University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

11-4-2011

Portraits of Empowerment Exhibited by One Million Signatures Campaign Activists

Manijeh Badiee
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, manijehb@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsdiss

Part of the Community Psychology Commons, Counseling Psychology Commons, Education Commons, Gender and Sexuality Commons, Other International and Area Studies Commons, and the Politics and Social Change Commons

PORTRAITS OF EMPOWERMENT EXHIBITED BY ONE MILLION SIGNATURES

CAMPAIGN ACTIVISTS

by

Manijeh Badiee

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Psychological Studies in Education

Under the Supervision of Professors Michael Scheel and John W. Creswell

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 2012

PORTRAITS OF EMPOWERMENT EXHIBITED BY ONE MILLION SIGNATURES

CAMPAIGN ACTIVISTS

Manijeh Badiee, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2012

Advisers: Michael Scheel and John W. Creswell

Iranian women have shown themselves to be anything but victims (Afkhami, 2009; Price, 1996; Shiranipour, 2002). Although they live in an oppressive regime (Nafisi, 1999; "Symbolic annihilation," 1999), grassroots efforts of their One Million Signatures Campaign transformed gender politics in Iran (Khorasani, 2009). The Campaign has become international, and Iranian Americans have played a prominent role in furthering its message (Tohidi, 2010).

Iranian women's struggles reflect the global phenomenon of women's movements (Ferree, 2006). Empowerment is used to conceptualize such movements, but few studies have explored individuals from the Middle East (e.g. Dufour & Giraud, 2007).

The present study addressed these deficiencies by recording the stories of eight activists of the One Million Signatures Campaign. My approach was influenced by personal experiences, my worldview, women's empowerment research, and literature on Iranian women's issues. I positioned myself in the research by explaining how parental influences, graduate school experiences, and an independent research project in Tehran led me to this study. I adopted the transformative worldview that science should be used to improve society (Mertens, 2008). I synthesized previous literature on women's empowerment and Iranian women.

Procedures of the study followed that of portraiture design (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Data collection included interviews, observations, and document review. I analyzed the

data using systematic and interpretative techniques to develop three composite portraits. Each portrait represented two or three individuals. The first portrait was of Soheila, an artist whose self-confidence was apparent in every word and gesture. The second portrait was Paria, a warm individual who possessed a deep passion for understanding people. The individual in the third portrait, Dariush, possessed a genuineness and calm persistence that inspired me to act. Themes that emerged across portraits were (a) finding purpose in adversity, (b) the development of gender consciousness, (c) self-awareness, and (d) uncertainty. I discuss implications of the findings. I conclude with limitations, research directions, and strengths of this study. The present study informs women's rights activists in social movements.

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to the One Million Signatures Campaign and all women and men who have ever taken a stand against gender inequality. I have a lot to learn, but I hope I can do this cause justice.

Author's Acknowledgements

A significant amount of people contributed to the development of this dissertation. I cannot express my gratitude enough to all the individuals who made it possible.

First of all, thank you, Dr. Scheel. From the first time we talked on the phone, I felt your genuineness and warmth. You helped draw me out of my shell the first year, at a time when I really needed it. Your support and encouragement throughout this process has been invaluable. I will never forget the day you questioned my concern about being "sweet." Why would I want to be sweet, you said, when I could aim for being genuine and strong? Thank you for empowering me.

Dr. Yakushko, thank you for helping me shape my vision for this dissertation. Early in my doctoral career, you told me that what I was truly interested in was women's empowerment. You knew this before I was consciously aware of it.

Dr. Creswell, thank you for providing me with the guidance to be a persuasive qualitative researcher and prolific writer, while at the same time giving me the freedom to explore my passion. You pushed me because you knew I could handle it, and because you knew I would be better for it. Not only have you shaped me as a scholar and writer, you have profoundly influenced my spiritual growth.

Dr. Babchuk, your confidence in me meant so much. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to co-teach classes with you and for being so approachable. Your care for your students inspires me, and I hope to the kind of teacher you are one day.

Dr. Moore, I learn from every interaction that I have with you. I am lucky to have worked with such an amazing scholar, and I find your strength and confidence contagious. Thank you for being on my committee and sharing your thoughtful perspective.

Dr. Kauffman, I will never forget the class I had with you. You are a gifted teacher. Your positive energy and curiosity has been wonderful to have on my committee. Thank you for always making me feel more upbeat.

Dr. Plano Clark, I am blessed to have gotten to know you, first as a teacher, then as a boss and mentor. Your superb skills as a researcher and eagerness to share your knowledge with me made me much more prepared to undertake this project. More than that, your heartfelt notes and well-timed words of encouragement gave me energy more times than you know. I went through some of the roughest semesters of my life while I was your research assistant, and I cannot imagine not having had your support and guidance.

Thank you to the activists I interviewed, for opening your hearts to me and allowing me to pick your brain. Thank you for trusting me with your stories.

Thank you to the students I have taught and lectured throughout my graduate career. I enjoyed every class discussion we had. You helped build my confidence in developing and sharing ideas.

Being able to share milestones in a stressful time such as graduate school is a gift. I am grateful to have been able to undertake this experience with amazing people, and I cannot imagine these four years without you. Cindy, thank you for your genuineness,

viii

viii

viii

friendship, and support. I am a better person because of you. Justin, you taught me so much about relationships, life, and psychology. I love how I can introduce any topic, and we can discuss it for hours. Ambyr, thank you for being such a supportive friend and for bringing positive energy to my life. You helped make Lincoln home. Allison, I am so grateful we opened up to each other and I think we will feel the rewards for a lifetime. Your strength as a powerful woman and mother are an inspiration to me. Sherry, we went through so much together, personally and professionally, and I love how we can give each other honest, critical feedback on practically any topic. We connect on multiple levels. Minda, thank you for always encouraging me to reach for the stars. I feel stronger after every conversation we have. Audra, my soul sister, the gifts of friendship and spirituality you share with me help me every step of the way.

Modar, thank you for being patient with me throughout this process, and for always believing I deserve the best. Bubba, thank you for being an inspiration and role model. Sirus, you always ground me and remind me not to take life so seriously. Marjon, I could not ask for a wiser and cooler sister, and your support means so much. Babai and Mamai (*marhoom* – who passed away), thank you for always believing in me. I am indebted to my extended family, both in Iran and in the U.S., for your support and advice.

Finally, I thank Sina, my partner and best friend. You never let me give up on myself. You are a major source of creativity, love, and inspiration in my life. You made me the feminist I am today. I look forward to years and years of celebrating milestones together.

Table of Contents

List of Multimedia Objects

Chapter One: Introduction

In Iran, women's lives are legally worth half men's, men marry another wife without permission, and men gain custody by default in divorce (Khorasani, 2009). Women are reminded they are less than men in divergent facets of life, such as being forbidden to ride bicycles ("New restrictions," 1996). One of the most insidious and disturbing elements of Iranian gender oppression is the "symbolic annihilation" of women ("Symbolic annihilation," 1999, p. 12). Women's pictures are banned from magazines and their voices are prohibited from penetrating the radio airwaves (Nafisi, 1999). Arguments to change discriminatory laws are banned, so women are punished severely for speaking and writing about gender oppression (Nafisi, 1999; "Symbolic annihilation," 1999). The message of the Islamic Republic of Iran to women is clear: Women are not to be seen, heard, or discussed. Even questioning this principle is forbidden.

These contexts translate to society in destructive ways. I will never forget the day I witnessed a young woman getting slapped by a man in a crowded Tehran park. More troubling than the incident was the reaction of others in the park. Despite his incessant yelling, no one seemed to flinch. The half-citizen status of women is ingrained and pervasive, the norm.

Iranian women fight back in a variety of ways (e.g. Afkhami, 2009; Price, 1996). They are becoming leaders in previously male-dominated fields, breaking stereotypes, and championing civil rights causes (Badiee, in progress; Tohidi, 2010). Women played a central role in the opposition uprising that rocked the world after the June 2009 elections

(Afkhami, 2009; Price, 1996; "Women's rights movement in Iran," 2009). They have done their best to fight the veil of invisibility, a veil that is far more destructive than the literal one they are required to wear (Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2008). Their unwavering desire to be heard is manifest in the variety of literature by and about Iranian women, in the form of memoirs, scholarly works, magazines, and more recently, blogging (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008; Nahai, 2007; Shiranipour, 2002). Women have risked their lives not only to fight for equality, but to share the lessons they have learned through writing (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008; Khorasani, 2009).

One of the most influential Iranian women's movements is the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality (Tohidi, 2010). The One Million Signatures Campaign is a grassroots movement that started with less than fifty people in 2006. They created a petition highlighting their demands for changing gender discriminatory laws, such as stoning women as punishment and allowing polygamy. This small group of women traveled door to door and to public places to collect signatures and generate discussion. Women primarily started the Campaign, which is one reason why I explored women's empowerment in the present study.

The brilliance of the Campaign lies in its strategy. Individuals find clever ways to start conversations about gender on bus stops, taxis, and subways. Activists put on elaborate skits to make people reflect on gender inequality in a society that renders such dialogues criminal. The collaborative approach of the Campaign put activists and citizens on the same level, breaking barriers that had existed for decades (Tohidi, 2010). The common goal of gender equality united thousands of women and men across cities and

urban areas, young and old, religious and secular (Khorasani, 2009). Their empowerment efforts set the stage for the elections of June 2009, which reflected considerable progress in gender politics (Afkhami, 2009). Three of the four candidates endorsed women's rights (Sayah & Amanpour, 2009) and women were much more prominent than in previous years (Tohidi, 2010). Involvement in the Campaign is considered illegal in Iran, and the majority of the original activists have been imprisoned, threatened, or worse (Khorasani, 2009).

Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani is one of the founders of the One Million Signatures Campaign.

> The campaign brings to mind the image of raindrops falling, forming rivulets, and then converging on an ever-larger scale until they become a river. First there is a murmur, a trickle, and then, gradually, a torrent of voices sounding together and reaching far and wide. (Khorasani, 2009, p. 2)

This grassroots movement has changed the landscape of Iran and spread to other countries, including the U.S.

Outside of Iran, the U.S. branch is the most active. Iranian Americans' efforts have been crucial in making the Campaign international (Tohidi, 2010). The branch is located in southern California, and the individuals in this movement are all active in their own ways. They give speeches about patriarchal gender and culture, perform art related to women's empowerment, and pursue careers that will allow them to continue their activism. Their long-term commitment can provide insight on what sustains the empowerment process. The U.S. branch's work as a group has also been impressive.

Because of trauma and a fierce independence that stems from culture, Iranian groups

often do not remain together after a few months. The southern California branch has only

grown closer in four years. Their cohesion is an excellent case study on how connections

with other women can be empowering. However, little is known about the empowerment

of the One Million Signatures Campaign activists.

One Million Signatures Campaign and other women's rights activists continue to

be arrested in Iran (Khorasani, 2009). Iranian activists have asserted that individuals

outside of Iran can help by publicizing the efforts of Iranian women, especially as

conditions get increasingly dangerous (Movement Watch, 2010, para. 3). In March 2010,

a group of Iranian women's rights activists stated: "We invite all women's rights

defenders, activists, organisations, and networks worldwide to demonstrate their

solidarity with the Iranian women's movement and the broader movement for democracy

in Iran" ("Gender equality for Iran," 2010, para. 6). This study addresses these calls for

action.

Yakin Ertürk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against

Women called the Campaign "a tale that is unique to the circumstances of today's Iran,

yet applicable to the struggle for equality anywhere in the world" (Khorasani, 2009, p.

185). The efforts of Iranian and Iranian American women are a microcosm of the global

phenomena of women's movements (Ferree, 2006; Kristoff & WuDunn, 2009; Tohidi,

2010). Ferree (2006) makes a distinction between feminism and women's movements.

Whereas feminism refers to the goal of challenging gender oppression, a women's

movement is women organizing to make change. Ferree identifies the two components of

women's movements: naming women as a constituency and building strategies, organizations, or politics about women's concerns. The One Million Signatures Campaign can be considered a women's movement with feminism as a goal.

Empowerment is often used to conceptualize women's movements (e.g. Becker, Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Klem, 2002; Dufour and Giraud, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007). Understanding the empowerment of women's rights activists can provide a more comprehensive picture of a women's movement. Furthermore, studying individual activists can enhance knowledge of empowerment, a concept largely formed in the academy (Boehm & Staples, 2002). Although previous empowerment studies have focused on ethnic groups (e.g. Chien, 2008; Holliday, 2009; Ngcobo, & Edwards, 2008; Patel, 2007), less have explored Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern American individuals (Rostami-Povey, 2003; 2007). The fact that little is known about the lives of Campaign activists is disconcerting because they are being arrested in droves.

Purpose and Research Questions

In this study, I attempted to address these practical and theoretical deficiencies. The purpose of this portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) was to understand the empowerment of eight activists (six women and two men) of the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Definition of empowerment. Zimmerman (2000) describes empowering processes as those in which individuals attempt to gain control, obtain resources, and understand the social environment. He also indicates that empowerment occurs at multiple levels, such as individual, organizational, and community. Empowerment can

transform individuals, such as by making them more resilient and self-confident (Kim et al., 2007; O'Leary & Bhaju, 2006). Thus, empowerment was defined as a life-altering, multidimensional process that involved taking action to understand and change the environment with the help of resources.

The research questions were:

- What do the stories of One Million Signatures Campaign activists tell us about empowerment? Sub-questions: What was their path to the Campaign? What strategies have they used along the way to gain control of the environment? How have they been personally changed in the process of their activism?

- How do individuals feel connected to the wider movement of the One Million Signatures Campaign? Sub-questions: How did they attempt to understand their environment? How did participants use resources in this movement? How were these resources mobilized?

Portraitists enter the field with an initial framework but are open to the research questions and central phenomenon changing as the research progresses (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I viewed empowerment as an initial conceptualization and remained open to other central phenomena emerging from the data.

Significance of My Study

This study has relevance in several areas. Below, I highlight the potential significance for individuals, practitioners, feminist activists and movements, methods, and policy makers and governments.

Individual empowerment. In a country where their lives are worth half of men's, women have risked torture, imprisonment, rape, and execution to fight for human rights and democracy for over 100 years (Afkhami, 2009; Price, 1996; "Women's rights movement in Iran," 2009). Although Iranian women played a significant role in the success of Iran's social movements, they were often denied rights extended to men (Price, 1996). Iranian Americans have been pivotal in spreading the One Million Signatures Campaign's message of gender equality (Tohidi, 2010). The lives of these Campaign activists provided rich examples of how individuals empowered themselves and raised society's gender consciousness.

Counseling. Social justice is a defining characteristic of counseling psychology (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Exploring the stories of empowered women can provide suggestions for individuals interested in social justice. Additionally, counseling psychologists have been recognized as national leaders in developing effective strategies for multicultural populations (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). The portraits can provide insight into gender roles in Iranian culture, which can contribute to knowledge on counseling immigrant families. The accounts can help illuminate the challenges of activism and findings may provide ideas for empowerment-based interventions. Previous research has focused on empowerment for ethnic groups: African and African Americans (Andrews, Felton, Wewers, Waller, & Tingen, 2007; Holliday, 2009; Ngcobo, & Edwards, 2008; Pronyk et al., 2008; Rowe & Rowe, 2009), Asian and Asian Americans (Chien, 2008; Chiu, Wei, & Lee, 2006), or South Asian (Agger et al., 2008; Patel, 2007). The current

study will add to this body of work for Middle-Eastern and Middle Eastern American individuals.

Narrative research is similar to portraiture in its emphasis on people and their stories. Riessman and Speedy's (2007) review of psychotherapy studies demonstrates a recent rise in narrative research in counseling. This preference is evident in the numerous narrative studies related to counseling (e.g. Feinsilver, Murphy, & Anderson, 2007; Goodman, Glenn, Bohlig, Banyard, & Borges, 2009; Norsworthy, Leung, Heppner, & Wang, 2009). The current study furthers this body of knowledge by employing a research design that is similar to a narrative approach.

Feminist activists and movements. Grassroots efforts started by women have transformed society (e.g. Ferree, 2006; Hoodfar, 2007; Mishra, 2008; Rostami-Povey, 2003; 2007). One such movement, the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality, began as a petition to change gender discriminatory laws and raised society's consciousness to a whole new level (Khorasani, 2009). This study produced engaging, accessible accounts of successful activists that can empower women and feminist movements. I focus qualitatively on how individuals are empowered on an individual as well as a group level.

Methods. Portraiture is a relatively new approach to research; the landmark book was written by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis in 1997. Although it has promise because of its emphasis on art and science and ability to reach audiences beyond the academy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), only a handful of studies were found, mostly by Lawrence-Lightfoot (e.g. 1983; 1994; 2000). The one exception was a study by Shavarini

(2006b). Her rich account illuminated the complexities Iranian women face when they enter college. More studies such as the present one can help establish portraiture as a methodology in its own right. Additionally, my project can contribute to social justice research methods. Both the topic of study and the methods I utilized relate to social justice. I plan to write a methodological article about my process of balancing social justice and scholarly considerations.

Policy makers and governments. Global leaders are uncertain how to proceed with Iran (Prince, 2010). Debate ensues about whether or not more sanctions should be implemented against Iran, and if so, what kind (e.g. "MEPs want sanctions on Iran," 2010). The power and impact of Iranian equal rights activists may not be obvious from outside the country (Badiee, in progress), but women's rights movements have exerted significant political influence (Sayah & Amanpour, 2009; Tohidi, 2010). Iranian Americans have been instrumental in spreading the message of the One Million Signatures Campaign (Tohidi, 2010). Who are the individuals organizing these movements? What motivates them to fight and enlist people to their cause? Understanding these questions can allow global leaders to create policies that take these influential individuals into account.

My goal for the next two chapters will be to highlight my research approach and explain why it fit the problem of study. I integrate my personal worldview and previous research to propose the conceptual framework for my dissertation. I describe the methods I utilized, highlight the ethical implications of my research, and discuss my procedures to establish validity.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

Consistent with a qualitative approach, I demonstrate how my topic fits into what is known and explain the theoretical framework that informs my study (Maxwell, 2005). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) assert that portraitists begin their research with intellectual frameworks comprised of prior experience, knowledge of the field of inquiry, and previous research. I recorded themes in each of these areas, referred to as anticipatory themes in portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). First, I discuss how my personal experiences have shaped this study. I subsequently integrate literature to develop a tentative conceptualization of women's empowerment. Finally, I review articles in which Iranian women are the focus of the study.

Positioning Myself

Qualitative research is interpretative at every step; thus, researchers reflect on the biases, experiences, and values that influence the project (Creswell, 2007). A variety of experiences have led me to my topic and methodological design. Upon reflection of past experiences and examination of my journals and research logs, several themes informed the purpose, methods, and topic of this study. Below, I highlight these themes: parental influences, graduate school experiences, and an Iranian women's empowerment project in Tehran.

Parental influences. I never believed in Santa Claus. When I share this information with people, they seem taken aback. The moment people realized Santa Claus does not exist is often described as a loss of innocence, a symbol of adulthood. My

father did not think I needed to believe in anything that was not "real." He is scientifically minded and atheist. My father would die for his beliefs. He was consistently beaten, imprisoned, and tortured in Iran for distributing proscribed literature and organizing peaceful demonstrations. Instead of regaling me with stories about Santa Claus, my dad told me stories of the torture he experienced in political prisons. Hearing these stories made me resilient and thoughtful about life. I knew if people could survive what my father had, I could handle anything. At an early age, I realized the importance of finding one's meaning in life. Visiting the torture prison where he was held captive for years made me eerily aware of my own purpose in life: to continue my father's pursuit of human rights.

Like my father, I am an activist, an academic, and a scientist. Being an activist is at the core of my being (see Transformative Worldview for more information). I learned through example that knowledge is powerful and I am privileged to be able to pursue it freely. Thus, I treasure being an academic. I do not believe I can separate my activism from myself as a researcher, so I try to make my biases transparent. As a scientist, I view my goal as furthering knowledge and bettering society. In this project, I remained committed to applying persuasive qualitative procedures and engaging in validation strategies. I tried to remain true to participants' stories as much as possible and enlisted their feedback on their portraits. I reflected on potential benefits to society at every stage of the research process. In my research, I am devoted to helping society, furthering knowledge, and employing systematic methods.

My mother was the first example in my life of a strong and empowered Iranian woman. I never got the sense that anything would break my mom, even though she bore so much pain and suffering at times. She endured war, death, sexual assault, and verbal harassment. She was treated as a fallen woman when she divorced a violent husband. In the face of this mistreatment, she always tried to remain strong and smile. Adversity empowered her and made her more successful. She taught me to be independent and that women must empower themselves, no one can do it for them. I learned I can experience my emotions and exude strength at the same time. My mother is socially gifted. She was a role model for me, and her influence helped me as I built rapport with the participants.

I cannot underestimate the role of my parents in my project. As a child, I listened to stories about overcoming the worst torture a human being can experience. I was simultaneously frightened and energized. As an adult, I watched my mother pick up the pieces of her life and become independent for the first time. I was inspired by my parents, and fascinated with the question: Why? Why had they become stronger when others may have succumbed to pressure? Where did this strength come from? My lifelong fascination with empowerment was born. My father infused a passion for social justice. My mother's tale helped me to focus this passion on Iranian women's empowerment. When I initially learned of the One Million Signatures Campaign, I was fascinated by the resilience of its members. They were arrested, harassed, and yet still persevered to create a better society. Like my parents, they did not give up.

My parents shaped the way I interpreted data. My father always taught me to extract the best from any situation. This lesson instilled optimism and admiration for activism,

which led to me developing portraits that focus more on the positive. He had an unusually resilient reaction to the torture he faced, having becoming a stronger person and never giving up on activism. The stories I heard from my dad and the strength I witnessed in my mother informed the theme of overcoming adversity. Throughout my childhood and adulthood, I watch my mother empower herself and develop a more profound understanding of herself as a woman. Witnessing this shift in gender consciousness may have influenced how the theme, development of gender consciousness, emerged. As an Iranian American who prides herself on being upfront, I could misinterpret participants' words or meanings in Farsi, an extremely indirect language. I remedied this concern by verifying findings with participants.

Graduate school experiences. Throughout my graduate school career, I have been exposed to ideas and opportunities that informed this project. My academic training and counseling practices reaffirmed my need to help marginalized groups in society. In self-reflective papers, I explored my identity and became proud of being a strong Iranian American woman. Counseling experiences cemented my interest in women's empowerment.

My research assistantship at the Office of Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research (OQMMR) opened my eyes to the world of qualitative and mixed methods research. My collaboration with Drs. John W. Creswell and Vicki Plano Clark helped me realize how systematic and engaging qualitative research can be. Through interactions with them and my work at the OQMMR, I developed an identity as a qualitative researcher. As a researcher, I emphasize collaboration, ethical considerations, and benefit

to society. I realized I was interested in obtaining a rich understanding of individuals'
stories.

My identity as a writer evolved in graduate school. For most of my life, I was able
to succeed in writing by exerting minimal effort. Graduate school was a tremendous and
humbling growth experience, as I realized I had a great deal to learn. My writing became
more structured and I focused on making every sentence count. Thanks to the invaluable
input of my advisors and technical writer, I strive to balance my attention to detail for
understanding the big picture. I integrated these two skills with my natural talent for
writing to become the best writer I can be. I experienced intense writer's block while
writing my dissertation. I was scared that I would not do the participants justice. With the
help of an advisor, I was able to recognize this block, overcome it, and proceed.

As a counselor, I adopt the feminist position that it is unethical not to engage in self-
care (Porter, 1995). The data collection phase was even more intense than I imagined. In
addition to constantly conducting interviews, observing, and attending events, I experienced
the additional stress of not knowing if I would be able to recruit enough participants. I made
sure to sleep adequately and took breaks to find enjoyment outside the project. I explored
the nature of southern California, visiting the beach and parks. I discovered spiritual
opportunities in Los Angeles that kept me grounded.

At times, I became overwhelmed and sought out support from friends, family, and
colleagues. My advisors provided support and guidance. A colleague and I discussed the
research process throughout my project, and these conversations helped me understand my
role in this study. The interactions I experienced at the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation

conference informed the present study. I met a founder of the One Million Signatures Campaign, and she provided feedback on my project and insight on the movement. I also spoke with a young man who made a speech about starting a men's movement. He inspired me to reflect on the role of men in gender equality. My partner committed to being available to me anytime, and was a tremendous source of support and strength. He reminded me to take care of myself and assured me that I was capable. I visited my college roommate and uncle's family on the weekends during the data collection phase.

My counseling training and graduate school experiences provided a compass that pointed me in the right direction. I have learned through my counseling practices that relationships are central to human beings. This perspective may have influenced some of the relationship-oriented themes that emerged in the present study, such as the heart of the matter. My research training provided me with useful tools for data collection and analysis. I built on these experiences in my Iran research project.

Iranian women's empowerment project in Tehran. My first women's empowerment project took place in Tehran in the summer of 2008 (Badiee, in progress). I interviewed 27 women who had made major life decisions that defied traditional or societal standards. I learned women's empowerment was more complicated than making major life decisions. By focusing only on these types of decisions, I missed the daily ways women were defying the regime. Some women were direct. One participant explained how she always challenged sexism vocally, whether it was coming from her boss, a taxi driver, or her own son. Others were subtle in their efforts, such as quietly employing women. The more subtle forms of women's empowerment often went

undetected, although they were not entirely without consequences. At any given moment, a woman's business can be taken away simply because she is a woman. The more outspoken women paid a high price. One participant had excellent skills but was fired for challenging sexism in the workplace. As I began to understand the nuances of Iranian women's empowerment, I realized more and more that qualitative approaches were best for capturing the complexity of Iranian women.

Some participants did not feel they had any support when they broke the societal rule. They said women were particularly harsh. They mistrusted and gossiped about them because they did not follow societal norms. I also found that Iranian women were extremely diverse: economically, religiously, and morally. The gender discriminatory system of the Islamic Republic exacerbated this divide among women and created mistrust: Khorasani (2009) explains how allowing polygamy creates instability in marriages and fosters mistrust among women. I was plagued by the question: how could such diverse women come together in a country that pitted them against each other? Through my participants, I learned about the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality. This influential movement had successfully united women all over Iran in the cause of fighting gender discriminatory laws and generating public conversations about gender (Tohidi, 2010). My research sparked an interest in exploring the Campaign, the topic of this study.

Several months after I left Iran, an Iranian American graduate student was arrested and held indefinitely in Tehran for conducting research on her dissertation on the women's rights movement. Once she was allowed back into the States, she was safe and

resumed her dissertation. I made an important decision regarding research in Iran, especially with respect to studying activism. In order to ensure the safety of my participants, I had to study politically charged topics outside of Iran. I realized that all research entails risk and is thus implicitly dangerous. I started to become more conscious of my enormous power as a researcher. I initially felt paralyzed, wondering if I was capable of this privilege and responsibility. I questioned myself. I eventually regained my confidence, but I try to never forget how much power I hold. The current study expanded and illuminated these previous insights. I realized throughout the course of the project that studying the Iranian women's movement was even riskier than I thought because it is relatively small.

My role in the One Million Signatures Campaign. Prior to starting data collection, I had signed an online petition on the Campaign website so I thought I was considered part of the Campaign. However, my participants taught me that being involved with the Campaign meant spreading the message of gender awareness. When they collected signatures to change Iranian gender discriminatory laws, the purpose was not the signature but the discussion that led to it. One participant remarked that if people approached her and wanted to sign the petition, she informed them they could on the condition that they take the Campaign pamphlet and educate others about equality. I consider myself a part of the Campaign as long as I continue to consistently take a stand against gender injustices. I envision my dissertation and its subsequent publication as activism for the Campaign because I am spreading its message of gender equality.

Transformative Worldview

Qualitative researchers clarify their worldviews, or collections of beliefs that guide action (Creswell, 2007). The transformative worldview (see Mertens, 1999; 2008) informed the current study. According to the transformative perspective, improving society is an important goal of research (Mertens, 1999). Mertens (2008) highlights the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of the transformative worldview. Transformative researchers believe in the existence of multiple realities and assert that these viewpoints must be placed within political, cultural, historical, and socioeconomic context. It is the transformative scholar's duty to struggle with multiple constructions and make sure not to privilege one perspective over another. Truth includes institutional processes and effects. Transformative researchers must be significantly involved in the participants or communities they are studying. From a methodological standpoint, transformative research is conducted with involvement of all relevant communities and findings are generated from these individuals. Special efforts are made to include underrepresented groups.

Interpretive positions can provide lenses for all aspects of qualitative research. The interpretive position taken in this study was feminism because women's concerns were central to the study (Creswell, 2007). I consider myself an unapologetic Iranian American feminist and activist. I am all too aware of the violent and insidious suppression of feminism and women's movements in Iran, and thus, I viewed it as my duty and privilege to stand up for this term whenever possible. In the process, I hoped to change mainstream conceptualizations of Iranian women.

In conclusion, the present study was influenced by my parents, graduate school experiences, my project in Tehran, and my worldview. My family impacted my choice of topic and view of science. In graduate school, I found focus, guidance, and exposure to qualitative research design and implementation as well as writing. My research on Iranian women solidified my interest and narrowed my topic. These experiences formed the foundation for my worldview, which I consider transformative. These components have informed the purpose, topic, and methods of this study. Below, I review literature on women's empowerment and highlight research on Iranian women.

Women's Empowerment

Consistent with a portraiture approach, I reviewed the literature for themes of women's empowerment (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I searched sociology and psychology databases for "women's empowerment" and collected qualitative and quantitative studies. The purpose of this review is to highlight my anticipatory framework for women's empowerment (Badiee & Yakushko, in progress). The themes that emerged from my analysis were catalytic events, environmental influences, intrapersonal transformation, factors that sustain empowerment, behavioral strategies, interpersonal metamorphosis, connections with other women, harm to women, and societal shifts. As I reviewed the literature, I analyzed how the themes were fitting together. I attempted to answer questions such as: What is the overall process of women's empowerment? How do the themes fit together?

Based on my interpretations, I developed a tentative conceptualization of the process of women's empowerment (see Figure 1). According to my conceptualization,

empowerment begins with catalytic events and environmental factors, and one or more of these two events instigates intrapersonal transformation. The empowerment process is mitigated by sustaining factors and individual strategies. Intrapersonal transformation, interpersonal metamorphosis, and societal shifts are depicted as circles because they are non-linear, fluid processes. As indicated by Figure 1, the most prevalent theme of women's empowerment was connectedness. The emergent themes are described below.

Catalytic events. In the present review, catalytic events are defined as personal changes that can initiate the empowerment process. Empowerment can emerge from a major life event (Roster, 2007; Sheilds, 1995). For example, occurrences that have led to women's empowerment include traumatic incidents (Sheilds, 1995) such as death (Roster, 2007). Interpersonal events that instigate the empowerment process include the end of a relationship (Roster, 2007; Sheilds, 1995) and changes in location, occupation, or gender roles (Sheilds, 1995).

Empowerment can follow a change in the broader social context of one's life (Sheilds, 1995). One example is Afghani refugee women who started an educational movement in Iran (Hoodfar, 2007). When Afghani women moved to Iran, they were empowered by the idea that women can become educated. After the Iranian government banned Afghani children from attending school, Afghani women risked incarceration to start secret schools. Hoodfar (2007) cites two reasons for this empowerment: exposure to a new way of being Muslim and a sense of entitlement that stemmed from emigration. When emigrating to Iran, Afghani women's views of education being anti-Islamic were challenged. This change gave them a sense of entitlement when the Islamic Republic took

the right of education away. Thus, Afghani women were transformed after being exposed

to a new way of being.

Catalytic events create contradictions on an intrapersonal level, resulting in a new

perspective. Individuals become more conscious of contradictions in other areas of life

(Freire, 1974). Because catalytic events are concrete, they are depicted as a rectangle on

Figure 1. Thus, catalytic events introduce a new way of being or perspective that

challenges previous conceptualizations.

Environmental influences. These factors may include organizational,

community, societal, and global sets of conditions. The need for basic resources was

identified as important for empowerment (Sheilds, 1995). Boehm and Staples (2002)

emphasized the quality of community services, availability of health, and social welfare

resources. Furthermore, individuals discussed the availability of leisure activities and

volunteer opportunities as significant factors for empowerment (Roster, 2007; Shawler &

Logsdon, 2008). Access to organizations (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007), especially ones

that challenge patriarchal gender roles (Rostami-Povey, 2003), create vehicles for

empowerment. Socio-cultural stereotypes, especially with respect to women's sexuality,

emerged as having a significant influence on women's empowerment (Roster, 2007).

Messages from the media that reinforce paternalism may inhibit women's empowerment

(MacKian, 2008). An extreme difference in level of equity could preclude empowerment

efforts (Mitra & Singh, 2007; Swift & Levin, 1987; Williams & Labonte, 2007).

War generates women's empowerment (Rostami-Povey, 2001; 2003; Shilo,

2008). Rostami-Povey's (2001; 2003) studies in the Middle East represent examples of

this phenomenon. In the period following the Iran-Iraq War, Iranian women convened to fight for women's rights. Rostami-Povey (2001) attributed this empowerment to contradictions between Islamic states and institutions. Iranian women participated in demonstrations and provided necessities to soldiers, but they were not granted custody of their children if their husbands were killed in battle. More women engaged in activism during the civil war in Afghanistan (Rostami-Povey, 2003). Shilo's (2008) analysis demonstrated that World War I resulted in Jewish women's empowerment. The development of soup kitchens, women's societies, and rise in social activism represented stellar achievements for Jewish women. In these cases, war made women more socio-politically aware and involved. However, despite their engagement, their rights often remained the same unless they were willing to fight for them. Thus, resources, access to organizations, gender stereotypes, economic conditions, and war emerged as environmental influences.

Intrapersonal transformation. Catalytic events and environmental influences trigger intrapersonal transformation, a necessary condition of empowerment. One major intrapersonal shift that emerged was related to confidence and a renewed sense of self (Gibson, 1995; Jewell, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; O'Leary & Bhaju, 2006; Roster, 2007). Sheilds' (1995) article exploring women's experiences of empowerment confirmed the development of an internal sense of self. The internal sense of self implied attaining ownership of one's identity and represented the development of self-value, trust, and self-acceptance. Kapadia (1999) referred to women's self-worth as the anchor of empowerment. Participants also reported a sense of purpose, satisfaction, self-awareness,

resilience, and the ability to resolve conflicts (Gibson, 1995; Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Jewell, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; O'Leary & Bhaju, 2006). Research demonstrated that women's empowerment was associated with the development of necessary knowledge (Gibson, 1995; Roster, 2007), competence (Gibson, 1995; Sheilds, 1995), control (Gibson, 1995; Johnson, Callister, Freeborn, Beckstrand, & Huender, 2007; Roster, 2007), and development of voice (Gibson, 1995; Parker, 2003; Sheilds, 1995). Furthermore, Roster (2007) found that feelings of guilt, vulnerability, and concern about societal images can undermine women's feelings of empowerment. Empowered women also developed a sense of dissonance (Sheilds, 1995). They may report responsibility overload and less support (Gibson, 1995). Thus, intrapersonal transformations include developing voice and identity, confidence, purpose, awareness, and competence.

Empowerment was modulated by factors that sustaining factors and behavioral strategies. Factors include women's characteristics that can facilitate the process of empowerment. Strategies represent choices made with the purpose of empowerment.

