like becoming a doctor, becoming a lawyer, and so on. Now, the lower class Afghans who have migrated to this country are not concerned about a higher education, but just to go to college and get an associates degree like becoming a car mechanic, a dental technician etc, etc. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Therefore, these women believe certain Afghan Americans do give a lot of weight to education. Often, the importance has to do more with the practicality of having a higher education than the essential nature of education. Some of the other women expressed their thoughts by saying; especially for women in their community Afghan Americans do not value higher education because more traditional roles were seen by some as being more appropriate.

Anita expressed herself:

We as Afghans were brought up to understand and believe that marriage was the most important factor in the success of our lives. Now, don't get me all wrong, I believe there is nothing wrong with marriage and some day I know I'll get married. The life of just living to get married and have kids is fine for some, but for me my higher education and setting-up my life is most important. Also, at my

university, rarely do I come across someone in graduate school from Afghanistan, and that's upsetting. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Khalida shared her views:

I don't think Afghan Americans have a good feeling for education in general. They talk about it's being useful to a certain extent, but to push a child to further his/her education does not make sense to them. They value a business like a cab, a coffee shop, or a rug shop as being a way out of the rat race and being a business owner makes a lot more sense as it's now and not after 4 to 6 years. It's all got to do with being successful and money does play a big role in the thinking. (personal communication, March 20, 2007)

The women's views suggest the feeling of the Afghan Americans towards education is not one of a similar kind or nature. Within the Afghan community the issues of social class and gender come into play in the women's perception of education. Although many Afghan Americans are placing a higher worth on education, the need to stay afloat and be successful in the material world can determine one's educational pursuits. Many Afghan Americans view education as a bridge for the second generation to take on a more integrated role in the mainstream America, but do not necessarily consider it instrumental in achieving and gaining material comfort.

Ethnicity and identity are two areas connected to the women. Their ethnic background and the immigrant experiences of their parents' generation are at the center of the development of their identity. Many experiences throughout their lives have determined their differences based on ethnicity. They have made note and talked about their ethnic identity often by contrasting their stories to those of others. But, their ethnicity has also played a role in shaping their identity, as it dictated their life with family and friends. The core of the family and a collective approach to life has impacted

the women and the way in which they move through the world. Most important, it should be noted the family has played a very important role in providing them support and comfort throughout their lives. Overall, the women identify with their Afghan lives but not entirely. They struggle and grapple with inconsistencies in their connections to their culture and at times they might feel their pursuits are not valued within the culture. The final point about ethnicity is it is not characterized by a lack of movement but has evolved throughout the years since the Afghans landed here after the 1980 Russian invasion.

Summary

The data for this chapter, primarily from interviews, demonstrated that the women identified early educational experiences, both academic and social, and were often hampered with challenges. After analysis, the researcher identified five emergent themes and these included: (a) education: motivation and challenges; (b) two lives; (c) change; (d) community; (e) Afghan identity.

Early educational experiences, both academic and social, were often wrought with challenges for these women. Although successful academically, they struggled and continue to do with expectations that reflect their lived reality as children of immigrants. The challenge to balance home and school life began when they first entered the school system and although their parents tried to be supportive, social factors caused hardships. The women have confronted barriers in their educational progress and often found that their home culture had not adequately prepared them for schooling. On-going conflict between their cultural backgrounds from which they take so much of their identity and their educational pursuits also pose a barrier for the women. As Samina pointed out, her

continuing pursuit of higher education is unappreciated and even challenged by loved ones who believe she should be taking up responsibilities related to the family. Many of the women, by their own accounts, have triumphed due to or in spite of these challenges, while others do not feel as fortunate.

Chapter V: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of Afghan American women who were motivated to pursue graduate education and whose parents are Afghan Immigrants to the United States of America. The primary research questions which guided this research study were: (a) What experiences do the women consider most significant in facilitating their accommodations of traditional Afghan and the new American culture? (b) What were the significant barriers to development of their new bicultural identity and how were those barriers handled? (c) What are some of the motivational factors that encouraged these women to enter into a graduate program? (d) How are their educational experiences different than that of earlier generations or parents?

