IRANIAN WOMEN'S QUEST FOR SELF-LIBERATION THROUGH THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA: AN EMANCIPATORY PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the discourse of body autonomy among Iranian women. It approaches the discourse of body autonomy by deconstructing veiling, public mobility, and sexuality, while considering the impact of society, history, religion, and culture. Although there are many important scholarly works on Iranian women and human rights that explore women's civil rights and freedom of individuality in relation to the *hijab*, family law, and sexuality, the absence of work on the discourse of body autonomy—the most fundamental human right—has created a deficiency in the field. My research examines the discourse of body autonomy in the context of liberation among Iranian women while also assessing the role of the internet as informal emancipatory educational tools.

To explore the discourse of body autonomy, I draw upon critical and transnational feminist theory and the theoretical frameworks of Derayeh, Foucault, Shahidian, Bayat, Mauss, and Freire. Additionally, in-depth semi-structured interviews with Iranian women aged 26 to 42 in Iran support my analysis of the practice and understanding of body autonomy personally, on the internet, and social media. The results identify and explicate some of the major factors affecting the practice and awareness of body autonomy, particularly in relation to the goal of liberation for Iranian women. Altogether, this study contributes to an underdeveloped area of scholarly analysis and will further awareness in Middle East feminist studies.

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In memory of Pegah Roshan, a former York University student, I dedicate this work to David the greatest father, partner, and teacher, my siblings Bahman, my primary feminist educator, and Behnaz, a role model in strength and tolerance.

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Vantage Point

I am a feminist Iranian woman living in the West. I grew up in Iran, in a middle-class Iranian family who believed in equal human rights for all individuals regardless of gender, race, class, and sexuality. As a child of a progressive Iranian family, I was supported in my intellectual growth and granted the rare cultural opportunity to learn about self- determination. This freedom fostered a passion to discover the controversial concept of autonomy, more specifically body autonomy. Practicing body autonomy occurred to me as a natural part of my rights as a woman and shaped my decision-making with respect to body awareness choices within my home environment. On the other hand, outside the home, in the public realm, social and legal values restricted my body autonomy.

Growing up, I struggled with conflicts between binary values and morality and between the private and public realms in my life. Despite the freedom and equal rights in my home environment, I was raised in a society that consider a woman's body rights to be taboo. Instead, society promoted a culture of shame and silence, discouraging me and many other Iranian women from exercising their rights, including body autonomy. Moreover, the social pressure to obey the rigid religious culture that promotes "modesty" over freedom, offers little agency for women and, instead, propagandizes the sexualization and objectification of women's bodies. Consequently, I learned the disappointing lesson that there is a significant difference between a woman's practice of body autonomy in the private realm versus the public realm. This conflict between private freedom and public oppression constructed a "multilayered experience," which raised questions in my mind regarding gender identity, women's rights, and body autonomy. This dissertation deconstructs the issue of human rights, more specifically women's self-determination. The primary focus is the discourse of body autonomy and the role of the internet and social media as emancipatory educational tools to further understand the concepts of attire,

sexuality, and freedom of mobility. My study aims to convey the unheard voices of Iranian women and to partake in their quest for liberation and empowerment.

My understanding of Islam, my personal and family experiences, and my feminist associations shape, advance, but also complicate my socio-cultural knowledge as well my approach to my research. For example, my positionality gives me a uniquely intimate opportunity to understand the issues of my research, and it allows me to interact easily with the participants in their native language. However, because positionality precludes neutrality, my background also shapes my comprehension and interaction with the participants. Furthermore, the feminist foundation of my research mitigates the complications of positionality and in fact transform them into strengths by providing a unique and reflective understanding of the discourse of body autonomy with my participants. Analytically, I incorporate critical feminist theory and transnational feminist theory during the interview and data interpretation process. Commitment to self-reflexivity provides the participants the opportunity to hear their own voices and to deconstruct their feelings and experiences as each interviewee was studied on her own terms (Hertz, 1997; Reinharz, 1997).

Although, my feminist perspective enhances my reading of what Muslim women perceive as body autonomy, I must also mention that the discourse of body autonomy is a very sensitive topic that requires multi-faceted knowledge. In exploration of the discourse, there is no privileged knowledge or one single perspective that shapes our views. On the one hand, I respect Iranian women who follow their religion and culture and have chosen to practice their body autonomy according to Islamic laws. On the other hand, I am also aware of those who believe that religio-socio-political ideas are problematic for the free practice of body autonomy as they often lead to body agency falling under institutional control. My experiences as an Iranian woman who has been exposed to and is knowledgeable in both Iranian and Western culture

provide me with a deeper understanding of the subject. On a more personal level, this research helped me to deconstruct myself as an Iranian woman and validate my academic interests. Understanding self through deconstruction is a valuable scholarly experience as an educator and social scientist.

Chapter 1: Overview of Thesis

Statement of the Problem

My doctoral research aims to look at body autonomy awareness and practice among Iranian women while taking the role of the internet into consideration to understand the relationship between women's body autonomy and informal education. Why, how, and for what reasons do Iranian women inside Iran use the internet and social media to self-liberate their body autonomy? What are the impacts of the internet and social media on women's understanding and learning about body autonomy and did that learning translate to re-evaluation of their identity? Answering these questions establishes the interconnection of Iranian women and the way they inform, shape, disrupt, and practice their identities and their rights.

Discourse of Body Autonomy

According to Bekker et al. (2008), as individuals construct relationships with their environment and draw lines between public and personal realms they are practicing their autonomy. Bekker et al. (2008) define the concept of autonomy as an act or behavior of self-determination while maintaining satisfactory social relationships. Friedman (2003) further explores the discourse of autonomy and argues that despite the controversial nature of autonomy for ordinary people, the discourse of autonomy is supposed to reflect notions such as "being true to oneself," "doing it my way," "standing up for what one believes," and "thinking for oneself" (p. 2). On the discourse of women's autonomy, Ahmadi (2003) emphasizes the influence of the patriarchal system on the construction of the boundaries of autonomy, including women's body autonomy. For Butler the discourse of autonomy is the repetition of norms that cause disruptions in true meaning and impose a new meaning. Consequently, practicing the new meaning is an autonomous action (Butler, 1993, pp. 105-106). In the case of Iranian women, this new meaning normalizes behaviors that defy religion and culture. For example, the *hijab* acts as a fashion

statement and form of self-expression rather than a testament to modesty and chastity. Though the *hijab* itself remains, the ideology behind the practice has shifted (Mahmood, 2005).