Sustaining factors. The research uncovered factors that sustained empowerment, rather than emerged from it. Research demonstrates that intrapersonal factors such as beliefs, determination, experience, commitment, love (Gibson, 1995), values (Gibson, 1995; Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007), perception of empowerment (Sheilds, 1995), and sense of responsibility (Gibson, 1995; Mahalingam & Reid, 2007) can mediate women's empowerment. Women's empowerment has also been linked to representation (Ransom, 2007), employment (Barajas & Ramirez, 2007), finances (Becker et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2007), age, income, and organization's role in the community (Becker et al., 2002).

Empowerment can be related to how women interact with others. Corcoran, Mewse, and Babiker (2007) found that empowerment was mediated through women's experiences of belonging, sharing, autonomy, positive feeling and change. Finally, perceptions of disempowerment (i.e. doing what was accepted, rewarded, or expected) influenced movement toward empowerment (Sheilds, 1995).

Behavioral strategies. This category pertains to active choices on the part of women on their paths to empowerment. Strategies pertained to intrapersonal, interpersonal, and societal domains. On an intrapersonal level, women learned leadership skills (Rostami-Povey, 2007), claimed leisure space (Roster, 2007), and resisted stereotypes (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007; Roster, 2007). Hutchinson and Wexler's (2007) study of the Raging Grannies involved the use of humor and creative expression to challenge gender and age stereotypes (p. 102). Interpersonal strategies include engagement in community work (Rostami-Povey, 2007), and participation in social networks, such as indigenous grassroots organizations, (Becker et al., 2002; Osirim, 2001). One community empowerment strategy involved working with women to foster critical analysis of discourse and remove sexist and offensive billboards (Moulding, 2007). Because empowerment often entails marginalized groups challenging power relations (Williams & Labonte, 2007), it is sought through local or neighborhood development and volunteer partnerships (Peterson & Reid, 2003). Many women engaged in sociopolitical participation (Becker, Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Klem, 2002; Ransom, 2007; Shilo, 2008). In an analysis of post-World War I documents, Shilo (2008) discussed how Jewish women developed soup kitchens, women's funds, societies,

employment opportunities, and attempted to join the army. Another form of activism was Jewish women's efforts to give prostitutes education and skills, and this compassion was striking in light of systemic tendencies to either deny the problem or punish the prostitutes. Thus, women engaged in a variety of strategies.

Women's empowerment has a profound impact on society (e.g. Hoodfar, 2007; Mika, 2004). The process results in interpersonal metamorphosis, connections with other women, harm, and societal shifts.

Interpersonal metamorphosis. Interpersonal transformation refers to outcomes of empowerment that have occurred with respect to women's family and community units. As a result of women's empowerment, major shifts in family structures have occurred (Hoodfar, 2007). For example, Kim and colleagues (2007) found that women's empowerment was related to household decision-making power. As in other components of the process, connections between women emerged as a theme, such as expanded social networks (Boehm & Staples, 2002; Kim et al., 2007). Furthermore, empowerment resulted in the capability to exert influence over one's life (Rappaport, 1984) and participatory competence, the ability to be heard by those in power (Gibson, 1995). Grassroots women's groups are being empowered and regaining political power over the definition of gender issues (Dufour & Giraud, 2007). Thus, interpersonal shifts include family, social, organizational, and political components.

Connections with other women. Connections with women were part of every stage of women's empowerment (Hall, 1992; Parker, 2003; Sheilds, 1995). Hall (1992) proposed that women's empowerment begins with the decision to be connected with

other females. Contact with women leaders (Rostami-Povey, 2003) and facilitators

(Roster, 2007) were also found to be important. Hur (2006) associated women's

empowerment with collective belonging and involvement in community. The

globalization of social movements has repercussions for women's empowerment and

activism (Dufour & Giraud, 2007). Furthermore, women's organizations, women's

media, and NGOs facilitate empowerment (Rostami-Povey, 2003). The idea that

connections with other women can be disempowering was not addressed in the literature,

but was explored in the current study.

Connections with women also emerged as an outcome. It led to shifts in

perspective: Jewell's (2007) study challenged researchers' biases of an individual notion

of empowerment. Participants' words revealed a consistent use of the word "we" rather

than "I" when discussing empowerment. The women who led the secret schools in

Afghanistan became an inspiration for other women to risk their lives to help others

(Rostami-Povey, 2003). Consistent with previous research, empowerment included the

formation of women's social networks (Dufour & Giraud, 2007; Gill & Ganesh, 2007;

Rostami-Povey, 2001; 2003; Roster, 2007). In Afghanistan, feminist solidarity consisted

of women transcending socioeconomic boundaries to unite (Rostami-Povey, 2003).

Dufour and Giraud (2007) described an even broader network, the World March of

Women, which serves as an umbrella for networks, coalitions, actions, and demands.

Thus, connections with women are important as catalysts, strategies, sustaining factors,

and outcomes of women's empowerment.

Harm to women. Empowerment can potentially have negative repercussions. Economic independence is often considered a component of empowerment (Greig & Koopman, 2003; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Stanistreet, Swami, Pope, Bambra, & Scott-Samuel, 2007). However, women gaining employment could be harmful if it adds too much to their workload (Greany, 2008). Mitra and Singh's (2007) analysis of gender empowerment and India demonstrated that educational empowerment can be linked with greater violence. The negative implications of women's empowerment warrant further investigation.

Constraint with respect to gender roles seemed intertwined with the experience of women's empowerment (Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Morell, 2003; Sheilds, 1995). Constraint emerged as a major theme of Gill and Ganesh's (2007) study of Caucasian entrepreneurs, and sometimes strengthened their sense of empowerment. Morell's (2003) findings suggested that to become empowered, a woman must recognize the fullness of her being, including limitations. Thus, recognition of constraints is an element of women's empowerment, and women may experience a wide range of emotions.

Societal shifts. When women are empowered, the entire society of their countries is strengthened and can flourish (Mika, 2004). Many important outcomes have risen out of women working toward changing gender relations, such as higher education rates and altered gender roles (Rostami-Povey, 2003; 2007). Sometimes, change can occur from the seemingly small acts of a courageous few (Hoodfar, 2007). Empowerment may lead to reduction in social problems associated with inequities in distribution of important resources (Becker et al., 2002). Because of Afghan refugee women's secret schools, girls

and boys are educated at similar rates in elementary school, and more females than males now attend secondary and high school (Hoodfar, 2007). Another broad change relate to empowerment is the replacement of gender stereotypes. As a result of Jewish women's efforts, the notion of the passive woman was replaced by one of an active woman (Shilo, 2008).

  Summary of women's empowerment review. The literature review demonstrated the complex process of women's empowerment. Catalytic events were personal changes that initiated empowerment, such as occupational change (e.g. Sheilds, 1995). Environmental factors that sustained empowerment included organizational, community, societal, and global conditions such as the availability of health and social welfare resources (Boehm & Staples, 2002). Intrapersonal transformation is necessary for empowerment and is associated with developing voice and confidence (e.g. Gibson, 1995; Parker, 2003). Factors that seemed to sustain empowerment included intrapersonal and interpersonal factors such as beliefs and how women interact with others (Corcoran, Mewse, & Babiker, 2007). Behavioral strategies employed by women included resisting stereotypes and political participation (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007). Interpersonal metamorphosis reflected outcomes that occur with respect to women's relational units such as expanded social networks (see Boehm & Staples, 2002; Kim et al., 2007). Connections with other women emerged as a major theme (e.g. Hall, 1992; Hur, 2006). Harm to women can potentially occur as a result of empowerment, such as work overload (Greany, 2008). Societal shifts referred to how women working

together can produce societal transformations and recast stereotypes (Shilo, 2008). Thus, women's empowerment is complex, dynamic, and holistic.

The spread of empowerment. An overarching theme of the literature is the contagious nature of empowerment (e.g. Dufour & Giraud, 2007; Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Roster, 2007). Positive connections with women seem to be the only necessary component of women's empowerment. However, one major deficiency is the transition from individual to collective empowerment. How do women transition from an emphasis on "I" to one on "we?" My research aims to address this gap. I will ask participants about milestones on their journey to social activism. I attempt to understand how they transitioned from individual activism to involvement in a social movement.

Iranian Women

The rights of women in Iran have fluctuated significantly in the last century, and Iranian women's movements have altered their strategies accordingly (Price, 1996). In order to understand the recent Iranian women's rights movement, it is important to understand how the status of Iranian women has changed since the Islamic Revolution. First, I provide context by discussing the history of the women's movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Second, I review previous literature on Iranian women.

History of women's movement in Iran. A women's movement in Iran has lasted for over 100 years (Afkhami, 2009). The focus of this section will be the women's movement after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Below, I describe how the status of Iranian women has evolved since the Islamic Revolution.

The Islamic Revolution resulted in the establishment of the theocratic state of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Laws and policies came under direct control of clerics, who immediately began to establish laws that furthered gender discrimination (Tohidi, 2010). Sharia law was instated, which allowed stoning for women adulterers and polygamy. The ruling clerics abolished the Family Protection Act, a law that ensured women's equal rights in marriage and divorce and enhanced women's custody rights in divorce. Within months of the Revolution, women were barred from becoming judges, women federal employees were ordered to observe the Islamic dress code, the marriage age for girls was reduced to 13, and married women were barred from attending regular schools (Price, 1996; Tohidi, 2010). These discriminatory restrictions were the most blatant gender discriminatory measures, but the newly established Islamic Republic pursued many sexist policies in the name of Islam (Tohidi, 2010).

The rapid decline in the status of Iranian women after the Revolution initially mobilized women's rights movements and activists (Tohidi, 2010; "Women's rights movement in Iran," 2009). Women began to organize demonstrations for women's causes, and landmark events included (a) a five-day demonstration in March 1979 to celebrate Women's Day and (b) the Conference of Unity of Women in December 1979 (Price, 1996; Tohidi, 2010). During demonstrations, activists shouted slogans such as "We did not make revolution to go backward!" and "Freedom is neither Western nor Eastern, it is universal!" (Tohidi, 2010, p. 387). The women's movement encountered opposition on multiple fronts: from the government, leftists who believed women's status

would naturally improve, and individuals who attacked or sabotaged their demonstrations (Price, 1996; Tohidi, 2010).

The 1980s were marked by the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). The war created a militant atmosphere that allowed religious extremists to gain power, and these extremists marginalized moderates, executed thousands of people, and banned all secular groups, including women's organizations (Iranian Chamber Society, 2010; Tohidi, 2010). Thus, the spark of the Iranian women's movement that occurred immediately after the Islamic Revolution was dimmed in the 1980s (Tohidi, 2010). In 1984, the first theology school was opened for females but they were not allowed to hold religious rank (Price, 1996).

The postwar period of the 1990s brought more moderate leadership and illuminated divergence among Islamic leaders. The surprise victory of moderate cleric Seeyed Mohammad Khatami in 1996 reflected the ideological shift in the public from Islamism to moderation and democracy (Tohidi, 2010). This decade unleashed a dynamic and unstoppable wave of feminism (Price, 1996), and women became empowered to challenge the Islamic Republic's rules, such as wearing more relaxed versions of the Islamic veil (Tohidi, 2010). Khatami's rule in the late 1990s paved the way for more feminist publications and an agreement was signed that gave women back some rights with respect to polygamy and divorce. However, this document has failed to be effective in practice. By the late 1990s, over half of university students were female (Price, 1996).

The One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality. The new millennium has been marked by decreased civil rights, especially women's rights, under the presidency of

Mamoud Ahmadinejad. However, the persistence of women's collective demands has contributed to the widening of differences among the ruling clerics (Tohidi, 2010). In 2005 and 2006, peaceful demonstrations for women's rights were violently attacked by police and security forces (Tohidi, 2006). These attacks led to debate about the effectiveness of women's rights demonstrations in Ahmadinejad's presidency (Tohidi, 2006).

From this debate, the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality was born in 2006. The Campaign is the largest and most influential Iranian women's movement in recent years (Tohidi, 2010). This movement started with a group of less than fifty women who created a petition that challenges gender discriminatory laws. These women gathered signatures by talking to people in public places and generating discussions. The signatures represent the resources of this grassroots effort but the Campaign is much more than gathering signatures. In creating discussions, Campaign activists are providing an alternate point of view in a totalitarian regime, a feat that can be revolutionary and dangerous. Indeed the Campaign has been revolutionary (see Khorasani, 2009; Tohidi, 2006; 2010 for examples of how this movement changed gender politics) and dangerous, as most of the original activists have been indefinitely detained (Khorasani, 2009).

The success of the One Million Signatures Campaign lies in its strategy of direct contact between activists and non-activists. Freire (1970) referred to using this collaborative style of education to consciously shape the individual and society as conscientization. Activists move beyond the role of expert to engage people in the

process of change, and thus, ordinary citizens are no longer spectators. The conversations they spark aim to transform the dominant cultural discourse.

The One Million Signatures Campaign seems to have surpassed ideological, sectarian and religious boundaries and limitations. This movement was primarily initiated by younger women and has grown into a network of thousands of activists with branches in more than 15 Iranian provinces. International branches of the Campaign have emerged in various countries, such as Kuwait, Germany, the United States (California), and England. It has gained recognition and respect among Iranian political and civil society organizations, intellectuals, journalists, and even some moderate Iranian clerics (Tohidi, 2010). The One Million Signatures Campaign and its members have won international awards for their efforts. One reason for the unifying success of the One Million Signatures Campaign is its combination of traditional Iranian approaches and modern technology. Activists collected signatures face-to-face which helped foster dialogue. They also mobilized online to expedite the gathering of signatures. The combination of these approaches strengthened the Campaign's progression (Tohidi, 2006).

The Islamic Republic's actions seem to indicate they are threatened by the women's rights activists. A significant number of Campaign activists have been imprisoned, and more and more Campaign activists are being summoned to court (Khorasani, 2009). The Iranian elections of June 2009 reflected considerable progress in gender politics, largely thanks to the Campaign and pressure from other women's rights groups (Tohidi, 2010). Three of the four candidates endorsed women's rights (Sayah &

Amanpour, 2009). The increased prominence of Iranian women such as Zahra Rahnavard, the wife of the most popular presidential hopeful, in the June 2009 election is largely attributed to Campaign efforts as well (Tohidi, 2010). The Campaign and its activists are the focus of this study because of their goal of challenging gender oppression, their success in transcending cultural boundaries, and their strategy of generating conversations to foster a higher level of gender awareness.

I learned a great deal from reading about the history of the women's movement. It only reaffirmed my commitment to this cause. It also provided me with historical perspective to explore with my participants. I inquired about their experiences with women's rights in Iran. I probed for how Islamic Republic policies affected their lives and their activism. My reading of the previous literature informed, rather than dictated, my study.

Literature on Iranian women. In this section, I review the literature on Iranian American and Iranian women. I searched psychology and sociology databases for articles that had the words "Iranian women" in their abstracts. I attempted to locate all theoretical and empirical articles on Iranian women. The empirical literature base on Iranian women is varied (e.g. Darvishpour, 2002; Ghaffarian, 1998; Shahidian, 1999). Previous studies on Iranian women have focused on body image (Abdollahi & Mann, 2001; Akiba, 1998), marriage and family (Darvishpour, 2002; Hojat et al., 2000), gender roles (Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001; Hajiabdolbaghi et al., 2007; Hannassab & Tidwell, 1996; Moghissi, 1999), acculturation and discrimination (Ghaffarian, 1998; Lindert et al., 2008; McConatha, Stoller, & Oboudiat, 2001), sexual behaviors, violence and risk (Khoei,

Whelan, & Cohen, 2008; Mahdavi, 2009; Mohammadkhani et al., 2009; Shahidian, 1999;

Shavarini, 2005; Shirpak et al., 2008), education and college students (Shaditalab, 2005;

Shavarini, 2006a; 2006b; 2006c), aging (Shemirani & O'Connor, 2006), satisfaction of

social conditions (Kousha & Mohseni, 1996), and life satisfaction (Karimi, 2009; Kousha

& Mohseni, 1997).

A handful of qualitative studies move beyond these areas of research (e. g.

Ghorashi, 2008; Tehranian, 2006). Sadeghi-Fassaei and Kendall (2001) studied women's

path to prison. Their findings revealed Iranian women prisoners shared a sense of

marginalization and viewed their crimes as rational responses to their environments.

Ghorashi (2008) compared the life stories of Iranian and Swedish refugees. Shavarini

(2006c) explored Iranian college students wearing the Islamic veil. For participants,

wearing the veil was associated with mounting determination to retain their places in

society. Tehranian (2006) analyzed participant narrative and poems to capture the

experiences of Iranian women in exile.

Gerami and Lehnerer's (2001) narrative approach demonstrated the power of

stories to highlight gender oppression in Iran. They described stories of women

negotiating their gender roles in various ways after the Islamic Revolution.

Through sheer persistence, Zarin prevailed and obtained a phone line, which she

immediately sold. This knowledge of the system also allowed her to resist the

Foundation's position on remarriage….To receive her widow's benefit and

specifically to maintain the supervision of her daughters, she did not officially

register her second marriage. Zarin had resources to resist and knowledge to

subvert the state system. (p. 564)

These rich narratives are a testament to the power of stories. Stories highlighting gender

dynamics are rare in the literature on Iranians.

In synthesizing the literature and considering my Iran project, I paid special

attention to unique elements of Iranian women's empowerment. As discussed below, I

found several themes related to Iranian women's empowerment that merit further

explanation. One theme that emerged from the research is feminism within the context of

an Islamic state. I subsequently highlight the complicated role of education in the lives of

Iranian women. Finally, I discuss the role of writing for Iranian women and

empowerment.

Feminism within an Islamic state. Much debate ensues about feminism in Iran

(e.g. Afshar, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2001; Shavarini, 2006a). Contradictory to the

Western emphasis on empowered women working outside the home, some Iranian

feminists reject the association between women's empowerment and occupational status

(Shavarini, 2006a). Afshar (2007) argued that Iranian women should "return to the

Koran" (p. 424) to promote women's movements. She specifically asked women to

follow the example of the pioneering women of Prophet Mohammed and change the

Islamic Republic's particular brand of Islam. She indicated that elite Iranian Islamic

women have won their rights through Muslim discourse, by using direct sources to

contest religious leaders' interpretations. Her argument brought to mind a discussion I

had during my interviews in Iran. A controversial writer told me that it is actually the

women who wear the most traditional Islamic dress, the head-to-toe black chador, who hold the power in Iranian society.

Barlow and Akbarzadeh (2008) acknowledged the impact of these so-called Islamic feminists, such as improving women's custody rights, but argued that they did not produce substantial changes. They claimed that, in effect, the laws these women changed have been essentially nullified by Iranian rulers' loopholes. For instance, the change to prohibit marriage under the age of thirteen is made virtually moot if a guardian and a medical practitioner deem the girl is ready. The authors questioned whether it is possible to create change within a "systematically patriarchal establishment" (p. 31). They stated that secular feminists are carving a path that is not compatible with Islamic feminists. On the other hand, Najmabadi (2000) warned against assuming a dichotomy between secular and religious feminists. Rostami-Povey (2001) integrated these viewpoints by arguing that the contradictions between the Islamic state and the reality of Iranian women's lives lead to empowerment. It is the fact that women are highly educated and active participants in society that make them question legalized gender oppression, not whether they consider themselves Muslim or feminist.

Education and empowerment. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, it became more acceptable for women, especially from religious families, to attend college (Shaditalab, 2005). Since that time, the number of women in college has steadily risen, and now, more women than men attend college (Shavarini, 2005). The research on Iranian women's education and their empowerment is mixed. Shaditalab (2005) emphasized the positive impact of education on women and how it helps spread

empowerment. However, the education system of the Islamic Republic of Iran prioritizes gender segregation and Islamic values over knowledge, so women are only educated to the extent that it does not interfere with a gender-segregated society (Shavarini, 2006c). Under the Islamic Republic curriculum, girls are prepared to be mothers, stay-at-home moms, or have "suitable" careers such as nurses and seamstresses (Shiranipour, 2002, p. 40). Mehran (1999) found that adult learning in Iranian society does not empower women because it only exposes them to domestic fields that do not reflect women's realities.

Shavarini (2006c) described the paradox of Iranian women college students. They are allowed to attend college in much higher numbers than previously, but several variables hold them back: 1) women are not allowed to participate fully like their male counterparts, 2) they simultaneously become open to possibilities and realize societal limitations imposed on them, 3) women can meet men but cannot be seen with them in public, and 4) they are liberated by family's permission and support to attend college yet limited by the financial dependence. Thus, a number of forces contradict the privilege of a higher education.

Shavarini's (2006b) portraiture study on an Iranian woman college student revealed these complex contradictions. The portraiture revealed how college can be simultaneously empowering and disempowering for Iranian women, both a "refuge" and a "cage" (p. 48). Computers are prohibited in the dorms, men are never allowed, and the cafeteria food is injected with a natural herb to curb the students' sexual urges. However, the internet cafe a stone's throw away exposes women to different perspectives, allows them to chat more freely with romantic partners, and perhaps discover themselves. A

qualitative study revealed that Iranian women view college as the only viable institution for them to alter public role and status (Shavarini, 2006c). Shavarini's (2005) qualitative findings indicated that women attend college to find a sphere of hope, a refuge, a place to experience limited freedom, an asset for marriage, a path toward financial independence, and a way to earn respect. Shavarini's (2006a) study revealed that young Iranian women are encouraged to pursue higher education but discouraged from entering the labor market. Her research suggested that the biggest impediment to women is not Islam per se, but broader sociocultural elements. Thus, Iranian women's education is a complicated issue, especially as related to empowerment.

Writing as a tool of activism and empowerment. The Islamic Republic has attempted to silence women, but women have fought back through literature. In 1998, a law was passed that prohibited images of women, banned publications about equal rights, and outlawed arguments for modifying gender discriminatory laws ("Symbolic annihilation," 1999, p. 12). Milani (1992) compared these attempts to make women invisible and silent to the veil:

> For centuries, veiling not only curtailed women's bodily expression but also inhibited their verbal self-expression. Their public silence was long legitimized, spiritualized, fetishized, and idealized...The traditional Iranian beauty appears to be made more alluring by not saying anything. Silence was one of her hallmarks. (p. 6)

Because Iranian women were not allowed to express themselves, writing became an act of unveiling and becoming publicly visible (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008). The desire for literal

visibility was accompanied by breaking silence about their lives, conditions, frustrations, and desires (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008). The writing phenomenon represents the nature of empowerment: consciousness of oppression in one area of life makes individuals question other areas (Freire, 1974). Additionally, Iranian women outside of Iran write because they live in a time and place where they do not fear punishment (Nahai, 2007).

Women broke their silences in many forms. As individuals have noted (Mozaffari, 2006; Shiranipour, 2002), there has been an explosion of memoirs by Iranian women in the last two decades (e.g. Esfandiari, 2009; Nemat, 2007; Rachlin, 2006; Saberi, 2010). Several Iranian women have discussed their time in prison (Esfandiari, 2009; Nemat, 2007; Saberi, 2010). Two of the most powerful Iranian women's rights activists have written memoirs (Ebadi, 2006; Khorasani, 2009). Ebadi (2006), a Nobel Peace Prize winner and human rights lawyer who constantly receives death threats from the Islamic Republic, discussed her life, her work, and her hopes for a better Iran. Khorasani, a Campaign founder, (2009) described the roots, goals, and journey of the One Million Signatures Campaign. Only one book was found that was a qualitative study of Iranian women. In the 1990s, Kousha (2002) interviewed women in Tehran from small cities about their relationships, institutions, gender roles, and daily challenges. However, no books were found that explored different perspectives on Iranian women's activism.

In addition to books, women's journal and blogs have become important tools of empowerment (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008; Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2008). Women's journals act as public forums for discussions of women's topics that are considered taboo in Iranian society (Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2008). One example is *Zanan* (Women), an

independent feminist magazine in which secular feminists discuss gender issues (Tohidi, 2010). In 1995, a contribution to *Zanan* from an Iranian feminist abroad helped enhance the transnationalization of Iranian feminism (Tohidi, 2010). Blogging has become another forum for expression, and women have gradually emerged as important in the Iranian blogosphere (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008). The effect of women breaking their silence has been profound on Iranian men. As one male blogger wrote:

> One of the most astonishing influences of Weblogistan is to open a space revealing a woman's inner state of mind. Women's talk had never been heard publicly in this country. Women never talked about their problems, their perspectives on the world, their needs and desires. In the past, in magazines and novels, even in daily talk, you could not find the feminine world from their own perspective...But today, thanks to Weblogistan, feminine public opinion has many representatives. (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008, p. 111)

Thus, these virtual conversations were the first time women and men could discuss such taboo issues openly and equally (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008).

The literature on Iranian women provides insight into their empowerment. Some individuals argue that women's empowerment should occur within a Muslim framework (e.g. Afshar, 2007); others question this idea (e.g. Barlow & Akbarzadeh, 2008). Education can be an empowering force for Iranian women (Shaditalab, 2005). However, the newfound freedom of college can present a paradox (Shavarini, 2006c). Iranian women's need for literal visibility propelled them to break their silence through writing (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008)

Integration of empowerment and Iranian women. My anticipatory framework of women's empowerment was integrated with research on Iranian and Iranian American women. Catalytic events included personal changes that initiated empowerment. Both lines of research confirmed war as a catalytic event (Shilo, 2008; Rostami-Povey, 2001; 2003). Whereas the global literature revealed occupational status as a catalytic event (e.g. Sheilds, 1995), Iranian women's occupational status was not necessarily linked with empowerment (Shavarini, 2006a). Environmental factors that initiate women's empowerment are the availability of health and social welfare resources (e.g. Boehm & Staples, 2002). For Iranian women, the impact of education is a double-edged sword: it can lead to financial independence or contribute to constraint (e.g. Mitra & Singh, 2007; Shavarini, 2006b). Additionally, contradictions between the Islamic state and the reality of Iranian women's lives could be viewed as environmental influences on empowerment (Rostami-Povey, 2001).

Intrapersonal transformation was associated with developing voice and confidence in the global literature (e.g. Gibson, 1995; Parker, 2003), but no study was found that directly explored Iranian women's intrapersonal empowerment. Factors that seemed to sustain empowerment included intrapersonal and interpersonal factors such as beliefs and how women interact with others (Corcoran, Mewse, & Babiker, 2007). Family emerged as a sustaining factor of Iranian women's empowerment. Behavioral strategies employed by women included refusal to accept stereotypes and political participation (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2007), but no strategies for Iranian women's empowerment were found.

Interpersonal metamorphosis resulted in expanded social networks in both areas of literature (see Boehm & Staples, 2002; Kim et al., 2007; Shavarini, 2006b). Contrary to the global findings (e.g. Sheilds, 1995), connections with women were not necessarily important for empowered Iranian women (Badiee, in progress). Perhaps this result is due to cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and political issues that divide Iranian and Iranian American women (Badiee, in progress; Khorasani, 2009). The research on Iranian women confirmed global findings that harm can come to women as a result of empowerment (Greany, 2008; Shavarini, 2006b). Societal shifts referred to how women working together can produce societal transformations, such as by recasting stereotypes (Shilo, 2008). Only one instance of societal shift was found, but it explored change on a group level (see Rostami-Povey, 2001). This study addressed the deficiencies by exploring individuals who have helped produce societal shifts and studying their intrapersonal empowerment (Tohidi, 2010).

Pilot Study

The participant of my pilot study was an Iranian American woman who had been an activist for thirty years. The interview lasted over two hours and went in a different direction than I expected. She did not discuss her activism in detail and instead described a narrative of torture. As the interview progressed, the themes that emerged were a sense of surrealism, the pain of remembrance, and the essence of humanity.

Preliminary Results: A Mini-Portrait

Parisa paused for a moment before deciding on some exotic-looking pastries. I offered to buy them for her but she refused as I expected. Most women of Iranian descent in their thirties or beyond will not allow a younger person to buy them anything. Parisa's curly hair was loose and her dark eyes looked tired. She explained that she had family in town for the Persian New Year festivities. Parisa is a software designer and an Iranian American activist. In the 1980s, she was held in one of Iran's most notorious prisons of torture for nine years.

A sense of surrealism. The bright French restaurant held a variety of patrons. Their contented voices filled the restaurant. They ate their fancy foods, blissfully unaware of the heavy conversation at our table. The sense of surrealism from this contradiction was pervasive. Parisa described how her life changed when the Islamic Republic was established. "They were arresting everyone and anyone," she explained, for politics, hair covering, whatever excuse they could find. She did not see her reason of arrest or her activism as extraordinary, but she exhibited signs that her behavior was outside of social norms. When she returned home from college, her family was shocked at how political she had become. Parisa explained the circumstances of her arrest and torture in mechanical terms, as if she were explaining a historical event that happened to other people. She laughs about a pair of shoes that she did not want to part with when she was arrested. These shoes seemed important to Parisa--she was somehow able to leave the prison with them! I wonder what they represented to her, perhaps dignity or some form of normalcy.

The pain of remembrance. The question of what stood out from the prison jolted Parisa out of mechanical terms—and English. "What stood out?" she asked as she leaned closer. Her dark eyes became intense and focused. This shift in the interview was palpable. She began speaking in Farsi, and telling me stories of suffering in prison. She described a friend that was depressed and wanted to kill herself. She tried to convince her not to, and so did the rest of the prisoners. At dinner one evening, Parisa noticed that her friend was missing. She and other prisoners found her covered in blood, barely alive. She was rushed to the hospital and committed. Parisa seemed to regret this experience because her friend did not die on her own terms as she wanted. Parisa noted "she would always tell me, you're so strong, you can handle this. I would reassure her. Now I know…" Parisa smiled thinly and looked away. I sensed her discomfort and validated her desire to help her friend. "How could you know?" I asked. She seemed to get a little comfort from this and we sat in silence for a few minutes.

The essence of humanity. Parisa said I could not grasp the sound of prisons: the sounds of ultimate suffering. She said they were so human, so universal. In those sounds, Parisa understood the essence of humanity. She compared it to a moment the night before, when she looked at her son in the living room. He was no different than all the other boys in the world. Her voice reflected the compassion she felt for humanity. I think this compassion is a vital part of her inner strength and resiliency.

Influence on Current Project

My pilot portraiture study of one Iranian American woman activist influenced my research questions, data analysis, and understanding of my role. One of my initial

research questions was what were the most severe stories of being punished for activism? When I asked this during the interview, the participant looked almost angry. "*Every* day was dreadful." She described how nearly a decade of her life had been filled with physical pain, the sounds of ultimate human suffering, and lack of hope. I realized that this question may not be appropriate for my participants, who are likely to have faced traumatic experiences due to their activism. The research question was changed to: What are the most memorable stories about their activism? Witnessing her reaction made me much more careful when I interviewed participants. I paid attention to non-verbal cues because Iranians have a tendency to be excessively polite and thus may not verbalize their discomfort.

The pilot study helped illuminate how I would analyze data. Portraiture consists of systematic and interpretive analyses (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). My qualitative training prepared me for the systematic portion. However, I was ill-prepared for the interpretive analyses, and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) do not provide detailed guidance. The pilot study allowed me to develop my own strategies. To attend to the relationships between myself and participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), I recorded memos while reviewing the participant's transcript. I compared the memos to notes that I wrote during interview. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) ask portraitists to relinquish the "need for control, order, and stability and submit to the complexity and instability of real lived experience" (p. 191). I closed my eyes to simply listen to the interview without judgment. These strategies became components of dissertation analysis. Additionally, conducting my pilot study allowed me to conceptualize the

dissertation in its entirety. I utilized findings and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) guidance to develop a data analysis plan (see Figure 2).

The participant helped me clarify the importance of my role as an accurate storyteller. Parisa had experienced some of the worst torture known to human beings. She never spoke of these stories, yet they haunted her. By listening and recording her ordeal, I was bearing witness to her trauma and making an implicit promise to honor it. She said other Iranians who had written prison memoirs had not been through what she had, the number of years, the level of torture. She knew her story was painful and unique, and she questioned whether or not I would be able to make sense of it. When Parisa looked into my eyes and said "I want to read what you write," I became acutely aware of my power as a portraitist. I realized some participants may have a desire to share their stories, and it is my privilege and responsibility to honor that by representing their experiences as accurately as possible.

Summary of Conceptual Framework Chapter

The conceptual framework chapter provides an overview of what I brought to the study. I realized my parents profoundly influenced nearly every phase of the project. Learning the project was so personal made it even more important for me to explore my biases consistently. Graduate school experiences gave me the confidence and tools to undertake this dissertation. My Iranian women's empowerment project taught me the significance of reciprocity. I discovered the power and privilege of being a researcher and began the process of owning that power. Understanding that I was part of the One Million Signatures Campaign because I was spreading the message of gender equality taught me

an important lesson about the Campaign: there is no distinction between individuals and activists. Individuals may talk about gender equality, and thus be part of the Campaign, without necessarily considering themselves activists.

Adopting the transformative worldview made me consistently intentional about my larger goal of social justice throughout the project. Developing the global women's empowerment model created a framework with which to view the process of empowerment. The model helped me visualize the connection between individual empowerment and activism. My review of Iranian women provided cultural context that helped me probe further in interviews. The pilot study was a powerful reminder to be sensitive to trauma responses. I consider the pilot study a milestone for how I view my roles as a researcher and counselor in interviews. I realized I can offer more benefits because of my background and training. My conceptual framework informed the present study and made me aware of my power as an Iranian-American researcher and counselor.

Chapter Three: Methods

In order to answer my research questions, I conducted a qualitative, portraiture research project (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Below, I discuss my chosen design and provide rationale. I describe my relationship to participants and elaborate on my intended site and participants. Finally, I explain my data collection procedures and highlight my methods of data analysis.

Research Design

Qualitative research is a type of inquiry in which researchers utilize participants' views to address broad, general questions (Creswell, 2007). In a portraiture design, researchers develop portraits: holistic, engaging narratives that reveal the dynamic interaction of values, personality, and history (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) elaborate on the focus of a portraitist:

> The portraitist describes the details of action and manifest behavior, what people are doing, how they are behaving, what they are saying...The portraitist is interested, as well, in how these actions and interactions are experienced, perceived, and negotiated by the people in the setting. In fact, that is the primary interest. (p. 15)

Portraiture shares features with other qualitative approaches. Portraitists and narrative researchers are interested in developing an authentic narrative (Creswell, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Phenomenological researchers aim to capture the essence of experience; narrative researchers explore the life of an individual. Portraitists,

in contrast, aim to capture the essence of an individual. I chose portraiture because I wanted to understand people as activists, to capture the essence of participants as empowered individuals.

The research process "begins by searching for what is good and healthy" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). Asking what is good absorbs a different reality than trying to identify problems. However, portraitists do not idealize or celebrate their participants; they recognize people's vulnerability and weakness. The contradiction between virtue and evil, and how people navigate them, is central to a portrait. Portraitists view context as a "resource for understanding" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12) and embed participants' narratives in physical settings, cultural rituals, norms, and values.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) consider portraiture a research design in its own right. All research includes elements of science and art, but portraitists are unique in that they are explicit about their combined use of artistic and scientific methods. This dual goal permeates many aspects of a portraiture study. During data collection, portraitists attend to the aesthetic elements of experience. They spend extended time in the field to understand the physical contexts they are studying. Data collection is systematic in the use of semi-structured interview protocols. Portraitists conduct systematic and interpretive forms of analysis. In writing findings, they utilize a systematic approach to integrate the portraits. They pay special attention to aesthetic elements of writing such as sentence structure, word choice, and sequence. The explicit

emphasis on scientific and artistic elements is a unique feature of portraiture that permeates the research process.