This qualitative study produced rich descriptions of the experiences of Afghan American women who were motivated to pursue graduate education and whose parents are Afghan American immigrants to the United States of America. The qualitative research design included 10 personal interviews. The women were asked to discuss their experiences as students and as community and family members to tell their stories. After analysis of the interviews, the researcher identified five dominant themes: (a) education: motivation and challenges, (b) two lives, (c) change, (d) community, (e) Afghan identity. The five themes respond to the research questions above and are reintegrated into the concept of transformation and change, including the identification of four major roles assumed by the women as they cope with the transformation. This process is depicted in Figure 1.

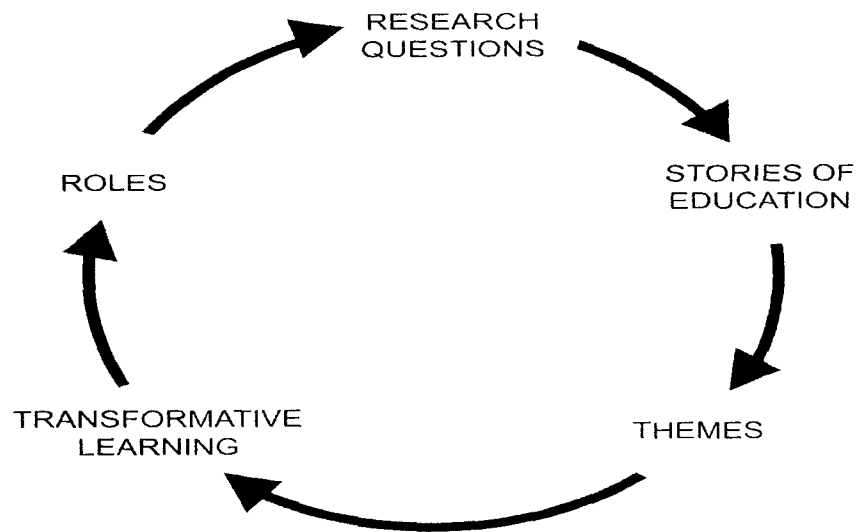


Figure 1. The process identifying the four major roles.

Transformation

One of the ideas from Gardener's (1993) research process is that graduate students' participation in the educational system differentiates along the lines of ethnicity, social class, and race. Students from minority backgrounds encounter an educational system which takes for granted the control of values very foreign from their own. Education and graduate school challenge the women to confront this different environment and then lead them down a path of change where they will view their future differently. This phenomenon was true for the Afghan American women in this study, affirming Conrad and Phillips suggestion that, "by attending graduate school, the women change their ideas of how to live their lives by joining support and collaborative group" (Conrad & Phillips 1995, p. 313).

This research study reviewed the women's strategies for surviving graduate school and how these strategies played out both in their personal lives and in graduate

school. Are the women driven to transform their views, practices and beliefs in order to successfully graduate? By the women's own thinking, graduate school is more intense and requires more time and energy than acquiring a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, graduate school pressures students to take more responsibility for their own educational well being and to take on bigger research projects dictated by the student's own interests and goals. Garrison (1997), in writing about his research of self-directed learning, affirms that the core property of self-directed learning is assuming responsibility for the construction of personal meaning. He writes about a "self-monitoring" process that monitors,

The repertoire of learning strategies as well as an awareness of an ability to think about thinking ... To self-monitor the learning process is to ensure that new and existing knowledge structures are integrated in a meaningful manner and learning goals are being met. (p. 24)

In order to be successful, the student adapts to absorb and transform to the dominant culture of graduate education, no matter how different it is from their own. This transformation process is not always precise, as it requires students not only to start a new way of thinking but also to relinquish their old ways of living.

The transformation process has been discussed in the introduction and literature review and was clearly apparent in this research study. Mezirow (1991) writes that change through adult education is generated by transformation of meaning perspective or our frames of references. In an interpretation of Mezirow's transformative learning theory:

Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness in any human system through the transformation of the basic worldview and specific capacities of the self; transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes

such as appreciatively assessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises. (Elias, 1997, p 3)

From the women's own explanations a number of examples of transformation are noticeable as a result of their pursuit of graduate education. For example, the students try to perform as independent scholars in spite of the fact from their own socialization they are intellectually geared towards working as a team. Their thinking on subjects such as politics and religion often differs from those held by their friends and family. There is an awakening in the women on how foreign they have become in their thinking and how life has changed them since entering academia. In most cases, the women try to conceal their transformation from their family and friends. Mezirow (1991) theorizes that change through adult education is generated by transformation of meaning perspective, our frames of reference. He writes, "Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p. 167). The women in this study talked openly about how they had never discussed with anyone the truth of coming to this country as an immigrant and going to school and eventually entering or completing graduate school.