However, the practice of body autonomy is not as straightforward in Islam. Although each individual, passively or actively, engages in forming their own autonomous conduct, in an Islamic context the discourse of individuality and voluntary action is problematic as it clashes with community-based rights which jeopardizes body autonomy (Lazreg, 2009). On this point, Lazreg (2000) argues that Islamic culture allows limited personal freedom and choice especially for women. According to Mahmood (2005), the emphasis on patriarchal practices and community rather than individuality in Islam dismisses women's agency and therefore, women's status is reduced to that of victim. For instance, when discussing the institution of *hijab*, it is claimed that women can voluntarily practice veiling[1], but on the other hand wearing *hijab* is mandatory and restricts women's activities and mobility. Hirschman (1998) states that having a choice is not sufficient if individuals cannot intellectually understand their options (p. 361). However, Lazreg (2009) counters that sometimes, for Islamic culture, "oppression is more intellectually acceptable" than the practice of body rights (p. 6). In addition, she argues that when autonomy and choice are combined, the state of oppression becomes relativized instead of examined. Lazreg further argues that the practice of veiling can increase women's mobility and give them access to more spaces. Therefore, the strategic reason behind veiling signifies their autonomy and the *hijab* becomes a tool in the exercise of that autonomy (ibid). I agree that veiling does not totally oppress women; however, Iranian women's rights tend to be shaped by Islamic rules that restrict the practice of body autonomy.

[1] Veiled: Refers to participants who practice fully covered, *chador* and those without *chador* who completely cover their hair and wear looser clothing.
Mis-veiled: Refers to Bad-*hijab,* women who practice *hijab* in a looser manner.
Unveiled: Refers to women who do not wear *chador or hijab* and do not cover their hair.

To summarize, while women's body autonomy conflicts with Islamic ideology, some Iranian women have found an alternate strategy to exercise their body autonomy. Since 1998, Iranian women have been fighting to gain body autonomy and individuality in the digital realm by means of the internet and social media. They also utilize the internet as a communication and information sharing tool to challenge their limited social and legal rights. In addition, the internet provides Iranian women with a safer space to share their experiences. In this dissertation, I present how the internet has become an emancipatory educational tool by promoting a new level of understanding and practice of body autonomy amongst Iranian women.

My research is grounded in the existing literature on the topic of body autonomy, which includes sexuality, veiling, and public mobility. There is no literature directly addressing the concept of body autonomy; however, there are many works related to sexuality, veiling, and public mobility that explicitly address the discourse of body autonomy. Feminist literature related to women's rights often focuses on *hijab* as a religious component (Bullock, 2002; El-Guindi, 1999; Mernissi, 1987; Stowasser, 1997), whereas literature related to public mobility and sexuality are less concerned with religion than with socio-cultural factors (Chubin, 2014; Merghati-Khoei, 2014). In order to understand Iranian women's body autonomy, it is important to explore the inseparable combination of social, historical, cultural, and religious factors.

The Contribution of Islamic Views on Iranian Women Body Autonomy

Until the eighth century CE, the Qur'an had not been subjected to interpretation, and *hadith* had been circulating solely as an oral tradition. Interpretation of the Qur'an began during the Abbasid dynasty (750-1258), and the resulting exegeses were permanently accepted as Islamic tradition and laws. At the same time, *hadith* were collected into text and were used to provide vital support for Islamic laws. Embedded within the growing body of Islamic jurisprudence were the "man-made trans-historical rules" and regulations that defined "proper

behaviors and conducts." These rules and codes of conduct, influenced by pre-Islamic misogynous culture, shaped women's rights and limitations within the Islamic context (Mernissi, 1987; Stowasser, 1997, p. 95). Moghissi states that according to Islamic practices and related sexual and moral beliefs, women are considered weak in judgment and cognitive ability, yet they are identified as forceful and seductive when it comes to the body and sexuality. As a result, the surveillance and control of women, not just by their families but also by their communities and the state, were and are completely justified in order to protect society's morality (1999). Inevitably, rules on women's body autonomy including attire, mobility, and sexuality began to form. Though there is ample literature on the codification of women's cultural subordination, there is still little analysis of how Muslim women perceive their own autonomy and how they understand their experiences of what might be described as oppression and subordination (Merghati-Khoei, et al., 2008, p. 239). In this part, I review primary and secondary sources in Farsi and English that are essential to exploring the three dimensions of body autonomy--sexuality, the *hijab*, and mobility—in the religious, social, and cultural contexts of Iranian women.

Body Autonomy in the Discourse of *Hijab*

The discourse of *hijab* in the Qur'an as part of a dress code for women is ambiguous and controversial (Barlas, 2002, p. 56). Some scholars, such as Bullock (2002), claim that the concept of *hijab* as a body covering for women is clearly indicated in the Qur'an. Conversely, scholars such as Derayeh (2011) interpret veiling as more of an "ethical and cultural practice rather than a religious obligation" (p.3). *Hijab*, with the literal meaning of curtain or separation, is mentioned seven times in the Qur'an, with both positive and negative connotations. The *hijab* represents spatial separation, a division between private and public realms for the sake of

protection and safety (19:16-17;[2] 33:53[3]). The *hijab* also possesses an ethical dimension: to separate the forbidden, authoritative, sphere from sight (42:51;[4] 7:46[5]). Additionally, the *hijab* used as a metaphor represents humans' inability to learn and understand the monotheistic message of Islam in the verse 41:4[6] (Mernissi, 1987). Furthermore, the word *hijab* is mentioned in the Qur'an with no explicit connection to femininity or attire. Rather, it is the extraction of meaning from the term *hijab* that generated clothing rules for women.