The findings in this study followed the format of Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1994) portraiture on six African-American achievers (see Preliminary Results for a mini-portrait). Portraits began with an introduction that included a short story and a description of the individual. The short story was usually about an early encounter between the participant and researcher and included relevant context. The portraits were an interweaving of descriptions of the individual, encounters between the researcher and participant, and researcher interpretations. Unlike a narrative study, the sequence of portraiture was not based on chronology of events in the participant's life. Following procedures of portraiture, the chronology of my portraits reflected how my understanding evolved. The portraits were separated by themes that emerged as I developed my interpretations.

Rationale

Portraiture is an ideal fit for this study. First, portraiture can address one of the goals of this dissertation: to reach a broader audience than the academy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I plan to publish this project as a book that can educate and spark interest in the Iranian women's rights movement. As a portraitist, I accomplished this task by attending to what was fascinating about the activists as people. I probed for elements of their stories that seemed universal. I attempted to utilize rich, colorful language to engage readers. Although I generally viewed my participants in a positive light, I attempted to make their portraits accessible by also describing their flaws. Second,

the topic of my study was activists, and I intend to share my findings with this

community. Portraiture can build bridges between research and action (Lawrence-

Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I was collaborative in my approach to participants and I

probed for how others could help the Iranian women's rights movement. I hope that

writing about these findings in my book will recruit more people to the cause and build

connections between activists. I think non-Iranian and Iranian individuals will be inspired

by the stories of these activists. I hope that reading their stories will motivate others to

empower themselves and create additional change.

Portraiture is ideal for studying empowerment. As indicated by my literature

review, women's empowerment appears to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

Portraiture can capture the holistic phenomenon of empowerment, including its cognitive,

social, and affective dimensions. A portraiture approach allows discussion about concepts

such as empowerment that resist reductionism and abstraction (Lawrence-Lightfoot &

Davis, 1997). The One Million Signatures Campaign, an influential Iranian women's

rights movement, is a complex, dynamic force, so a thorough approach is needed to

capture its complexity.

Research Relationship

A portraitist's role is to "listen *for* a story" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997;

p. 13, italics in original). Listening for a story implies an active, engaged position in

which an individual searches for the story, seeks it out, and is central in its creation.

Portraitists admit the central and creative role of self in the research process. As in other

qualitative approaches, the portraitist is considered the key instrument of data collection

(Creswell, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). She has "an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). The portraitist's voice is present in the portraits when it is relevant. In a portraiture design, relationships are central to the empirical, ethical, and humanistic dimensions of research design. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), the close relationship is counterbalanced by rigorous methods and methodological tools to reduce biases. In fact, the efforts to balance these two components are central to the portrait's success. However, my goal was not to reduce my biases; rather, it was to make them transparent so that the audience can decide what to believe.

Site and Participants

The One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality is one of the most influential women's rights movements in Iran (Tohidi, 2010). These Iranian activists gathered signatures and generated debate in public places about gender discriminatory laws, and many have been imprisoned for doing so (Khorasani, 2009; Tohidi, 2006). The efforts of the One Million Signatures Campaign activists are said to have changed Iranian gender politics (Tohidi, 2010). The Campaign is the focus of this study due to its success in connecting diverse women around the world, rapid growth and transnationalization from a small grassroots group, and strategies of spreading awareness to achieve social change (Khorasani, 2009; Tohidi, 2006; 2010).

Branches of the One Million Signatures Campaign have emerged in cities around the world. The major Campaign branch in the U.S. is the southern California chapter.

This branch is "one of the most active ones" (Tohidi, 2010, p. 402), although the interviews demonstrated their activity has fluctuated. At various times, this group has held meetings and events to raise gender awareness, as well as communicated and collaborated with women's rights activists (see Appendix A for sample event). Additionally, the southern California branch created an English website dedicated to disseminating information about the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Portraiture involves extensive data collection at one site (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I stayed in Los Angeles for four weeks but I considered my primary site to be the One Million Signatures Campaign. I did not limit my research to participants in LA; I often traveled to interview participants. I observed Campaign activists at conferences and events. The Campaign is highly active online, so reviewing websites provided further insight.

Participants included (a) visible or (b) active members, as well as (c) individuals who were part of the Campaign in Iran, and (d) people who did not consider themselves active or were active at one point but stopped. Visible members included individuals that I have read about in my research as key players in the Campaign and people identified by my main contact, a member of the Campaign. Active members devoted at least 10 hours a week to the One Million Signatures Campaign. In order to confirm that participants were active or visible, I searched for their names. They were considered active or visible only if I found triangulating evidence of involvement, such as videos of speeches, statements made at rallies, translations they had completed, and articles they had written.

In July 2010, I was awarded with the Hammed Shahidian Critical Feminist Award at the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation (IWSF) Conference in Paris. The IWSF is a non-profit organization that seeks to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas related to Iranian women, to disseminate information on Iranian women, and to foster a network of communication among communities of Iranian women around the world (Iranian Women's Studies Foundation, n.d.). I connected with influential women's rights activists and made connections with potential participants at the conference.

In the present project, I employed four sampling strategies: intensity, emergent, snowball, and maximal variation. Qualitative inquiry involves focusing on a relatively few number of cases in order to develop an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2007). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) identified two points about data collection that influenced my sampling strategies. First, portraitists identify "key players" that demonstrate the phenomenon (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 166). They may analyze documents to identify these cases. I sought information-rich cases of individuals who are passionate about their activism. Thus, I employed an intensity sampling strategy to recruit cases that strongly represent women's activism (Patton, 2002). I selected individuals highly active in the One Million Signatures Campaign based on my ongoing interviews and my contact's expertise.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) second point is that researchers have to be ready for revelations that can transform the discourse. My understanding of women's activism and intensity sampling may change as I collect data. I remained open to the data by utilizing emergent sampling (Patton, 2002). Emergent sampling involves on-the-spot

decisions about sampling to take advantage of previously unforeseen opportunities. As I collected data, my views on participant selection shifted. I realized that two of the three individuals who had initiated the southern California chapter of the Campaign were men, and men had a unique role in developing and sustaining the group. If I were to truly engage in intensity sampling, I could not omit the perspectives of these instrumental men.

Snowball sampling was relevant to my topic of study. I examined a social movement that is based on ongoing dialogue. Thus, participants were more likely to know each other than in a typical study. I engaged in snowball sampling by asking participants to help me identity more information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). The snowball approach allows me to find individuals who are connected to others in the Campaign, which can provide insight on the movement itself in addition to individual activism. Additionally, I utilized maximum variation sampling to obtain diversity of perspectives. I sought participants who varied in terms of sex, level of involvement, how and where they were mobilized, and location of activity (e.g. Iran or U.S.)

Patton (2002) recommends that sample size be determined by variables such as purpose of inquiry, what will be useful, and what is possible with available resources. The purpose of my inquiry was to discuss a few cases in-depth. My approach was similar to a narrative design, which involves a small number of participants. Narrative researchers study 1-2 individuals unless they are developing a collective story (Creswell, 2007). I wove the collective story of the movement in addition to activists' stories, so I interviewed eight individuals about their activism and the One Million Signatures Campaign. In terms of usefulness, I plan to publish my findings as a book. I attempted to

recruit enough participants so that the book will have wide appeal, but not so many as to be overwhelming. I did not understand the final component of sampling—what is possible with available resources—until I arrived in Los Angeles. Participants were extremely busy and could only be interviewed one time during the short period I was in Los Angeles. Additionally, a previous researcher had exhausted participants and violated their boundaries. I felt I had to proceed with caution and take extra care with confidentiality. Thus, I decided to interview them once and create composite portraits that consisted of several individuals. Three portraits emerged, each composed of two-three individuals. The One Million Signatures Campaign is a relatively small, well-connected social movement. Creating composite portraits made it much less likely participants could be identified.

I recruited participants with the help of one primary contact. She was an Iranian American graduate student who resided in California and was an active member of the One Million Signatures Campaign and Iranian women's movements. I interviewed a total of eight participants, six women and two men. Their ages varied from 25 to 42. Participants were diverse in their level of activity, with some describing themselves as devoting their lives to women's rights and others who considered themselves inactive supporters. They varied in terms of how and where they were mobilized. Some participants became active in Iran whereas others heard of the Campaign in the United States. They learned about the Campaign through Iranian NGOs, online communities, and friends. Two individuals had experience with the Campaign inside of Iran.

Additionally, participants varied in terms of political views and whether or not they considered themselves feminists.

Following procedures approved by UNL's Institutional Review Board, the recruiter and I contacted potential participants in the summer of 2010 via email (see Appendix B for recruitment emails) and I followed up with phone calls. Participants signed an informed consent form. I asked each individual to help me identify other information-rich cases to study. Analysis of the interviews informed participant selection by broadening my interpretations of appropriate cases.

Data Collection

Consistent with a portraiture approach, I collected multiple forms of data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Below, I highlight the main forms of data I collected, including interviews, observation, and documents. I sought deep understanding of the individuals involved in the Campaign and the movement, and I collected data that assisted me in those goals. As a portraitist, I asked participants for documents or any other potential data mentioned in interviews (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Art emerged as an additional source of data.

Interviews. My primary source of data was interviews conducted during my month-long stay in Los Angeles in the summer of 2010. I conducted one semi-structured interview with participants at times and locations that were convenient for them. The interviews generally consisted of a combination of Farsi and English, although several participants spoke exclusively in one language. These interviews were conducted in person when I was in Los Angeles. I utilized an interview protocol approved by the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The protocol was modified in the initial stages of data collection, and the updated version has been uploaded to IRB (see Appendix C for semi-structured interview protocol). The semi-structured protocol consisted of 10 central questions to help me understand the stories and involvement of One Million Signatures Campaign activists. During the interviews, I probed for more detailed information related to empowerment, the movement, and activism. All but one interview lasted an hour or more. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, maintaining the original language. Although I had IRB approval to help with the transcription process if needed, I transcribed all of the interviews myself. Appendix D represents a sample page from an interview transcript. Additionally, I experienced seven informal interactions with participants. Consistent with a portraiture approach, I spoke with individuals outside my pool of eight participants because they were valuable in understanding the One Million Signatures Campaign.

In collecting my data, I kept in mind what portraitists refer to as hearing the "cacophony of voices" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 191). During data collection, I listened for multiple perspectives from different angles. I have honed this skill through my counseling practices. Throughout the project, I wrote about how the participants relate to each other. I asked participants to respond to what other interviewees said while maintaining confidentiality. In this way, I generated a dialogue among participants.

Documents. Portraitists examine written material to understand their participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I examined One Million Signatures Campaign

documents, official and unofficial statements, participants' written material, and art. I reviewed key Campaign documents translated to English from Khorasani (2009): 1) One Million Signatures Campaign Petition Demanding Changes to Laws That Discriminate Against Women 2) The Campaign Plan: About "One Million Signatures Demanding Changes to Discriminatory Laws", and 3) One Million Signatures Campaign Timeline.

I reviewed two official statements released by the One Million Signatures Campaign. The first was a transcript of a video about the movement. The video was posted on the Campaign's official website. The second was the Campaign's Statement on the Occasion of the June 2009 Presidential Elections in Iran. I sought unofficial statements from websites associated with the Campaign. I requested copies of potentially informative resources as participants mentioned them (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Participants suggested websites with information about the Campaign which were particularly useful. I asked participants for their works related to them as individuals or their activism. They provided me with articles they had written as well as excerpts from their speeches.

Observations. Consistent with the portraitist's emphasis on context, one purpose of observations was to study the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, I observed all settings that seem to provide context, such as participants' homes, meeting sites, and art exhibits. Participant observation provided me with information on individuals and context. I observed art created by participants and other women's rights activists. Two participants had completed a project on the oppression of Iranian women, and I reviewed the video. I observed women's rights activists and their interactions at the

Iranian Women's Studies Foundation Conference in July 2010. This three-day event

provided significant opportunities to understand the dynamics between individuals in the

One Million Signatures Campaign. Additionally, the conference illuminated criticisms of

the Campaign that I had not previously considered, such as making slow progress and

being Islamic Republic apologists because the goal was to change the system rather than

overthrow it.

Data Analysis

My approach to data analysis was informed by portraiture methods (Lawrence-

Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), prior experiences with qualitative research, and knowledge of

this study. Portraiture emphasizes the scientific and artistic elements of research. Thus, I

engaged in systematic, rigorous procedures as well as interpretive, voice-centered

analyses (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I used MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis

software package, to analyze my data. Figure 2 illustrates my analysis procedures. Below,

I elaborate on my data analysis procedures.

Initial document analysis. As indicated in Figure 2, my initial step was

document analysis, which occurred prior to entering the site. Consistent with a portraiture

approach, I conducted systematic and interpretative analyses (Lawrence-Lightfoot &

Davis, 1997). My systematic approach to the documents and observations consisted of

open coding. Open coding involved breaking the data apart and describing its meaning.

Each document or observation was divided into text segments and each segment was

coded for meaning. Analysis of the first document provided a list of open codes, which

were subsequently refined through the document analysis process. My interpretive

approach consists of reading the entire document several times and memoing my impressions. As I progressed through data analysis, the memos helped to provide a paper trail of how my impressions of the documents evolved. This approach is consistent with the portraitist's emphasis on recording changes over time (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Daily analyses. On-site, I documented my daily reflections as I collected data. These reflections took the form of an "Impressionist Record" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188), which describes emerging inferences about the data, suggests interpretations, highlights shifts in thinking, identifies dilemmas (e.g. methodological, ethical, conceptual), and outlines an action plan for the next visit (please see Appendix E for Sample Impressionistic Record). Consistent with portraiture procedures, my goal in writing Impressionistic Records was to record the interplays between my interpretations and developing insights from the field. These Records fostered the ongoing dialectic between description and analysis, researcher and setting, throughout the data collection process. The Impressionistic Records became part of my observation documents. The bulk of data analysis occurred after I left the site (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Below, I describe how I analyzed the interviews, documents, and observations.

Main analysis phase: An iterative process. As Figure 2 shows, I initially engaged in open coding my observations. I coded the observations first to create the setting and provide context for further analyses. I subsequently analyzed my interviews using the process described below. Data analysis was an iterative, non-linear process. I

analyzed the transcripts, documents, and observations simultaneously, and these findings informed each other.

I adopted a flexible plan that was consistent with the emergent nature of portraiture and qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraitists experience a tension between organization and classification and maintaining the rich complexity of human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997). I embraced this dichotomy by engaging in systematic and interpretive analyses. Throughout the process, I recorded memos of my evolving impressions of codes and transcripts.

Systematic inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) discuss systematic coding procedures described by Miles and Huberman (1994): descriptive, interpretative, and pattern coding. Coding involves breaking up the transcript into text segments based on content. For each text segment, I created a descriptive code. Descriptive codes provided a brief description of the segment. The next step was interpretative codes, which indicated taking one more step away from the data to record my interpretations. The final coding step was pattern coding. Rather than pattern coding, portraitists engage in a similar process called thematic analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thematic analysis involves searching for emergent themes in the data. I coded for common themes within and across transcripts.

Interpretive analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) discussed an interpretive, voice-centered approach to data analysis, but they did not describe specific procedures. My plan was based on what they instruct readers to attend to in their analyses

as well as my experiences throughout the project. First, they proposed that portraitists attend to situational, personal, and cultural dimensions of individual lives. I focused on these dimensions in my analysis. I read through all interviews and informal interactions with each participant and recorded my observations. I reviewed their written documents and artwork. This process helped me record subtle changes over time (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Second, portraitists attend to the relationships between self and participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I reviewed the transcripts and created memos of my reactions while reading. I compared that to impressions that I recorded during data collection. Third, I attempted to withdraw my "need for control, order, and stability and submit to the complexity and instability of real lived experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 191). Thus, I closed my eyes to simply listen to the interviews.

As I conducted my iterative analyses, I attended to identifying the myriad of perspectives. I spent time immersing myself in the data in order to understand how participants related to each other. Individuals' discussion of other participants provided a basis for analysis of relationships. Additionally, I analyzed the dynamics between people that I witnessed in the group informal interactions. I conducted follow up interviews to discuss the findings and used the information to enrich this ongoing dialogue (please see Validity section). Finally, I engaged in meditation when I encountered impasses in data analysis. I physically removed myself from the data, closed my eyes, and reflected on my project. These meditations helped me break through analysis barriers. The systematic and interpretive analyses formed the basis for integrating individuals into one portrait.

Individuals were grouped together based on gender, complementary life histories, and the way they told their stories.

Once I conducted systematic and interpretive analyses, I integrated the two by reviewing all analyses for one potential portrait. I attempted to be mindful to the content of what participants were saying as well as the meaning beyond their words. I recorded my impressions through writing or art. Allowing myself this freedom of expression provided me with more opportunity to create rich, holistic portraits.

Ethics

My project was approved by Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in its initial state (see Appendix F for IRB approval letter and Appendix G for approved informed consent form). Changes suggested by the doctoral dissertation committee and shifts that emerged throughout the project were incorporated using a Change Request Form to IRB. Several ethical implications were associated with my project. I discuss how I navigated the close relationship with participants. I subsequently highlight the risk in discussing potentially traumatic experiences and the risks associated with the Islamic Republic. I discuss implications of exploring a grassroots movement as an Iranian American feminist. I explain how I plan to offer reciprocity. Finally, I describe how I handled an ethical issue that emerged from the project.

In portraiture, the researcher is closer to participants than in any other approach (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As with counseling, I used my meditative activities to reflect, not stress about participants. I attempted to envision participants holistically and from multiple angles. I invited feedback from participants about our relationship and

remained committed to maintaining a collaborative, non-defensive stance. It was important for me to make sure participants felt comfortable with my project and intentions. Thus, I provided them with my contact information and asked them to follow up if they had any additional questions or concerns. I informed participants that I planned to engage in member checking and would remain in contact (see Validity).

One risk was the difficulty in speaking about potentially traumatic experiences, both for me and for participants. They had experienced interpersonal violence, imprisonment, and beatings from Iranian police. I used my counseling assessment skills to gauge whether participants felt re-traumatized by telling their stories. When appropriate, I offered support and normalized their emotions. I utilized my clinical judgment in deciding whether or not I should continue the interview. I obtained knowledge of local counseling centers and support groups so that I could make referrals if needed. The risk of speaking about difficult experiences was mediated by the fact that prisoners of conscience tend to cope better with trauma, perhaps due to their "highly developed awareness of the strategies of control and resistance" (Herman, 1997, p. 80). Additionally, this particular group had been interviewed many times, so they were more accustomed to sharing their stories and thus less likely to be re-traumatized. Two participants' stories were challenging for me to hear, and the scenes they described remained in my mind for several days. When these re-traumatizations occurred, I spent time relaxing and connecting with close friends and family. I took nature walks. Self-care helped me to progress in my dissertation.

A risk existed with respect to the safety of participants if their identities were recognized and they returned to Iran. I initially believed that this risk was very slight. I thought their activism was much likelier to get them in trouble than a book that included their stories anonymously. Activists who work within this realm are generally aware of the dangers of activism in Iran; indeed, this danger is one of the reasons they fight for change. Punishment because of my book would require the fulfillment of two unlikely factors (a) my book becomes well-known enough for Islamic Republic officials to learn of it, (b) IR officials conduct research to identify the women I interviewed. I minimized this risk by never recording the names of participants. Each participant was assigned an identification number. I had one document that matched participants' initials with their identification numbers. I erased audio files once they were transcribed. I made the confidentiality risks clear to participants and disclosed how I am minimizing them.

I learned throughout the project that the risk was greater than I had originally imagined. The Campaign is a small movement, and many people within it know each other. Thus, had I focused on one portrait per person, it would have been easy for others familiar with the Campaign to identify them. In developing the composite portraits, I tried to weave together the stories in a way that identities would be unrecognizable. I made sure participants were comfortable with the level of detail I revealed when I discussed their portraits with them. The participant who was initially most concerned about confidentiality remarked later that I had integrated the stories together so well that she was not sure which part was hers.

At the outset of research, I recognized that I am an Iranian American feminist studying a grassroots movement and reflected on the implications. Khorasani (2009), who is one of the founders of the Campaign, discusses problems with transnational women and international organizations getting involved in the movement. These entities often focus on sensational cases, such as stoning for women adulterers, at the expense of gender discriminatory laws that may not be as interesting but are affecting many more women. I tried to remain open and collaborative with participants and not view myself as a rescuer helping the oppressed. I stayed reflective and cognizant of idealizing or victimizing participants. I remained true to describing and maintaining complexity of the individuals and the One Million Signatures Campaign. Khorasani (2009) also discusses a problem with Iranian activists abroad. She states that although well-intentioned, these activists are often uninformed about the realities on the ground. I viewed the participants as experts to help me understand these realities, and allowed them to inform my data collection and analyses (Creswell, 2007).

Reciprocity, or what participants will gain from the research, is part of the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2007). I used my skills, knowledge, and experiences to offer reciprocity to participants. First, I gave participants the opportunity to promote their causes. I asked them how other people could further the One Million Signatures Campaign's cause and included this information in their portraits. I utilized my experiences as a counseling psychology graduate student and qualitative researcher to reciprocate. When it seemed appropriate, I helped participants process traumatic experiences. I edited a manuscript for a qualitative study for my main contact. I provided

thank you cards in Farsi to each participant, and I believe this was viewed as a very meaningful gesture.

The issue of a previous researcher, who I will subsequently refer to as "B.," presented ethical challenges. B was an Iranian-British graduate student from London who was conducting her dissertation on feminisms of Iranian women's rights activists in the diaspora. By the time I arrived in Los Angeles, she had been there for eight months. Participants were hesitant to speak with me when I first came, even ones who originally were open to my research. I later learned during an interview that this was because of B, who had conducted extremely long interviews, failed to provide informed consent, and constantly recorded interactions without permission. "She wore us out," the participant explained. I changed my project (see Site and Participants for more detail) and approach (please refer to Implications for how I broke through these barriers) to adjust to the state of the community after what B had done. Additionally, I conducted some informal research to find out what could be done about B's violations. I consulted with a qualitative methodologist familiar with ethical guidelines in the U.S. and Europe. With her guidance and my own online searching, I located the ethical board responsible for approving B's research. In a follow-up email to the participant, I explained her options for reporting, provided contact information for the university ethics board, and asked her to contact me if she had any further questions. I hope that I left individuals with more awareness of their rights as participants.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research relates to how accurately findings represent participants' realities (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In my project, I used multiple validation strategies. I engaged in journaling, audit trail through memos, portraitists' strategies for maintaining reflexivity, multiple data sources, member checking, peer debriefing, multiple theories to provide corroborating evidence, and providing quotes as evidence.

I considered journaling to be a meditative form of writing in which I did not censor or judge myself. I simply reported what my mind gave me, without concern for sentence structure, organization, or other stylistic elements. As with my Iran project, journaling helped me to keep a clear head and an open mind about participants. In my journal, I engaged in bracketing, a qualitative research strategy that involves separating impressions, emotions, and early interpretations from descriptions (Hatch, 2002). Throughout the project, I wrote memos to record insights on the codes and transcripts. I stored the memos in MAXQDA and they served as a paper trail of how my thinking evolved.

I followed Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) plan for reflexivity. I initially recorded the anticipatory themes that shaped my worldview in my conceptual framework section (see Chapter Two). This framework was comprised of previous research experience, philosophical stance, interests, and life story. I reflected on these themes throughout data collection, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) instruct. This process helped me remain reflective and open to what was emerging.

I collected multiple data sources. My findings were based on documents, observations, activists' words, art, and Campaign statements. The triangulation of

multiple forms of data resulted in a richer and more complete description of the activists and the One Million Signatures Campaign (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I envisioned member checking as a constant process. If I noticed that two participants used different language or viewed something differently, I clarified with each individual and probed for further information on this discrepancy. In this way, I engaged the participants in a dialogue and helped foster the "cacophony of voices" desired by portraitists (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 191).

I conducted member checking once the final portraits were developed. I contacted each participant and asked whether they were willing to react to their portraits. All eight participants initially agreed to participate, but only five individuals were able to set up a time to speak with me further. I spoke with these five participants on the phone and they provided me with feedback. The member checking conversations were rich and provided additional depth to the portraits. Participants consistently remarked that their voices had been captured effectively and accurately. One individual even mentioned that her portrait was so cohesive that she had trouble identifying her own story within it. Participants' feedback was incorporated into the portraits and overall analysis.

Peer debriefing is a review of data and research by someone familiar with the content or research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I had several sources of peer review. I completed this project under the guidance of a multi-disciplinary dissertation committee. The committee consisted of university professors with backgrounds in educational psychology and sociology and included a qualitative research methods expert. They provided support, challenged my assumptions, and helped me to develop my

study methodologically. A second "peer" was a colleague in the counseling psychology

program who is familiar with qualitative research. This colleague challenged my

interpretations and helped ensure my impressions were emerging from the data, which is

a part of peer debriefing (Creswell, 2007). I met a founder of the One Million Signatures

Campaign at the IWSF conference in Paris, and she served as an additional source of peer

debriefing. Her feedback throughout the project helped me clarify my biases and

represent the Campaign accurately.

I used multiple theories to provide corroborating evidence by reviewing books on

Iranian gender and sexuality in Iran, articles on women's movements, and feminist texts

that participants provided (e.g. McBride and Mazur, 2006; Najmabadi, 2005). Reading

feminist texts as I was writing the findings provided insight on emergent themes. Finally,

I provided quotes as evidence in my final portraits. These strategies helped me validate

my findings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

As an Iranian American woman, qualitative researcher, and writer, it is my

responsibility and privilege to bridge the gap between cultures and share activists'

perspectives with a wider audience. I chose portraiture as my design because of its appeal

to wider, eclectic audiences, ability to make readers think more profoundly on a subject,

and goal of instigating social change (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a

portraitist, I followed systematic, scientific procedures in order to make my findings

credible to academia and beyond. In developing the portraits, I kept in mind that artistic

elements of writing can appeal to a wider audience than academia. My participants were

eight activists of the One Million Signatures Campaign in southern California. I engaged

in semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. I analyzed my data in both systematic and interpretive ways. Three composite portraits emerged: Soheila, Paria, and Dariush. I hope this study will build knowledge, spread awareness, and instigate social change.

Chapter Four: Findings

Three composite portraits emerged from interviews with eight activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign. I was touched by their stories, and I learned a great deal from our interactions. Soheila never allowed herself to believe she was less than anyone, until her divorce changed her forever. She was always powerful, but became empowered after she faced societal and legal constraints. I learned about the significance of art in empowerment from Soheila. She taught me that empowerment can permeate every part of one's being. She speaks and walks with a confidence that I simultaneously envy and admire. Paria is a tender-hearted, caring individual who has a profound understanding of herself and of others around her. She is touched by the conversations she has with people about gender; she describes how their voices and faces swim in her head for days. Her empowerment began with her activism. From Paria, I learned the importance of self-awareness in empowerment. Additionally, she taught me that the transition from individual to interpersonal empowerment requires trust. Dariush is a sensitive, dedicated man who leads by example. His abusive father had a great deal to do with him becoming a champion of equal rights, but in the end, it was Dariush that changed his father. Dariush told me, and showed me through his presence, that empowerment is about engagement: I felt more educated and inspired to fight for change after speaking with him. He taught me that women's empowerment goes hand in hand with men's.

The One Million Signatures Campaign started in 2006 in Iran. The word was spread to other countries through the internet. A year after the original movement started, an online community on women's rights began to discuss the Campaign and how individuals outside Iran could help. Several individuals in that community were from southern California. Three of them who were interested in becoming involved with the Campaign decided to meet in a coffee shop. Eventually more people heard through word of mouth and the online community and decided to join. The southern California chapter of the Campaign was born. According to Paria, the group has had periods of intense activity, including an International Women's Day event in March 2011 that featured prominent feminists from the Middle East. One of the milestones on the activists' path has been the Green Movement.

Participants discussed the profound impact of the Green Movement at length. This movement emerged after Ahmadinejad was declared president in June 2009 against Opposition party candidate Mousavi in an election widely believed to be fraudulent. Stolen elections were not new tactics of the Islamic Republic, but what was different this time was the aftermath. People began protesting on the streets en masse, often risking arrest, torture, and even death (Nasrabadi, 2011). The uprising was named after Mousavi's campaign color. However, the Green Movement transcended him and became about the people and their demands (Nasrabadi, 2011). The crackdown on dissidents has steadily grown worse, and now a person is executed in Iran every eight hours. The protests and subsequent arrests have profoundly impacted the equal rights movement.

Soheila

The weather was beautiful the first time I met Soheila at a coffee shop in southern California. The skies were a happy shade of blue, the breeze blew just right, and the sun beamed. I got there early and realized I was nervous. Soheila was well-known among activists. Her artwork touched many. What would she be like, I wondered as I stared into my hot drink.

Soheila walked in with a smile on her face. Her appearance somehow seemed to match the weather. Her skirt and scarf collectively had every possible color; her lipstick was bright red to match the red of her hat. Her dark brown hair was cut in a short, funky style that defied conventionality. Our eyes met, dark eyes meeting dark eyes, and she grinned. I felt instantly at ease. How could a person who wears so many colors be intimidating? Only artists should be allowed to wear that many colors, so we can distinguish them from everyone else. I had wondered if she would be closed off. She was transparent.

Soheila is one of the few who has decided to dedicate her life, and her career, to women's rights. She is currently completing a graduate degree in the social sciences because it will help her activism. Her dream is to return to Iran one day and reach people as a professor or even start her own university. She tells me "I used to think the most important thing was love. Now I think it is to rebel." As I hear her speak, I forget about the Islamic Regime, the many imprisonments they have done already, including Soheila's own: I forget about the activists who have been killed. All I can think, as I watch her

speak animatedly with a twinkle in her eye, is I know she can do it. She strikes me as a very determined woman.

Soheila seems grateful for everything in her life: the people who have supported her along the way, her privilege, and the beauty of life. I knew before meeting her that she was courageous and made me proud of Iranian women. What I did not expect was her sense of gratitude, and her ability to be present. She has a refreshing clarity, and an eye for detail. Perhaps that is why she is such a good artist: the combination of these two, along with her creativity, is a recipe for producing delights for the senses. She is also passionate about women's rights, and her art seems to both fuel and be fueled by this passion. Her projects are always created with the purpose of raising awareness and making a better world.

Power of art. I do not pretend to understand art, but I am constantly fascinated by artists and want to know more. I look across the table at Soheila. She looks like a rainbow with the smattering of wild colors: the blues, greens, yellows, and oranges in her scarf, the red in her hat, her cheeks pink from the cold. She is not like the rest of us, and she knows it.

But there is more that makes Soheila an artist than the clothes she wears. She has always been free, a free spirit, a person who defied conventions. You can see this freedom in her art: the bold images that do not scream but stay etched in your mind for some time, beckoning you to come closer, to truly see. This is what ultimately makes Soheila a good artist; she can incite that consciousness which propels social change. With her art, comes great responsibility. In her case, it is to tell the tale of Iranian women.

Soheila sees her art as communicating her activism to a wide audience. She explains that visual arts have a certain impact that written works, for example, do not because they can really interact with people. I think that the power of art in activism cannot be underestimated, especially in a country like Iran.

In Iran, the very act of discussion, of sharing ideas, is resistance. So I can only imagine how terrifying art is for the government. As Soheila pointed out, the deep communication that art provides to its audience, the consciousness it can stir, are powerful forces. In Iran, artists are constrained by rigid rules. Music has to be approved by the government before it is played on the radio and concerts are forbidden. The situation is even worse for women. Soheila left Iran several years ago as an adult. She explains how when she was there, she and other women were ostracized for being artists. Women's reputations are trashed; female voices are prohibited on the radio, except as backup singers. Iranians also tend to take male artists more seriously than female ones. Despite these struggles, there are plenty of people like Soheila who continue to create. Although she works from outside of Iran now, her passion has not wavered in the slightest. In fact, it has only seemed to deepen since she has been away. Soheila committed herself to learning a variety of artistic mediums, and she thinks carefully about the most effective way of reaching people. She views her passion for human and women's rights as inseparable from her art.

As Soheila discusses art and activism, I cannot help but marvel that this is one of the beauties of the One Million Signatures Campaign. People were able to utilize their unique talents. Soheila's eyes light up as she tells me about the tactics

of the Campaign activists in Iran. She leans in toward me and comes alive,

> They would go to common places and they would stage a fight between
> *dota zan* (two women). *khob hame too park witnessam fekr mikardan een*
> *vagheye dige*. (Everyone in the park that witnessed it thought it was real.)
> No one knew they're putting on a play.

The women would pretend to fight about a gender inequality issue. In one play, a woman in her fifties met with a woman in her twenties. The storyline was that the husband of the older woman had decided to marry the latter woman as a second wife. The first wife tries to convince the second wife not to marry him, and they have a fight. As Soheila tells me the story, it is like she becomes it. Even though we are sitting in a coffee shop, and she barely moves, her face and voice are so expressive that I feel the story to my core. She speaks as the older woman. "I worked for this life and then you just walk into my life *man ra badbakht mikoni bichare shodam* (you make me pitiful, I am destitute). I have kids." It gives me chills, and I feel the pain of this woman, somehow, through Soheila's secondhand telling. The potential second wife replies that she is in love with him. That is when the One Million Signatures Campaign activists get involved in the discussion. They say that what happened to the first wife is not fair, how she is in a terrible situation, and what is to blame is the law that legitimizes polygamy.

To understand how brave these women (and sometimes men) were, to stage these plays in public places, one has to know they were risking their lives and livelihoods. Dissent is not tolerated, and that is why many Campaign activists

have been detained, sentenced to extremely harsh crimes, and even tortured. Soheila even recalls one time that the police were involved, and, despite the possible danger, the performers continued their "acts."

In Iran, art can be a powerful tool, but as Soheila explains, Americans have also used art to further Iranian human rights. Soheila remembers one particularly compelling example. The disputed presidential election results of June 2009 brought many people to the streets, and a brutal crackdown of protestors quickly followed. One of the most important people during that time was Neda Agha-Soltan, a bright young woman who was shot in cold blood during a protest in Tehran. Previously, governments could commit such callous acts in secret, but Neda's killing was caught on video. Her powerful eyes, boldly staring at the world in the face of death, became a symbol for the spirit of the people and the brutality of the regime. Soheila remembers being in Iran at that time, and she also remembers another video that was released a few days after.

The second video was of an American man playing his guitar. He wrote and performed a song for Iranian protestors and for Neda Agha-Soltan, a young woman who was shot by police during a protest in Tehran. Soheila was in Iran when this video was released, and could not say enough about the impact of this video on Iranians. She was excited as she talked about it and used phrases like "moving," "huge," and "so beautiful." It almost seemed as if she could not find the words to express the power of what this man had done. "Imagine you're coming back from protest *kotak khordi you're asho dasht* (you have been beaten,

you are weary) and you turn on the TV, get on the computer and this guy from other side of the world is singing a song for you. It's beautiful." She excitedly tells me how everyone was talking about the clip. "'Did you see that?' Then you feel proud, wow, you moved someone as a nation and the other side, *ye kasi beshine* (someone sits) and sings for you." I have seen videos on youtube supporting protestors, but I did not know until this conversation with Soheila how much impact they actually had. The videos, both of the protests and the responses, represent an interaction between everyday people, and I think that is why they are so powerful. These are ordinary human beings making extraordinary connections. These connections often help form the foundation for empowerment and societal change.

I have focused on women's empowerment in my practice and research, and one of the consistent themes I have noticed is how contagious empowerment can be. Seemingly small acts by a courageous few really can have tremendous impact on societies, especially ones that are oppressive. With technology, this impact transcends borders (Noueihed, 2011). With technology, a group of protestors can touch the world, and a man with nothing but talent, guitar, and a computer, can touch them right back. The universal experience of someone acknowledging your efforts and purpose, especially when you are tired and downtrodden, can be priceless.