Dirkx's (1998) research supports the findings regarding the relationship between how the participants change and the fact they started graduate school with an existing motivation for change both personally and their social lives. Dirkx, in examining the concept of motivation from the perspective of transformation says, "[L]earning is neither the individual will nor the powerful forces of social cultural structures. Rather, learning is

understood as a process that takes place within the dynamic and paradoxical relationship of self and other” (p. 83).

The idea of transformation of the women and their expanded awareness of their lives leads the researcher to believe there is a new meaning to their actions. Transformation learning theory affirms that the adult’s psychological and cognitive development is contingent upon increasing the capacities to reflect on his/her prior learning, to take on new perspective, to make new meaning and to integrate the emerging insights. The women are members of a learning community and are sharing the responsibility of their own learning to critically scrutinize the power dynamics that impact their daily lives. Freire (1970, 1996) says that once students become aware of the social and cultural forces that impact their lives, they become empowered and empowerment leads to action.

Transformation learning theory posits that the adult’s psychological and cognitive development is contingent upon increasing the capacities to reflect on her or his prior learning, to take on new perspectives, to make meaning and to integrate the emerging insights. As the adult learner transforms her or his meaning perspectives, they become more inclusive, differentiated, open, and integrated (Mezirow, 1991). The women described changes in their graduate educational process as a new beginning and a way of life. The changes they talked about in their interviews were a greater sense of authority, a sense of faith, sense of knowledge, and sense of purpose.

The work of Jarvis (1987) confirms that personal transformation involving an expansion of consciousness does not take place in a vacuum. He writes about the social context of adult learning and says “[L]earning is not just a psychological process that

happens in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives, but it is intimately related to that world and affected by it” (p. 11). These women felt the learning environment supported them in bringing their historic and cultural backgrounds into their graduate education learning. They investigated their personal and social experiences and the relationship of these experiences to their language, history, and politics. Through this educational experience, they confronted issues of inequality and developed ideas of oppression. They were aware of the idea of knowledge and learning as an understanding between the learner and the learner’s community. These results with respect to the relationship between social context and learning are supported in research conducted by Benn, 1996; Clark, 1992; Jarvis, 1987; hooks, 1994; Tisdell, 1993; Maher & Tetreault, 1994.

The women in the study were successful graduate students and had been high achievers throughout their academic life. Life in graduate school for the women brought on a new thinking and an independence of sorts, very different than their experiences in their life as bachelor degree seeking students. Graduate school in many cases had the women turn to an invisible life with their personal realms of family and friends. When moving on to a new way of thinking, the women in many cases revolted against the old set ideas that have been in place for years, and fought with the idea of what being educated felt like with respect to their own personal and cultural lives. Interpersonal relationships, family and belief systems linked to religion and culture were the focal point to their individuality and yet it looked like this new found freedom of education heightened to deprive them of these cherished connections. By going to school and becoming educated women they were in many ways fueling a change in their life styles

and their thinking. Their close friends and parents stopped being a part of their educational experiences.

Using Rosaldo's (1989) idea of borders to view graduate education as an experience which some people are ready to take on and others are not, the participants have clearly identified the barriers that are relevant to this research and a few of the strategies used by them in the completion of the graduate degree. While graduate school did involve challenges for the participants, the decision was made to attend and the challenge of completing the degree was met.

Once in graduate school, most of the participants were positive about their education. They were challenged and stimulated and never regretted their decision to attend. There are other researchers who have made inroads in the topic of graduate students' experiences. For example, Cronbach (1975) found in order to be successful, graduate students adopt various strategies, not one common one. He explored graduate students' steps to their studies and their relationships with their professors and with solving problems. Some of his study participants took on several functions or strategies to complete graduate school. Many of the participants had similar ideas; none had one single approach in the completion of graduate education.