Among the verses related to Islamic dress codes for women, the only verse containing the word *hijab* is verse 33:53.[7] Although the verse implies a barrier between the private and the public realm, it is the basis for the institution of the *hijab* (Mernissi, 1987, p. 93). The next most important verse on veiling for women is 24:31.[8] It, too, has been used to support interpretations of the *hijab* as mandatory attire; however, Hassan points out that the only type of clothing

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[2] Relate in the Book (The story of) Mary, When she withdrew From her family To a place in the East. She placed a screen (To screen herself) from them; Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared Before her as a man In all respects (Qur'an, 19:16-17).

[3] O ye who Believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, — Until leave is given you, — for a meal, (and then) Not (so early as) to wait For its preparation: but when Ye are invited, enter; And when ye have taken Your meal, disperse, Without seeking familiar talk. Such (behaviour) annoys The Prophet: he is ashamed To dismiss you but God is not ashamed (to tell you) the truth. And when ye Ask (his ladies) For anything ye want, Ask them from before A screen: that makes For greater purity for Your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you That ye should annoy God's Apostle, or that Ye should marry his widows After him at any time. Truly such a thing is In God's sight an enormity (Qur'an, 33:53).

[4] It is not fitting For a man that God Should speak to him Except by inspiration, Or from behind a veil, Or by the sending Of a messenger To reveal, with God's permission, What God wills: for He Is Most High, Most Wise (Qur'an, 42:51).

[5] Between them shall be a veil and on the heights will be men who would know everyone by his marks: they will call out to the companions of the garden "peace on you" they will not have entered but they will have an assurance (thereof.) (Qur'an, 7:46).

[6] Giving Good News And Admonition: yet most Of them turn away, And so they hear not (Qur'an, 41:4).

[7] O ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses, -until leave is given you, -for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation: but when ye are invited, enter; and when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such (behavior) annoys the Prophet: he is ashamed to dismiss you, but Allah is not ashamed (Qur'an, 33:53).

[8] And say to the believing women That they should lower Their gaze and guard Their modesty; that they Should not display their Beauty and ornaments except What (must ordinary) appear Thereof; that they should Draw their veils over Their bosoms and not display Their beauty except To their husbands, their fathers, Their husbands' fathers, their sons, Their husbands' sons, Their brothers or their brothers' sons, Or their sisters' sons, Or their women, or the slaves Whom their right hands Possess, or male servants Free of physical needs, Or small children who Have no sense of the shame Of sex; and that they Should not strike their feet In order to draw attention To their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together Towards God, that ye May attain Bliss (Qur'an, 24:31).

mentioned in verse 24:31 is *Khimar,* an outer garment used to cover the bosom (2011). Furthermore, verse 24:31 asks only that women refrain from displaying their beauty, ornaments, *zinat*, and private parts, *aurat* (Hasan, 2011, p. 65). According to Derayeh (2011), *zinat* and *aurat* are the two main terms in verse 24:31 that have been employed for the justification of the *hijab*.

However, Islamic scholars such as Majlisi (1627-1699) extend the meaning of adornment well beyond decorative pieces and generalize it to the entire female body, thus justifying the *hijab* for women (Ardestani, 1995 as cited in Afshar, 1998, p. 198). Furthering this justification, Islamic scholars such as Baydawi and Majlisi argue that *aurat* refers to the whole female body as a private part, a source of shame and embarrassment and, therefore, the whole body must be subjected to veiling (Derayeh, 2011, p 10). Another important verse on the discourse of *hijab* for women is 33:59.[9] The word *hijab* is absent from this verse; instead, another outer garment, *Jilbab*, is mentioned (Hasan, 2011, p. 65). The verse asks believing women to pull their outer garments over themselves so that they would not be mistaken for sexually available slaves and prostitutes. The purpose was specifically to protect Muslim women from harassment by hypocrites (Mernissi, 1991, p. 180). Although laws imposing limitations on women have been practiced since the 8th century, Mernissi (1991) claims that many of the verses dealing with veiling or sexual limitations were revealed during very specific situations such as military defeats, increasing incidents of sexual harassment, and social disorders (pp. 173-183). In fact, the Qur'an emphasizes modest behaviors for both men and women and recognizes the sexuality of the male and female body (El-Guindi, 1999, p. 137; Barlas, 2002, p. 159; Derayeh,

[9] O Prophet! Tell Thy wives and daughters, And the believing women, That they should cast Their outer garments over Their persons (when abroad): That is mosr convenient, That they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (Qur'an, 33:59).

2011, p. 10; Hassan, 2011, pp. 116-117). For example, both men and women are told to "guard their modesty" and "lower their gaze" in the verses 24:30[10] and 24:31.

Mainstream religious discourse on the *hijab* is not based on the Qur'an exclusively. *Hadith* play an important role in the justification of veiling; however, there are only two *hadith* related to the discourse of *hijab* and one of them is a *mursal hadith*[11] (Clark, 2003). The absence of clear and direct commentary implies that the *hijab* as a specific dress code for women was not a pivotal issue for society during Prophet Muhammad's era. Unfortunately, many who are in favor of veiling justify the practice through *hadith* that are fabricated, which then creates a perfect environment for misogynist *hadith* and interpretations (Barlas, 2002, p. 48; Mernissi, 1991, pp. 65-66). Moghissi (1999) argues that within Islamic societies, the body of a woman is only a generator of sexual pleasure and, therefore, the body must be covered, disciplined, and confined legally and culturally (p. 20).

Misogynist interpretations of the Qur'an and *hadith* in support of veiling remained largely unchallenged until the 20th century in Iran (Bamdad, 1977). It was in the early twentieth century that some Iranian women began to question their lack of freedom and identified the *hijab* as a barrier to their autonomy. As a result, women started to discuss and question the *hijab* and, occasionally, took action. For example, Fatemeh Ardeshiri's letter in 1927 identified the issue of *hijab* as an "obstacle to progress" and a way to "chain women at home" (Derayeh, 2011, p.12). Sediqeh Dowlatabadi was the first defiant woman who appeared completely unveiled in public in 1928 (Bamdad, 1977). Consequently, by the 1930s, more women began to appear unveiled in Tehran and slowly unveiling became tolerable. Nevertheless, the *hijab* remained part of

[10] Say to the believing men That they should lower Their gaze and guard Their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted With all that they do (Qur'an, 24:30).
[11] *Mursal hadith* is a type of *hadith* with a broken chain to the original source.

traditional Iranian culture because for many Iranian women, the *hijab* is strongly associated with the Qur'an, Islamic faith and tradition.