The more I came to understand Soheila as an artist, the more I realized she has something that goes beyond grasping techniques. Perhaps this is a quality of all true

artists, but I get the sense that Soheila does everything profoundly: she seeks a deep understanding of the world around her, and of herself. She immerses herself in everything she does.

Defying boundaries. Soheila possesses a rare clarity. She does not struggle with decisions the way that most people do. "I never chose anything in my life. It's like I knew where I should go," Soheila explains. She says that either the path ahead of her has always been so clear that it did not seem like she had a choice, or there was no path ahead. I reflect on this statement, and ponder, how decisions, and lives, can be so simple for some. How could someone like Soheila, so young at 32, know her path so clearly, while some struggle their whole lives?

I think about how growing up somewhere like Iran, women are socialized to believe they are half of men. Soheila says that girls are constantly abused in Iran's streets: being pinched, verbally harassed. If a girl possesses "*ye zare hassasiyat,*" or even a little bit of sensitivity, she cannot ignore this constant abuse; it unconsciously becomes a part of her. I often ponder the impact of that socialization. Soheila, however, never considered herself less than anyone. From an early age, she wrestled with boys, she fought with them, she threw punches with the best of them. She never saw herself as inferior. She said "*hich vaght censor nemikardam khodam ra* (I never censored myself)". Her disregard for conforming to gender stereotypes was difficult for people around her to adjust to, especially the boys, but it did not seem difficult for Soheila herself. Eventually, she won their respect, too. Soheila never had doubt she was equal to them and had the

same rights. How can you argue with someone who is sure of her position? Eventually, you start re-examining yours.

Soheila excuses herself for a moment. I close my eyes and imagine her as a fresh-faced, wild-eyed child: stubborn, never forgetting she was not less than the boys were, refusing to back down. But when Soheila gets back, she starts to tell me about a defining moment in her life that made her painfully aware of gender oppression and empowered the activist within her: her divorce.

Soheila got married at the age of 19. She was in love, she explains, but pressure from their families and difficult economic conditions put a great deal of stress on their marriage. They decided to get a divorce several years later. One shock for Soheila was the difficulty in filing the divorce. She did not know that Iranian women have such limited rights in terms of initiating a divorce.

"*too shahre bozorg zendegi mikonam oonja daneshga miram o ina vaghti nemidoonam dar morede een ghavaneen labod khaylia hastan ke nemidoonan injoori barashoon sakht mishe*. (I live and attend university in a big city, and if I do not know about these laws, there are probably many others who also do not know.)" She encountered significant legal obstacles. If it could happen to her, she realized, it could happen to anyone. This experience propelled her to read as much as she could about laws that discriminated against women. It was an awareness that would only grow over time, what I refer to as the journey of women's empowerment.

Additionally, Soheila was bothered by the "social stigma" of being "*zane motalaghe* (divorced woman)". She explained that her friends started to treat her differently.

> *khob man khayli baram sakht bood. man hichvaght bavaram nashod. man hamishe bachegim ra ba pesara bozorg shodam, ba pesara bazi mikardam. ye ho. to fekr mikoni hala yeki ye shohari nist ye ho chera adam ha ba to injoori raftare adam bahat avaz mishe? ham chi marda ye joor dokhtara ye joor. zana ye joor.* (It was really hard for me. I never believed it. I grew up with boys, I played with boys, and suddenly I was known as "without a husband?" Why are people suddenly treating me differently? The men, one way, the girls, one way, the women, one way.)

For the first time, Soheila felt the heat of oppression, and this experience shook her to the core. I try to feel what she is saying, imagine myself in her shoes. I have listened to other Iranian women discuss their divorces and I know her story is not uncommon. Their accounts demonstrate that if the status of women in Iran is to change, the laws as well as the culture have to change. Soheila explains that the aftermath of her divorce was a big reason she was later drawn to the One Million Signatures Campaign. The Campaign recognizes the impact of laws as well as culture. She appreciated that it targeted gender discriminatory laws, it was grassroots, "*chehre be chehre* (face to face)," activists talked directly to people, and it had a horizontal structure. "*hame dar ye sataan.* (Everyone is at the same level.)"

It would be years after her divorce before Soheila learned about the Campaign, but her opportunity to become active came right away. That summer, Soheila's university held a series of workshops on human rights. In Iran, discussion of such topics is an act of resistance. She met individuals who were also interested in women's rights. Soheila and a few others eventually started a non-governmental organization that focused on women's rights and human rights. They started their own workshops on topics that were generally not discussed in public, such as teenagers' sexual relationships. Most of the NGO members were in their early twenties, as she was. They started meeting weekly, and their activities varied from conversing about books to sharing personal experiences. One major area of discussion in these meetings was how to introduce women to the idea that they deserved these basic rights; they did not believe they had the rights that they were being denied. "You're not gonna ask her something unless you know about it. It's not feeling the need for something unless you have the right for something." Thus, the first step had to be making women aware of lack of fundamental rights.

I can tell that Soheila enjoyed working for the NGO; she smiles as she remembers. I think about the value of the discussions they had. However, everything changed shortly after Ahmadinejad became President in 2005. Under Khatami's presidency, NGOs consistently received permission from the government. Ahmadinejad completely changed the management of the organization that approved the NGOs, and it became very difficult to obtain permission. Soheila's NGO was not approved, which meant that involvement was now considered illegal. They were forced to cancel several

planned workshops. They changed their phone number and rather than advertising their events, they started to privately email people they trusted.

On March 8, 2005, Soheila attended a protest to commemorate Women's Day. She remembers fondly that they were singing. Despite their peaceful methods, police forces attacked them. Soheila lowers her eyes as she talks about the brutality of that historical day: "*bishtare adam ha hamashoon khayli kotake khayli bad khordan.* (They hit most of the protestors very badly.)" She described how an 80-year-old woman was severely beaten by the police. Soheila went home that day with giant bruises on her legs. She experienced so many emotions that day: elation at the significance of the event, the power of making a difference, and heartbreak at the police's treatment. The sudden risks, precautions, and arrests scared Soheila, but true to her nature, she did not give up. Her journey of activism was just beginning.

I know who I am, and where I am going. After the NGO was dismantled, several of its members became involved with the One Million Signatures Campaign, which was in its early stages. Shoreh, Soheila's friend, invited her to go to her first Campaign meeting. Soheila explains that, at the time, she was unfamiliar with the Campaign, but she was immediately captivated by the energy of the meeting. She is transformed as she talks about the meeting: she leans forward in her chair and cannot get out the words fast enough:

> *zoghe excitemente ziadi dasht baraye hame bekhaterinke* (There was so much happiness and excitement because) it was the first movement, it had an interesting variety of people and ideas, different ideologies…*bad hamashoon ba ham zanaan*

ba ham sobat mikardan. khayli chize jaleb be voojood oomade bood. (and all of

them together as women speaking together. Something amazing had started.)

Soheila was astounded that so many different strategies were being used for one common

purpose. She was even more inspired when she heard a speech about the goals of the

Campaign and she thought: "We are gonna make a change, we are gonna be friends. We

were so excited!"

Less than an hour after this speech, police forces broke into the meeting and ordered

everyone to leave. They stated that the meeting did not have permission to gather.

The One Million Signatures Campaign meetings resumed, but they were more

secretive. Their presence in Iranian communities would only strengthen in the next few

years. Soheila explains that the Campaign had its own thinktanks in which they would

discuss strategies and what was working. She was so impressed by how openly people

shared their ideas, and how respectfully people were able to disagree.

Although everyone had different arguments, they agreed that the first order of

change would be spreading the message of the original Campaign booklet. It was a

simple book of "small yellow printed pages" that stated certain laws needed to be

changed, such as a woman's right to divorce. This booklet was to be distributed among

people and the signatures were collected on a standardized form.

Soheila explains that signing one's name is an incredibly different experience in

Iran than in the U.S. In Iran, Soheila explains, people hardly ever sign their names,

especially if they are women. They sign when they get engaged, when they get married,

and if they open a bank account.

man yeki az culture shockam vaghti oomadam amreeka (One of my biggest

culture shocks in coming to America) was the signature. People just signed their

name and *man fekr mikardam* (I thought) that's just such a waste, to just sign your

name? For me, it took two years to choose my signature and then decide, [do I use

my] whole name, *masalan* (such as) artistic expression, *khayli* important *bood*

baraye (it was very important for), it was so important for us.

Whereas Americans may sign their names three times in one day, Iranians sign three

times in one decade. Thus, their signatures were very meaningful and difficult to obtain.

However, the value was in the journey to obtain a signature—the discussion—rather than

the signature itself.

The signature was an excuse to get people to engage in the action; the larger

concern was "*ba adam ha sobhat kone masalan farhang saziye* (to talk with people and

make cultural shifts)." In order to engage people, the activists had to meet them at their

levels. "You should maintain a close relationship with the body of society. Make the

connection and, little by little, try to change the people."

I think about Soheila's care in choosing a signature and then selecting it as an

artistic expression. Perhaps many Iranian immigrants are as detail-oriented as she is.

However, I cannot help but think that she does things with every core of her being: her

art, the way she dresses, the way she speaks. She feels every moment. This is evident as

she describes the reactions she received to talking to people and gathering signatures.

With every character, Soheila's face launches into a different expression and her voice

changes to match. She says that men signed more easily because they were more

accustomed to signing their names and because they were privileged. "*oon ehtemad be nafs ke marda dare ghashang neshoon midad too oon emzae*. (The self-confidence of men showed very clearly in that signature). However, she said that men were sometimes cowardly or disingenuous about signing. Imitating one of these men, she shrugs her shoulders and says flippantly "*'be man chie zanha ba mah yeki beshan* (So what if women become one with us?)" He did not really mean it, she said. Some were patronizing. Soheila slows her pitch and makes her voice condescending, as if she was talking to a child, "*'to faghat dokhtari o hala mikhai ye chizi emza konam?'* (You're just a girl and you want me to sign something?)" They did not take women's rights seriously: they wanted to be "cute," according to Soheila. Some men were inspiring. She recalls explaining the Campaign message to one man while he listened intently without saying a word. He then signed the petition and left. He later returned with his family and asked Soheila to repeat the message so they could sign as well.

The place and people you ask for signatures is important. Some may only sign in certain environments with specific crowds. Soheila says that she asked someone in a coffee shop, and with a confident swaggering voice, he said "'Sure, why not?'" However, in a different setting, he would deny having signed. Others were scared to sign, and still others called their efforts pointless.

Like the other Campaign activists, Soheila took every opportunity to engage people, exchange ideas. Some individuals were genuinely interested in learning more. "It depends *ke khodemoon cheghadr* (how much we) you kind of, explain it, but *dige bastegi dare be oon adam ke cheghadaram* (it also depends on how much the person) wants to

know more." Her words highlight the fact that the One Million Signatures Campaign is interactive to its core. Both parties must be willing to come together to engage in dialogue.

One argument Soheila frequently heard was against the *mehrieh*, which is a specified amount of money or coins that the bride and groom's families agree upon. The wife can request her *mehrieh* anytime as one lump sum payment from her husband. Some assert that the *mehrieh* is not fair because women can request it at any time, whether the couple is together or not. Soheila said that people would often argue that women should not be allowed their money unless they were getting divorced. Her response was "*to vaghti haghe talagh dari,* yes, I agree, there shouldn't be *mehrieh vali mehrieh* works as a weapon for women to get their divorce. (When you have the right to file for divorce, yes, I agree there should not be *mehrieh*, but it works as a weapon for women to obtain divorce.)" I had previously been against the *mehrieh*, but I could not argue with Soheila's logic. In a country where so many laws are against women, it serves a purpose.

I ask whether men's reactions to the *mehrieh* have anything to do with not considering their privileged status in society. What she says surprises me. Men's reactions are more complicated than they first appear, Soheila explains. Iranian men have a "very hard life," especially with the current economy. They are not only expected to take complete financial responsibility of their families, but sometimes are even responsible for their parents' families and other relatives. They worry that getting those rights will shift the responsibility to her. Thus, both men and women face significant

pressure. "We're talking about women's rights but in fact it's men's rights, too." The rigidity of Iran's gender roles is detrimental for both sexes.

Soheila suddenly remembers something. She stops mid-sentence and remarks on how incredible it is that so many men became involved in the Campaign. More and more men started to get involved with the Campaign, not only in her private circles, but all over Iran. Her eyes shine as she talks about it. "*nemikham begam 50/50 bood tedadesh ye zare tedade marda kam nabood* (I don't want to say it was 50/50, but the number of men wasn't small either)."

Soheila reflects on the protests throughout the years and remarks on how far people have come. The Women's Day protests in 2005 were not widely supported. However, as the years passed, more and more people joined, and an increasing number stood up to the police. Soheila credits the Campaign for this empowerment.

Not long after Soheila became involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign, several of its more well-known activists were targeted by the government. They were put under constant surveillance, their every word recorded. Two young men gathering signatures at the subway station were arrested. For Soheila, knowing the same activists she had recently seen were now imprisoned was surreal, and scary. She became less visible in the streets and pondered new methods.

She reflects on that time period for a moment. I wonder how she feels now, in the U.S., being so far away. She tells me that, since joining the Campaign, she has developed a gender sensitivity that cannot be shut off. "*az kenare ham hichi nemitoone begzare. halla ya khube ya bade sakhtar mishe zendegi*. (You see more and things that you cannot

just ignore. For better or worse, life gets harder).” Soheila laughs. She says she cannot watch a movie, read a book, even learn another language without considering gender. I understand that; I am starting to feel that way myself.

Do not pity us: Join us. Soheila moved to the U.S. approximately a year after her first meeting for the One Million Signatures Campaign. She connected with other activists in the U.S. and resumed working with the Campaign. One of the strengths of the Campaign is that she could pick up where she left off:

> *campaign khubeesh ine ke jaye ke to zendegi mikoni bad adama hayi ke doro varet hastan hameye ina asar mizare rooye raveshe karet. bekhatere hamin masalan organization nistesh masalan modele hierarchy nistesh um bekhatereen pakhshe ke har kasi raveshe kare khodesh ra payda kone.* (The beauty of the Campaign is that where you live and the people around you will affect the strategies you use in your work. That’s why it’s not an organization; it’s not hierarchical, and that’s why any person can find their unique job).

Soheila’s own purpose shifted with her move. She moved away from gathering signatures. In Iran, “you're making that person think,” but she did not get that feeling with Iranian Americans. Instead, she felt people looked at signing as charity and that bothered her. She changes her tone to a high-pitched, melodramatic voice. “’Oh, poor Iranian women, poor Iranian women, Okay, I'll sign it, I'll help them.’" I look at her eyes as she is talking: not a single trace of doubt. Soheila has no use for people’s pity. She wants them to act, to collaborate, to join forces with Iranian women and men.

Signature never really was my priority. I was, because we all knew from the

beginning that it's not the signature. It's about the cultural change and what the

signature should do which I believe the signature here wouldn't do as much.

Soheila is still dedicating time to educating herself about women's rights. She creates art

with social justice themes, often regarding women's rights issues. She has wowed Iranian

and American audiences with her art. Soheila's eyes shine with pride as she describes her

most recent project on the oppression of Iranian women. She shows me a video of the

performance. There are three women, each representing a different impact of patriarchy.

For example, one woman has an "x" on her mouth, indicating the fact that women are

silenced. I am spellbound. She talks about how the project highlighted how women are

supposed to maintain femininity but not be seen or heard. She says the audience became

really emotional.

She still considers herself part of the Campaign, but Soheila's role has now

changed from a "member" to a "supporter." But what is in a name? "I don't care about

een esma che fargh mikone vali (these names, what difference does it make but) that was

the reality *ke ma bishtar support mikardim* (that we were supporting [Campaign in Iran]."

The One Million Signatures Campaign, although it is now supported worldwide, is

ultimately a grassroots movement in Iran. Soheila's words do not minimize the work she

and others have done for the Campaign outside of Iran. They have devoted countless

hours and dedicated their energy to spread the message of the One Million Signatures

Campaign. The Campaign is now fairly well-known in certain circles. It has been

recognized by "Glamour" magazine and Feminist Majority Foundation.

Soheila's move to the U.S. has not slowed down her activities at all; in fact, she talks excitedly about all that people can do. Americans can become involved with policy, and write letters to their representatives about the human rights abuses. Individuals can publicize and condemn the human rights atrocities of the Iranian government. The goal is to create an "international force" to oppose the constant human rights violations. Often, petitions emerge that condemn a particular violation. Individuals can publicize these through their websites, weblogs, and social networking sites. I asked her, as someone who had witnessed the imprisonment of many in Iran, if she thought publicizing these cases helped. Not a trace of doubt existed in her response. Absolutely, she said. It's not as if everyone will be released, but it does raise the stakes for the government. Whatever the government does, "they pay a high price for it because the world is watching." Additionally, people can donate to organizations that support women's rights and human rights. They can create websites that publish news and letters about the situation in Iran. These can provide moral support to Iranian women.

Major fields of study are banned or nonexistent in Iran, such as the social sciences and women's studies. Individuals that are bilingual in Farsi and English can translate scholarly books and articles to Farsi. For bilingual speakers of Farsi and English, translation for the Campaign is a big help. These activities can be found on their website.

"Keep talking about it," Soheila says. People can spread the word that such a movement exists in Iran. "*haminjoori ke* (just like how) you're thinking about your rights and you're thinking about other's rights, you're doing something, right?" I agree with

Soheila that raising one's consciousness is an action, and one that often manifests into more action.

Soheila leans in and stares at me, with her eyes that see everything. She asks me about my long-term goals. I tell her that one of my goals is to open domestic violence shelters in Iran. She excitedly says that that has always been a dream of hers, too, and we talk about collaborating. I am serious about working with her: she is ethical, detail-oriented, strong, intelligent, easy to work with and to know, and she is kind. She talks about her dreams of developing graduate programs in gender studies in Iran, which are practically nonexistent, and I think about her tendency to profoundly engage in the present moment. If anyone can do it, she can. The more she talks, the more I appreciate her ability to devote her heart and soul to everything she does.

Soheila was inspired by her professors in Iran, and one day she would like to do the same for students there. She said certain teachers encouraged thinking "outside the box." In a place where students are denied complete access to information, these professors had a "huge impact." "I want to be that kind of teacher." This time, I lean in. "You will be."

Soheila gets a far away look in her dark eyes. I can tell that her heart remains there. She is in deep thought. "*bebinim iran chi mishe* (Let's see what happens with Iran). It all depends. I'm thinking in five years maybe." I sit in silence because I understand exactly what she is saying. Since the disputed elections of June 2009, protestors have gathered in droves, and the government has continually cracked down. It is estimated that one person is executed every eight hours and numerous individuals have been tortured for

the simple act of dissent. Although the people have not lost their will and I believe they will eventually prevail, it is difficult to predict when that will happen (Nasrabadi, 2011).

The brutal crackdown has caused some people in the One Million Signatures Campaign to rethink strategies. After all, will the government respond to a petition when it does not even respect the vote of the people? "I think we came to this conclusion that *joomooriye eslami* (Islamic Republic) doesn't care." Additionally, priorities have shifted because the human rights violations are so atrocious. "*nemirim masalan too tazahorat hame daran koshte mishan masalan begim shoma bian emza konin* (We won't go to a protest where everyone's being killed and say please sign this)". Being active within Iran's current state can often seem futile. "Sometimes you work and work and don't see any result. I don't know what happens; suddenly, you're not as passionate." I am struck by the helplessness implicit in her statement, the opposite of empowerment. However, I know human experience is often dialectical: we feel strong at the same time we feel weak. I know Soheila will always regain her sense of strength.

Some get burned out permanently. Soheila has struggled with fear and uncertainty, but seems as passionate as ever. She consistently speaks out against Iran's human rights issues. However, she has also realized the source of her passion is women's issues.

> I'm totally passionate about other stuff but I've realized I should decide what I want to do. I can't do everything. I can't be active in women's rights, children's rights, *tamaame chizam* (all things). So I started to [declare] *prioritye man*

woman's rights bashe (my priority should be women's rights) and I tried to not

get tempted to do anything else.

Few people work on women's rights, so she feels a sense of responsibility to "keep it

alive." Soheila also acknowledges the Campaign is a project with a start and finish. It is

part of the Iranian women's movement that has lasted over a century. Thus, the future of

the Campaign is the future of the movement, and Soheila says this is just the beginning.

"We still need a lot to work on. *khubeesh ine ke* (The good thing is) we have experience

of other women and activists and every part of the world and we'll use those." She says

that people like me and her have a lot of projects to do and laughs light-heartedly. I feel

inspired by her words, imagining activists like her all around the world. I also feel a sense

of responsibility to do my part.

Soheila acknowledges the dire situation in Iran, but she does not think women's

rights should be pushed to the backburner. This happened in the Constitutional

Revolution of the early 20th century and then again when Iran became the Islamic

Republic. Women were told that that it was not a good time to demand their rights.

When the timing is right? I really hope that, you know, women's rights will be

acknowledged as important and priority nothing less than any other activist, any

other request. That's what I think that women right now, women in the Campaign

should identify that this is our rights, we are gonna talk about it, this is the right

time.

Soheila speaks in no uncertain terms. I see the determined glint in her eyes, her wild hair, the array of bright colors around her face and body, and I feel hopeful for the future of Iranian women and men.

Soheila was a composite portrait of three women. She struck me as an individual who had been powerful from an early age. It seemed as if, for most of her life, she did not have the felt experience of being constrained due to her sex. As a child, she played and fought with boys, and as an adult, she never allowed herself to feel less than her male counterparts. Her divorce was a life-changing event. For the first time in her life, Soheila felt the pain of gender oppression. I believe this is the moment when she became conscious of gender and its impact. The legal and social obstacles she faced in her divorce empowered her to fight for equality. Additionally, Soheila taught me about the importance of art in interpersonal empowerment. She described how art can instigate individuals to social change in a way that other forums cannot. Soheila showed me that empowerment can permeate every aspect of one's being. Her unfiltered opinions, her confident stride, her steady gaze were evidence that this was an individual who was empowered to the core.

Paria

The first detail I notice about Paria's voice on the phone is that it is very warm. She does not say anything out of the ordinary, but her voice is kind and almost musical. She agrees to drive out of her way to meet me at my apartment in Los Angeles. Before she arrives, I practice making *chai* twice so that I can ensure it is good by the time I serve it to her. It is important to my Iranian identity to make it well. All my efforts were

rewarded when she arrived: she seemed so excited about the *chai* and the sweets! In person, I was struck by the grace in her eyes, a quality that I could not explain in words. I wonder if I would get a better sense of this nameless trait during the interview.

I am fascinated with empowerment and its ripple effect. I sometimes wonder if the Islamic Republic realizes that when they execute, capture, or detain a human being, someone, somewhere may be watching. With today's technology and more ways to connect than ever, that single act can affect many. The prisoner's bravery, courage, spirit, whatever you want to call it, is spread. When that bravery touches a passionate person who is ready to act, an activist is born.

Paria is one such individual. Although she was active in various social justice causes, Paria had not yet found her niche. She decided to do something for Iran. Because of her fluency in Farsi and familiarity with the culture, that is where she thought she could be of most help. She was searching for her purpose when one email and a woman named Sarah changed her life.

Paria's fateful email arrived a year before the Campaign started. It had photographs of Women's Day protests in front of a university. The pictures are beautiful, filled with people bravely speaking and singing together. You can almost hear their voices rising from their megaphones. Paria describes the images with an infectious excitement as "a lot of really compelling pictures and holding signs." Paria's voice rises as she describes her reaction: "oh my God, oh my God, this is so amazing!" Paria's "huge connection" with the photographs propelled her to reading all she could about the women's movement. She learned about the Campaign, but was unfamiliar with the

details. It was just a name for her. However, the case of Sarah changed all that. Sarah was one of the women in the Women's Day protests. She was arrested by the Islamic Republic, on one of those absurd charges they have for activists. Paria describes how she felt when she read about the case:

> I saw her picture, I read about her, and it was pretty much a girl my age, with a nice smile. Curly hair, just like me…So, seeing her in that position, it was kind of like seeing myself in prison. The picture was so close to me…something hit me, something told me, it's your turn, it's your time to do something. It was an experience that I never had before, although I had seen a lot of prisoners. I heard about their cases, which was always them being active about Iran and me doing something else. There was always a distance between us. And then the case of Sarah (name changed) got me close to it, I touched it for the first time. I felt in prison.

As Paria and I talk about the case, we both get emotional. I feel instantly connected to her. She apologizes, and I tell her it is okay. I do not say everything I am feeling: I want to thank her, to tell her I think she is brave and I am honored she shared her journey with me, but I cannot get the words out. I decide to stop thinking about what I should say and just listen.

Heart of the matter. Paria is dressed simply, and she possesses a quiet power. Her eyes emanate kindness, and I cannot help but feel comfortable around her. She tells me about a trait she has possessed since childhood. She first refers to it as having an "analytical mind," but it is more than that. Her grade-school teacher described it to her

once: "*khayli sari miri ta oomghe masala ra mibini.* (You are able to quickly understand the root of an issue.)" Her teacher also informed her that this trait could be both a blessing and a curse in her life, and Paria has found this to be true. She can do things quickly, and efficiently. Because she knows exactly what needs to be done, it is easy for her to see the gap between what is and what ought to be. Seeing people acknowledge a problem and yet not act disturbs her. She asks a hypothetical bystander, "*chejoori shoma? alan chetor shode nemibinin? vaghti mibibin, chetor mitoonin dar moredesh hich kari nakonin*? (How is it that you are like that? Now what has happened that you don't see? When you do see, how come you don't do anything?)" Paria speaks passionately, and I see a glint in her eyes, one of determination.

Paria's parents wanted her to be a doctor, but she did not enjoy biology. Her father was a math teacher. She wanted to follow in his footsteps. However, she was told that sons, not daughters, follow in their fathers' footsteps. She grudgingly studied biology. She recalls learning about a tiny critter that was the size of her finger. She laughingly asks what role this creature will have in her future.

Even though she hated her classes, she made high grades. This did little to convince her parents that she should change fields, despite Paria's explanations that she hated bad grades more than biology. Paria eventually decided to pursue her own path and has never looked back. "I love what I do." When she moved to the U.S., she started her studies in computer science. As she got involved with activism, her analytical mind and computer experience were put to good use. Paria has helped design a website for the Campaign. She also documents events about the Campaign and women's rights.

Paria is interested in learning about my goals for this project. I tell her that I would like to publicize the One Million Signatures Campaign and incite people to action in their own environments. She peers at me, and I can see the analytical wheels in her head turning as she thinks. She talks about taking care with publicity, and I ask her what kind of publicity can be harmful. The One Million Signatures Campaign has been misrepresented as a women's political organization, but it is a grassroots civil movement. There is no leader, despite claims to the contrary.

Recognition of an activist or group of activists is more complicated than I would have thought. Although she understands awards given in academia, Paria explains that within human rights, the issue is much more sensitive: "In a situation where a lot of people are paying a high price for their activism and a lot of them are very under the radar, what does it mean to highlight someone?" She is glad that, in the case of the Campaign, the recognition has been for a movement rather than one individual. I ponder her question. Is it worth it to prioritize some activists above others, if it gets people talking about the women's rights movement in Iran? I do not have an answer.

Paria said the most dangerous kind of misinformation is the interweaving of women's rights and war. She discussed this in relation to the Bush presidency and the war in Afghanistan. Many believe that women's rights were exploited and used as justification to attack. She worried that the same thing would happen in Iran, so she had to watch what she said in speeches and interactions: "I wouldn't really want to delve into the negative things...personal stories of people who have had such horrible lives" because politicians could "take advantage."

The process of collaboration. Paria's ability to understand the core of an issue also applies to collaborations. As she talks about her involvement with the Campaign, her analytical eye colors her words, offering perspective and insight. Her initial involvement was joining an online social networking site related to Iranian women's issues. The conversations were sometimes deep, sometimes frustrating. When the Campaign started, commentators discussed whether or not it was appropriate for people outside of Iran to get involved. Through this site, she "met" other people who were also interested, and their U.S.-based group was born.

The group started working together: organizing booths at Iranian events, making t-shirts, finding books, translating fliers, designing posters. Although they all either worked or went to school, they dedicated countless hours. She drags the words out, "*khodemoon ra koshteem* (we killed ourselves)." What amazes me is that they did this all through email and telephone. They did not meet in person for months! No one asked each other what their ideologies were, whether or not they were a feminist, even where they worked or what they studied. They did not have a criterion for joining the group.

Working without having met was not always easy. People were hesitant to trust others' work. Because they allowed everyone to give feedback, this lack of trust slowed down progress dramatically. "*man age miam poshte ye mizi vay bestam, ye fliereyi mikhad biad roo meez, man ghablan mikham flier ra dide basham, mikham roosh comment dade basham.* (If I'm going to stand behind a table and a flier is supposed to be on it, I want to have seen the flier in advance. I want to have provided feedback.)" She says that even if just one person dissented, they would continue to discuss the issue until

everyone was in agreement. Their process was truly democratic, and I admire the patience it must have taken to follow through.

The first event they did in the name of the Campaign was a huge success. It was at an Iranian event where they had rented a booth. They exchanged ideas with many people, shared literature, and gathered a substantial number of signatures. People in surrounding booths were tired as they cleaned up at the end of the day. This group was rejoicing. They had been standing and gathering signatures for two days straight, twelve hours a day, yet they danced around their booth. They laughed and joked as they gathered their equipment. In psychology, we talk about a group becoming cohesive. She does not say it, but I wonder if this was the moment when they truly became a team. Paria keeps laughing when she talks about the other people in the group. I have trouble following the jokes; I am not sure if it is my Farsi or if it is because these are "inside" jokes. However, I cannot help but laugh, too, because I can tell she is rejoicing as she is talking.

It is much more difficult to get people to work together on long-term projects rather than short-term projects, Paria says. So what is it about their group that has helped them not only survive for so long, but also learn to truly enjoy each other? She highlights a distinct difference between the events that were successful and the ones that were not:

> *ghashang to kara motvaje mishod, har vaghti ke trust nadashtim va say kardim ke hay yeki roo tahde feshar bezarim ke masalan motmaniyee midooni midooni che kar bokoni? na, to bayad oonjoori bokoni, injoori bokoni. yani nazashtim har kasi een styleh khodesh ro dashe backfire karde, yani baesse confrontation shode*. (It was obvious in our work. Whenever we did not have trust and we tried to pressure

each other: 'Are you sure you know what you are doing?' No, you have to do it this way, or that way.' We did not let people have their own style and it backfired, it caused confrontations.)

It reminds me of a tool I learned about relationships in my counseling classes: Always assume the other person is doing their best. After all, with rare exceptions, human beings *are* trying to do their best. It seems to me that this rule is applicable to groups as well. The trust probably takes longer to develop in groups because there are more individuals to consider. Paria indicates that when they had trust, they learned to be a "helping hand" rather than a "guiding light." She said this trust was particularly relevant for Iranians because they tend to be leaders rather than followers.

Paria smiles and tells me about a spirited debate they had recently. They yelled and screamed, but they not engage in swearing or name-calling. In my experience, yelling is not uncommon for arguments among Iranians. It is different from the more reserved style of discussion I have witnessed in the United States. Considering their heated context, Iranian arguments can quickly get out of hand, resulting in personal attacks. However, although this group yelled, they remained respectful and offered each other honest, constructive criticism. Because they have known each other for so long, they can offer feedback about each other's personalities. Paria learned something important about herself from the group that day. She takes too much responsibility in tasks, so others around her stop putting in effort because they know she will take charge. They were right, Paria says, her passion drives her to perfectionism and reduces the efforts of other

people. "I don't allow for failure and so many times, people learn from failure not from successes."

Paria's tendency is not uncommon to activists, or perfectionists, or women. Our greatest strength can quickly becoming our downfall. People who feel responsible to change the world can overreach their capacity. If they do too much, they run the risk of burning out. In the psychological profession, that means a person gets so tired of taking care of others they quit or, even worse, exhibit poor practice. Feminist psychologists have proposed a solution to this issue, which they refer to as the ethic of self-care (Porter, 1995). People who are in the position of helping others ethically must make sure they are being kind to themselves. They must know themselves well enough to know when they need a break and how to engage in good self-care. In Iran, activists are under such pressure they may barely have time to think about their own needs. Risk involves "you, and your life, and your well-being." In the state of being stressed or threatened, Paria says, "it is harder to forgive." I cannot even imagine the constant pressure activists in Iran experience. When a person's safety is endangered, it is difficult to concentrate on other things.

In some ways, self-care simply is counterintuitive to Iranian culture. The emphasis is always on the guest, the other person. Among activists, this cultural characteristic seems even more magnified to me. They dedicate themselves around the clock, and it is often a thankless, dangerous job. It makes sense how people work so hard they never tend to themselves.

I am reminded of another expression in Farsi. My father taught me that "*koohnavard fatehe kheesh ast*." Literally translated, this means a person must conquer herself or himself before conquering the mountain. Thus, the main challenge is the self: how to manage and challenge the self. If you are successful with yourself, you are going to be successful with the social issue that you are struggling against. If you are not, it may cost you, in your relationships, in your activism, and in the world. Thus, I believe we all have an obligation to try. I know it can be next to impossible to maintain that balance when times are stressful and lives are endangered, but I have to believe that it is worth trying.

I keep thinking there is more to Paria's story. It is not just the group; there must be something about Paria and the individuals too. I cannot pinpoint what it is until she starts talking about her mentor. Her mentor leads by example: she is patient, calm, and open to hearing different points of view. I am most struck by how her mentor contributes to her success by what she does not do:

> *ye moshkel too adam too bazi ha sobhat mikoni een hastesh ke adam ha khodeshoon ra faghadr boonvane yek activist mishnasan. ..dige baghiyeye bod ha ye zendegi ra nemidooni va chon dige identiteet ba activiteet yeki mishe*, then you start taking things personally. (One problem that we have talked about that people have is that they only know themselves as an activist…then you do not know the other dimensions of life because your identity is an activist, then you start taking things personally).

That is the point where one loses objectivity and becomes less tolerant of alternative opinions. It suddenly hits me—humility: being humble enough to know that you do not know everything, and that others have much to contribute.

Americans sometimes view women from the Middle East with pity. Paria describes the reactions she received at an awards ceremony recognizing the Campaign. She launches into a dramatic voice "'we're so proud of you.'" She replies, "Don't be proud of us, be proud of yourself! We're proud of ourselves already. Let's work together!" Rather than recognition and rescue, she is advocating collaboration and empowerment. She says something that changes the way I think about my own project. "It's not always about helping them, sometimes it's about learning from them." I silently vow to learn all I can.

After all, Paria reminds me, Iranian women's rights activists are "badass, you can't look down upon them!" People need to first educate themselves on the issues and listen with an "open and receptive mind." They should learn to decipher what is good and bad information. Paria mentioned we-change.org, http://iranianfeministschool.info/english, and http://www.change4equality.com/ as good sources of information. She tells me to be aware that Islamic Republic agents create websites or groups that seem to promote women's issues but are actually full of pro-government propaganda. The learning goes both ways, and she thinks Iranians should also make an effort to learn more about the U.S. "If you want to engage another culture, you have to know what they're about. You can't have these packaged or stereotypical views about them…you have to start by breaking those."

Once people have educated themselves, they can spread the word by making connections, posting relevant links, sharing good translations, and posting information in their personal blogs. Paria suggests becoming a permanent blogger on feminist sites, such as feministing.com, to write about Iranian women's issues.