The definition of success as described by the participants included a fulfilling life. In the research, the participants identified a number of roles they took on as they experienced graduate life. These roles brought to life the ways in which the participants understood the numerous aspects of their lives. Through their own accounts, the participants made clear their interpersonal relationships as the core to their sense of self. In both instances, whether they were choosing to include or exclude others in the various

aspects of their lives, the participants made decisions that influence how they conducted themselves and how others perceived them. In fact, some of the behaviors encompassed in these roles represented a form of resistance. For example, some resisted the model of individualism, the independent graduate student with few other concerns, choosing instead to maintain the relationships with loved ones.

Baird (1990) concluded that graduate school “is a different place for a student who is oriented to interpersonal relations” (p. 373). Noddings (1997) also notes that women in graduate education can “suffer the ‘true professional’ syndrome” where “many ask whether it is possible to have both a professional and family life, and often highly successful women tell them that it is not” (p. 172). Acker et al. (1994) also found that for both students and supervisors, “individualism is pervasive in the discourse” (p. 248) about students’ proficiency. They contend that, “individualism does not seem to us to be accidental but is instead an important factor in reproducing the academic profession” (p. 248).

The findings from this study of Afghan American graduate students support those conclusions. As one student stated, graduate school is based on a work ethic of the independent scholar, which is in conflict with their own values. Not only was it a challenge for the participants to adapt to an environment not similar from the one they knew at home, the distinction went further than simply being in a different place. Most of the participants stated that their cultural values were opposed to the one of living the life of individuality. Based on their own experiences, the participants felt certain their family contributed to the growth and survival of the women and this was the central point of view in the Afghan American women’s thought process. Furthermore, these relationships

are not purely emotional but also include a supportive aspect and is no longer centered on material survival specifically, but has more to do with fulfilling other emotional and social needs.

The family needs of the women were for translation and general assistance in the community. In graduate school more emphasis is placed on individual achievement and the family needs placed a burden on the women causing the women to negotiate two very different lives concurrently. So while graduate school expects the women to be independent scholars, on the other hand, the families of the women demand to participate in the collective well being of the family. These expectations related to interpersonal relationships that existed for the women throughout their lives, and the age of the women and being in graduate school may have added to this expectation. Being where they were in their present lives, the women were expected to continue to be engaged in their roles within their family but also they would marry and start a home of their own.

Graduate school appears to be seen by family members as unsuitable with the expectations held by the participants. One of the participants mentioned a bachelor's degree was "ok", as was a teaching one which would lead to a job, but an academic pursuit such as a graduate degree with no vocational results was "too much" for her family to understand. All of these factors are part of the challenges the participants had to face in graduate school, which was not present in their studies for their bachelor's degree. The favoring of these two very opposite sides, one which values independence and the other of being connected, is a constant challenge.

Melendez & Petrovich (1989) found that some "culturally determined behaviors" did not fall into place to be accepted and distinguished in mainstream culture and in

graduate education. As mentioned above, the sense of collectivity and the behaviors that accompany it can be a point of conflict for the participants. Graduate school values independence and individual success. The Afghan American culture is preoccupied with the common good of the group. With the feeling of pride felt by the parents for the successes achieved by the women through higher education, there is always consideration of the effects of their goals on the immediate family.

The women also mentioned the opposition from their parents who believed the women should be spending more time with the family with help with the home and also with outside income instead of going for a graduate degree. The women were also expected to look at taking on roles of wives and mothers that would help the family in many ways. Despite doubts within, the women felt a strong urge to consider the welfare of those they cared for. This caring on the part of the women was not one-sided and was due to their own well-being that was received and continues to receive from their immediate families. The interpersonal connections they held in their lives were a central part of their sense of well being and success.

Zambrana (1988) refers to “Bicultural Socialization” as a process in which the women must adapt to two different cultures. She notes a number of factors which can influence the process. One such factor is “the conceptual style and problem-solving approach of minority individuals and their mesh with prevalent or valued styles of the majority culture” (p. 71). This same factor played a role in the “Bicultural Socialization” of the Afghan American female graduate students. These women were brought up and continue to live in a culture that values collectivity and interpersonal relationships. At times, this model is a hard sell to the students with their minds set on completing

graduate school which demands an independent approach and less focus on interpersonal relationships.