Over the course of the 20th century, the meaning of the veil has shifted. If the *hijab* was a cultural and traditional practice until 1979, since then it has become a socio-political uniform and has diminished the personal and social freedom of Iranian women. Moreover, it has become a national and "international identity" for Iranian women (Afshar, 1998, p. 201; Kaar & Lahiji, 1998). After the revolution in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini's decree made the "*hijab* an institution" and a means to define women's identity, measuring their level of chastity and commitment to their nationality and religion (Derayeh, 2011, pp. 15-16). According to Ayatollah Khomeini's decree, the expected proper *hijab* means full body coverage except for the hands and face (Ayatollah Khomeini, 1984, p.15 as cited in Derayeh, 2011). He further declared that women were obliged to practice the *hijab* and any refusal was considered blasphemy (Derayeh, 2011). Despite the compulsory nature of *hijab* in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini justified the *hijab* as a sign of respect for Iranian women in that it offers protection against women's sexual objectification (*Zane Ruz*, 13 December, 1994, as cited in Afshar, 1998). In addition, some Islamic scholars connect the veil to the protection of community. For example, Muttahari (1989) claims that the veil can protect the whole community from sexual corruption and that veiling is specifically for women as they have the tendency to show off and attract attention from males. In contrast, Moghissi (1999) argues that the restrictive dress codes for women have never been proven to be a form of protection against sexual harassment and sexual violence; therefore, the veil is not working in favor of public morality, as the state claims. Ultimately, women are forced to take responsibility for men's lust, thereby increasing men's power to control women.

There are claims that veiling empowers women, but these arguments ignore the notion of personal choice and fail to account for the root causes of social, cultural, and political control

(ibid). The veil became the symbol of political conformity instead of representing an individual's religious beliefs (Nafisi, 2006). However, now through "silent rebellions," women are less accepting of veiling regulations every day (Afshar, 1998, p. 206). Some women have slowly learned how to express their individual identities by making their own fashion out of a dress code they have been forced to accept (Kaar, 2006). Despite continual propaganda promoting *hijab* as a valuable element of Islamic government, women have started to wear looser scarves, tighter attire, and makeup.

Moreover, as women learn more about *sharia* law, they search for legal loopholes within the system to fight against *hijab*. For example, according to *sharia* law a bald woman is not required to cover her head and does not violate Islamic law when unveiled in public. Inspired by this law women started a new movement and appeared in public unveiled and with shaved heads to demand freedom of choice (Chapui, 2016). Although it seems *sharia* law left the matter of the *hijab* open to interpretation and somewhat flexible, the fact is that women are still obligated to follow a specific dress code and cannot choose their attire. Scholars such as Moghissi (1999) believe the nature of the *hijab* itself is a form of gender segregation which limits mobility.

Body Autonomy in the Discourse of Public Mobility

During the Prophet's era, women were active participants in the community and had no restriction on their mobility, but centuries later the Qur'an is cited as the authority for the separation of private and public spaces that has resulted in gender segregation and women's confinement (Mernissi, 1987, p. 93). Interpretation of verses 33:33[12] and 33:53 have validated gender separation. Although the verses directly address Muhammad's wives, interpreters such as Baydawi apply these verses to confine all women. For the community that was growing and

[12] And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless (33:33).

Muhammad as a leader of such an important society, separation for his wives was offered as a sign of protection and class and it is irrelevant to other women (Mernissi, 1987). Another verse that has been used in the confinement of women is 3:26.[13] Razi (1934) concludes from this verse that men have authority over women and the latter should be excluded from the public realm (as cited in Stowasser, 1994).

Although confinement literally creates absolute public exclusion, ideologically it can also impose limitations on freedom of mobility for women and solidify male authority. For example, verse 65:1[14] deals with restricted mobility during *ud'ah*, the waiting period after divorce. In a divorce, the man has the right to choose the residence of the woman for three months, to eliminate paternity disputes should she be pregnant. However, interpreters such as Ayatollah Khomeini have generalized the meaning of this verse to apply in situations involving the right to travel, the rights of residency, the right to work, and the right to education for all women (Ayatollah Khomeini, 1984 as cited in Derayeh, 2006). Consequently, conflation of misogynistic values and religion provide those in charge with the opportunity to create interpretations of the law that favors men and reinforces patriarchal values. In a misogynist religious culture, women are treated as vulnerable sexual objects, which then justifies and even necessitates control over women's bodies with restrictions such as veiling, limiting their mobility, and controlling their sexual desires (Mernissi, 1987, pp. 4, 11-12).

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[13] Say: "O God! Lord of Power (and Rule) thou givest Power to whom Thou pleases and Thou strippest off power from whom Thou pleases thou endues with honor whom thou pleases and thou bringest low whom Thou pleases; in Thy hand is all Good. Verily over all things Thou hast power (Qur'an, 3:26).

[14] O Prophet! When ye Do divorce women, Divorce them at their Prescribed periods, And count (accurately) Their prescribed periods: And fear God your Lord: And turn them not out Of their houses, nor shall They (themselves) leave, Except in case they are Guilty of some open lewdness, Those are limits, Set by God: and any Who transgresses the limits Of God does verily Wrong his (own) soul: Thou knowest not if Perchance God will Bring about thereafter new situation (Qur'an, 65:1).

As an Islamic society, Iran has been subjected to gender-biased laws that have restricted women's mobility for centuries. At times, the restrictions were moderately confining, such as during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign. At other times, the restrictions were extreme, as was the case during the Safavid era. In contemporary Iranian society, gender segregation and mobility restriction take place in many different public spaces, such as schools, public transportation, and the workplace. These restrictions negatively influence both men and women within Iranian society, though the impact is much more severe for women. According to Ayatollah Khomeini (1984), women are obligated to obey their husband and must not leave the house without his permission. In addition to male domination of the place of residency, according to *sharia* law, women need permission from their father, or their husband after they marry, in order to travel, continue their education, or work (Civil Code of Islamic Republic of Iran, 2006). For example, women cannot obtain a passport without their husband's permission and, even with permission, they are not able to purchase hotel accommodations independently, however, men can travel alone and purchase hotel accommodations without restriction (Afshar, 1998).