Paria's words have a great impact on me. I have had my own struggles with humility that have stopped me from acting. In my case, I did not feel worthy enough to be part of the Iranian women's movement. I now know I allowed my ego to get in the way of my helping others. I am fortunate that people like Paria remind me. I am lucky to have met her and heard about her group. She said their journey has been an "amazing growing experience." She suspects that if I talked to the others in her group, they would say the same thing. I wonder if the others in her group also possess the same humility. They probably do, because, ultimately, they did not allow their differences to tear them apart.

Campaign as coalition project: "Just speak about the white elephant." Paria recalls a conversation with a Campaign activist from Iran. She was shocked to hear the activist say that Campaign support outside of Iran had been harmful because "*az too ma ha raees dorost kardan* (You made leaders from our group)." Paria reflects on this as she takes a sip of *chai*. She says the group did their best to contact everyone in the Iran Campaign when they engaged in activities. However, they could only contact people who were active online. It is no wonder that their U.S.-based group could not reach everyone considering the pressure from the government that activists are under as well as internet filters. Even the information that comes directly from activists is not complete; certain voices are always left out.

Not everyone in Iran believes the international support has been harmful. In my interactions with Iranian activists, many believe the support has been positive. However, the implications of Paria's conversation are significant. Her words highlight the conflict of the Campaign being a grassroots movement that has garnered international support. They also delineate why it is so important to understand what the Campaign is, and what it is not. Paria sheds light on this issue for me. She calls the Campaign the "tip of the iceberg" of the Iranian women's movement, which has lasted over hundred years. It is the experiences of all these activists that made the Campaign possible. What made the One Million Signatures Campaign unique, Paria says, is that no matter who you are, where you are, or how you think, you can join with others to have a coalition. The Campaign is simply a coalition project, everyone can help in their own unique ways. "Do whatever you can, just speak about the white elephant." Her words give me goose bumps.

Paria illustrates the Campaign with an example of how far American women have come. She refers to a time period in history where sexual discrimination was not discussed as a potential problem. It was taken for granted that women could be mistreated in the workplace. If she complained, whatever happened was considered her fault. Paria looks at me, wide-eyed, and asks how we arrived to our current state, in which companies provide mandatory training about sexual harassment. She has my attention.

First of all, she says, people decided to talk about the white elephant. There had been a general attitude that women's complaints need to be silenced. By talking about it, these attitudes started to shift. Second, the laws changed. The legal consequences

complemented the cultural changes, and it started because "*society ghabool kard ke dar moredesh harf bezane* (society accepted that it was okay to talk about)."

The Campaign helped provide context to talk about gender in Iran. Its message is relevant everywhere: "Don't be quiet. Challenge people to talk about it. Educate yourself, educate others." No matter where you are, or what your talent is, you can work towards educating the masses about gender and producing cultural shifts.

Paria has confidence in Iranian women's rights activists and is hopeful about the future. After searching for a cause, she has found her home in the Iranian women's rights movement. She initially thought she had to take the role of supporter because she lives outside of Iran; she could not be an actual activist. She is excited as she talks about how her mindset shifted. The Campaign allows people to develop their own projects that are relevant to their communities. Thus, Paria discovered that there was no "border for being an activist." She looked within her Iranian American community and noticed inequality and discrimination. There is a great need for services like women's shelters. Additionally, she could keep talking about equality and human rights at Persian events, on the radio. "So there's no limit for me to be an activist."

Transformation as immigrant. Paria learned English as a child and adolescent in Iran. Thus, when she moved to the U.S. in her late teens, she was ready. She arrived with high expectations. In Iran, "obviously there's a lot of sexism," Paria explains, but you "learn to maneuver around it". Growing up in a culture entails that you adopt its social norms, and you grow somewhat accustomed to its inequalities. However, in an unfamiliar culture, "new biases are so shocking to you." The first thing she noticed in her

American university was the way girls were laughed at and dismissed. They were seen as less athletic: "you threw the ball like a girl." As a straight-A student, Paria was shocked at the stereotype of the "stupid girl" in popular culture. Paria remembers hanging out with her boyfriend and his friends, and they constantly made fun of girls. She underwent a transformation:

> At first, I would just sit quietly and not say anything but then and then I would go home and I would think about it…and I really felt the difference. I didn't really feel this as much in Iran...That's when I actually became a feminist.

Paria laughs as she recalls a moment of self-discovery. She was well-aware of the negative connotation of feminism. She started reading more and more until she finally declared "I'm a feminist, screw you guys!" We both laugh this time.

When Paria has spoken with American audiences, she talked about contradictions. She discussed contradictions in Iranian culture, such as the fact that women can become surgeons but their testimony is worth half a man's in court. She also spoke out against contradictions in American culture, such as the emphasis on female politician's appearances. Additionally, she keeps up-to-date with what is going on in Iran, and sites such as the Feminist School are a "wealth of information." However, she describes a "disconnect" between activists inside and outside of Iran. The biggest challenge for activists away from the country is that they are out of touch with society. To get a sense of what life is really like, Paria reads blogs. She pays attention to how people are looking at things. She names a source that I find surprising—soap operas. She says that soap operas reflect what is going on in Iranian society.

Paria says that no matter how many video clips we see or firsthand accounts we read, "none of them is a substitute for that first-hand experience being inside the society". She discusses the widespread protests that emerged in Iran after the disputed elections of June 2009, often referred to as the Green Movement. The police have responded to the Green Movement by imprisoning and attacking protestors in droves (Nasrabadi, 2011). Paria describes how speculating from outside Iran has led to erroneous conclusions:

> A lot of people here say, what happened to this Green Movement? Did you see Iranians, they were high for a couple of months and then it all kind of faded? They object to it, without knowing what is the situation inside Iran, like how much security is an issue, how much economy is an issue.

Paria's eyes cloud with sorrow. She asks me how anyone can expect a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, to protest when they can be imprisoned, lose their job, or worse. "It's so unrealistic to ask such a thing but if you're not inside Iran, you don't see it." We sit in silence for a few seconds.

Paria says she is grateful to live in the U.S. and be exposed to different cultures. Immigration has afforded her the opportunity to compare her perspective to others' and allowed her to see that there is more than one way to do things. "*oon chizi ke man migam bozorgtarin chize donya nist ya behtarin chize donya nist*. It's just one of many. (That thing I say, it's not the biggest thing in the world, it's not the best thing in the world. It's just one of many.)" Since she has been in the U.S., Paria says she is more tolerant, has more respect, and works better in a team.

Paria talks about another benefit of being in the United States, one that I have never considered: the emphasis on teamwork. She informs me that children in Iran do not work in groups at school. Thus, kids do not practice working together to develop "the general communication to be able to work as a team without being egoistic." The first time she worked in a group was when she attended college. In America, Paria says, "the values are taught from early at school, people have so much group experiences." She and the U.S.-based Campaign activists she works with were exposed to teamwork through work and school. She thinks this set them apart from other Iranian activist groups who were not able to sustain themselves: they are able to have "very healthy communication". She thinks the Campaign could benefit from more knowledge on collaboration.

> If somebody wants to help activists, I mean Iranian activists whether inside Iran or here, I think talking about teamwork, what we're weak, what our weak points are, how we can make them better, our communication style. Those are very vital, those are very important regardless of any kind of topic you work on, whether they are student activists or women's rights or working on racism or minorities, this is something we all really need to learn.

I think Americans especially can offer a great deal of insight in this regard.

With privilege comes responsibility, and Paria seems to live by this adage. She realizes that as an Iranian American, she is in a unique position to help the Iranian women's rights movement. She is fluent in both languages and has frequently helped the Campaign translate. She says it is a much-needed skill. The problem is not that there are not enough people to do it. According to Paria, the issue is that translation is very

difficult to do well because the languages are so different. She says that in Farsi, we use more words and we stretch them out. I think about my own adjustments to writing in graduate school, and how I still struggle to use fewer words. Because of this difference, it is difficult to translate Farsi to English without losing the essence. With a twinkle in her eye, she describes her own process of translating: "*hay miri o miai, hay nega mikoni loghatash ra avaz mikoni.* (You keep going back and forth, you keep looking and changing the words.)"

Two more eyes. Paria's group has collected signatures at Iranian events in the U.S. Paria lights up when she talks about it. Gathering signatures "is the most exciting part of the Campaign for me. It's a tremendous experience." She loves to talk to crowds, and I can picture it: her warm smile, her curly hair, making hand gestures as she talks to people. Do not mistake her kindness for weakness; she is as strong as they come.

"I'm really one of the persons who collects the least amount of signatures." Their group calculated that the average amount of time to gather signatures is seven minutes. However, Paria often takes longer "because I talk about, I don't want the signature. The signature itself to me is nothing...I just want to have that communication."

I want to know more about why she enjoys it. She laughs and says it is exactly like an "anthropologist field search". I look at her and think, this is an individual who genuinely loves people. I do not mean that she is sociable; it is beyond that. She has a deep desire to connect with and understand human beings. She continues talking about her passion for collecting signatures: "I get to talk to people, which is very fun for me.

Total strangers. I can stop them, I can start talking to them, which is very fun for me." I think her warmth and genuine care for people makes them open up to her.

One of the best parts of talking to people and collecting signatures for Paria is the reactions she receives, which she says are "amazingly diverse." She learns a lot from people when she gathers signatures, particularly when they share experiences.

It's really, an odd, overwhelming experience for me, when I go one day to collect signatures. For a few days after that, my head is full of talking mouths. They just don't fade away, they stay with me, all these people, their faces, they stay with me.

As a whole, the responses were supportive. Some had heard of the Campaign and had a positive impression. A significant amount of people cared about what was going on in Iran.

"Since people have witnessed it, they connect to it very fast." People relate their own stories of inequalities in Iran, such as a man whose daughter went through a horrible divorce. She has found that people quickly connect to gender issues because they have had experiences that make the "effect of inequality very tangible." Because they can identify with the Campaign goals, they appreciate the work Paria and the activists are doing.

Paria says some people view the Campaign as government agents because they are working to change the laws of the Islamic Republic and do not advocate overthrow of the government. These individuals are suspicious of the Campaign because they believe the *only* way to change Iran is to remove the Islamic Republic from power. Additionally,

she has encountered women who left Iran in adulthood and did not realize oppression was a problem. Paria says these woman may have had limited exposure to the public sphere. She says these individuals challenged her beliefs. Still other women went even further and said they refused to believe women were oppressed.

Paria describes a striking example of one of these women. She was in her forties and visiting from Iran. Paria says she was dressed up like a Hollywood movie star. Paria was introduced to her through the woman's sister. The sister informed her that Paria was an activist. At first, the lady barely wanted to talk to her, but later that evening, she started to ask Paria questions. The woman asked her if she had studied in a university. Paria replied that yes, she had a graduate level degree. The woman asked if she worked, and Paria said yes. The woman proceeded to give her an earful about how everyone had bragged about Paria's husband. If Paria's husband was so great, why did she have to work? It's the mentality behind this statement that bothers Paria—the implication that men's duty is to financially support women.

Paria asked the woman if she was bothered by the pressure on women in Iran. The lady replied that no, she did as she pleased. Paria learned later that she was the mistress of a wealthy, religious man, and she was financially taken care of without working. When they discussed the Campaign, the woman asked her what was the point. Why was she so concerned from the other side of the world? Live and let live.

shoma mikhai khodetoon ra bokosheen, hooghooghe barabaar biareen ke

beshinim mesle shoma ha majboor beshim hafteye panj rooz berim ta shab kar

bokonim? na azizam, bezar marda mard bashan yadeshoon bashe che kar ha

bayad bekonan ma ham zanha mitoonim zan basheem. (You all want to kill

yourselves, gain equal rights so we can sit like you and be forced to work five

days a week from morning until night? No, sweetie, let men be men and

remember what they are supposed to do and we can be women.)

I am initially shocked by the woman's words. How could someone not want equal rights?

But then I try to see it from her vantage point, and I think about the long work hours that

we have here in the U.S. Why would someone who bears such few responsibilities want

to share that burden? Paria says equal rights will be at the expense of some women.

Then, Paria draws an intriguing comparison to illustrate what true equal rights

entail. A friend of hers is recently divorced. She makes more money than her husband so

she has to pay alimony. Although her friend has lived in the U.S. for over twenty-five

years, she asks "how dare he?" What does that really mean, Paria asks me. If women are

entitled to half of the couple's assets in a divorce, why should men not be? She is right:

we cannot have it both ways. She says we can idealize equal rights all we want, but we

need to think about whether we understand the full picture.

Paria reports that the reactions of men to collecting signatures were varied. Some

men that she spoke with said outright that women were less and should stay at home

"with no *taroof*". *Taroof* is a concept in Iranian culture in which one masks their true

intentions to benefit the other person in some way. They were not shy at all about stating

their opinions. Women at home are respected and by challenging this concept, the

activists were "challenging the dignity" of women. One man even yelled at her for

challenge the dignity of his mother. Even though this incident stands out in her mind,

Paria cannot say that this man was the worst experience. "That doesn't hurt me because that's the reality. That's the reason I'm an activist, because I want to make a difference in that." These people presented an opportunity for interaction.

She does not mind the differing opinions, or even the anger, as much as the people who are apathetic and criticize them for doing something at all. "The one that hurts me is people who say you're not going to do it, you're not going to get anywhere." They gathered signatures prior to the disputed elections in June 2009, and Paria says at that time there was a "national depression about political issues". She says people were hopeless but the Green Movement "changed everything. It really changed that balance." I agree with Paria that people are much more hopeful now. Paria says people told them it would take forever to get the results they wanted. They questioned whether they would reach one million signatures and whether the Parliament would care if they did. Paria and the activists would explain that it is not about the signatures and ask: "This is about you and I talking about women. Have you ever had a discussion about women with anybody? And they go silent."

Paria spoke with a man identified who identified with their cause because his sister was stuck in Iran in a terrible marriage. Yet, he refused to sign. Paria asked him if he planned to return to Iran; he said no. She asked him why he was afraid. "Because I'm a coward." She stares at me in disbelief. I understand her incredulity, with so many risking their lives to participate in social change, someone in a free society refuses to do such a simple, innocuous act. I have to believe people like that can change when they are ready:

they just need to be awakened (Freire, 1970). I am constantly trying to understand that process.

Paria emphasizes that the negative reactions she received were not representative of all men. She has been inspired by many men around her. She reminds me to be respectful in my portrayal of men, especially because I advocate collaboration. "If you want gender equality, it means you respect both genders." She says there is a fine line between being a strong, powerful woman and being anti-men, and she gets sad when people cross the line.

Since the June 2009 elections and the rise of the Green Movement, there has been controversy about the role of women's rights. How do women's rights and the Green Movement interact? Are they separate? There is also debate about whether a movement that aims to change laws will work in the current regime. "We were trying to change the system. Then we thought there is no system to change. It's a hodge podge, personal agendas and personal decisions." Why would leaders that do not even allow their people the right to vote care if they are equal? For Paria, the aftermath of the elections helped her to reflect and look beyond the Campaign at other possibilities to help. She learned a great deal, it was "such a blessing," and she is grateful for the friendships she has made. She still thinks the methods were amazing. However, she thinks the Iranian women's movement is changing with the times.

Although she remains active, Paria no longer speaks publicly about women's rights. Iran's atrocious violations of human rights: these ongoing traumas—the tortures, imprisonments, and executions—overshadow all else. When there are constantly cases of

prisoners who are kept so isolated and in such horrid conditions that no one knows what

has happened, Paria prefers to discuss that. Additionally, Paria says that her work with

the Campaign has always been as supporter of what they are doing in Iran. However, the

nature of the activity in Iran has changed. Two years ago, the Islamic Republic began

counting Campaign involvement as a formal charge; prior to that, Campaign activists

were still arrested but were given other charges such as "propaganda against the state."

This legal shift was huge for the individuals working in Iran. The Campaign changed

form. The change4equality website remains active and is updated constantly. Fewer

signatures were gathered in public; efforts became much more underground due to

government pressure. The metamorphosis represents another reason Paria does not feel

comfortable initiating public events in the Campaign's name. Even in the past, her group

was careful about planning events in the U.S. just for the Campaign because they did not

want to put Iranians' lives in danger. The Islamic Republic tends to track those types of

events and could easily have used them to harass activists in Iran. She has learned that

there are many ways besides signatures to accomplish gender equality. For example,

Paria has realized how important it is for Iranian activists to form coalitions and dialogue

with activists from other Islamic countries such as Egypt.

The increasing government pressure on activists in the last two years has

transformed the Iranian equal rights movement. In addition to the legal repercussions of

being involved with the Campaign, the Green Movement protests and subsequent arrests

of dissidents has forced activists to go underground or to leave the country. Individuals

who have been involved with women's rights in Iran for over thirty years have now

become activists in the diaspora. These individuals, Paria says, are re-evaluating their identity and responsibility within the Iranian movement. They have to adjust to becoming an immigrant, changing their goals, and possibly losing positions of power. People like Paria, who have been outside of Iran for many years, need to adapt to these activists' new identities just as the activists themselves need to adjust. Paria explains that some of her friends in the U.S. have changed their priorities to help these activists legally, financially, and emotionally. Her friends' attention has shifted from the movement to the individuals within it. This wave of activist emigration is changing the landscape of the Iranian equal rights movement.

Paria reflects on the current state of gender awareness in her Iranian American community. "I see in the Iranian community here. I see this tendency to change, this desire to change, although the means is not there yet, and it takes a lot of time." She is inspired by what she sees, but she knows change will not happen overnight. After all, the world has been patriarchal for thousands of years.

Paria says that there has suddenly been a focus on Iranian women in media. More and more people talk about women's role in the Green Movement. Paria says although this discussion is positive, it is still in the "talking stage". She says there is still a "huge difference" between talking about gender equality and actually believing in it. It is a long process, one that "takes lots of fighting itself to get from this talking to a community that you say, okay, this community really respects gender equality." Along the path to respecting gender equality, there are certain triggers that help by illuminating the "conflict in what they think and how they act."

Paria hopes the Campaign served as a trigger in people's journeys of gender awareness. She says patriarchy is not isolated to a single part of one's life, it is "so entangled with the way we think, with the way we talk, our body language, everything". She says if you ask most people if they believe in equality, they will say yes. However, disconnect exists between how they think and how they act in terms of gender. Paria says a trigger occurs when this difference is brought into awareness. "When you expose this difference, I think it's very good because people get conscious about themselves." Although they will probably not change right in that moment, they may hear other triggers that will propel their journeys of gender awareness.

> If they hear it from me, and then they hear something in the news, and then they
>
> hear a case of prison, and then they hear some activists, I think it accumulates
>
> somehow, give results at some point. People become conscious about it.

It occurs to me that Paria has probably impacted more people than she knows.

Paria started her own journey of gender awareness years ago. When she thinks back, she was a feminist decades before she had the words to express it. She remembers playing with boys and girls as a child in Iran. Around the age of 11, one of the more traditional moms started trying to separate the sexes. She remembers being so against it. She considers her perspective a feminist position because clearly, she was equal to the boys so "who are you to come out and try and impose something and separate us as two different species or something?"

When she attended university in Iran, she never observed women congregating in the public spaces. Between classes, boys would stand with their friends and talk whereas

girls would quickly walk to their next destination. Cafeterias were segregated by sex. At a meeting to greet new students with the head of the department, Paria stood up and asked ""where are all the women in this school?"

> I never thought about a feminist identity at that point but I was being very outspoken about it, I was very angry that I felt like we are being restricted and shoved into a little space…Boys were allowed to be loud and laugh and stuff and we were not.

She says it was "very clear," and she emphasizes the words, that loudness was unacceptable for girls. She considers this encounter a milestone on her journey to developing a feminist identity.

Paria's involvement with the One Million Signatures Campaign is another landmark on her path of gender awareness. She thought, like the rest of her projects, she would work for a short while and move on. She tends to get bored and change her job, or all her involvements. However, after a few months with the Campaign, she knew she would stay in women's rights. "I'm not going to leave this place. This is a good place. I might add to it, I might change it. And it will change during time but it's the right place for me."

What was so different about becoming involved with the Campaign? In addition to the activist component, it was what was happening to Paria as a person. She started to think about gender more and more in her own life. She sees the world differently: "I have two more eyes right now just for gender issues, just for inequality, just for discrimination, sexism: all of those things that really affect the lives of women." She said the Campaign

gave her a mirror to look at herself and observe the patriarchal behaviors she followed unconsciously. "That mirror gave me a lot of self-consciousness about equality and how I can start changing myself before changing the world." The Campaign made the unconscious oppression she had experienced, conscious.

"And then after seeing, after feeling, after going through that, I really thought I don't want to be quiet about it." She realized, she could have enjoyed being a woman all these years. Paria did not want her experiences to be in vain, so she made a commitment to always do her part to make social change. "No matter how big is the issue, and no matter how limited is my power to change things, I just take the step that I can take." She still finds herself acting in patriarchal ways, and she tells me she has a long way to go in terms of gender awareness. It's a process, she tells me, and I agree. Paria's process was learning about gender, "getting a degree of consciousness," and deciding to act.

Paria's extra pair of eyes has opened up another world recently: the intersection of gender and language, and she educates me about the patriarchy in the Persian language. Her voice rises as she gets more passionate "*arzash haye khube jameye ma be ye nowi ba mard boodan hamra shode*. (Good qualities in our society have become synonymous with being a man.)" Adjectives should be genderless, but those with positive connotations are associated with being a man. For example, if someone works hard, people say, *javoon marde*, which literally means "gentlemanly." Another expression is "*gholo mardoone bede* (make a manly promise). It is as if the promise of a man is more worthy. On the other hand, negative expressions are associated with women. A weak person is referred to as "*zanoone*," or womanly.

The findings from three women were integrated to create Paria's portrait. Her journey began with her activism. She described her interpersonal shifts of empowerment in detail. A significant aspect of her intrapersonal empowerment was the development of gender consciousness. The process of forming gender consciousness empowered Paria and sustained her passion for activism. Additionally, she taught me the importance of not letting ego get in the way of interpersonal empowerment. She said that for people to collaborative effectively for change, there must be a level of trust. Paria says overcoming patriarchy starts with examining herself: "it's kind of observing myself, observing others, and then trying to extract all these things that reproduce patriarchy (sic) and talk about it." She constantly writes in her journal and tries to observe herself from outside. That nagging intuition I had at the beginning that there is something about Paria, a light in her eyes, returned. I think it stems from the fact that this is a woman who has looked into herself. She has the calm of someone who is self-aware. I look in her eyes, and I know she is ready for the mountain in front of her.

Dariush

I had not planned to interview men. Hearing about Dariush changed my mind. He is friendly, with a smile that lights up his whole face. He is also very hospitable. Within an hour of letting him know I had arrived, he called and asked if I would like to spend time with him and his friends. He even offered me a ride to the place. He shakes my hand heartily when we meet, and his infectious smile makes me feel comfortable on my first day in a new city.

I also realize that he has a wonderful sense of humor: he is funny, and quick to laugh at a joke. There is something about his sense of humor that is so gentle—there is no ridicule—and genuine. This is a person that enjoys life, and can put others at ease. I am grateful to have the opportunity to have interviewed one of the many Iranian men who is active in the struggle for equality.

One of the first things he teaches me is that my title is inaccurate. My original title referred to participants as "women's rights activists." It is not just about women's rights, he told me. "Men are also prisoners of this system." In Iran, an inordinate amount of financial responsibility is placed on the male. Additionally, Dariush explains that men behaving in patriarchal ways "kills the livelihood" of relationships. I asked him what title he proposed, and he said "equality."

Dariush recites a quote by Kristof (2011) that helped crystallize his approach to equal rights:

> The struggle to achieve gender equality is not a battle between sexes but something far more subtle. It's often about misogyny and paternalism but those are values that are absorbed and transmitted almost as much by women as by men.

It is not accurate to say that men are to be blamed for patriarchy. Yes, Dariush says, we should hold men accountable. However, we should not hold them accountable for everything. They have stakes in this struggle, too. It is the culture that is patriarchal, a culture that is perpetuated by men and women. Instead of an "us versus them" mentality, Dariush says, we should recognize that oppression affects everyone and we must all work

together to change it. I agree with Dariush. If society is to transform, both genders need to be held responsible and engaged in the process of change.

Shedding light on the blind spot. Dariush's eyes twinkle when he talks about his mother and sister. "*khayli doosteshoon daram* (I love them so much)." He grew up in a patriarchal family. He describes the environment for his mother as "*khayli khashen*," or extremely violent. These experiences opened his eyes to the fact that the rights as well as talents of women were neither recognized nor respected. "You're basically dismissed." What effect does that have? No one will know your worth, Dariush tells me. "Living in that society or not living in that society, it will, your life will end up in a totally different place." For his mother, this place was very painful. Recognizing the huge impact of society does not excuse people like his dad from responsibility for their actions. Nevertheless, Dariush says, his father would be a different person had he grown up in, for example, Sweden. "Society has a really powerful impact."

Dariush and his father had very different views on gender roles and how women should be treated, so they often had conflict. The issue of equal rights was nearly invisible and "had completely fallen into my father's blind spot." It was very strange, Dariush says. "*har cheghadr ke behesh begam* (no matter how much I tell him), he just doesn't understand it." His father kept making the same excuses "like a machine."

I ask him for an example of a discussion with his father about equality. He remembers one time where his father got extremely upset about yogurt, something so insignificant. Dariush told his father that he gave himself permission to get angry at his mother. His father insisted he became angry because of the situation. If she had not

behaved that way, he would not become so angry. Dariush asked his father to recognize that he was an angry, violent person who would find any excuse to become mad. After all, he only became mad with her; he was able to control it in other contexts in which his outbursts had a greater cost. Dariush would say to his father, "your behavior is not right."

When Dariush initially mentions these conversations, I assume he means he tried to talk to his father explicitly about equal rights. However, as I hear more, I realize he was instead focusing on his father's behavior. I comment on this observation. He disagrees; he says he was referring to the unequal power dynamic between his parents. The problem was that his father took control by force and others had to obey. Dariush tried and tried to break this cycle of violence. For many years, the message did not register with his father at all. He wanted to help his father transcend the environment to consider another perspective, but his father simply processed things differently. Dariush says he did not have the language to talk to him about it, the context.

It did not help Dariush's case that he never heard any discussion about the rights and worth of women. Although he attended a politically active university, he could not find any movies or events to learn more about women's rights. "I never encountered it." There had to have been events that were related to women's rights, he said, but it was not very public. When gender oppression occurred, people like his father did not have an "emotional pulse" to feel it. It was not until years later that he discovered a language with which to talk to his father. The Campaign was the first social movement Dariush encountered that targeted this phenomenon.

Dariush was drawn to the One Million Signatures Campaign for several reasons. "What I like about Campaign the most is its method." When you speak with people one by one, face to face, "*harfashoon ra mishnave dastaneshon ra mishnave chond ye ghadam aval ine ke to ashna beshi be jameye ke zendegi mikoni dardashoon chie bad bahashoon sobat mikoni.* (you hear their words, you hear their stories. The first step is to become familiar with the society you are living in, find out what their aches are, then speak to them)." People of lower socioeconomic status are more sensitive to political issues because it affects them more directly. However, previously, little communication occurred between this group and activists. The Campaign was the first time Dariush witnessed direct communication between activists and citizens on such a large scale.

There are a lot of ways to communicate with people, Dariush tells me, such as film, art, and media. However, he thinks discussion is the best because it is the most engaging. Direct communication with the people allows you to "customize" to your audience, gain in-depth understanding of society, and shatter stereotypes. He felt like the Campaign had promise to shift social dialogue "in a less harmful and more understanding and appreciating toward the world." Dariush knew that this type of dialogue would be most effective with people like his father.

As Dariush puts it, Iranian Campaign activists bravely and ingeniously took a stand against patriarchy. This stand represented a "window of opportunity" for him. He emphasizes the *window*. He knew it was not going to last forever, so he felt a sense of urgency. "…It's up to us to make it work or not work…Let's make the most of it." He decided to act.

Face to face: Eye to eye. Dariush was excited to become involved in the One Million Signatures in his city. He says it is easy to get started. An individual first must read the framework of the Campaign. According to this framework, a person can be active anywhere in the world; it is like "open source." As someone who majored in computer science, I like this comparison to technology. Through an online community about Iranian women's issues, he found others who were interested in becoming involved. With each new person that expressed interest, he met with them and discussed the Campaign. When he introduced everyone to each other, he talked about the talent each could bring to the group. I realized he has an ability to see the best in people; I think that is part of what makes him so engaging.

Dariush says the work of activists can be "so mundane." It involves tasks like "driving half an hour" to run menial errands and "staying up 'til 1 in the morning putting leaflets in envelopes." He refers to it as "very trial and error." For example, they once had an idea to have a huge canvas at an Iranian event. However, the logistics complicated matters. Transporting the heavy canvas was a problem. "It sounds like a great idea but when you actually put it together it's hours and hours trying to find something with a straight canvas that's made of wood."

He tells me how the initial weekly meetings lasted for hours. In a meeting on one sunny day, he had a realization. He looked out the window and thought "so many things to do around here, could go to beach or go hiking." Instead, he and the others were giving up their time to discuss ways to promote equality. The seriousness of the issue hit him.

The group did fun activities together but he realized they could have spent a lot more time socializing:

> It would be so easy in a place like this to do that stuff all the time. It's pretty amazing that we spent 2 years, we didn't do that. We did that sometimes as well but our spare time we spent discussing, planning events.

I marvel at their patience and level of commitment.

Dariush asks me to tell him if he is explaining too much. "I tend to talk a lot, I'm famous for that." I say it's a good thing to be famous for because it means he has a lot to say. He replies, "I have one thing to say a lot." We both laugh heartily. He says he describes his perspective from so many different angles that he exhausts a subject. I think that is part of his charm.

It takes some time for Dariush to answer the question of when he became part of the Campaign. Having not experienced the discrimination firsthand, he initially felt like an outsider: "I used to wonder, can I write "we" when I send an email to those guys"? After all, he is a man, he did not feel like an activist yet. "I'm still learning about this stuff."

He refers to this time period as an "existential" struggle. He does not remember an exact moment when he stopped worrying about being part of the Campaign or not. He thinks it was approximately after six months. After a year, his worries seemed "ridiculous." "How stupid, of course I'm part of this Campaign. But you know, I'm always aware that my position is different." As an Iranian American woman raised in the

U.S., I can relate to his feelings. I wonder if I am too "outside" to truly understand Iran and the Campaign. His triumph over these issues serves as an inspiration to me.

Dariush discusses his experience with gathering signatures in his Iranian American community. He says that although it was set up to be an interaction, that is not the way it would usually work out. Most people would sign the petition within one minute, unless they had questions. Dariush explains that less than ten percent of the questions were about whether equal rights were deserved or not; most people were supportive. One amazing aspect Dariush noticed is that people's reactions changed as the years passed. As the Campaign became more well-known, people became more receptive and comfortable talking.

Dariush says that gathering signatures was enriching. I ask him if he can recall a story from his experiences. He explains that interacting with people was always interesting, but he cannot think of a particular story that stands out. Instead, he says, there were ''a lot of little moments." Everyone's story is unique and fascinating in its own way.

I think about Dariush's ability to see the best in people as he discusses a conflict that occured within the Campaign, but outside of the southern California chapter. A well-known activist published an article about how all men were chauvinists and those that did not initially seem chauvinist were hiding their true purpose. Her article propelled a series of heated arguments, and what Dariush refers to as a "meltdown in communication." It became so offensive that "there was no defense for it."

Several people he had worked with supported the original article, which was "quite shocking" for Dariush. He felt like these people had been his friends, in addition to working together. Until yesterday, Dariush says, we were on the same page. Now, instead of attacking discrimination, they were perpetuating sexist behavior. "I'm not gonna put my time and energy for reverse sexism."

These conflicts represent one dialogue within the equal rights movement. The distinction between this approach and the original dialogue of the Campaign is very important. The Campaign was not about blaming or hating men for what exists in society: they were encouraging men to participate. Dariush seems saddened as he says that the subsequent "anti-men" dialogue gave a negative impression of the equal rights movement. Although he was disheartened, he did not give up. In fact, that experience taught him there is room for growth in the equal rights movement. He suggests that people can help by analyzing the Iranian women's movement: what works and what does not. Interested individuals could educate themselves on the movement, use their expertise or theoretical perspective to analyze it, and publish the information so that activists everywhere can have access.

I have had a long day and I am tired. Dariush says if I want to yawn, I can. I tell him that no, thank you, I do not need to yawn. I hope he does not mistake me being tired with not being interested in what he is saying. That could not be further from the truth; I am hanging on every word. I have to concentrate to catch all the Farsi words, so my dark eyebrows furrow together. As he is talking, he realizes the issue of the sexist article and

subsequent discussions reverts back to the idea of equal, rather than just women's rights. I suppose I was defending equality, he says. Similarly, he is bothered when people are ridiculed or belittled on the basis of their beliefs, no matter who they are.

Bearing fruit. Prior to starting my interviews, I assumed the One Million Signatures Campaign was 50% in Iran and 50% in other countries. Dariush corrected this assumption by informing me that 95% is in Iran. The most important work the Campaign has done is there. He tells me that, in the U.S., helping the Campaign with translation is a useful contribution.

Dariush keeps himself informed about the equal rights movement in Iran. He smiles as he discusses activists he admires; he always reads their articles. He says the activists there are very well-trained and experienced. They are open to different strategies. What the Iranian Campaign has done, Dariush tells me, is engage the people into the action. Thus, the people gathering signatures on the streets would not necessarily consider themselves activists.

By the time Dariush became involved with the Campaign in the U.S., several activists had already been arrested and threatened in Iran. The Islamic Republic is "very well-funded," Dariush tells me, and their powerful media lies to justify their punishments. One way to help Iranians is to counteract that media by publicizing these arrests and harsh sentences. The imprisonments increased the cost of activity for people involved with the Campaign. Their phone and email conversations are monitored and recorded, and their meetings are often disrupted by police forces. Therefore, Dariush says, he is firmly against having contact with activists inside Iran. If the Islamic Republic

discovers that someone in Iran had a conversation related to activism with someone in the U.S., the Iranian could be accused of trying to overthrow the government with foreign support. Conditions have become so terrible that many activists have left the country. Instead of contacting activists in Iran, Dariush keeps up with their articles, and waits to see what they will do next.

The Green Movement refers to the widespread protests that occurred after Iran's disputed presidential elections in June 2009. The protests represented Iran's first mass dissent in decades. Police responded by arresting and attacking protestors for over a year. The Green Movement has had a huge impact on Dariush's work. It put him and the activists he worked with in a state of "emergency". Their priorities shifted. Previously, they were engaged in long-term change through the Campaign, but it was suddenly as if "*ye ho bachat khatar mishe* (your child is in danger) so you become immersed with that." Several of his friends in Iran were beaten severely in the streets. Dariush and his friends in the U.S. were all glued to their computers, awaiting the next news.

The Green Movement also had an impact on Dariush personally. He says he was very "emotionally involved"; tempers around him were flaring. Some people became physically sick, and others fell behind in their studies. "It was nothing you can separate yourself." He says because he and his friends grew up in Iran, their emotional ties are very strong. I tell him that as someone who was raised in the U.S., it was difficult, so I cannot imagine how it was for him. Prior to the elections, he would get together with his friends and talk about who they would vote for. And, then...he trails off as he is speaking.

I gently prod him, and he says "*kharab shod* (it was broken)." I think we both feel sad. We sit in silence for a few moments.