From the women's experiences, some form of transformation is necessary and important for them to be successful in graduate school, and further they do not suggest that it is an unconscious process. Furthermore, these women are aware of the actions at play in graduate school, and when they select to be successful by latching on to acceptable behaviors, they are very aware of the choices they have made. They are also aware of the impact these choices will have on their lives.

All of the participants were Afghan American women who had arrived in the United States after the Russian invasion of 1980, and had entered college as high achievers and had successfully completed four years of college. This study revealed their expressed decision to apply and attend graduate school. Baird (1990) found three important reasons why students decided to enroll in graduate school, "interest in the field, the fact that their desired field required an advanced degree and improving their chances of receiving a suitable salary, promotions, etc." (p. 362). The women in this study experienced these motivations. It was a given that the women were interested in the program of studies they had chosen, but at the same time they enjoyed being in school and wanted to enhance their knowledge of the field of study. The women were also interested in graduate school as a means to an end and wanted to achieve success in their personal and academic lives. These women from immigrant families were told to make something of their lives and as such used the entry into graduate school as a vehicle to achieve a successful stature in society that they would otherwise not be able to reach. The women, on entering the United States did not have the family and social background that

easily offered them a role in society; therefore, they entered graduate education as a stepping stone to a better position in society.

Erwin & Stewart (1997) state that a “university education” is a “badge of ability” (p. 217) for many women, but for immigrant women entering a graduate program is a way to achieve a higher social standing in society. For these women, education was perceived by them as the only vehicle to transport them to a successful career.

Roles

The women in this study are members of what Gardner (1993) refers to as a transition class because they are the first generation of their family to seek a graduate degree. What does it mean for the women to become educated? How do they describe the changes they witness in themselves and in their relationships with others? Most of the women were able to see what it meant to be associated with this transition class. Some of the women knew that it was logical to take advantage of the opportunities given to them, while others struggled with what it meant to juggle one’s place in the family of immigrants and in the community in general.

As Egan (1989) points out, “For some individuals, adaptation to the new role of professional student may be complicated by the expectation that this role will supersede all others” (p. 203). The women’s behavior in their personal relationships and educational endeavors fell into one of the four categories. The instructor role was one that the women adapted on a regular basis. For the women who adopted the “instructor” role, it was clear that sharing the educational learning’s with family members came easy while at the same time, they did not want to share their culture with friends and colleagues in the educational settings. In fact, the latter circumstance only showed up at rare occasions.

Women who adopted the second role, the “watchful attentive” person were those who, despite the challenges of pursuing graduate education, continued to perform an important role in their family, providing and helping at all times. The actions performed were both practical and emotional in fashion. These women were the ones the families turn to when going through the day-to-day activities and the long term hardships. The other role of “good as gold” is exemplified by those women who throughout their educational experiences maintained the status quo as it related to their family and friends. The good as gold women were those who separated their lives between education and private, much more than the other groups. They never imposed their educational learning’s on their families, nor did they impose their cultural background on those in the educational classroom. Women who maintained this role were the least likely to express concerns about role conflicts or difficulties with becoming educated. The last role of “opposition” included the women who during their studies started to move away from their families and eventually had nothing to do with them. Considering the academic pressures of graduate school, the notion of “culturally determined behaviors” (Melendez & Petrovich, 1989) brings about a certain kind of harmony with the four roles. The reality of these roles is that they are strategies acted upon by the women to make it through graduate school and at the same time it was very important for them to maintain some kind of a relationship in their lives as they travel through higher education.