Additionally, the sexual objectification of women is a factor in gender segregation and subordination; a noteworthy example is street harassment (Chubin, 2014). Mernissi's (1987) theory of women's sexuality argues that men consider women to be passive individuals who seek pleasure by receiving attention; street harassment is then a form of attention. Furthermore, Gardner (1995) argues that some men believe women's presence in public is a violation of cultural rules; hence, women deserve to be punished through harassment. Despite occasional feminist movements against street harassment, the lack of practical anti-harassment laws indicates the acceptance of violence against women (Ilahi 2010; Nahar et al., 2013). According to Foucault and de Beauvoir, human attitudes and behaviors are socially learned and are a reflection of social norms. This is perhaps why some Iranian women have chosen to limit their

mobility and choice of attire and why some continue to equate covering themselves with avoiding sexual attention from men (Cohen et al., 2008). Applying Freire's theory of oppression to the power imbalance experienced by Iranian women, it appears likely that as long as women believe their non-compliance with gender expectations is the cause of street harassment, they will remain oppressed (Freire, 1993).

Body Autonomy and the Discourse of Sexuality

Sexuality is experienced uniquely by all individuals through thoughts, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and practice, society, culture and religion still dominate the expression and experience of sexuality for many (Little, 2013). As Baumeister (2002) explains, gender differences have always played a role in the expected sexual behaviors of men and women, including sexual desires, sexual fantasies, sexual activities, enjoyment, masturbation, and premarital sex. Islamic societies are no exception in this regard, and women's sexuality and body have been two of the most controversial topics among Muslims (Bouhdiba, 1985; Ikkaracan, 2000). Islamic culture is hegemonic and fails to take women's sexuality into consideration; the Qur'an elaborates on the discourse of sexuality and body autonomy for both men and women (Abu-Zayd, 2007, p. 123 as cited in Abbas, 2013). In the Qur'an, there are 93 verses in 30 chapters that focus on various concepts of sexuality and reproductive rights including the prohibition of homosexuality, the prohibition of incest, the conditions for heterosexual relationships and mutual responsibility in sexual relations (Janghorban, 2015). The Qur'an acknowledges the importance of sexual satisfaction for both wife and husband within the context of a heterosexual Islamic marriage contract, including women's sexual pleasure and orgasm as well as men's (ibid). However, Imam (2000) points out that recognition does not indicate equality; women's sexual obedience is also clearly indicated in the texts and is considered an essential part of the marital contract. Additionally, Bouhdiba (1985) conclude that

women's sexual rights are not recognized to the same extent as men's sexual rights and needs (as cited in Ahmadi, 2003).

The ambiguous treatment of women's sexual rights in the Qur'an and the ongoing influence of a misogynous culture led to restrictive interpretations of women's sexuality and women's rights within Islamic law. For example, Al- Ghazali denies the importance of Qur'anic passages on sexual pleasure for women and argues instead that Muslim women and their sexuality should only be used in service of their husbands and should be kept away from society (as cited in Mernissi 2000, p. 20). Muttahari (1989) also denies the rights of women in sexual relations, justifying his interpretation based on the Qur'anic concept of *tamkin*. He explains that within the Islamic marriage contract, a woman is responsible for satisfying her husband's sexual needs, while the man is responsible for paying the bride's dowry and providing his wife with food, shelter, and clothing. Muttahari's (1989) argument aligns with Ahmadi's argument on "modest obedience," *iba dah*, the path to reaching God. Women's worship of God seems to be meaningful only through obedience, *ta'ah*, and submission, *tamkin*, to their husband. Therefore, the sexual satisfaction of a woman's beloved is considered a form of worship (Ahmed, 1992).

Some Islamic scholars take an even more extreme view and deny sexuality as being a central aspect of marriage life all together. Contrary to the Qur'an, these commentators argue that the sole focus of Islam should be spirituality, prayer, the observation of rites, and caring for other people. They claim that sexual pleasure should be controlled because it is destructive to faith and morality, and they dismiss the sexual desires and rights of women altogether. For example, according to Al- Ghazali (1072-1127), sexuality must be used in the service of God and, therefore, the primary reason for sexual desire must be reproduction for women. Reflecting on the complexity and variety of Qur'anic interpretations in relation to women and sex, Moghissi (1999) argues that female sexuality holds more convoluted and distinct meanings in Islamic

societies than non-Islamic societies. Consequently, the Muslim female body has become the site of a struggle between modernity and traditional patriarchal society.

As an Islamic society governed under *sharia* law, Iranian society is no exception with respect to the discourse of women's sexuality. Merghati-Khoei (2014) identifies Islamic androcentrism as the main factor in shaping Iranian women's sexual rights and identity. Islamic androcentrism is further reinforced by a patriarchal culture that determines women's understanding of sexuality in the context of a society that suppresses women's sexual rights. For example, drawing upon discussions of chastity and virginity in the Qur'an, Iranian society perceives these attributes as expected qualities for women.[15] Furthermore, while women are expected to remain asexual virgins, for men, patriarchal culture supersedes Islamic law and normalizes premarital sexual relations. Once married, women's sexual needs must remain hidden; women should only show their sexual desire at the request of their husbands because sexual needs are seen as a masculine trait (Khalajabadi-Farahani & Cleland, 2015; Sadeghi, 2008). The rationale for this disparity is that Iranian society defines men's sexual desire as part of their instincts, while women's sexual desire depends on factors such as the quality of the marital relationship, the mental desire for sexual interaction, and respect for the husband (Merghati-Khoei, 2014). In addition to proscribed sexual motivation, women's sexual rights are similarly defined by Islam: a wife must fulfill all her husband's sexual desires and she cannot stop him from sexual intercourse without a religious excuse. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, if she does not uphold her responsibilities, she forfeits her rights to food, shelter and clothing (as cited in Moghissi, 1999, p. 23).