The Green Movement also represented a pivotal moment for Dariush's group of U.S.-based activists. When the amateur videos of the protests started to emerge, they knew what to do. They had the experience of meeetings, of publicizing to the media. He refers to the concept of "*roshanfekre boomi*", or organic intellectual. It is organic because you are involved in "planning, organizing, directing, like helping people to arrive at subconscious without being a leader." For years, the work that organic intellectuals do may not have results. "But when the juncture changes, then suddenly all the planning which makes it foolish and frustrating, it bears fruit." That is what happened to his group when the Green Movement happened. They had experience with rejections, organizing demonstrations, and they had media contacts. Thus, they sprang to action. "Once you have that experience, when the situation gives you opportunity to reach out to many more people, gives you a place, you can do it." I try and imagine what it must have been like for them.

"We have a voice." Dariush and I discuss the future of the equal rights movement in Iran. He says it will be a "long battle", but Iranian women will gain some rights. There may be conflicts as the Campaign re-strategizes until "*kam kam befaman hala chi mikhan o chejoori mitoonan be ertebate een jensiati be soorate ye chizi salem shooroo kone shekl payda kardan* (Little by little, they will understand what they want and how they can improve interactions between genders in a way that is healthy)." The Campaign is not an organization; it resumes with different people at different times. What

about discussions that the Campaign is no longer applicable? He recently discussed with his friends what relevance the Campaign has in today's Iran. "The fact that Iran is deeply patriarchal and the laws reflect that: that hasn't changed, and neither has what needs to be changed. The Campaign's job is to change that. It's the case though that it's become much harder." The Campaign cannot just "ignore politics"; they must rethink their strategies. That is why, Dariush explains, their activity in Iran has shifted. But Dariush thinks the original objectives are still valid.

In fact, Dariush explains, the situation for women in Iran is getting worse. The government systematically is trying to limit their rights to encourage women to stay in the house. The more they are forced to stay home, he says, the less likely they are to get their rights. The Islamic Republic has ordered changes in university standards to admit more men because women outnumbered men in many fields. Additionally, the restrictions for women's *hejab*, or Islamic dress, are becoming increasingly rigid. He recalls a recent visit to a medium-sized city in Iran, and he says that all the women there were wearing the traditional *chador*. The *chador* covers a person from head to toe in black. Although he does not have a problem with people wearing it, he wonders how many of the women had a choice.

The Iranian government is trying to relax the rules for allowing polygamy. Under certain conditions, a husband no longer has to seek permission for marrying a second wife. Dariush says laws allowing polygamy remove the family's security and in turn will "severely damage the family." The home is a place to feel secure and loved, but a woman in Iran has to constantly worry that her husband will seek another wife. She can build a

life with him that can be torn away in an instant. Losing one's marriage because of a third person can happen in the U.S., too, but I think the laws make the outcomes totally different. In America, infidelity is grounds for losing benefits; in Iran, infidelity (for men) is not only allowed, but legalized and encouraged.

Thus, taking a stand for equality in Iran may be more important than ever. Dariush believes in a "steady hand," and he believes the women's rights movement will be more effective if they "keep pushing forward". "*age khanoom ha tooye masooliyat ghabool nakonan, ba ghodrateshoon ra balla nabaran, kasi hagheshoon ra beheshoon nemide* (If women in Iran do not accept responsibility to empower themselves, no one will do it for them). Thus, women cannot take a stance of helplessness. This rule applies whether you are referring to their rights in the family or the larger society.

Dariush's interactions with his Iranian American community have changed him as well. Although he has been overall pleased, he emphasizes that there is a long way to go. He knows of people who claim to be whole-hearted supporters of the women's movement, but the way they act is "producing inequalities of power, producing patriarchy in the way they think, the way they act, the assumptions they have." These individuals were often raised in the U.S., they are men and women, and they are young and old. He says they are "deeply patriarchal in so many ways."

He refers to the outrage of Iranian Americans that the "Persian Gulf" was changed to "Arabian Gulf" on maps. "Everybody was angry and everybody is signing petitions…crazy stuff is happening." During that time, a bill was introduced to the Iranian Parliament that relaxed polygamy laws. People did not react because they were

numb, Dariush says. "We are still, in my opinion, numb." Dariush tells me that the Campaign has at least helped to make this topic heard.

As for his own family, Dariush's parents have changed in recent years. Although his mother suffered a great deal because of patriarchy, she now perpetuates some of those values with Dariush's girlfriend. Perhaps she adopted those values because it would have been too difficult not to in that society, Dariush says. I agree; how can one not change after being treated like half a person for decades? His father repeated the angry, violent behavior toward his mother when they visited Dariush in the U.S. One day, Dariush had had enough. He got so upset that he punched a hole in the door. His father followed him, and Dariush delivered the message he had repeated so many times. "You don't have the right to treat my mother like this." He says he did not hold anything back regarding the "ugliness of his behavior." This time, when he started questioning his father about his behavior, he got a different reaction. His father started crying. Maybe it was because he saw how emotional Dariush became, but since then, his father does express anger at his mother in front of Dariush. What previously manifested as anger now appears as agitation or discomfort.

I ask Dariush why he thinks his dad has changed. He says he is older and at a stage in which he is reflecting on his life. He sees his past mistakes and he regrets a great deal. Dariush also deserves credit for helping his father change. He says he was fairly consistent and he never backed down. At times, he was even harsh. It is not that his father is completely different, Dariush says, but he is "much softer." As a psychologist in

training, I can appreciate the importance of his father's changes. It can be a long process for a person to decide to change and take action.

Watching his sister grow and become successful has opened Dariush's eyes. His perception of her has transformed from a little sister who did not know much to a complete human being. I hear what he is saying. If I only see people through the gender roles dictated by society, "I don't respect that person for who he is, as a person and human being in general."

Dariush quotes the great Persian poet Shamloo as saying "*jayi kar mikonam ke bishtarin assar gozari daram* (I will work where I can have the greatest impact)." He views his role differently than what people do in Iran; the work an individual does for the Campaign will depend on his or her context. He has realized that as Iranians living in the United States, "we have a voice and we have a responsibility." He says "there is a lot of work to be done here," and it may not be related directly to Iran. It has to do with changing attitudes among Iranians in the U.S., which is a "very different task."

Dariush sees a unique opportunity for himself in the equal rights movement: he would like to target men. He believes if they hear about gender equality from other men, they may be less defensive. I think his words would also ring true for male perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault. Dariush taught me the significance of men's role in prevention. I agree that when it comes to raising gender awareness, same-sex role models can be especially powerful. Just as he educated me, he would like to educate others on the fact that what he is taking a stand for is "as much of a men's issue as women's issue." He wants to help men be more sensitive to gender issues and to "preach a sense of

responsibility among men." I am excited by what Iranian men like Dariush have to offer the equality movement.

The findings from two men were combined to create Dariush's portrait. He transformed my idea of empowerment. Previously, I viewed it as exerting control over one's environment. However, Dariush made me realize that empowerment is about engaging people to a social cause. He embodied the idea of engagement as empowering. I previously believed that men developed gender consciousness later in life, but Dariush challenged this bias. His gender consciousness began early in life with witnessing his father's behavior. I found his presence inspiring, and felt my motivation to achieve gender equality deepen after our conversation. The biggest lesson Dariush taught me that is that women's empowerment is inextricably linked with men's. All of society suffers when one group is unequal. My view of women's empowerment was broadened to include the impact on men.

Cross-portrait Analysis

Although the participants varied widely in terms of their levels of involvement, beliefs, and personalities, common themes emerged. Participants indicated finding purpose in adversity, the development of gender consciousness, self-awareness, and uncertainty due to Iran's human rights violations.

Purpose in adversity. Adversity was described as a lifelong experience or as a single event. One of the individuals in Soheila's portrait indicated that being sexually harassed on the streets was routine for girls and women: "*matalak beshnavi veshkoonet begiran hezare o yek joor* (you hear them teasing, they pinch you, a thousand and one

ways [to abuse]." She said it is impossible to ignore if a person possesses even "*ye zarre hassasiyat* (the slightest bit of sensitivity)." The incessant abuse becomes a part of one's identity and, in her case, formed the basis for her passion. She was impressed by people who follow a passion even though they do not have firsthand experience with the oppression, people such as one man in Dariush's portrait. Although he did not have the felt experience of being a woman, he was sensitive to how gender roles defined the relationship between his parents. His father was abusive, and Dariush said it was clear he gave himself permission to act that way because of the male privilege bestowed to him by society. Listening carefully to the patterns of abuse opened his eyes: he realized he lived in a society in which women's rights were neither "recognized" nor "respected." "*na tanha hooghooghe to vali estedadat*. (not only your rights, but your talents [are not respected or recognized]." Thus, women are "basically dismissed." The adversity experienced by both these individuals inspired them to seek opportunities to learn more about women's rights. It was only a matter of time before they would discover the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Other individuals recalled moments of adversity. The feeling of connection to an activist's arrest represents one example. A woman in Paria's portrait felt moved when a particular Campaign activist was captured. Although she had heard of other activists being imprisoned, she always felt distanced from them. This particular activist seemed so much like her and for the first time, "something hit me, something told me, it's your turn, it's your time to do something." The connection propelled her to action.

Two individuals that comprised Soheila's portrait discussed how their divorces opened their eyes to gender injustices. However, it impacted them in different ways. One woman's most difficult obstacle was obtaining legal permission. The divorce process took over a year. "*nemidoonestam ke haghe talagh nistesh baraye khanoom* (I did not know women had no right to initiate a divorce)." Her shock spurred reflection. She thought: I live and attend university in a big city; how could it be that I have never heard of this problem? "*labod khaylia hastan ke nemidoonan injoori barashoon sakht mishe* (There are probably many others who do not know [divorce] will be this hard for them.)" She started to read about the discriminatory laws and became determined to do what she could do to change them. The other woman who divorced had a simple legal proceeding that took "just five minutes," but it was the resultant "social stigma" that haunted her. "*tooye gooroohe doostam ye ho cheghadr dar raftara ba man avaz shod* (Suddenly my group of friends started to treat me differently." She could not believe it at first, especially as someone who always felt equal to her male counterparts. She knew she had to fight for other women in similar situations. These participants' shocking realizations of women's place in society pushed them to learn more and become involved.

Not all participants gleaned meaning from adversity. One woman in Soheila's portrait became involved with the Campaign in Iran. She initially felt energized and full of hope: "*enghadr hayejanzade shode boodam.* (I was really excited.)" However, as conditions became more dangerous, she endured beatings in the streets, meetings broken up by police, and the pain of watching her friends captured. When two individuals from the Campaign were arrested at the subway station for collecting signatures, she was very

affected. Like her, they were college students, full of dreams, but now facing a prison sentence for talking to people about gender. "*bekham active tooye har ja emza jam konam mitarsidam* (I became too scared to collect signatures anywhere)." When she moved to California., she tried to remain active. However, she soon became consumed with concerns of day-to-day living in the U.S, such as securing funds as an international student. "*enghadr dargire dargirayiye inja shodam khob man dargire zendegiye shakhseeye khodam shodam.* (I became so occupied with the issues of here, I had to take care of my personal life.)." She still follows the news, but no longer participates. I wonder if the trauma she experienced with her involvement in Iran keeps her away from activism.

Development of gender consciousness. Gender awareness was a journey that transformed participants on a personal level. Some individuals indicated being aware of gender their entire lives, but described pivotal moments that transformed their gender consciousness. One participant said she "absolutely, always" was aware of gender, but only considered herself a feminist after she emigrated to the U.S. In Iran, she adapted to expect and "maneuver around" the pervasive sexism. You learn to "ignore it because it's so much." Prior to leaving, she had "such a high expectation of America" in terms of gender equality. However, upon arrival, she discovered a new form of sexism: the "concept of stupid girl." When she sat down with her American boyfriend and his friends, "they would laugh at girls, they would dismiss them." Paria was shocked.

> At first I would just sit quietly and not say anything but then I would go home
> and I would think about it I'm like I can't believe they would!... What the hell are

you talking about? I'm getting all As, I'm kicking your ass in class and then you

go around and talk to your friends about how girls are stupid and dumb?

She believed women were constantly minimized or viewed as the subject of ridicule (e.g.

throwing like a girl). Additionally, she noticed Americans tended to react poorly to

feminism. She began to read about it and discovered she liked the concepts. "I don't think

feminism is bad; in fact, I think I'm a feminist…so officially calling myself a feminist

happened here."

Another individual was aware of gender her entire life, but emphasized a

milestone in her journey. As a teenager in Iran, she was not allowed to pursue her father's

professional path—accounting--because "*pesara bayad payeshoon ra jaye bubbashoon*

bezaran, na dokhtara. (boys should follow in their father's footsteps, not girls.)" She

agreed to pursue medicine, at least temporarily. When her parents urged her to marry and

move to America, she obliged, and immediately enrolled in accounting, economics—the

path she wanted. In a long-distance conversation with her father, he asked her what

classes she was taking, and she told him. He replied "*to fekr kardi rafti oon vare donya*

har kari ke khodet mikhai mitooni bokoni? (Do you think because you have gone to the

other side of the world you can do as you please?" She shot back, "*na oon moghe ke*

shoharam dadeen, sene hijda salegi behem goftin har kari delam mikhad mitoonam

bokonam (No, in that moment that you made me get married, at eighteen years old, you

told me that I can do whatever I want.)" The decision to choose her own path seemed to

mark a significant moment in her empowerment.

The male participants described developing gender consciousness through activism. One man in Dariush's portrait studied the Iranian women's rights movement for his thesis. He immersed himself and is now one of the southern California chapter's most prominent members. Through his involvement, he started to understand the female experience and now, he is all too aware of the patriarchal behavior around him: "I've never felt discrimination, but through my work in the Campaign and through reading and talking to other feminists who are not necessarily Iranian, you realize discrimination is everywhere and it takes multiple forms." Another male participant sought out ways to expand his gender consciousness, such as by joining online groups that discuss gender issues. "*man faghat miraftam oonja faghat mikhoondam ke bebinam moshkelati chie challengeye ke daran bekhaterinke zanaan chie bekhaterinke man hichvaght oona ro tajrobe nakhayad kard moshgelayi ke bekhatere jensiateshoon daran*. (I went [to the online group] just to read and see the problems, the challenges that they have because they are women, because I never experienced the problems that they have because of their gender.)" He made a conscious decision to develop his gender awareness.

The men were not the only individuals whose gender consciousness was influenced by their activism. One participant described the awareness she gained through the Campaign as life changing.

> Every day I would wake up, hearing gender, gender, gender, and then all the issues around it, whether it was about here, whether it was about Iran, all of a sudden this concept of gender became more important than before for me. And then, I asked myself, why is it so problematic to be a woman?

She referred to this period of questioning as a "transformation." She had always felt

something was "out of place" in her life, but it took the Campaign to "verbalize the

issue." She decided she had to act. "After seeing, after feeling, after going through that, I

really thought I don't want to be quiet about it." Paria summed up her process as "really

knowing about the issue, getting a degree of consciousness, and then deciding to do

something about it."

Participants indicated that this awareness made life more difficult in some ways.

One individual said it meant she could not "ignore" the injustices around her. Others

described how gender became so central in their lives that they could not watch movies

or experience art (or even life) without considering it. "*khod be khod har kari ke adam*

mikone hamesh too zehne adame ke masalan een bara man fargh mizare ya nemizare?

(Little by little, everything a person does, it's always in your mind: does this make a

[gender] distinction or not?)" She questions her behaviors constantly. "*ya khube ya bade,*

sakhtar mishe zendegi. (For better or worse, life becomes harder.)" However, for both of

these participants, developing their gender awareness and enhancing others' was a

lifelong journey. The pain fueled a desire to spread the message.

Self-awareness. The participants could all clearly describe their paths and were

cognizant about what had led them to activism. Perhaps this pattern is because of the

individual activists: something in their personalities that draws them to activism

inherently makes them more self-aware. One of the women whose interview was

integrated to create Paria impressed me with her dedication to understanding herself. She

was accustomed to undertaking short-term projects, preferring not to stay in one place too long, but the Campaign changed all that. She treasured the self-reflection:

> Besides the social work, what's happening to me as a person, as an Iranian woman, is so valuable. And that experience was basically, it was kind of like Campaign handed me a mirror to look at myself and start seeing the patriarchal behaviors that I would follow without even knowing. And that mirror gave me a lot of self-consciousness about equality and how I can start changing myself before changing the world.

She started to ask herself what patriarchal behaviors she was promoting. The "mirror" led to Paria breaking her own pattern and making a commitment. "After a few months of working with the Campaign, I knew that I'm not going to leave this place." She may add to her path, or modify it, but she knew she had found the place for her.

Another individual within Paria's portrait discussed the dangers of not having self-awareness. She said problems arise when people "*khodeshoon ra faghadr boonvane yek activist mishnasan* (only see themselves as an activist)." The point when an individual recognizes themselves as an activist only, both to self and others, they are in a "box" and lose track of other aspects of life. "You start taking things personally. Then, you're not as objective when you're listening to comments and open to other ways of going about doing something." The open-mindedness necessary for an activist is gone. Thus, an essential part of activists' self-awareness is recognizing one's own relationship to their involvements, not unlike researchers who position themselves.

Although these women were particularly striking in their level of self-awareness, all participants had clearly spent time reflecting on their journeys. A potential reason is that this particular group has had a significant number of researchers study them. In the last year, 4 or 5 researchers have interviewed them about the Campaign and their experiences. I believe this has helped them reflect on their activities and lives, and also on what they want to disclose. One participant expressed hesitation to be interviewed initially, saying she had "revealed too much" in a previous interview and "*pashimoo shodam*. (I regretted it.)" After we built rapport in our interview, she explained that her (and possibly others') initial reticence toward me is that previous researchers "wore us out." Not all participants experienced previous researchers that way. One commented on how much she enjoyed being interviewed because it was an opportunity to be more self-aware. After I remarked on the depth of one of her answers, she took pride in saying she was getting "good at this."

Individuals discussed the importance of fostering self-awareness in others. One man in Dariush's portrait highlighted the fact that both women and men must be aware of their contributions to gender inequality. Patriarchal behaviors are "promoted as often by women as by men." He stressed the importance of understanding the self. A woman in Paria's portrait attempts to spur audience's self-reflection when she gives speeches about Iran. She discusses the contradictions women experience in Iran, such as the fact that they are highly educated but their lives are worth half of men's. She subsequently points out that contradictions exist in American society, too. "Maybe you are better off in America if you're a woman on average, but at the same time, don't forget about domestic violence

in the U.S., the wage gap." Women politicians "can run for presidency, but one of the main issues that is talked about on the news is what they wear and if they look womanly enough or feminine enough." Perhaps these contradictions do not seem as "drastic" to her American audience because they are "used to them." However, Paria aims to make these contradictions conscious in her audience, to make them more self-aware.

Impact of Green Movement. Due to the Green Movement and subsequent human rights violations, the participants are mostly in a state of uncertainty. The Campaign activists tirelessly worked around the clock to support the Green Movement. The turn of events put the southern California chapter in a state of "emergency;" priorities suddenly shifted. They started attending demonstrations and meetings two or three times a week. Activity for the Campaign initially came "completely to a halt." Due to the twelve hour time difference between Iran and California, as well as the constant news, "*az shab ta sob paye computer bood* (from morning until night we were on the computer.)"

An individual in Dariush's portrait explained that all his Campaign friends in Iran participated in the street protests. The fate of his friends was similar to what other protestors faced: "*hadaghaleshoon een bood ke kotak khorde boodan* (the least that had happened to them was they were beaten.)" Some were severely beaten and imprisoned. For the southern California activists, "*asaba daghoon bood. khayli az bache haye inja khayli tense boodan.* (Nerves were shattered. Many of us were very tense.)" One participant disclosed that she watched her relationship, and those of others in the group, dissolve last year. She believes that the human rights violations produced such a state of

"discouragement and disbelief" that the effect "*faghat tooye zendegiye activisteshoon*

naboode (was not only in their activist lives.)" As another participant explained, as

activists, "sometimes you work and work and don't see any result. I don't know what

happens, suddenly you're not as passionate." Iran's atrocious treatment of dissidents

incited a profound personal impact on the Campaign activists, who were all "emotionally

involved" in the Green Movement.

With Iran's political climate of executions and atrocious human rights violations,

the issue of equal rights has taken a backburner for activists inside and outside Iran. One

activist echoed this sentiment: she refuses to speak publicly about women's rights. "I'm

not comfortable right now to go outside and talk about women's issues because there are

executions. There are stonings. I would prefer to talk about those things." The participant

chose to discuss the "ongoing traumas as far as human violations" rather than "equality."

She said the gender equality conversation should be "adjusted so it becomes tangible

again."

In the wake of the human rights crisis, some participants find gender equality

more relevant than other. A participant warned that women's rights should not be

forgotten in this critical time. She cites a lesson from the Islamic Revolution of 1979: "we

were fighting for the rights. Everybody told women shut up, it's not the time." However,

women's rights have declined in many ways since then. She longs for the day that

pursuing equal rights is considered as important as other forms of activism. She believes

women in the Campaign should demand that people talk about equality. Her statement

resembled the opinion of one of the men in Dariush's portrait, who views this time period

as critical for Iranian women. The Iranian government is limiting women's rights in a "systematic" way, such as encouraging women to stay in the home. If women do not make demands to oppose these measures, he says, "fortunately or unfortunately they won't get the right." One participant is saddened by the executions and tortures, but still feels her main responsibility is to the women's rights movement "because we are not that many. If we get engaged in other projects, *dige een chi mishe (*what happens to this)? So I feel responsible to keep that alive myself, to work within woman's era." Thus, the Green Movement solidified some people's passion for achieving equality.

All participants agreed that the future of Iran is uncertain. Even the fiercely determined woman in Soheila's portrait, whose goal of building a feminist school in Iran was crystal clear, admitted that her dreams depended on the situation in Iran.

For these participants, their activism began by overcoming adversity. This adversity represents a period of quiet darkness that allows time for self-reflection. Once emerged from that darkness, there is a shift in consciousness and eagerness to learn more. Information is devoured to satisfy this insatiable hunger for knowledge, but the quest only begins there. This is a journey that will last a lifetime. The pursuit of knowledge is eventually accompanied by action. The action begins through connecting with others. Purpose and meaning are gleaned through action, prompting further insight and self-exploration. Activists try to know themselves. Thus, activism is a dynamic, interactive process that transforms. It can often be thankless and discouraging, but there are moments when it all seems worth it. The people one interacts with make it worth it. The

road of activism is bumpy and needs ego strength to ride. Humility and openness are essential to navigate this path.

The next chapter positions this study within relevant research and highlights its implications. I summarize the findings, draw attention to memorable scenes, and delineate unexpected outcomes. I explain how the research questions were answered by this study. I highlight implications, limitations, and future research directions. I conclude with the unique contribution of my study.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter highlights the implications of this study. I summarize the findings and relate them to the literature. I describe memorable scenes and unexpected outcomes. I address the research questions. I discuss the implications and limitations of my project

and suggest directions for future research. I conclude with my study's strengths and unique contribution.

By exploring Campaign documents and art and interviewing activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign, this study described both individuals as well as the contexts of their activism. Composite portraits were created from eight people in the southern California chapter of the Campaign. The portraits are holistic, engaging narratives intended to capture the empowerment of the participants as activists.

Summary of Findings

Themes that emerged from findings included purpose in adversity, development of gender consciousness, self-awareness, and impact of Green Movement. Findings were explored and related to the literature.

Purpose in adversity. Finding one's purpose in life can be a lifelong pursuit. Frankl (1984) claimed that people discovered their meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed; (2) by experiencing a value, and (3) by suffering. Findings of this study support these three reasons. One participant found her purpose through the deed of talking to other people about gender inequality. The majority of participants found their purpose through experiencing the value of gender inequality, such as a female participant noticing the strikingly small number of women students on her campus or a male participant witnessing the mistreatment of his mother. Some of them had also found their purpose through suffering. The participants who experienced divorce gleaned meaning from the social stigma and legal challenges they faced.

Development of gender consciousness. Angelique and Culley (2003) reviewed 89 community psychology articles with feminist content to identify themes of gender consciousness. The articles addressed gender-stratified power imbalances, link between individuals and environments, contextual analyses of gender, and focus on competencies. Two of these themes were prominent in this study: person-environment link and emphasis on competencies. Participants mentioned environment as crucial in their gender consciousness, and their stories confirmed this result. Several individuals were transformed by a complete change in environment, i.e. moving to the United States, or a smaller change, such as becoming an activist. Angelique and Cully's (2003) findings on competencies demonstrated that resiliency and empowerment produce positive outcomes. The participants' resiliency was impressive. They had endured a great deal of disappointment, setbacks, and, in some cases, pain, and yet, they remained active.

One striking findings was participants' different reactions to feminism. Reid and Purcell (2004) defined a feminist as a person who (a) feels interdependent and connected to other women, (b) recognizes women's subordinate position to men in society, (c) attributes unequal power dynamics to illegitimate causes such as institutionalized sexism, and (d) oriented toward collective efforts to improve women's place in society. By this definition, all the participants would be considered feminists. However, one individual insisted that she was not because she "did not hate men." Her equating of feminism with hate or exclusivity is not uncommon within the Campaign, just as in the larger society. Reid and Purcell's (2004) study demonstrated that women with greater exposure to feminist ideologies had stronger feminist identities than those who did not. I am sure that

the participant who had a negative reaction to feminism had spoken at length with others in the Campaign who are proud feminists. However, this exposure did not make her consider herself a feminist. By contrast, another participant instantly became a feminist when she began reading about what it actually was.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness emerged as a theme related to empowerment. This finding can provide insight on how the participants sustained their activism throughout the years and is consistent with previous research indicating that self-awareness is related to more prosocial and helping behavior (Abbate, Isgrò, Wicklund, & Boca, 2006; Yang, & Chang, 2010). Self-awareness also emerged as important in maintaining good connections with activists. The participants were able to evaluate their own reactions to other people, rather than immediately react. As participants indicated, the hostile conflict that occurred between Campaign members abroad was possibly due to lack of self-awareness. Additionally, the willingness to engage in the process of self-reflection contributed to self-awareness. The participant who struck me as the most self-aware was also memorable in her eagerness to understand herself.

Impact of Green Movement. Mir-Hossein Mousavi was a popular presidential candidate in 2009. In Iran, candidates are represented by various colors, and his was green. After only a few hours of open polls, the Iranian government announced that Ahmadinejad won the elections. The results were considered highly suspicious, and Iranians took to the streets en masse in protest (Nasrabadi, 2011). They wore green ribbons, carried green banners, and painted their faces green to show support for their favored candidate. Thus, they were labeled the Green Movement. Women were central to

the protests, and Campaign activists widely participated (Kian-Thiébaut, 2010; Nasrabadi, 2011). Eventually, the tone of the dissidence became less about Mousavi and more about a regime change, but the name Green Movement remained. The subsequent protests lasted over a year, until the brutal crackdown forced people to find alternative ways to gain their rights.

As I witnessed at the Iranian Studies Foundation Conference in July 2010, the relationship between equal rights activists and the Green Movement is highly controversial. The range in participants' responses reflected this complicated struggle. Some felt that at this time, the need to rectify Iran's human rights crisis surpassed equal rights. According to this perspective, until Iran becomes a democracy, efforts to change laws and gather signatures will not bear fruit. Kian-Thiébaut (2010) asserts that many Iranian women have realized democracy and equality are intertwined. That may be true, but does that imply democracy will automatically grant women's rights?

The participants did not all think democracy by itself would produce equal rights. Several individuals still viewed gender awareness as essential, especially for women in Iran. They argued it is a crucial time for women to demand their rights, especially considering the way their rights continue to be undermined (Kashani-Sabet, 2011). Nasrabadi (2011) interviewed three veteran Campaign activists in Tehran. Like the participants, the activists supported the Green Movement's sentiment that the election results should not be accepted and participated whole-heartedly in the protests. However, as the Green Movement swept the nation, they found that the issue of equal rights was being subsumed. The three women have resumed their activities for the Campaign with

positive results. Their statements echo participants' declarations of renewed passion and responsibility to equal rights.

The Green Movement had a profound impact on nearly every Iranian American I knew, inspiring those who previously had no political involvement and were even apathetic. This effect was exhibited in the multitude of global protests supporting the Green Movement, captured on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The southern California chapter was no different. They constantly waited for news. They worked around the clock. Some people experienced burnout, and others lost interest. I could not blame the individuals that did not sustain interest, especially those who feared for their loved ones' lives. However, I was energized by the participants who remained hopeful and tirelessly fought.

Purpose in adversity, development of gender consciousness, self-awareness, and impact of Green Movement emerged as themes of this study. Their integration with the literature demonstrates that these activists both confirm to and deviate from expectations.

Memorable scenes. In addition to themes, certain images stand out and captivate my memory. I highlight memorable scenes of this study.

I have no desire to be equal to men. One participant described a conversation with a woman from Iran. The woman scoffed when she heard of the One Million Signatures Campaign. She had no interest in being equal to men: she did not want the responsibility and pressure of being an Iranian man, a provider. She thought it was better if the genders knew their place. She criticized the participant's lifestyle: why did she have to work? She had heard American women lead lives of luxury, but they seemed to work

harder and live with less extravagance than she did! Her comment illustrates the range of interest in gender equality. People can care so much about it that it becomes part of their identities. Individuals on the other extreme end are opposed to it and may fight it, even if they are the more oppressed group in society. The people who ended up signing the petition were probably in the middle of these two extremes.

Do not judge a book by its cover. It is impossible to tell who is extreme solely based on their appearance. One participant described approaching two women on a subway in Iran. One was young and fashionable, and the other was an older woman who wore the traditional *chador*—head to toe covering. She started to talk to the younger woman, who said she had no use for such a petition. The older woman spoke up, and said she would sign it. She had suffered a great deal due to the unequal laws. Another man in Iran, when hearing about the Campaign, asked his whole family to sign. He emphasized to his daughters that the Campaign's message of gender equality was important. My stereotypes were challenged.

An explosive punch. The concept that things were not what they initially appeared to be was evident in my interaction with one participant. When I first met this individual, I was struck by his easygoing manner, sense of humor, and a constant twinkle in his eye. He always looked like he was on the verge of laughing. Perhaps that is why I was shocked to hear a story he told me during member checking. We discussed how his father's abusive behavior catalyzed his journey of gender awareness, which was already noted in the portrait. I asked him how his relationship with his parents was now. He said they had visited him recently and this time, when he observed his father's patriarchal

behavior, he could not take it. He punched a hole in the wall. Imagining this kind and even-tempered man punching anything was difficult. The image stuck in my mind because it made me realize everyone has a breaking point. We can experience or witness oppression for only for so long before we act. The action preferably is not done in anger or haste. However, the stresses of life in Iran and the way women are treated make it likelier to provoke strong emotional reactions.

   Endless hope. Despite obstacles, most of the participants remained positive and could not get away from activism. This phenomenon was especially pronounced in one woman. She was ready to dedicate her life to the cause of gender equality, and she selected a graduate program with that purpose in mind. She told me about her dream of building a feminist school in Iran and described the different programs that would be available. She asked me if I would be interested in working there, and I eagerly agreed. The picture she painted of her dream gave me inspiration, and I can only imagine how many people she has moved. With people like her and the other activists I interviewed, there is hope for Iran.

   These scenes remain etched in my memory and I continue to reflect on them. The unexpected outcomes of my project also loom in my mind.

   Unexpected outcomes. Several unexpected results emerged. I highlight the surprising findings of this study, including two that changed the outcome.

   The importance of men. Discovering the role of men was an outcome that changed the project. I was introduced to the importance of men to the women's rights movement at the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation conference, prior to collecting

data. I met a dynamic individual who was doing research on gender. He made a speech about what men can do in the Campaign. Someone in the audience challenged him and asked why he had to join the Campaign. Why did men not start their own movement, rather than riding the coattails of one started mostly by women? He smiled sincerely and replied that they were working on that. His involvement was reflective of the increasing number of men in the Campaign. Only one individual that signed the original petition of the One Million Signatures Campaign was male. However, men quickly became involved and were in turn punished for their activism. One participant described two men in college who were arrested for gathering signatures on an Iranian subway. Being involved in the Campaign is considered a bad enough crime, but being a man involved in the Campaign is even worse. These men take incredible risks to make society equal. I found my stereotypes of Iranian men, and Muslim men, shattered, and I felt humbled.

Gurin (1985) demonstrated that when American women became more gender conscious in the 1970s, men followed suit. They increasingly recognized their privilege as males and noticed unequal power dynamics in society, although not at the same rate as women. The author suggests that the "parallelism" of men and women's lives, as well as continuing interdependence of women and men, imply that gender relations will continue to change. This phenomenon explains what happened in Iran with the Campaign. Men were not originally involved, but many quickly learned and took action. However, Gurin's (1985) findings do not explain the southern California chapter.

The southern California chapter of the Campaign was activated by three individuals. Two of the three were men. Thus, men did not take the lead from women to

raise gender consciousness, unlike Gurin's (1985) study and the Campaign in Iran. I wanted to know more about this unexpected dynamic. Additionally, men seemed like such an important voice in the group that I did not feel comfortable omitting their voices. I had the privilege to interview one founder and another man who had become committed to the Campaign a year later. They taught me and others a great deal.

Impact of previous researcher. The research of a graduate student was another event that changed the process of research. She was conducting a study on the Campaign and had been in California months before I was. She was the third or fourth in a line of researchers who had explored the southern California chapter of the Campaign. She did not mention informed consent to participants, conducted long interviews, and constantly tape recorded without permission. I was met with reticence by a few participants, and finally one explained it was because of the previous researcher. She had worn them out. I learned this early in the project, and I felt I had to proceed with caution. Due to this issue and confidentiality concerns, I decided not to conduct three interviews with each person. The participants seemed to appreciate this change.

By the time I started member checking, the participants had time to recover from their series of interviews. Most of them were open and detailed in their reactions to the portraits, and several conversations lasted over an hour. The experience of the previous researcher made me reflect on what kind of researcher I wanted to be. I began to view the process as more than member checking: it was a collaborative endeavor. Two of the three portraits were transformed from this collaboration.

Toxicity of connections with women. Prior to embarking on this project, I was privy to the possibility of connections with women being harmful rather than helpful in empowerment. However, I did not realize how toxic these connections can be, and how much they can hinder activists' efforts. My initial contact was at the IWSF conference. I expected people to challenge each other's speeches and viewpoints, but at times they attacked them personally. There seemed to be hostility between certain people. This study taught me that these divisions run deep. Several participants referred to a rift between prominent activists of the Campaign in Iran. Additionally, a battle of words erupted online regarding Iranian men. It started when one well-known activist said all men are the same and are chauvinists deep down. The article provoked heated responses. The southern California chapter, with such amazing men, was profoundly impacted. Participants described feeling disillusioned, disappointed, and betrayed by these conflicts. However, they persevered in their activism, and kept their connections healthy.

Role of trauma. I think the individuals who have stayed in the chapter are healthy people who work well with others. One reason it may be more difficult for activists in Iran to maintain healthy connections and self is the constant trauma they face because of their activities. One woman that I interviewed was no longer an activist. She had faced beatings, arrests, and constant terror in Iran for her involvement, so I found her position understandable. The effects of trauma, such as terror and disconnection, may have lingered in this participant (Herman, 1997). People have different reactions to trauma, and I think it important to heal before engaging in activism. But what about the activists who continue, despite trauma after trauma? Perhaps they have not fully healed, in which

case, it may be inhibiting their activism. Aggressive behavior towards others could be one potential symptom. Another possibility is that they have not yet reached their breaking point. People have different capacities to process trauma, and it may take some longer to be affected.

The southern California experienced a collective trauma when the Green Movement emerged. They were glued to their computers and waited in agony for loved ones, friends, and colleagues protesting on the streets. For the first time in decades, it seemed like a change could happen in Iran. The subsequent crackdown was appalling and disappointing. The participants processed this event differently, but it seemed to affect all their personal lives in some way. Like the Campaign in Iran, they lost track of equal rights activities for a while. By the time I was in Los Angeles, they were starting to re-examine what they could do for the Campaign. I do not believe the trauma will ultimately hinder their activism.