The Instructor Role

The instructor role was when the women wanted to share their knowledge that they acquired from graduate school. These women were mentors and pioneers and would like to sell the importance of education to friends and family and are always willing to

give back to the community and society in general. In the process of gaining a higher education, a graduate education, the women who assumed the role of an instructor worked hard to bring this experience back to their family members. Dina who lives at home with her parents describes how she shared her educational experiences with them:

With respect to my relationship with my parents ... I'm always making sure to make it back home once I have finished my work at school. I like to have dinner with them and talk about my work at school and how my fathers and mothers day was. As you know my father is a taxi driver and he really brings back some incredible stories and I love to listen to them. I help my mother with the cooking (sometimes) and the cleaning of the house and this gives me a lot of satisfaction. I see a kind of respect that my parents have for me and this makes me very proud. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

Sabrina had a similar experience with her parents and offered the following observations:

I'm talking to them about my feelings especially the women of Afghanistan. These at times are heated discussions and I get into trouble for saying things that might not be what they would like to hear. But, then I ask them about my own situation and what if I was still in Afghanistan and not getting an education? They like the fact that I'm in school and at the same time always there for them, through thick and thin. We have our discussions, but in the end we are family and I love them. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

For both women, the role of the instructor was what they assumed upon entering graduate school, one which they came to find as meaningful to their lives. Sharing their knowledge and ideas with their parents did not come easily since the knowledge they brought into the family circle could be controversial. They walked a fine line and did not want to be perceived as arrogant or patronizing, but rather helpful. The women who chose to be instructors did so with a real desire to share their stories with others and to help with bridging the gap between the private and public sectors. The instructor role has the greatest degree of interaction between the two lived sectors. The role of the instructor

extends beyond the life of sharing and goes into helping with mentoring. As Anita explained the story of her mother who was denied the opportunity of going to school and she was the one who helped her with getting back into education at a community college.

Growing up in Afghanistan, my mother's generation had a very tough time in going to school. As a matter of fact, when she got married to my father, she was only a sixth grade student, and she always used to push me to go to school and get an education. I guess, my generation of Afghan's living in the States, are the fortunate ones. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

The Watchful and Attentive Role

The watchful and attentive role involved translating, driving and being with the parents at various appointments and helping out in the Afghan community. In assuming the role within their personal lives, the women often found it conflicts with the role of being a graduate student. For example, Saeeda explained to her fellow students how she was late to a graduate meeting at school and blamed it on missing her connecting bus rather than telling the truth that she was helping with her mother's appointment at the doctor:

I remember times when I had to take my mother to the doctor and usually, we always were delayed at the office. The doctor was running late or she was busy with other patients. I did not mind this but I did not want my friends to know and I always used to blame my being late to class to the missing of my bus connection. (personal communication, April 3, 2007)

Their role did not easily engage with the graduate student profile, but at the same time, it is assumed by a number of participants. The women described themselves using terms similar to a participant who said she was one to whom secrets are entrusted by her family, and the one who gave them support and listened to their worries. Anita talked about her role as the watchful and attentive person in the following way:

I'm the person in the family who takes care of everyone and includes the immediate family and also the uncles and aunties and their children. I take care of their money, their visits to the grocery shop, the doctor and to their friends' homes. If anything goes wrong, I'm the person who is called upon and I find time and get the work done. I like the fact I'm looked at as a member of the family who is always there to serve and help. (personal communication, November 26, 2006)

Dina also described the role in her family:

When ever we visit a doctor's office and my mother does not understand what is being said, she leaves it up to me to take notes and once we return home, she will ask me to give her all the information about the meeting. I look forward to being in this position and my mother likes the arrangement. (personal communication, March 14, 2007)

For her parents, this arrangement gave them access to the way of life in the United States and they always made her aware and give their thanks. Many of the women who were the eldest sibling in the family talked about this kind of arrangement that started from an early age. Furthermore, this group of women took on the work of being the decision makers with respect to their brothers and sisters education. First generation immigrant parents depend on their older children to lead them in their role as parents within the educational system. Living this role from an early age can grow into being a life long commitment within the family and the women found in these roles the family and the community needs for the rest of their lives. When asked about the current situation, Dina explained by saying that, "I have always felt a huge responsibility". This commitment to work makes the women carry on in the role, regardless of the responsibilities and that's including higher education. For most women the role moved beyond their immediate family. Samina described many of the odd jobs she performs for her larger family, "They ask me for letters to be written and bills to be read and paid. I

have to answer the phone when I am home and explain to my parents what the phone call was about". The caring behavior appears to be an attempt by the women to remain central figures in their family's lives while they move into graduate school. The need to be wanted by the family, the watchful and attentive role model enjoys the sense of fulfillment which can be a result of this type of behavior. Also, this form of relationships provided the women with practical and emotional support and can be viewed as a defensive response to keep them connected to their family, as they moved away from them in other aspects of their lives.