[15] However, it is noteworthy that the discourse of virginity is mentioned only twice in the Qur'an and in both cases with an emphasis on chastity, not necessarily virginity: e.g., the story of Mary mother of Jesus and the *hoori,* a young virgin woman rewarded to pious Muslim men in the afterlife (56:22, 56:23).

Cultural expectations of sexual passivity and chastity are linked to another important obstacle to women's autonomy: a culture of silence and shame (Merghati-Khoei, 2014). Women learn through androcentric social norms that communicating about their sexuality is taboo; they should keep sexual matters private at all times (Janghorban, 2015). Consequently, feelings of shame, fear of being labeled as having excessive sexual desire, fear of receiving negative judgments about their chastity, and fear of hurting their husband's feelings or being rejected by their husband work against women's sexual autonomy (ibid). Janghorban argues that the culture of silence and shame negatively affects women's body autonomy, regulates communication about their sexuality, desires, wants, and needs, and equates modesty and self-respect with obedience and submission (ibid). In fact, women who seek the same level of sexual freedom as men are not respected, even among other women. Following the culture of shame and silence in Merghati-Khoei's (2008) study, Iranians repeatedly used the word *najib*, modest, to describe an individual who is not sexually expressive, does not initiate sexual relationships, and is a sexually quiet person. Merghati-Khoei (2014) found passivity in Iranian women's sexual behaviors due to patriarchal culture which, limits Iranian women's sexual rights and forces them into the shadow of silence.

In recent years, women's sexuality has been the subject of controversy. Pre-marital relationships have become more common despite the high social value placed on chastity and virginity, and the average age of marriage has increased (Asadi 2006; Movahhed et al., 2009; Sadeghi, 2008). On the one hand, men expect women to be sexually available, even before marriage, while on the other hand, the same society does not appreciate the openness of women and instead promotes a culture of silence and shame (Sadeghi, 2008). This is one of the main paradoxes that shape Iranian women's identity: being a modern woman in Iran means being trapped between tradition and modernity. Unfortunately, the culture of silence and shame

combined with changing sexual attitudes has led to sexual involvement in private spaces. This hidden sexual involvement and its dualistic values leave women vulnerable to sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and unhealthy abortions (Joan, 1994; Sadeghi, 2008).

Pregnancy and abortion are supported in the Qur'an through reproductive rights and freedom of choice while emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility (Janghorban, 2015). The Qur'an addresses reproductive rights and the right to life, but prohibits Muslims from committing infanticide (17:31).[16] The Qur'an encourages life but does not forbid the use of contraception (22:5;[17] 23:13-14;[18] 7:189;[19] 53:45- 46;[20] 2:233). [21] Abortion is also permitted in the Qur'an during the first trimester of pregnancy, and women have full rights to their body when it comes to abortion (6:151;[22] 17:31).[23]

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[16] Kill not your children For fear of want: We shall Provide sustenance for them As well as for you. Verily the killing of them Is a great sin (Qur'an, 17:31).

[17] O mankind! If ye have A doubt about the Resurrection, (Consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a leech-like Clot, then out a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order That We may manifest (Our power) to you; And We cause whom We will To rest in the wombs For an appointed term, Then do We bring you out As babes, then (foster you) That ye may reach your age Of full strength; and some Of you are called to die, And some are sent back To the feeblest old age, So that they know nothing After having known (much). And (further), thou seest The earth barren and lifeless, But when We pour down Rain on it, it is stirred (To life), it swells, And it puts forth every kind Of beautiful growth (in pairs) (Qur'an, 22:5).

[18] Then We placed him As (a drop of) sperm In a place of rest, Firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm Into a clot of congealed blood; Then of that clot We made A (fetus) lump; then We Made out of that lump Bones and clothed the bones With flesh; then We developed Out of it another creature. So blessed be God, The Best to create! (Qur'an, 23; 13-14).

[19] It is He who created you from a single person and made his mate of like nature in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy they both pray to God their Lord (saying): "if Thou givest us a goodly child we vow we shall (ever) be grateful" (Qur'an, 7:189).

[20] That He did create In pairs, — male and female, From a seed when lodged (In its place) (Qur'an, 53:45-

[21] The mothers shall give suck to their offspring for two years if the father desires to complete the term. But he shall bear the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms. No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear. No mother shall be treated unfairly on account of her child nor father on account of his child. And heir shall be chargeable in the same way if they both decide on weaning by mutual consent and after due consultation there is no blame on them. If ye decide on foster-mother for your offspring there is no blame on you provide ye pay (the mother) what ye offered on equitable terms. But fear God and know that God sees well what ye do (Qur'an, 2:233).

[22] "Come I will rehearse what God hath (really) prohibited you from": join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents: kill not your children on a plea of want; We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not nigh to shameful deeds whether open or secret; take not life which God hath made sacred except by way of justice and law: thus doth He command you that ye learn wisdom (Qur'an, 6:151).

[23] Kill not your children For fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them As well as for you. Verily the killing of them Is a great sin (Qur'an, 17:31).

Despite abortion and contraception being permitted in Islam, Iranian women's bodies are seen as a tool for reproduction, and their bodies are a symbol of "communal dignity" and belong to the state (Moghissi, 1999). Reporting on abortion among Iranian women, Akbarzadeh (2016) concludes that because abortions are taboo, usually there are reports of feeling guilt, being afraid of God, and other psychological reactions such as nightmares. Jarahi (2014) argues that in addition to the culture of shame and the feeling of guilt, Iranian women hold inadequate knowledge regarding contraception and their rights to abortion, which limits the practice of body autonomy.

Although there is no direct approach to sex education in the Qur'an, there are *hadith* and Qur'anic verses that discuss sexuality and provide guidance. Therefore, based on the existing materials related to sexuality, it appears that there should be no obstacles to sex education in Islam. However, Iranian women have limited knowledge on the discourse of sexuality, and Merghati-Khoei (2008) notes that religion as well as culture of shame and silence play a crucial role in setting those limitations. She found that group discussion during meetings with female religious authorities are the main sources of sex education for women. As Latifinejad (2013) argues, if there is any sex education, discussion of sexual rights and body autonomy is completely absent; avoiding and ignoring these taboo subjects remains the preferred approach. Adolescent females in particular receive direct and indirect messages from their parents to avoid the topic of sex (ibid). Girls are taught from an early age that their first sexual experience must be with their husband, and they are taught to control the way they present themselves in public, such as the way they walk, talk, and sit (Bauer, 1985; Merghati-Khoei, 2008).