Idealization of helping Middle Eastern women. Participants alluded to the stereotype of the helpless Middle Eastern woman being saved by Americans. One individual was particularly outspoken about the issue. She had attended events recognizing the Campaign, and felt annoyed by what she viewed as pity and condescension. She challenged my interview question about how others who heard about the Campaign could help. It is not always about helping them, she informed me. Sometimes it was about learning from them. After all, the Campaign activists were incredibly strong individuals. I altered my perspective and approach. Instead of focusing

on how Iranians could be helped, I decided to explore how Iranians and Americans could collaborate and what could we learn from each other.

The woman who scoffed at the idea of equality, the traditional-looking woman who bravely signed the petition without hesitation, the kind-hearted participant who punched a wall, and the woman who devoted her life to equal rights taught me valuable lessons. The unexpected outcomes of the role of men, previous researcher's presence, toxicity of connections, trauma, and idealization of helping Iranian women changed my project and outlook. Below, I describe how findings addressed the research questions. I conclude with limitations, future directions, and strengths of my project.

What do Campaign Activists' Stories Tell us About Empowerment?

The first research question was explored in the interviews. As individuals, participants each struck me as having the ability to engage others, but it was manifested differently. Some people won others to them with their confidence: it was visible even from afar. One of the women whose interview was integrated into Soheila was an excellent example of this. She had a swagger I had previously witnessed only with men in Iran. The men's confidence seemed to be granted to them by society, it emerged from being privileged in many ways. However, her strength seemed so embedded within her essence that I got the sense nothing could break her. Her power was embodied in her words and actions. She spoke her mind. Two women who were integrated into Paria were more reserved. Their power to engage was not visible right away. However, the more I talked to them, the more I realized they did not let people take advantage of them. They stood their ground, and because of that, they earned people's respect. Finally, some

participants were powerful in the way they interacted with people. This was the case with one of the men that I interviewed as Dariush. He had an uncanny ability to see the best in people and connect with them. Additionally, he exuded a hopefulness and optimism about human beings that I could feel after just a few minutes.

Portraitists begin by asking what is "good and healthy" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). The southern California branch of the Campaign was an ideal fit. Prior to starting my interviews, I knew that this group is the largest and longest-sustaining branch outside of Iran. However, I did not realize how healthy their communication and relationships were. Primarily I spoke with individuals who, four years after their branch started, still consider themselves somewhat active. Their commitment and success can offer insight into empowerment.

As the study progressed, I questioned whether my project was no longer about empowerment. However, I realized that the participants were discussing empowerment in a way that is actually closer to Freire's (1974) notion of engaging citizens. Partly, that is because of the Campaign's definition of activism or participation: Not all individuals who participate—e.g. gather signatures or perform other actions related to the Campaign--consider themselves to be activists. According to the present findings, activism and/or participation means applying one's unique talents and skills to fight for social justice. I started to reflect on what was common to people's stories, and the answer emerged from the original purpose of the One Million Signatures Campaign: engaging people. Each of the individuals I spoke with, who had retained passion all these years, had his or her own unique ability to engage people. This engagement is consistent with Freire's (1970)

notion of the transformative and empowering effect of dialogue. Rather than the internal focus, empowerment became about how one interacts with people to transform society.

Women's empowerment model. Findings enriched my initial framework of the women's empowerment process (see Figure 1). Catalytic events, environmental influences, intrapersonal transformation, sustaining factors, behavioral strategies, interpersonal metamorphosis, connections with other women, harm to women, and societal shifts were used to analyze the present data.

The categories of the empowerment model, such as catalytic events, are based on an overall view of empowerment. The men were purposefully selected as individuals who had demonstrated interpersonal metamorphosis, engaged in strategies to promote gender equality, and participated in societal shifts. Thus, they exhibited multiple elements of empowerment, and including their data seemed reasonable. The combined analysis can provide additional insight on the different ways empowerment is experienced by gender.

Catalytic events. Consistent with previous research, empowerment emerged from major life events, sometimes traumatic (Roster, 2007; Sheilds, 1995). One of the men in Dariush's portrait witnessed his father abusing his mother repeatedly and that stirred him to seek information on women's rights. The trauma could also be secondary, as with one of the individuals in Paria's portrait. She heard of a case in which a young woman was arrested. She felt a connection to the woman because they had similar careers, ages, and even physical appearances. That was the first time she felt a strong pull to take action. Two participants stated that their empowerment began with their divorces, supporting past literature (Roster, 2007; Sheilds, 1995).

Environmental influences. The only environmental factor that initiated empowerment for the participants was the introduction of an organization. Access to organizations as a vehicle of empowerment is supported by past research (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2003). In several cases, individuals had always been conscious of gender, but simply had not had the opportunity to participate in a movement. The birth of the Campaign in southern California marked the beginning of their involvement. One participant's journey began when a nongovernmental organization about women's rights emerged in Iran for brief period of time due to the presidency of Khatami. She experienced Darsey's (1991) more collective definition of a catalytic event, i.e. moments in a movement that provide the appropriate conditions for discussion.

The present study offers perspective about the cultural components of empowerment. Two participants had been involved in the Campaign in Iran. They described empowerment being different based on where they were. In Iran, they said the act of gathering signatures was empowering, but in the U.S., they found it pointless and even harmful. Asking an Iranian for a signature meant generating a discussion, shifting someone's perspective. In the U.S., however, one participant mentioned that collecting signatures contributed to the stereotype of the poor, weak Middle Eastern woman. The development of gender consciousness seemed to transcend location of activism. Most participants described a process of gender consciousness and indicated wanting to foster that process in others. Thus, gender consciousness may be a universal component of empowerment.

Intrapersonal transformation. The intrapersonal transformation of participants involved an individual and a collective component. Past research has focused on the changes to individual's sense of self, such as confidence, a renewed sense of self, and development of voice (Gibson, 1995; Jewell, 2007; Kim et al., 2007; O'Leary & Bhaju, 2006; Parker, 2003; Roster, 2007; Sheilds, 1995). The major intrapersonal shifts described by participants were development of knowledge, enhanced self-awareness and the development of a gender lens for viewing the world. Most participants emphasized education as a significant part of their transformation. Individuals described becoming more aware of themselves and their biases. One woman even remarked that she knew immediately she would stay in women's rights for a long time because of the journey of self-awareness. The development of self-awareness in empowerment is supported by Jewell's (2007) study. The development of a gender lens was not necessarily viewed as positive; in fact, one participant insisted it made life harder. She could not listen to music or watch movies without thinking of how genders were portrayed. Her experiences support Morell's (2003) findings that for women to be empowered, they must recognize their limitations. The collective component of intrapersonal transformation was a striking finding not found in previous research. Gibson's (1995) results indicate empowerment involves satisfaction, but the participants were anything but satisfied. They saw so much to be done in the world around them and were determined to do their part. The more they learned, the greater responsibility they felt to help others.

Sustaining factors and behavioral strategies. Empowerment was sustained by personal factors and behavioral strategies. Consistent with past research, beliefs,

determination, and a sense of responsibility modulated empowerment (Gibson, 1995; Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; Mahalingam & Reid, 2007). One woman in Paria's portrait embodied passion and it was clear that equality was a lifelong pursuit for her. The exception was another woman in Paria's portrait who no longer pursued women's empowerment issues although she still cared. Her involvement in Iran and the subsequent police brutality had frightened her. I believe the trauma associated with these events caused her to avoid similar efforts. The strategies used by participants were specific to the Campaign, such as generating discussion and gathering signatures. They also utilized strategies that are not safe to do in Iran, such as organizing public events to talk about gender.

Outcomes. The outcomes in my model were interpersonal metamorphosis, connections with other women, harm to women, and societal shifts. Participants began to view their relationships differently. One woman described suddenly becoming angry one day as her American guy friends commented on the stupidity of women. She could no longer keep quiet. Participants described expanding networks with women as a beneficial outcome, consistent with past research (Hall, 1992; Hur, 2006). A major reason the southern California chapter had sustained itself so long was the relationships between its group members. They maintained open and healthy communication and learned a great deal from each other. In addition to describing connections with other women, many participants remarked on their positive connections with empowered men. They were clearly enriched and even transformed by these cross-gender interactions.

The negative impact of connections with women emerged from the interviews. Participants felt disempowered, betrayed, and disillusioned when a conflict arose between prominent members of the Campaign. The effects were toxic on some participants, although none of them turned away from the cause of gender equality. Thus, connections with other women can foster empowerment only if they are healthy connections, providing mixed support for the contagious nature of empowerment (Dufour & Giraud, 2007; Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Rostami-Povey, 2001; 2003; Roster, 2007). Harm to women, other than the emotions related to the conflict, did not emerge as a major theme. Understanding the societal shifts created by the activists is beyond the scope of the study, but several reported the Iranian American community has become more open about gender since they started.

How do Individuals Feel Connected to the Campaign?

Regarding the second research question, participants felt somewhat connected to the One Million Signatures Campaign. The southern California chapter did not have a specific office, as I initially thought. Several participants remarked that the most important work of the Campaign was done in Iran. Iranian activists were well-trained and much better able to mobilize resources and develop strategies. However, they were also limited by working under increasing government pressure. The southern California chapter was able to publicize issues much more freely. The contact this group had with activists abroad was mostly limited to Iran. When it was not dangerous, they communicated. They also tried their best to keep abreast of the Iranian equal rights movement. However, they admitted that it was impossible to know the reality from

outside the country especially considering filters and wiretapping. Perhaps that is why several sought to educate Iranian American and American communities. A few, such as one of the women integrated as Soheila, viewed their purpose as fighting for equality in Iran rather than the U.S. However, even she admitted to knowing little about what occurs on the ground in Iran.

The issue of feeling connected to the Campaign or not, being part or not, is more complicated than I originally thought. The One Million Signatures Campaign is, at its core, a grassroots effort that has become a coalition project. Its message has spread to other countries, and the branches that have emerged address the unique needs of their populations. The chapter emphasized in this study was developed in an area with a significant population of Iranians and Iranian Americans. Thus, their strategies of gathering signatures and publicizing at Iranian events made sense given their time and context. Ultimately, being part of the Campaign means being willing to be a voice for gender awareness and equality. It means taking a stand when the opportunity arises.

The Campaign and the Iranian equal rights movement operate similarly to a transnational feminist NGO. These types of NGOs are "dynamic networks of coalitions, with many interlocking lines of communication and cooperation (Ferree & Pudrovska, 2006, p. 251)." Several members became acquainted with the Campaign through online organizations and forums. However, unlike similar global efforts, connections among activists in the Iranian women's rights movement are severely hindered by the government, and activists within Iran have to be careful about what they publish.

Implications

I believe my study has a wide variety of implications. Activists have stated that raising awareness can help the Iranian equal rights movement (Movement Watch, 2010). The One Million Signatures Campaign has been widely publicized within feminist organizations and groups. However, I am targeting a different audience with my study. I intend to incorporate this work into a book to be used as a supplemental textbook in courses such as women's studies and ethnic studies. Additionally, it can help raise awareness about the Iranian equal rights movement and gender among non-academic audiences. The current uprisings in the Middle East have left many people outside the region wanting to know more. I often speak with individuals who are fascinated about the role of women. Stereotypes of submissive Middle-Eastern women have been challenged, but what will replace them? My study offers a first step in that direction by offering an in-depth perspective of inspirational people who have been there and have fought for change.

Several participants indicated that gender shapes the way they see the world. This phenomenon is similar to Tolleson-Rinehart's (1992) concept of gender consciousness:

> The recognition that one's relation to the political world is at least partly shaped by being female or male. This recognition is followed by identification with others in the "group" of one's sex, positive affect toward the group, and a feeling of interdependence with the group's fortunes. (p.32)

Participants described gender consciousness as a lifelong process with milestones along the way. The milestones, or what one participant referred to as triggers, may not make

that much difference in the moment. Over time, however, these triggers can pave the way for gender consciousness and awareness. I hope that my study can be a trigger on people's path to gender awareness, especially for individuals who are not conscious about it yet. People who feel well-aware of gender in their surroundings can still benefit because they will learn the stories and challenges of individuals in a highly influential gender equality movement.

I believe my study can contribute to the literature regarding critical consciousness, women's movements, and Iranian feminism. Freire (1974) describes how societies shift when individuals develop critical consciousness, i.e. an awareness of society and its inherent power structures. He believed one way this can occur is through dialogue, a horizontal relationship based on "empathy between the two poles who are engaged in a joint search (p. 40)." The effectiveness of dialogue cannot be overestimated. This study provides real-life accounts of dialogues that fostered critical consciousness. All participants were asked about how they experienced these dialogues, and these reflections are included in the portraits. Individuals in a social movement can gain insight on different ways the dialogue may be experienced.

McBride and Mazur (2006) contend that women's movements contain three major elements: a) identification of self with women as a group, b) inclusion of gendered language about women, and c) ideas expressed in terms of representing women as women in public life. Participants described the second and third elements frequently, using gendered language and discussing the status of Iranian and Iranian American women in the public sphere. The first element implies that men cannot be actors in women's

movements; indeed, McBride and Mazur (2006) are explicit that women's movement actors are only women. They argue that men who use women's movement discourse are considered allies rather than actors. The men I spoke with considered themselves a part of the Campaign and their status was not any less because they were males. One of them described feeling like an outsider at first and indicated that he would never truly know what patriarchy was like. Thus, the experience of relegated status (e.g. ally rather than actor) can be very salient, but I challenge McBride and Mazur's (2006) reinforcement of it. According to present findings, the solution to gender equality lies in both women and men so perhaps it is time to rethink women's movements.

This study has implications for the Iranian equal rights movement. Since the Islamic Republic took power in 1979, feminist discourse has centered on the women's veil, which has become the symbolic of the status of women (Najmabadi, 2005). One participant mentioned the compulsory veil, but most described a variety of other challenges that Iranian and Iranian American women face. Findings indicated that equal rights are comprised of so much more than the veil: the patriarchal language inherent in Farsi, gender awareness, and legal and social oppression. Additionally, this study can contribute to the One Million Signatures Campaign. There has recently been a falling out among some of the most well-known organizers of the Campaign, and some activists refuse to speak with or work with others. Several participants mentioned that people could help the Campaign by analyzing its teamwork practices. In the second portrait of Paria, I include a description of what may have gone wrong in the Iran Campaign without

revealing identities. As a counseling psychologist, I am in a unique position to offer this insight.

Findings are relevant to international policy. Global interventions often operate under the "rescue paradigm," (Tripp, 2006, p.302) in which one group attempts to save another. These interventions tend to trivialize grassroots efforts and assume local actors are weak. Tripp argues that the rescue paradigm promotes a stereotype of "us," the privileged versus the "other." Participants consistently confirmed the idea that collaboration is essential. One participant discussed her disappointment in reading the comment cards at a celebrity awards banquet honoring the Campaign. People commented about being grateful to live in the United States and sometimes even demonstrated pity for women living in Iran. She was not spreading awareness so that people could learn not to take their own rights for granted. Instead, she wanted to educate people, and collaborate. This experience made her realize she had to be careful about how she talked about the Campaign and consider her audience more carefully when she gave speeches. Her story serves as a lesson for me to make the same considerations. Participants' ideas can help policymakers to develop future interventions that empower rather than rescue. Interventions should focus more on supporting grassroots efforts.

This study can further knowledge within counseling psychology. Counseling psychology is associated with social justice and empowering marginalized groups (Gelso & Fretz, 2001). I aim to promote social justice with my dissertation and raise awareness about Iran and Iranian Americans. The findings can empower readers in their own journeys of gender awareness. Although diversity is a cornerstone of counseling

psychology, Middle-Eastern populations are often left out of the discussion. My dissertation can contribute to the literature about counseling immigrant families. Participants described the unique challenges faced by Iranian Americans, such as domestic violence, rigid gender roles, and despair over Iran's political climate.

My dissertation illuminates the psychology of women. In her discussion on the challenges faced by women, Miller (1986) highlights the need to constantly serve others at the expense of themselves. The women participants I spoke with seemed to have struck a healthy balance between devoting themselves to others and taking care of themselves. When they lost trust in themselves, in others, they were less able to take care of themselves. The portrait of Paria provides further insight into how these women were able to do this.

The portraiture approach has potential to be relevant to counseling psychology in a way that strictly quantitative approaches may not be. Quantitative studies tend to focus on a few variables at a time, but in the therapy room, the client is experienced as a whole person. Portraiture is also designed to capture the entire individual. Portraits could be comprised of several individuals experiencing a similar clinical issue, such as depression. The counselor and client could discuss the portrait in session and use it to clarify how the client's experience is similar or different.

This study has implications for me on a professional and personal level. I learned that no project is without risk. Prior to starting my dissertation, I wanted to believe that my study was not dangerous in any way or political. I have taken every precaution that I am trained to take, and I have thought a great deal about protecting participants. I have

realized that no project is without risk, especially considering the atrocious punishments given for activism in Iran.

My dissertation has helped me to clarify my roles. Throughout this project, I tried to integrate being an activist and scholar. I am aware of the controversy of combining activist and academic endeavors. Researchers are often expected to be dispassionate about what they are studying. However, I believe my passion only strengthened my desire to represent participants' experiences accurately and fully. Thus, being an activist enhanced the scholarly nature of my work. Hearing the participants discuss ways to help the Iranian equal rights movement gave me ideas on how to be more involved as an activist and scholar. I had previously signed a petition online, and I thought this made me part of the One Million Signatures Campaign. However, I realized that being part of the Campaign was not about a signature, it was about being an agent of change. My interviews helped clarify my responsibility to speak out against gender inequalities. I needed to first educate myself so that I could educate others. During this project, I was invited to be a guest lecturer at Doane College. Speaking to first-year college students from rural Nebraska about my experiences as an Iranian American woman was eye-opening. I applied the lessons participants had taught me to make a more informed presentation. My dissertation has made me a more effective teacher, scholar, and activist.

Something remarkable happened to me throughout the course of this project: I started to consider myself an Iranian American woman. In the sixth grade, the Iranian part of my identity went into hiding when a classmate referred to me as Saddam Hussain's little sister. I tried to be as American as possible after that. In my twenties, I

started to be proud of being Iranian. This project helped me integrate my two identities and recognize the strength and beauty of being bicultural. As someone familiar with both worlds, I am in a unique position to start discussions and build bridges between Iranians and Americans.

Upon arriving in California, I faced the ghost of a previous researcher, who had exhausted the participants with her incessant recording and long interviews. She and I were both graduate students, of the same age, and we even looked alike! People were initially hesitant to talk to me. I am grateful to have two years of experience conducting ethically sound qualitative research under the guidance of qualitative experts. Additionally, I have co-written about social justice research and reflected on my worldview a great deal. These experiences, combined with my counseling skills in building rapport, prepared me to break the barriers created by the other student.

I made it clear from the beginning that participants should share based on their comfort levels and they would see the final product prior to it being published. I was transparent about my intentions. I disclosed that I was a collaborative researcher. I learned how to overcome resistance, gain trust, and leave a better impression of researchers than before. The most striking example of a change was in one of the women incorporated into the character of Soheila. She did not even want to do the interview when I first arrived, even though she had said yes previously. She had revealed too much in recent interviews and was weary of giving another one. I said I understood, and told her she had every right as a participant to withdraw or refuse to answer any questions. She decided to do the interview and she ended up being so open. The last time I talked to

her for member checking, she told me to keep in touch and please visit California again. The doubts that plagued me along the way, the challenges I faced, and overcoming them caused me to grow more confident in my own skin.

Limitations, Future Research, and Strengths

It is important to note the limitations of the present research. Because the project is qualitative and relatively few participants were interviewed, the findings cannot be generalized to all Iranian American activists. However, particularity, not generality, is the hallmark of qualitative research (Greene & Caracelli, 1997). Additionally, the purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth look at individual activists, not represent them as a whole. The findings have transferability, i.e. applicability to another situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I attempted to provide readers with adequate context so that they can decide whether the study is relevant for them. Portraiture requires extensive interviews and immersion, which I was not able to do due to time constraints and consideration for participants. This deficit does not pose a serious threat to my findings. To compensate for this deficit, I engaged in additional conversations with participants about the portraits and integrated feedback, collected observational data, and utilized participants' artwork and documents in my analysis. I refined my interview protocol to gather most of the information I needed in one semi-structured interview.

Only two of eight people I interviewed had been active with the Campaign in Iran. Since participants indicated that the most important work of the Campaign is in Iran, the present project does not accurately represent its most important players. Interviewing activists in Iran would be dangerous. Additionally, my dissertation is an attempt to

highlight Iranian American activists in the Campaign rather than the entire Campaign. A final limitation concerns the cultural barriers between my participants, who mostly immigrated as adults, and me, who has been in the U.S. since early childhood. I could have misinterpreted or mistranslated something they said. This limitation is remedied by the fact that I included both languages in direct quotes and invited participants' feedback on the portraits. Member checking is considered the most important technique for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This study provides multiple directions for future research. There are still constructs that can be explored in further detail, such as empowerment, gender awareness, and the felt experience of being an activist. Qualitative research could further explore empowerment and gender awareness. A phenomenological study could highlight the felt experience of being an activist. Findings indicated that developing gender awareness is a lifelong process. A grounded theory study could shed light on this process and help to develop a theory of gender identity development. Unanswered questions remain related to the prevalence of sexist attitudes among Iranian Americans and the effectiveness of dialogue. Quantitative researchers can investigate the patriarchal attitudes participants observed in their Iranian American community. How prevalent are traditional gender attitudes among men and women in the Los Angeles area? Additionally, the effectiveness of the dialogues that spread the Campaign message can be evaluated quantitatively. Participants can be randomly assigned to an intervention designed to raise gender consciousness, such as discussion and art. A pretest and posttest on gender awareness can assess whether or not dialogues produce a significant

difference. Perhaps some people, or approaches, are more effective in helping people develop gender awareness.

Mixed methods studies can provide a more holistic understanding of activism and adherence to gender roles. An Exploratory Sequential Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) could first qualitatively explore how equal rights activists became conscious of gender. The results could be made into a survey on gender awareness that could be given to Iranian Americans to assess their level of awareness. Additionally, mixed methods researchers could administer a survey to assess the gender role attitudes of immigrant populations. Their surveys could help participants identify participants who are extremely traditional or not traditional at all. These individuals could then be interviewed in-depth about their experiences. This Explanatory Sequential Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) has the advantage of evaluating the general traditionality of the population but also understanding more about the people who are on the extreme ends.

The present project possesses significant strengths. The qualitative nature of the study provides an in-depth look at challenges that are faced by activists, potential strategies that may be used, and important lessons learned along the way. I wrote the portraits in a way to be empowering by discussing what made them successful activists and how they inspired me. I tried to engage the reader into my world, as if they were the ones being transformed and empowered by the interviews. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) propose a new way of thinking about generalizability. They describe how a portraitist "seeks to document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting

that the readers will feel identified" (p. 14). Thus, we portraitists hope to evoke universality; we hope that readers can identify with the portraits. I kept this goal in mind as I collected data, analyzed, and wrote the portraits.

Portraiture allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis. Researchers remain open to discoveries that can transform the project (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This trait of portraiture proved useful when I encountered barriers to data collection. Because I was allowed to adapt my methods to fit the population, my project produced richer data. My first goal of three interviews per participant was likely to contribute to their feelings of exhaustion and violation from the previous researcher. Composite portraits made it less likely participants would be identified. My goal evolved from having three interviews with one participant to developing portraits composed of three participants each. Participants felt heard and respected, and they ended up sharing a great deal with me despite initial resistance. Portraiture is designed to empower the audience, and I was intentional about this throughout my project. I used my clinical knowledge of empowerment to guide my writing. An additional strength of my project is the goodness of fit between design and topic. Portraiture—a method designed to empower and engage—is being used to study activists in a social movement.

The use of composite portraits was unexpected, but this approach had several advantages. I tried to create portraits that represented various voices within the One Million Signatures Campaign. There are passionate men in the movement, there are those that see their true purpose in their U.S. cities, and some who dream of returning to Iran one day. Composite portraits have the benefit of capturing a variety of perspectives and

obtaining the "cacophony of voices" described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997, p. 191). They allow for more creativity on the part of the researcher, as different perspectives and stories are synthesized into a whole human being. Participants gave positive feedback about the composite portraits. I think knowing the portrait was not going to be exclusively about them helped them feel safe.

As I learned through my project and the Iranian's Women's Studies Foundation conference, several graduate students and researchers are currently exploring the One Million Signatures Campaign. However, my project is unique for several reasons. Rather than exploring the movement as a whole, this study focuses on and analyzes the individuals. From my conversations with participants and at the Iranian women's conference, I learned other research projects are theoretical, such as analyzing feminisms. My dissertation is more applied: it offers a real look at real people, and contains practical strategies and challenges of activists. Thus, it has the ability to reach non-academic audiences. Additionally, my project was collaborative. Participants influenced the way I viewed the interview protocol, participant selection, and my project as a whole. Collaborating with participants on writing the portraits was especially powerful. I had a conversation with every participant about their portrait. They were given the opportunity to give feedback, provide further detail, and remove anything they did not want included. This willingness to discuss their portraits demonstrated I had earned their trust. These phone interactions were tape-recorded and incorporated into the portraits.

I brought my own strengths to my dissertation. As an Iranian American woman who grew up in the United States, I felt like both an insider and an outsider. With the

exception of one participant, all had left Iran as an adolescent or adult. I was "inside" because I speak the Farsi language fluently, and I am cognizant of the culture. My research project in Tehran, and living there for two months, gave me much more perspective on Iranian culture and way of life. I could understand and put into context what the participants described. When they discussed being treated completely differently because they were women (or, in the case of the men, watching women being treated differently), I felt that experience. My outsider experience as an American helped me to relate their thoughts to a wider context. I drew comparisons between the experiences of Iranians and Americans. My outsider perspective also made me open to the data. I was not entrenched in any particular political philosophy. Being an outsider helped me build rapport with participants. They seemed happy that I had been raised in the U.S. but still was so passionate about helping Iran. One participant even jokingly asked if I could teach her nieces and nephews.

The benefits of being an insider and outsider were manifest in participants' reactions to the thank you cards. I wrote them in Farsi. The last language workbook I completed in Farsi was at the elementary school level so my writing looks like a careful child's. Participants seemed genuinely moved by the cards. Their faces often lit up, and a few of the more expressive individuals even shrieked or squealed. They hugged me. They had had so many researchers interview them, but I think I was the first that thanked them, at least in that way. The participants' growing openness to me and my project solidified that I was making a unique contribution.

This study provides detailed portraits of activists in an equal rights movement. Themes for social movements emerged that could be investigated in further detail in future studies, such as the role of self-awareness for activists, the patterns of healthy collaboration, and the various approaches to empowering people. The traits of individual activists, such as self-awareness and humility, can be starting points for learning more about activists. The strategies people used to empower themselves, such as gathering meaning from adversity, finding purpose, and participating to fight against injustices, can provide tools for counseling interventions. People are hungry for awareness about the exploding Middle East and are particularly interested in information about the courageous activists. My dissertation breaks new ground by systematically analyzing activists to help provide this deeper understanding.

References

Abbate, C., Isgrò, A., Wicklund, R. A., & Boca, S. (2006). A field experiment on perspective-taking, helping, and self-awareness. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *28*(3), 283-287. doi:10.1207/s15324834basp2803_7

Abdollahi, P. & Mann, T. (2001). Eating disorder symptoms and body image concerns in Iran: Comparisons between Iranian women in Iran and in America. *International Journal of Eating Disorders, 30*, 259-268.

Afkhami, M. (2009). Women are driving Iran toward democracy. Retrieved from http://www.learningpartnership.org/en/advocacy/campaign/iran-women

Afshar, H. (2007). Muslim women and feminisms: Illustrations from the Iranian experience. *Social Compass, 54*(3), 419-434.

Agger, I., Ansari, F., Suresh, S., & Pulikuthiyil, G. (2008). Justice as a healing factor: Psycho-legal counseling for torture survivors in an Indian context. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, *14*(3), 315-333. doi:10.1080/10781910802229116

Akiba, D. (1998). Cultural variations in body esteem: How young adults in Iran and the United States view their own appearances. *Journal of Social Psychology, 138*(4), 539-540.

Amir-Ebrahmi, M. (2008). Transgression of narration: The lives of Iranian women in cyberspace. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies, 4*(3), 89-118.

Andrews, J., Felton, G., Wewers, M., Waller, J., & Tingen, M. (2007). The effect of a multi-component smoking cessation intervention in African American women

residing in public housing. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *30*(1), 45-60. doi:10.1002/nur.20174.

Angelique, H. L., & Culley, M. R. (2003). Feminism found: An examination of gender consciousness in community psychology. *Journal of Community Psychology, 31*(3), 189-209. doi:10.1002/jcop.10050

Badiee, M. (in progress). *Iranian women's empowerment in the form of short stories*. Unpublished manuscript.

Badiee, M. & Yakushko, O. (in progress)*. Women's empowerment process: A global overview*. Unpublished manuscript.

Barajas, M., & Ramirez, E. (2007). Beyond home-host dichotomies: A comparative examination of gender relations in a transnational Mexican community. *Sociological Perspectives, 50*, 367-392.

Barlow, R., & Akbarzadeh, S. (2008). Prospects for feminism in the Islamic republic of Iran. *Human Rights Quarterly, 30*(1), 21-40.

Becker, A. B., Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., & Klem, L. (2002). Predictors of perceived control among African American women in Detroit: Exploring empowerment as a multilevel construct. *Health Education & Behavior, 29*, 699-715.

Boehm, A., & Staples, L. H. (2002). The functions of the social worker in empowering: The voices of consumers and professionals. *Social Work, 47*, 449-460.

Chien, M. (2008). Coping strategies of Taiwanese women with a history of childhood sexual abuse. *Chinese Journal of Guidance and Counseling*, *23,* 81-116.

Chiu, M., Wei, G., & Lee, S. (2006). Personal tragedy or system failure: A qualitative analysis of narratives of caregivers of people with severe mental illness in Hong Kong and Taiwan. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, *52*(5), 413-423. doi:10.1177/0020764006065155

Corcoran, J., Mewse, A., & Babiker, G. (2007). The role of women's self-injury support-groups: A grounded theory. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 17*, 35-52.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J.W. & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative research. Theory into Practice, 39(3), 124-130.

Creswell, J. W. & Plano Clark, V. (2011). Designing and conducting mixed methods research

(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Darsey, J. (1991). From "Gay is Good" to the Scourge of AIDS: The Evolution of Gay Liberation Rhetoric, 1977-1990. *Communication Studies, 42*, 43-66.

Darvishpour, M. (2002). Immigrant women challenge the role of men: How the changing power relationship within Iranian families in Sweden intensifies family conflicts after immigration. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 33*(3), 271-296.

Dufour, P., & Giraud, I. (2007). Globalization and political change in the women's movement: The politics of scale and political empowerment in the world march of women. *Social Science Quarterly, 88*, 1152-1173.

Ebadi, S. (2006). *Iran awakening: From prison to Peace Prize: One woman's struggle at the crossroads of history*. London: Random House.

Esfandiari, H. (2009). *My prison, my home: One woman's story of captivity in Iran*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Feinsilver, D., Murphy, E., & Anderson, H. (2007). Women at a turning point: A transformational feast. *Collaborative therapy: Relationships and conversations that make a difference* (pp. 269-290). New York, NY US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Ferree, M. M. (2006). Preface. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. vii-ix). New York: New York University Press.

Ferree, M. M. & Pudrovska, T. (2006). Transnational feminist NGOs on the web: Networks and identities in the Global North and South. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. 247-272). New York: New York University Press.

Frankl, V. E. (1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster. (Original work

published 1946)

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Freire, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.

Gelso, C. & Fretz, B. (2001). *Counseling psychology* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson

Learning.

Gender equality for Iran (2010) *Call for solidarity.* Retrieved from

http://www.irangenderequality.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=articl

e&id=1:call-for-solidarity-freedom-and-gender-equality-in-iran&catid=1:8-

march-statements&Itemid=3

Gerami, S., & Lehnerer, M. (2001). Women's agency and household diplomacy:

Negotiating fundamentalism. *Gender & Society, 15*(4), 556-573.

Ghaffarian, S. (1998). The acculturation of iranian immigrants in the united states and the

implications for mental health. *Journal of Social Psychology, 138*(5), 645-654.

Ghorashi, H. (2008). Giving silence a chance: The importance of life stories for research

on refugees. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(1), 117-132.

Gibson, C. H. (1995). The process of empowerment in mothers of chronically ill children.

Journal of Advanced Nursing, 21, 1201-1210.

Gill, R., & Ganesh, S. (2007). Empowerment, constraint, and the entrepreneurial self: A

study of white women entrepreneurs. *Journal of Applied Communication

Research, 35*, 268-293.

Goodman, L., Glenn, C., Bohlig, A., Banyard, V., & Borges, A. (2009). Feminist

relational advocacy: Processes and outcomes from the perspective of low-income

women with depression. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *37*(6), 848-876.

doi:10.1177/0011000008326325.

Greany, K. (2008). Circles in the sand: Challenge and reinforcement of gender

    stereotypes in a literacy programme in Sudan. *Gender & Education, 20*, 51-61.

    doi:10.1080/09540250701763533

Greene, J. C., & Caracelli, V. J. (Eds.). (1997). *Advances in mixed-method evaluation:*

    The challenges and benefits of integrating diverse paradigms. (New Directions

    for Evaluation. No. 74). San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Greig, F. E., & Koopman, C. (2003). Multilevel analysis of women's empowerment and

    HIV prevention: Quantitative survey results from a preliminary study in

    Botswana. *AIDS and Behavior, 7*, 195-208.

Gurin, P. (1985). Women's gender consciousness. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 49*(2), 143-

    163. doi:10.1086/268911

Hajiabdolbaghi, M., Razani, N., Karami, N., Kheirandish, P., Mohraz, M., Rasoolinejad,

    M., et al. (2007). Insights from A survey of sexual behavior among A group of at-

    risk women in Tehran, Iran, 2006. *AIDS Education and Prevention, 19*(6), 519-

    530.

Hall, C. M. (1992). *Women and empowerment: Strategies for increasing autonomy.*

    Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere Publishing Corp.

Hanassab, S., & Tidwell, R. (1996). Sex roles and sexual attitudes of young Iranian

    women: Implications for cross-cultural counseling. *Social Behavior and*

    Personality, 24(2), 185-194.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State

    University of New York Press.

Herman, J. (1997). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books.

Hojat, M., Shapurian, R., Foroughi, D., Nayerahmadi, H., Farzaneh, M., Shafieyan, M., & Parsi, M. (2000). Gender differences in traditional attitudes toward marriage and the family: An empirical study of Iranian immigrants in the United States. *Journal of Family Issues, 21*(4), 419-434.

Holliday, B. (2009). The history and visions of African American psychology: Multiple pathways to place, space, and authority. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *15*(4), 317-337. doi:10.1037/a0016971.

Hoodfar, H. (2007). Women, religion and the Afghan education movement in Iran. *Journal of Development Studies, 43*, 265-293.

Hur, M. H. (2006). Empowerment in terms of theoretical perspectives: Exploring a typology of the process and components across disciplines. *Journal of Community Psychology, 34*, 523-540.

Hutchinson, S. L., & Wexler, B. (2007). Is 'raging' good for health?: Older women's participation in the raging grannies. *Health Care for Women International, 28*, 88-118.