The Rogue Role

In taking on this role, the women moved away from their families and became immersed in their academic pursuits. All the women were in opposition to their cultural norms as they entered the less traditional path of graduate school. But, the role of the rogue women took it further by moving away from their traditional background rather than attempting to find a bridge between their educational and private lives. Often membership in this group had more to do with how others perceived them than with how they perceived themselves. This group of women also suffered consequences for their actions others did not seem to confront.

For Saeeda, with respect to her choice of universities, she disappointed her mother when she decided to leave home and get married to a boy who was not an Afghan. By making difficult choices, she resisted fitting into the life style expected by most Afghan families. As a consequence, she was not respected as she should have been and this really upset her. The message to Saeeda was clear through her choices and her independence; she no longer was seen as an Afghan, but had become an outsider.

Much of Raha's rebellion was defined by others' reactions; she interpreted her behavior as rebellious and recognized the impact of her educational pursuits on her life style choices:

The more educated I have become, the more hard nosed I have become in my belief systems, like saying no to something I didn't want to do. It was from an early age, I felt I was different and didn't want anything to do with my own community and this included my cousins. Whenever we had an occasion to attend at the Afghan community center, like a wedding, I always made excuses. In many ways, I felt foreign in my own home and I remember they were times when I looked at my family as being a far cry from where I want to be ... like I was not one of them. When I informed my family I was going to attend graduate school, they were not happy, and told me to get a job and start working. "What will this degree do for your future." (personal communication, March 13, 2007)

In Raha's view it was a matter of making choices; get an education and be an outsider or get married and have a family and in the end fulfill the family's expectations. Because she chose to select higher education, she automatically became the opposing role model who found the opportunity to become part of her family's dreams. Over the years, her family has learned to live with her decisions respecting her lifestyle and choices, but she has lost something in her relationship with the family as a whole.

The Good as Gold Role

The good as gold role is one where the women appear to make very few changes in their lives based on their experiences and graduate school. Throughout their educational and personal lives, these women have always been very supportive of their families and always there when they are called upon. In the conversations the researcher had with members of this group, the descriptions of their lives indicate they do, in fact, have little conflict in their experiences, or in other words, they lead a very simple life.

The women keep their academic and personal lives separate and only occasionally bring these experiences into their private life.

Dina continued to live with her parents as she pursued her graduate degree. She described a warm and close relationship with them and her siblings. The family continued to have dinner together on most evenings and according to her, had wonderful discussions. When asked if her relationship with her family had changed since beginning graduate school, Dina was clear to say, "Since joining school, I have become very close to them". In describing her relationship with them, she added, "It's amazing, what has happened to our relationship. I'm still there daughter, and being from Afghanistan, this is a far cry, because I really feel I have become a friend". Now on the other hand, her relationship with her colleagues from school, she did not connect in a personal way, but just kept it at an academic level. She maintains her friendship with her friends from high school, but does not discuss her college life with them. She worked during her high school years and also has kept working throughout college. It appears the pieces of her life fit neatly much more than many of the other women in the study.

Since entering graduate school, Sabrina has also been very positive and happy with her relationship towards her parents. Her parents were the ones who encouraged her to enter graduate school and get a teaching certificate, and she is happy about this decision. She kept her life simple and the job at the school district has not brought about a major change about her. Her parents are happy she is in a profession that helps people and on weekends she helps out at the Islamic Center in Houston. Throughout graduate school, she was grateful to her parents for being there to take care of her financial responsibilities and she thanked them for this. She described her feelings:

I guess it comes with age, one realizes the good things and how fortunate one can be. My parents have always helped me and I think this is wonderful, because when I listen to my American colleagues at school, who talk about loans they have taken on during their college years, I'm very lucky to have them as my parents. (personal communication, December 27, 2006)

Other women described comfortable relationships with their families, but talked about the disconnect that occurs as they live their daily lives separate from those of their families. This form of disengagement was not found for those who live the role of good as gold. These women speak Farsi and Phustow fluently and are close to their families and do participate in day-to-day family and community life. These women do very well at school, but do not partake in academic life outside the classroom. They have maintained close relationships with to their friends from high school and live similar lives to those they had prior to graduate school. Graduate school for these women looks like an activity they look forward to on a daily basis and once this is over, they return to the home setting which is also a positive one.