In conclusion, it is apparent that the interconnectivity of cultural, social, political, and religious factors has played a role in shaping the discourse of body autonomy for Iranian women. Although there have been many cultural and social changes in Iran over the last 40 years,

sharia law still plays an important role in shaping legal and social norms. Women are often defined as sexual objects and are subjected to the culture of shame and silence. Consequently, sexual subordination, veiling, gender segregation, morality police regulations, and street harassment violate the body autonomy of Iranian women (Sadeghi, 2008). Although Islamized public spaces have changed in recent years and people have started to experience some flexibility in public, women are still living in fear when in public spaces due to the restrictions imposed on their behavior (ibid). Even though the practice of body autonomy directly violates male domination, religious laws, and cultural expectations, Iranian women have not remained passive, but have tried to obtain their rights and freedoms. In this regard, the digital realm, the internet and social media, provide a unique opportunity to learn and exercise body autonomy through the exchange of information and international communication.

Research Question

Friedman (2003) defines autonomy as a "critical self-reflection" of one's circumstance and making personal choices that are not influenced by manipulation or coercion (p. 4). Adopting Friedman's definition of autonomy, the focus of my research is to explore the discourse of body autonomy among Iranian women. It is known that despite the passive role the state has defined for women in the past thirty-seven years, Iranian women have never stopped their quest for autonomy and have been finding ways to resist restrictions on dress code, social movement, and sexuality. They have become increasingly active participants in education and the workforce, in addition they have been trying to take control of their personal and sexual relationships, public access, and physical appearance (Ahmed, 1992; El-Guindi, 1999). I investigate how Iranian women approach their body autonomy despite compulsory rules and societal pressure on their beliefs, desires, needs, and identity.

Unlike much of the relevant work that focuses on only one aspect of body autonomy such as veiling, sexuality, or public mobility, my work incorporates each of these layers to create a multifaceted analysis of body autonomy in the context of informal education (Afshar, 1998; Chubin, 2014; Merghati- Khoei, 2008). In this study, I move away from a common misinterpretation of Muslim women as passive individuals who are oppressed under the name of their religion and culture while I unpack Iranian women's identity as a blend of politics, history, religion, and culture that has complicated the situation for women (Ansari, 2002). I also challenge the traditional ideology of teaching body shaming and silence through religious propaganda, informal education, and formal pedagogy. Using some Iranian women's personal experiences as authentic testimony of their reality, my dissertation develops a new perspective on practicing body autonomy that acknowledges human rights and self-liberation. My research sheds further light on what Iranian women understand about body autonomy by examining the following core questions:

How are women's understanding and practice of body autonomy shaped by socio-cultural expectations?

How do the internet and social media, as informal educational tools, play a role in women's understanding and practice of body autonomy?

In what ways do women practice body autonomy through their social media and internet use?

How and in what ways do women advocate for their own and others' liberty?

To explore the discourse of body autonomy in the context of informal education, my research sample include Iranian women inside Iran. Furthermore, my inquiry focuses on the impact of the internet as an informal emancipatory educational tool with less surveillance and body policing

while simultaneously considering the paradoxical lives of Iranian women living in a restricted society.

Theoretical Framework

Derayeh (2002) argues that according to Western and Eastern feminist theories, the general definition of subordination is "a state of secondary, inferior, limited, unequal, partial, and complementary existence" (p. 18). Additionally, the state of subordination can be caused by any of the following elements: "family, education, employment, religious, legal, social, and political spheres" (Derayeh, 2002, pp. 18-19). Moreover, subordination is the root cause of domination throughout history and has often led to females being referred to as the "second sex" (Beauvoir, 1953). Bordo (2000) and Usher (1997) describe femininity as a position of subordination in which the living experience of women under patriarchy involves "being proper," following gender and beauty standards, and learning how to anticipate and accommodate the "male gaze" (p. 117; p. 47). According to Derayeh (2002), Iranian feminism is defined as any effort with the purpose of eliminating subordination while aiming to establish gender equality in one or more of the above-mentioned elements (pp. 18-19).

Historically, Iranian women began to quest for their rights by actively participating in national movements in 1906; however, their involvement cannot be considered a feminist movement because it did not result in their liberation. Derayeh further argues that despite Iranian women's unfamiliarity with the West's 20th century "feminist movement," the "theory of superiority" and the "superior uniqueness of women" were still concepts at the center of Iranian women's attention and were represented during their demands for education and body rights in the early 20th century (p.199). Consequently, women's quest for equality and rights that was influenced by social, religious, and cultural factors have continued to cultivate since that time. As a result, contemporarily, both Islamic feminism with an emphasis on religion as a

means of emancipation and secular feminism are growing. These divergent feminist perspectives disagree on the controversial discourse of body autonomy. Therefore, some Iranian Islamic reformist feminists deny the right to body autonomy, claiming it is contrary to cultural, moral, and religious values (Shahidian, 2002). On the other hand, secular feminist scholars have not rejected body autonomy, and they detect individuality and family detachment as a way to empowerment (Derayeh, 2006).

I must emphasize that my research is not intended to promote or condemn religiosity or culture; rather, it is concerned with awareness, the practice of agency, and body autonomy and that women should have the right to consciously decide and act according to their beliefs. My work will explore existing theories as grounds for problematizing both the apologetic Islamic feminist and those who justify the absence of autonomous practice, by positioning Iranian women's discourse of body autonomy in the context of "I act therefore I am," "oppositional duality," "theory of estrangement," "techniques of body," "conscientization," and "social non-movement."

I act therefore I am.