Iranian Chamber Society. (2010). *Iran after the victory of 1979's Revolution*. Retrieved from http://www.iranchamber.com/history/islamic_revolution/revolution_and_iran_after1979_1.php

Iranian Women's Studies Foundation. (n.d.). *The Iranian Women's Studies statement of purpose*. Retrieved from http://www.iwsf.org/?page=about

Jewell, G. (2007). Contextual empowerment: The impact of health brigade involvement on the women of Miraflor, Nicaragua. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 18*, 49-56. doi:10.1177/1043659606294192

Johnson, T. R., Callister, L. C., Freeborn, D. S., Beckstrand, R. L., & Huender, K. (2007). Dutch women's perceptions of childbirth in the Netherlands. *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing, 32*, 170-177.

Kapadia, S. (1999). Self, women and empowerment: A conceptual inquiry. In T. S. Saraswathi (Ed.), *Culture, socialization and human development: Theory, research and applications in India.* (pp. 255-277). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Karimi, L. (2009). Do female and male employees in Iran experience similar work family interference, job, and life satisfaction? *Journal of Family Issues, 30*(1), 124-142. doi: 10.1177/0192513X08324973

Kashani-Sabet, F. (2011). *Conceiving citizens: Women and the politics of motherhood in Iran*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Khoei, E. M., Whelan, A., & Cohen, J. (2008). Sharing beliefs: What sexuality means to Muslim Iranian women living in Australia. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 10*(3), 237-248.

Khorasani, N. A. (2009). *Iranian women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The inside story*. Bethesda, MD: Women's Learning Partnership.

Kian-Thiébaut, A. (2010, 4 October). Women's struggles for citizenship rights and the Green Movement. *Reformistes & Solidaires*. Retrieved from http://www.re-so.net

Kim, J. C., Watts, C., Hargreaves, J., Ndhlovu, L., Phetla, G., Morison, L., et al. (2007). Understanding the impact of a microfinance-based intervention on women's empowerment and the reduction of intimate partner violence in South Africa. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*, 1794-1802.

Kousha, M. (2002). *Voices from Iran*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Kousha, M., & Mohseni, N. (1996). How satisfied are Iranian women with their social conditions? An exploratory analysis. *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology, 33*(1), 43-57.

Kousha, M., & Mohseni, N. (1997). Predictors of life satisfaction among urban Iranian women: An exploratory analysis. *Social Indicators Research, 40*(3), 329-357.

Kristof, N. (2011, March 2008). Do women leaders matter*? New York Times, The Opinion Pages*. Retrieved from http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/do-women-leaders-matter/?hp

Kristoff, N. D. & WuDunn, S. (2009). *Half the sky: Turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1983). *The good high school.* United States of America: Basic Books.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (1994). *I've known rivers: Lives of loss and liberation*. New York: Penguin Books.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2000). *Respect: An exploration.* United States of America: Basic
Books.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lindert, A. T., Korzilius, H., Van de Vijver, F. J. R., Kroon, S., & Arends-Toth, J.
(2008). Perceived discrimination and acculturation among Iranian refugees in the
Netherlands. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 32*(6), 578-588.

MacKian, S. C. (2008). What the papers say: Reading therapeutic landscapes of women's
health and empowerment in Uganda. *Health & Place, 14*, 106-115.

Mahalingam, R., & Reid, P. T. (2007). Dialogue at the margins: Women's self-stories and
the intersection of identities. *Women's Studies International Forum, 30*, 254-263.

Mahdavi, P. (2009). "But what if someone sees me?" women, risk, and the aftershocks of
Iran's sexual revolution. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies, 5*(2), 1-22.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.).
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McBride, D. E. & Mazur, A. G. (2006). Measuring feminist mobilization: Cross-national
convergences and transnational networks in Western Europe. In M. M. Ferree &
A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism,
organizing, and human rights* (pp. 219-246). New York: New York University
Press.

McConatha, J. T., Stoller, P., & Oboudiat, F. (2001). Reflections of older Iranian women:
Adapting to life in the United States. *Journal of Aging Studies, 15*(4), 369-381.

Mehran, G. (1999). Lifelong learning: New opportunities for women in a Muslim country (Iran). *Comparative Education, 35*(2), 201-215

MEPs want sanctions on Iran, but the EU wants to wait for UN. (2010, January 31). *New Europe.* Retrieved from http://www.neurope.eu/articles/MEPs-want-sanctions-on-Iran-but-the-EU-wants-to-wait-for-UN/98801.php

Mertens, D. M. (1999). Inclusive evaluation: Implications of transformative theory for evaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation, 20*(1), 1-14.

Mertens, D. M. (2008). Mixed methods and the politics of human research: The transformative-emancipatory perspective. In V. P. Clark & J. W. Creswell (Eds.), *Mixed methods reader* (pp. 68-104). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. (Reprinted from *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research,* pp. 135-164, by A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie, Eds., Thousand Oaks: Sage)

Mika, E. Z. (2004). The empowerment of women to improve health. *Clinical Excellence for Nurse Practitioners, 8*, 152-153.

Milani, F. (1992). *Veils and words: The emerging voices of Iranian women writers.* Syracuse University Press: London.

Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, J. B. (1986). *Toward a new psychology of women.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Mishra, M. (2008). The emergence of feminism in Fiji. *Women's History Review, 17*, 39-55.

Mitra, A., & Singh, P. (2007). Human capital attainment and gender empowerment: The

    Kerala paradox. *Social Science Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing Limited), 88*,

    1227-1242.

Moghadam, V. M., & Senftova, L. (2005). Measuring women's empowerment:

    Participation and rights in civil, political, social, economic, and cultural domains.

    International Social Science Journal, 57, 389-412.

Moghissi, H. (1999). Away from home: Iranian women, displacement cultural resistance

    and change. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies, 30*(2), 207–217.

Mohammadkhani, P., Khooshabi, K. S., Forouzan, A. S., Azadmehr, H., Assari, S., &

    Lankarani, M. M. (2009). Associations between coerced anal sex and

    psychopathology, marital distress and non-sexual violence. *International Journal*

    for Sex Medicine, 6, 1938–1946.

Morell, C. M. (2003). Empowerment and long-living women: Return to the rejected

    body. *Journal of Aging Studies, 17*, 69-85. doi:10.1016/S0890-4065(02)00091-9

Moulding, N. T. (2007). 'Love your body, move your body, feed your body': Discourses

    of self-care and social marketing in a body image health promotion program.

    Critical Public Health, 17, 57-69.

Movement Watch. (2010). *Take action*. Retrieved from http://movementwatch.com/take-

    action.php

Mozaffari, N. (2006). Review: [untitled]. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 34*(1/2), 516-527

Nafisi, A. (1999, February). The veiled threat: The Iranian theocracy's fear of females.

    The New Republic.

Nahai, G. (2007, June). So what's with all the Iranian memoirs? *Publishers Weekly*.

Najmabadi, A. (2000). (Un)veiling feminism. *Social Text, 18*(3), 29-45.

Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Nasrabadi, M. (2011, June 4). Letter from Tehran. *Jadaliyya*. Retrieved from http://www.jadaliyya.com/

Nemat, M. (2007). *Prisoner of Tehran: One women's story of survival inside an Iranian prison*. New York: Free Press.

New restrictions for women in Iran (1996). *Women's International Network News*, *22*(4), 63. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Ngcobo, H., & Edwards, S. (2008). Self-perceived multicultural counseling competencies in South African psychologists: A basis for practice guidelines. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, *18*(4), 647-654.

Norsworthy, K., Leung, S., Heppner, P., & Wang, L. (2009). Crossing borders in collaboration. *International handbook of cross-cultural counseling: Cultural assumptions and practices worldwide* (pp. 125-139). Thousand Oaks, CA US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Noueihed, L. (2011). Peddler's martyrdom launched Tunisia's revolution. *UK Reuters*. Retrieved from http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/01/19/uk-tunisia-protests-bouazizi-idUKTRE70I7TV20110119

O'Leary, V. E., & Bhaju, J. (2006). Handbook of girls' and women's psychological health: Gender and well-being across the lifespan. In J. Worell, & C. D. Goodheart (Eds.), *Handbook of girls' and women's psychological health: Gender and well-being across the lifespan* (pp. 157-165). New York: Oxford University Press.

Osirim, M. J. (2001). Making good on commitments to grassroots women: NGOs and empowerment for women in contemporary Zimbabwe. *Women's Studies International Forum, 24*, 167-180.

Parker, P. S. (2003). Control, resistance, and empowerment in raced, gendered, and classed work contexts: The case of African American women. In P. J. Kalbfleisch (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 27.* (pp. 257-292). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Patel, N. (2007). The construction of South-Asian-American womanhood: Implications for counseling and psychotherapy. *Women & Therapy*, *30*(3-4), 51-61.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage.

Peterson, N. A., & Reid, R. J. (2003). Paths to psychological empowerment in an urban community: Sense of community and citizen participation in substance abuse prevention activities. *Journal of Community Psychology, 31*, 25-38.

Porter, N. (1995). Therapist self-care: A proactive ethical approach. *Ethical decision making in therapy: Feminist perspectives* (pp. 247-266). New York: Guilford Press.

Price, M. (1996). A brief history of women's movements in Iran. Retrieved from

http://www.iranonline.com/history/women-history/index.html

Prince, R. (2010, January 30). Tony Blair: World leaders need to take urgent action over

Iran. *Telegraph.* Retrieved from

http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/7094635/Tony-Blair-world-

leaders-need-to-take-urgent-action-over-Iran.html

Pronyk, P., Kim, J., Abramsky, T., Hargreaves, J., Watts, C., Porter, J., et al. (2008). A

combined microfinance and training intervention can reduce HIV risk behaviour

in young female participants. AIDS, 22(13), 1659-1665.

doi:10.1097/QAD.0b013e328307a040.

Rachlin, N. (2006). *Persian girls: A memoir.* New York: Penguin Group.

Ransom, P. (2007). Assessing empowerment: The role of women's organizations in

global negotiations for persistent organic pollutants. *Women & Health, 44*, 43-60.

Rappaport, J. (1984). Studies in empowerment: Introduction to the issue. *Prevention in*

Human Services, 3, 1-7.

Reid, A., & Purcell, N. (2004). Pathways to feminist identification. *Sex Roles, 50*(11-12),

759-769. doi:10.1023/B:SERS.0000029095.40767.3c

Riessman, C., & Speedy, J. (2007). Narrative inquiry in the psychotherapy professions: A

critical review. *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 426-

456). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Rostami-Povey, E. (2001). Feminist contestations of institutional domains in Iran.

Feminist Review, 69, 44-72.

Rostami Povey, E. (2003). Women in Afghanistan: Passive victims of the borga or active social participants? *Development in Practice, 13*, 266.

Rostami Povey, E. (2007). Gender, agency and identity, The case of Afghan women in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. *Journal of Development Studies, 43*, 294-311.

Roster, C. A. (2007). "Girl power" and participation in macho recreation: The case of female Harley riders. *Leisure Sciences, 29*, 443-461. doi:10.1080/01490400701544626

Rowe, D., & Rowe, S. (2009). Conversations in marriage: An African-centered marital intervention. *Intersections of multiple identities: A casebook of evidence-based practices with diverse populations* (pp. 59-84). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Saberi, R. (2010). *Between two worlds: My life and captivity in Iran*. New York: HarperCollins.

Sadeghi-Fassaei, S., & Kendall, K. (2001). Iranian women's pathways to imprisonment. *Women's Studies International Forum, 24*(6), 701-710.

Sayah, R. & Amanpour, C. (2009, June 11). Iranian elections could be test for women's rights. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/11/iran.election.women/

Shaditalab, J. (2005). Iranian women: Rising expectations. *Critical Middle Eastern studies, 14*(1), 35–55.

Shahidian, H. (1999). Gender and sexuality among immigrant Iranians in Canada. *Sexualities, 2*(2), 189-222.

Shavarini, M. K. (2005). The feminisation of Iranian higher education. *International Review of Education, 51*(4), 329-347.

Shavarini, M. K. (2006a). Admitted to college, restricted from work: A conflict for young Iranian women. *Teachers College Record, 108*(10), 1960-1982.

Shavarini, M. K. (2006b). The role of higher education in the life of a young Iranian woman. *Women's Studies International Forum, 29*(1), 42-53.

Shavarini, M. K. (2006c). Wearing the veil to college: The paradox of higher education in the lives of iranian women. *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 38*(2), 189-211.

Shawler, C., & Logsdon, D. (2008). Living vigilant lives with chronic illness: Stories from older low-income minority women. *Health Care for Women International, 29*, 76-84.

Sheilds, L. E. (1995). Women's experiences of the meaning of empowerment. *Qualitative Health Research, 5*, 15-35.

Shemirani, F. S., & O'Connor, D. L. (2006). Aging in a foreign country: Voices of Iranian women aging in Canada. *Journal of Women & Aging, 18*(2), 73-90.

Shilo, M. (2008). The first world war. *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies, 7*, 1-15.

Shiranipour, R. (2002). Women's rights, writing and education in Iran. *Changing English, 9*(1), 35-45.

Shirpak, K. R., Chinichian, M., Maticka-Tyndale, E., Ardebili, H. E., Pourreza, A., & Ramenzankhani, A. (2008). A qualitative assessment of the sex education needs of married Iranian women. *Sexuality & Culture, 12*(3), 133-150.

Stanistreet, D., Swami, V., Pope, D., Bambra, C., & Scott-Samuel, A. (2007). Women's empowerment and violent death among women and men in Europe: An ecological study. *Journal of Men's Health & Gender, 4*, 257-265.

Swift, C., & Levin, G. (1987). Empowerment: An emerging mental health technology. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 8*, 71-94.

'Symbolic annihilation' of women is alive and well in Iran (1999, March). *Media Report to Women, 27*(2), 11-12.

Tehranian, K. K. (2006). Inhabiting her space: Lived experiences of Iranian American women. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 8*(3), 413-427.

Tohidi, N. (2006, November). Iran's women's rights movement and the One Million Signatures Campaign. *Payvand's Iran News*. Retrieved from http://www.payvand.com/news/06/dec/1174.html

Tohidi, N. (2010). The women's movement and feminism in Iran: A glocal perspective. In A. Basu (Ed.), *Women's movements in the global era* (pp. 375-414). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Tolleson-Rinehart, S. (1992) *Gender consciousness in politics*. New York: Routledge.

Tripp, A. M. (2006). Challenges in transnational feminist mobilization. In M. M. Ferree & A. M. Tripp (Eds.), *Global feminism: Transnational women's activism, organizing, and human rights* (pp. 296-312). New York: New York University Press.

Williams, L., & Labonte, R. (2007). Empowerment for migrant communities: Paradoxes for practitioners. *Critical Public Health, 17*, 365-379.

Women's rights movement in Iran. (2009). Retrieved from

> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_rights_movement_in_Iran

Yang, F., & Chang, W. (2010). The effects of mood and objective self-awareness on

> helping intention and helping behavior. *Bulletin of Educational Psychology*,

> *42*(2), 339-358.

Zimmerman, M. A. (2000). Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational, and

> community levels of analysis. In J. Rappaport, & E. Seidman (Eds.), *Handbook of*

> *community psychology.* (pp. 43-63). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic

> Publishers.
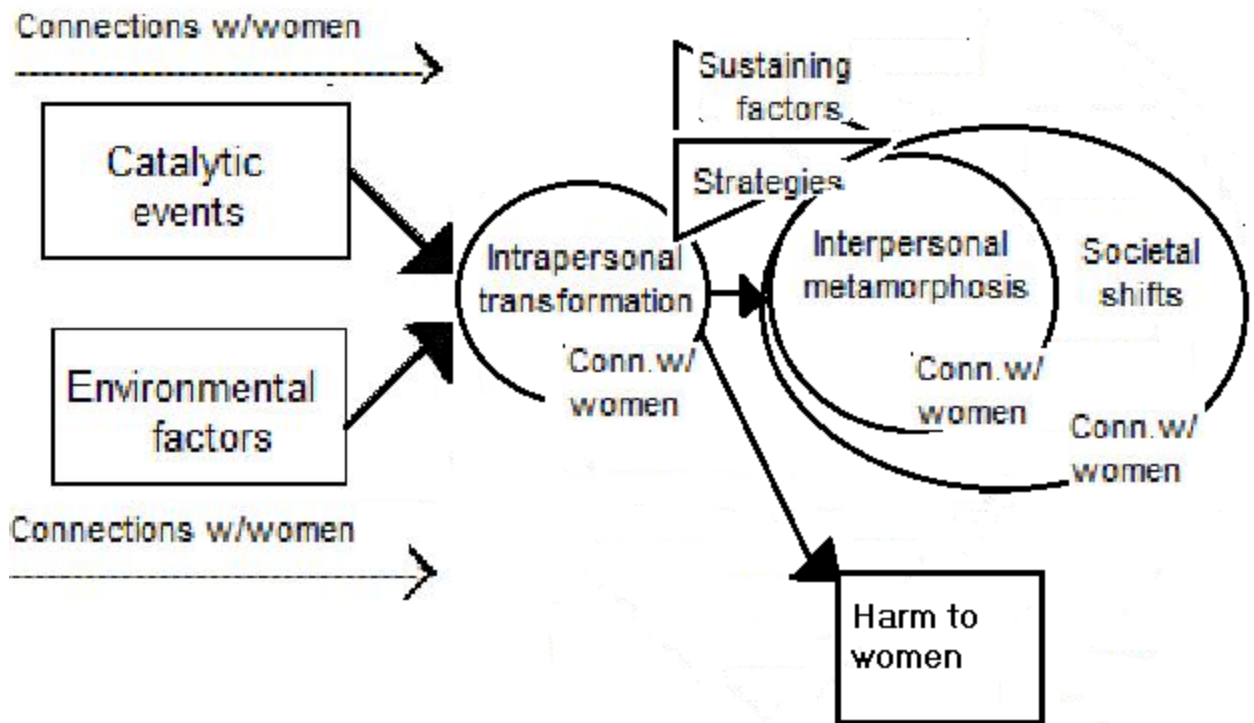
Figure 1. Tentative conceptualization of women's empowerment (see chapter two)

(Badiee & Yakushko, in progress)
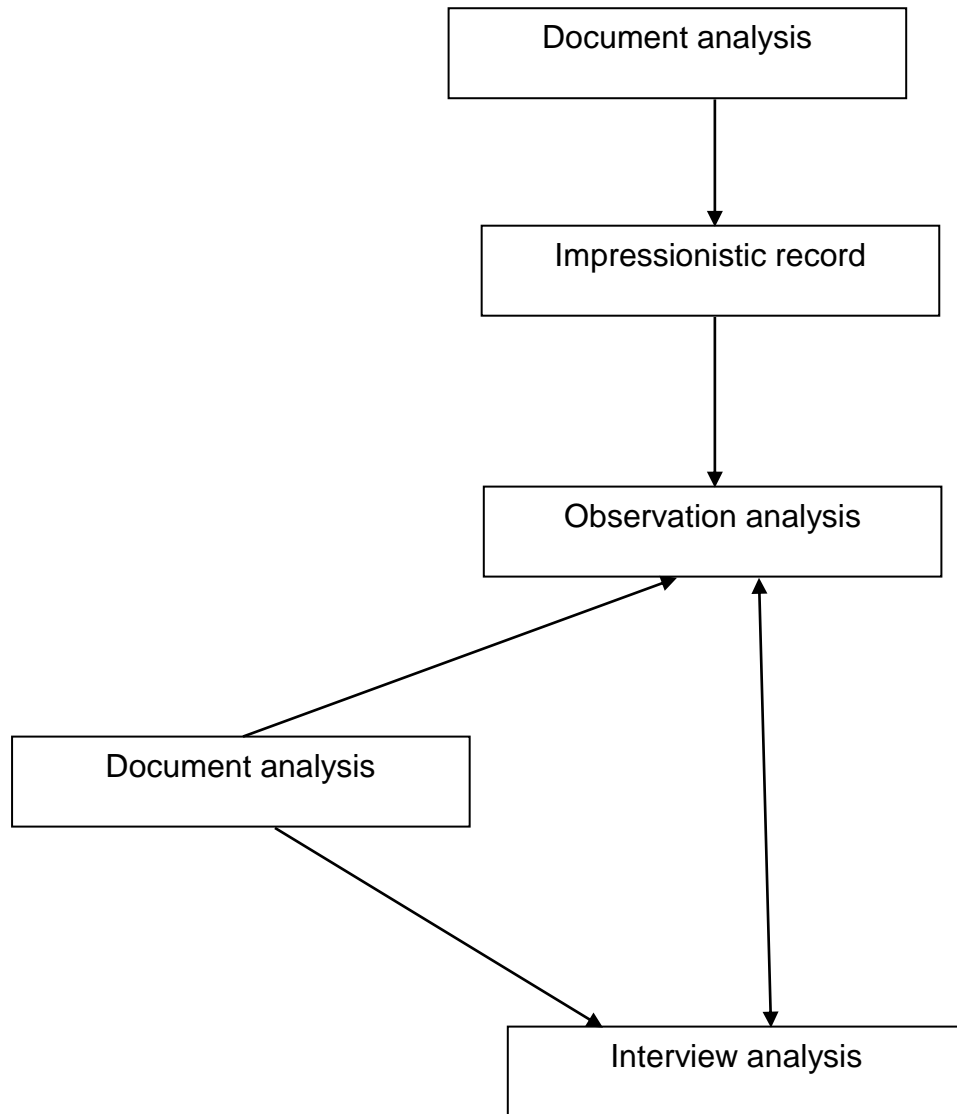
Figure 2. Data analysis plan.

Appendices

Appendix A: Flier for Campaign event in Los Angeles

Appendix B: Recruitment emails

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview protocol

Appendix D: Sample transcript

Appendix E: Sample Impressionistic Record

Appendix F: IRB approval letter

Appendix G: Informed consent form

Appendix A: Flier for Campaign event in Los Angeles

Society for Democracy in Iran
(Southern California)
Presents:

The mourning mothers' movement:
a Comparative perspective
Elham Gheytanchi *teaches sociology at Santa Monica College*

The Importance of Gender Equality in the Movement of
the People of Iran for Democracy
Kiana Karimi - *Women's Rights Activist and a Member of One Million Signatures Campaign inCalifornia*

Responsibilities of supporters of "Mournful Mothers"
of Iran in abroad
Sofia Sadighpour - *one of supporters of "Mournful Mothers" of Iran in Los Angeles*

Wednesday March 31, 2010- 6:30 PM

The Conference Room in Denny's Restaurant at:
10700 Jefferson Blvd. Culver City, 90230
(Intersection of Jefferson & Overland)
phone: (310) 559-5351

Appendix B: Recruitment emails

First email from recruiter:

Salam doostan e aziz,

Manijeh jaan, who is cc in this email, is a dear friend of mine who is a counseling psychology doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She will be conducting her dissertation on Iranian-American activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign in LA and she is planning to do her research on July and August. So I am introducing her in this email and she goes from here.
mokhles,

PS: khodetoon ham daneshjoo bodid o hastid. So you know what does that mean :P

My subsequent email to potential participants:

Salam.

As Jasmine* said, I am conducting a study on Iranian-American activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign. I believe it is essential for Americans to know about this vibrant women's rights movement and dispel the stereotypes of Iranian women as passive or weak. That is why I would like to eventually publish my dissertation as a book. If you decide to participate, I will interview you at least once and up to three times. These interviews would preferably take place during my stay in Los Angeles in mid-July to early August but can also be over the phone. I am proud of you, my sisters and brothers fighting in this Campaign, and I want to do my part to publicize your voices.

If you are interested in participating, please email me at manijehb@gmail.com or call me at 512-775-4743 and I can provide further detail. I look forward to hearing from you.

Merc for your consideration,
Manijeh

*Name changed to protect recruiter's identity

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview protocol

Portraits of Iranian-Americans as Activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign

Interviewee ID: _____
Date: _____
Time: _____

Hello _____. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me today about yourself and your involvement in the Campaign. Before we begin, I want to remind you that I am planning to record our conversation today. Do I still have your permission to make the audio recording?

I want to assure you that your identity will be kept strictly confidential. I will be asking you a number of questions so please feel free to discuss your ideas and views. Are you ready to begin?

1.   First, please tell me a little about yourself.
Now I want to focus on your experiences in the One Million Signatures Campaign.

2.   Please describe how the Campaign started in your city.

3.   Please describe your current involvement with the One Million Signatures Campaign.

4.   What led you to the Campaign?
   - Specific events
   - Epiphanies
   - Turning points
   - Was there one moment in time when you decided to become involved?

5.   Tell me a story about your experiences in the One Million Signatures Campaign.
   - Probe for more stories, especially related to empowerment.

6.   Please describe strategies you have used as an activist in the One Million Signatures Campaign.
   - Probe for stories how well strategies worked.
   - What resources do you utilize and how they are mobilized

7.   Do you view yourself as part of a movement? Please explain.
   - How you see yourself related to Campaign activists in Iran and other countries
   - What differences have you seen between activists in Iran and activists here in the U.S.?

- Will you please describe any barriers to communication or understanding between Campaign activists in different parts of the world.

8. How do you view the future of the movement?

9. If someone outside of Iran heard about the Campaign and wanted to get involved, what would you recommend to them?
    For Farsi speakers -
    For non-Farsi speakers –

10. What else can you add to help me understand your activism?

11. Can you recommend any other One Million Signature Campaign activists? They can be here in LA or other places.

Thank you very much for participating in this study. Your time and insights are greatly appreciated.

Appendix D: Sample transcript

P: Later, I got signatures but I wouldn't, maslan go after people, maslan I was standing, behind a desk and people would come I'd explain and they'd sign. Signature never really was my priority. I was, because we all knew from the beginning that it's not the signature. It's about the cultural change and what the signature should do which I believe the signature here wouldn't do as much because if you're living in this society for 20,30 years and the culture and the roots and the laws of the society hasn't changed your mindset, the signature won't do anything. You see what I'm saying? So, I really never look at them, vali ye zamani and then, man fekr kardam ke khayli khob we have problems here with the iranian community why not work on what we have here? Instead of ma hamishe fekr mikonim too iran, enghadr signature befresteem, vaghean signature is not important. 00:17:24-4

M: mmhmm 00:17:26-4

P: Instead of that, we do the same thing here but within the Iranian community which we did from the start but then man dige raftam this was before I leave here to Iran and then when I came back dige it was after the elections and everything was different. 00:17:50-2

M: When you say prioritiyet emza nabood, what do you think was your biggest priority then? 00:17:56-9

P: bebin nega kon man, khob vaghti ke I thought Campaign is beautiful, and still think it was brilliant but too Iran. bebin nega kon Campaign signature ye bahane bood ke you get chance to talk to them and you make people to engage in the action, doroste? Because when you sign, you nakhodegan conscious response, ye hessi mikoni because you've signed something, midooni? vali too amreeka man ino hes nakardam. too amreeka maslan khob. We were nakhshte supporte iran ra dashtim vali khob I think we did a good job. maslan halla campaign is special in United States, it's well-known vali inke cheghadr ma az een campaign. akhe it's two different. az (emphasizing) Campaign members how much ma kar kardim az supporters of campaign ma cheghadr kar kardim. az nazare supporte campaign ma khayli khub kar kardim. az nazare inke khodemoon shayad dorostar bood ke begim we are not members of a campaign, we are supporters of the campaign. halla man I don't care about een esma. che fargh mikone? vali that was the reality ke ma bishtar support mikardim. baranke khodemoon midooni 00:19:33-6

M: and you say it like past, so do you think he hanooz injooriye, ya 00:19:38-1

P: khob alan ma ha maslan we are not that active. 00:19:42-4

Appendix E: Sample Impressionistic Record

Site: Los Angeles, CA
Today's activities: Art exhibit, restaurant, house of participant 6, speech for famous Persian poet
Shamloo
Date: Sunday, 7/25/10
Time: 1 pm – 8 pm

Emerging inferences about the data:

They were guarded at first, but they seem to be opening up to me. I'm trying to just observe as much as possible. But even with doing that, I feel like an outsider. Yesterday I asked one person why he was smiling, and it turns out he was laughing at an inside joke in his head. He said he felt self-conscious around a psychologist. I immediately said sorry. I think he was joking. But still, it made me very aware of my position as a psychologist. After all, I am around engineers and computer scientists. They are not used to someone "analyzing" them maybe? Or talking about feelings and things like that?

How can I feel less self-conscious as a psychologist? I think like everyone said, I should just continue to be myself. I think his comment was harmless and if you look at the whole afternoon, people seemed comfortable with me being there. So, I think it's all good, but sometimes the social anxiety takes over and I start catastrophizing. I need to just relax, sometimes.

So what I gather is, they are initially guarded, but warm people. They are more alike than I realized. As L said, they seem like they are isolated as far as hanging out with Persians.

I want them to respect my research.

Alternative interpretations

They are only guarded because there have been so many researchers; prior to that they were more open. That's certainly the case with 7. She regrets opening up to the last researcher about her personal life. This makes perfect sense. I regret our conversation the other day, when I mentioned that we didn't have to have more than one interview because I had a lot of information about her through online sources. It was true, but I could definitely see how it could make her feel exposed. So I may have contributed to her not wanting to open up to me specifically. I thought long and hard and consulted with multiple people (see Sunday, July 25 entry) to determine the best way to proceed. Without giving personal information, I simply said if you are a person that has been well-researched, and are used to the microscope, what would make you feel less that way?" The broadness of my questions helped me maintain confidentiality of participants. I received various suggestions. Thus, in the message I left for 7, I gave her a list of times I was available and I also mentioned that if she could please give me a list of topics we could discuss. I emphasized we wouldn't talk about anything she wasn't comfortable talking about, only the things she mentioned were okay. I left her a message yesterday and she hasn't responded. I may have lost her as a participant, partly due to my own mistake. As I was writing this entry, 7 called. We just set an appointment. I asked what it was okay to talk about, she said I could ask all my questions and if she wasn't comfortable she just wouldn't answer.

Shifts in thinking

3 is really funny. I had no idea. He is very serious in ways, but also very funny. He wondered aloud if the Green Revolution should be supported, whether it's going anywhere or whether it would lead to the same place it was before. He was saying something bleak, but he has a sense of humor about it. He seems to enjoy intellectual debate more than the others, although they all got involved, 8 not as much, which was surprising. 8 does seem politically minded. She also seems inquisitive and opinionated.

I must be careful of my status (see alternative interpretations of this entry) as a researcher and the way I come across. I must take into account the fact that they have been under a microscope. I am learning as I go.

I am wondering if I should invite the participants here. That is after all the Persian way. This would involve some preparation on my part today. I could go to a Persian store. I would need to get some shirini and something to make chai. I want an old-fashioned thing to make chai.

I told 7 that I was looking forward to meeting her because she seemed like a cool person. She laughed about that. She had an infectious laugh, I wonder how infectious it must be in person. She seems to have grown a little more comfortable with me.

9 returned my email, and didn't mention me inviting her to the U.S. to come speak. I wonder if she trusts me enough yet. This is just the beginning of my journey to developing trust and connection with the Iranian women's rights community. I feel both inside and outside.

Dilemmas (e.g. methodological, ethical, conceptual)

Just trying to think of myself as not as much of a psychologist, balancing that with being too in my head about it, and being myself.

Methodological: I may need to adapt to more Persian ways of interaction. For instance, one person brought candy to 6's house. I didn't even think of that rule-that it's better to take something the first time you go to someone's house. So I am going to start inviting people here. I want to go purchase items for Iranian chai and also some candies so that people can feel comfortable being here. I will buy those things tomorrow. Also tomorrow I am going to try a few bookstores to find Strengths Finder books to give as gifts to participants. I want 10 of them I think.

Ethical: I'm pondering the ethics of using information from informal interactions like this. It's not fair that they should feel under a microscope every time they are around me. I will draw the line by writing down my observations, but not direct quotes.

Conceptual: I realized today, when I was writing down places to visit in LA, how much note taking interrupts the flow of conversation. Make sure recorder has space and no more note taking.

Action plan for tomorrow

Work on specifying interview protocols for participants I saw today. Make them more personal based on what information I already have and what I would like to know more about.

Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter

April 13, 2010

Manijeh Badiee
Department of Educational Psychology
114 Teachers College Hall Lincoln, NE 68588

John Creswell
Department of Educational Psychology
241 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0345

IRB Number: 20100410698EP
Project ID: 10698
Project Title: Fire rising from the ashes: Portraits of Iranian women as political activists

Dear Manijeh:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).This project has been reviewed as Expedited, category 7.

Date of EP Review: 03/30/2010

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 04/13/2010. This approval is Valid Until: 04/12/2011.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,
{Mario's Signature}
Mario Scalora, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB

Appendix G: Informed consent form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project:
Portraits of Iranian-Americans as Activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign

Purpose of the Research:
This is a research project that examines important stories that have shaped the political activism and lives of activists in the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality. I will be creating portraits of activists that represent a composite of different sources, rather than a single individual. Identifying information will be removed as much as possible. Prior to being published, I will show you the portraits to ensure that you are comfortable with the level of detail being revealed. I hope to publish these portraits as a book about One Million Signatures Campaign activists.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate in this study, you will take part in one interview that lasts approximately one hour. The interview questions will focus on important stories about your journey as a political activist, your role in this worldwide movement, and how you view the Campaign. After the in-person interview is complete, I may contact you as I analyze the data if I need further information. If it seems necessary and you consent, we may schedule follow-up phone interviews or verify information via email. All interviews will be audio taped with your permission. Finally, you will be given the opportunity to read the portraits before I publish or present the findings. If you decide to participate in follow-up procedures, your total length of participation will be 3-4 hours.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
One risk is the difficulty in speaking about potentially traumatic experiences. Although this can be a powerful and healing experience, it can be painful for some. I am a counselor and am dedicated to you feeling safe and comfortable. I will also find referrals if you feel that you would like to seek psychological services.
The other risk is getting you in trouble with the Iranian government, although it is highly unlikely that representatives from the Iranian government would confiscate my records outside of Iran. If I do return to Iran before my research is complete, I will remove audio recordings, transcripts, and identifying information from my laptop as well as delete emails regarding the research from my inbox and empty the trash. It is possible that after being published, Iranian officials may recognize some of the activists, which could cause problems if you visit Iran. However, I will minimize this risk by creating portraits that are a composite of different sources rather than focusing on one individual. I will create fictional locations for participants and I will change other identifying information as well.

Benefits:
You will have the benefit of sharing your stories. In addition, I will donate time to help with the Campaign however you think I can. I will also give you an opportunity to write or speak about how the readers of my work can help with the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept strictly confidential by the project investigators. Pseudonyms and numbers will be used to identify participants, institutions,

and programs in place of actual names and titles. Interviews will be audio recorded, but the audio recording will be done solely for the purposes of completing transcriptions. Transcriptions will be prepared by the primary investigator and transcriptionists associated with this project, and all identifying characteristics will be deleted. All personal notes and any documents that the researchers may obtain during the study will be stored in the locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will be destroyed within two years after the study is complete. Audio recordings produced during this project will be destroyed immediately upon the completion of the transcription. The results of the research will be disseminated via professional journals, conferences, dissertation, and a book, but no identifying characteristics of participants will be revealed throughout these endeavors.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Please call me at any time, phone 512-775-4743. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone 402-472-6965, 114 Teachers College Hall / P.O. 880345 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0345
http://edpsyc.unl.edu

Freedom to Withdraw:
You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me or anyone you know. Withdrawing will not cause you problems.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information in this document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

_____ _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date
Name and Phone number of investigator(s)
Manijeh Badiee, MA, Principal Investigator Home: _____