Summary

The students in this study have traveled through a personal transformation through their graduate and post graduate learning experiences. As they entered into graduate school, they learned how to reflect upon vast frames of reference, they learned about themselves and the women they had become, started thinking for them, and became proactive in their day to day dealings. Their consciousness started to grow in the field of socialization which helped them in determining the manner they think and act and how they at times without any effort helped support this change in their daily lives. They have started to become more confident and certain about their decisions. This increased

confidence and positive decision making has given them the ability to take risks in their daily lives.

Recommendations

The focus of this study was the feelings and responses of second generation Afghan American women during their graduate educational experiences. It cannot be assumed that all Afghan women in similar situations will have the same feelings and react in the same manner to academia. Likewise, no assumptions can be made about the limitations and differences in the feelings and reactions of men in similar situations, and of men or women from other ethnic groups recently immigrating to the United States. In addition, it would be interesting and valuable to understand whether individuals from following generations would differ significantly in their feelings about and reactions to life and educational experiences. As a result, several recommendations are proposed for further research:

1. The process of assimilation or simply of change that Afghan American women students undergo needs further examination.
2. The educational experiences of men of similar backgrounds should be examined.
3. Research examining similarities and differences in the experiences of second-generation women of other immigrant groups and ethnicities should be examined.
4. The differences and similarities of educational experiences of men of other immigrant groups and ethnicities should be examined.
5. Similarities and differences in the educational experiences of members of the following generation of Afghan women and men should be examined.

Closing Reflections

As an international student and then an immigrant I, like most of the participants, grew up on the edge of two often conflicting worlds. The boundaries between these worlds usually blurred, sometimes juxtaposed and sometimes overlapped. I had one foot planted in the traditional world of my early life in Pakistan, the other rooted in the world outside my front door. The journey to adulthood and discovering one's place in the world is difficult enough, but immigrants must also find a bicultural identity that will reconcile one culture with the other.

The concept of "transformative learning" was difficult to understand for me when I first entered this research process and I was not at all certain of what it meant. When I completed the formal course work, I still had not completely understood my transformative learning experiences in relation to how I was behaving and acting differently on this earth. While my research experience had been deep-seated and spirited, the idea of research and writing a dissertation seemed very distant and foreign to me. However, my personal perspective about the relationship between theory and action was profoundly changed. And as someone who believes in a 'hands-on' life style, my learning edge was giving myself the time and space to engage with critical thinking and reflection, and to understand that this engagement was a result of my own actions. As I stepped into this research, I found myself infused with the excitement of discovery as I started reading the data and came to appreciate the dissertation process as a follow-through of my own learning.

Looking back and making sense of the reported experiences of the women, I at times found myself reconstructing the meaning of my own learning and living

experiences. Amidst my own journey to adulthood, I have watched my Afghan wife of twenty six years struggle and change over the years as she has redefined herself as an Afghan-American woman, a wife, and a mother. At times her experience seemed to mirror mine, but both of us have grown together as first generation immigrants --- as individuals and as well as members of our immediate community and extended families. We have found our own unique place in our community and in the larger mainstream society. This study has in many ways re-examined and brought to light my own personal transformation that I had gone through during my early years of marriage, or in other words; reliving the life I had once. An important insight for me that has developed out of my direct experience of engaging with this dissertation paper has to do with the relationship between experience, theory, and action. The women and I have discovered that our lived experiences have provided stories that were equal to stories written and told by others, a lived experience which has become a foundation of knowledge upon which to reflect, to make meaning and to act. As I reflect upon the issues and circumstances that make these experiences in life different and, yet similar to those of the other women immigrants, I wonder and ask the question; what is going to be the experiences of women like my own daughter who were born in this country. An experience that time will tell and hopefully expand our critical reflection capacities through transformative learning experiences.

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