My work focuses on understanding the concept of feminism among Iranian women by examining the potential for and limitations of body autonomy awareness and practice based on the notion of "I act therefore I am." "The concept originated in 1994 and brought a new trend of feminism to Iranian culture through exploring women's actions" (Derayeh, 2010, p. 155). Women raised their voices through "recent cultural production[s]" as scholars, writers, or directors. Derayeh (2010) explores this notion by analyzing the efforts of Iranian women in cinema that challenged gender-based discrimination (p. 151). The theory explains the actions of women through their independent identity as mother, wife, daughter, and sister, but it does not limit them to these roles. The independent identity creates opportunities for women to raise their

voices and take action as a means to self-liberation. For example, self-liberation is seen in the short novels of Iranian female writers such as Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani. In one of her stories, she borrowed the concept of the forbidden apple from the Qur'an to show how eating the apple provided an oppressed woman with the wisdom and power of liberation (as cited in Derayeh, 2011). Although the theory of "I act therefore I am" is a powerful notion and promotes self-liberation, women need to understand how their freedom is affected by the context and environment in which they live and receive their education (Mohanty, 2003).

Oppositional duality.

According to Foucault, social discipline can regulate spaces, bodies, and the boundaries between individuals by utilizing fear and surveillance as a means of control (as cited in Nouraei-Simon, 2005). This is the case for the Iranian situation where policing the body and public space with oppressive restrictions enforces submission and obedience through fear and surveillance. This has engendered contradictory behaviors and actions—submission and obedience in the public realm and resistance in the private realm—that is, oppositional duality. In the case of oppositional duality, the individual does not try to discover the needs and desires that have been hidden from them; instead, they focus on discovering new experiences based on desired needs through self-conscious deconstruction (Foucault, 1984, as cited in McNay, 1993). As they try to discover their own way and desires, they remain limited by their exposure to culturally and socially constructed information. As a result, deconstruction does not necessarily reveal the hidden truth, but rather is limited to revelations based on the available information. For this reason, social surveillance and controlling information "colonizes" individuals' will and desires so that they become the very tools of their oppression. They obtained information under oppression and therefore they move within their oppressed schema (Foucault, 1979).

Moreover, Foucault claims that repression and resistance are not two distinct concepts. Instead, repression produces its own resistance, and power would be meaningless in the absence of resistance (Foucault, 1984, as cited in McNay, 1993, p. 142). The individual's resistance in this case is when she practices her autonomy based on the available information. Although the available information may not offer her full autonomous conduct, her resistance to public regulations by borrowing information from within the society will empower her autonomous action. However, the negation of oppositional duality between the true self and the other self prevents the full development of self-determination (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 1998). Instead, individuals need to reinvent the self in order to practice body autonomy. The ethical conduct of reinvention must be at the individual level while retaining the ability to self-criticize. In addition, ethics must be practical rather than being universal or based on religion or politics (Foucault, 1984, as cited in McNay, 1993, pp. 45-46).

Applying Foucault's theory, Sadeghi (2008) argues that Iranian women adopted "social identity surveillance," which allows them to learn about the rules and restrictions in public while finding ways to circumvent the restrictions of their traditional fixed identity through the private realm. Consequently, the double life caused by discrepancies between private and public life led women to be less Islamic in private spaces (Kian, 2013). The generation after the revolution was the first to be raised with oppositional duality as a core socio-cultural experience. The women of this generation—"the children of the revolution"[24]—experienced separate lives and identities in public and private spaces (Nouraei-Simon, 2005). In order to survive, the children of the revolution have been taught by their family members and authorities to have two identities, to fear and hide, to submit and resist (ibid).

[24] The generation born just after the revolution are known as "the children of the revolution." I must point out that the children of the revolution are, in fact, a very diverse group of individuals. Among them are those who support the "new regime" created by the Islamic republic and those who do not necessarily support the new regime, but do not openly reject it either.

Estrangement.

Alongside oppositional duality, "estrangement" plays a vital role in shaping the identity and autonomous conduct of Iranian women. The concept of strangers, or the others, was introduced to sociology by Simmel in an influential short essay in 1974. The concept was adapted to investigate the issue of being different and concluded that estrangement is the consequence of physical/spatial changes (Park, 1974). Shahidian (1996) further argues that the condition of otherness does not necessarily take place in the presence of spatial movement. Furthermore, Shahidian states that the norms and values of each society are defined by a certain group of people who enjoy access to social, economic, political and cultural resources, establishing a set of norms and values for the entire society (ibid). I agree with Shahidian's view suggesting his estrangement theory to the living situation of Iranian women inside Iran and further explains that Iranian women's situation has created a sense of separation and exile for them inside their own country.

Shahidian (1996) states that the norms and values of each society are defined by a male-dominated class who enjoy access to social, economic, political, and cultural resources. Nonconformity to these norms and values constructs estrangement. Shahidian's estrangement theory applies to the situation of Iranian women inside Iran who experience a sense of exile and separation from their native society. The patriarchal society of Iran views women who fail to abide by the set values and norms as outsiders who have the potential to cause sexual dependence and disrupt the social equilibrium. As a result, women must adopt their imposed identities and roles in order to be accepted by their culture and society. This means that to maintain their public image, Iranian women have to obey rules of conduct regarding sexuality, attire, and public appearance. Such predefined norms remove women's freedom to act upon their

own religious or personal objections; instead, women's conduct is based on social expectations and judgments of their chastity and modesty (Bauer, 1985).

A society rooted in cultural and religious patriarchy sees women as outsiders who have the potential to cause sexual dependence and hence disruption of the norms and the society. Hence Iranian women do not have the option to decide on their sexuality and gender roles, and although they might disagree with the imposed expectations and roles secretly, they will continue to put up with the cultural expectations. In order to maintain their public image, Iranians still have to observe rules of conduct in some areas, including sexuality. In this regard, Bauer (1985) explains that Iranian women's actions were not based on personal or religious beliefs, but determined by social implications and judgments. Therefore, an important factor in immorality is not about the behavior in relation to religious objection or personal objection, but whether the woman can keep the behavior from the public observant (ibid).

Techniques of the body.

Mauss's (1973) argument on "techniques of the body" describes how individuals learn to make their "bodies culturally viable" (pp. 70-74). Although the living body is a personal matter, we cannot deny the necessity of social relations and interaction (Lyon & Barbalet, 1994, p. 55). An example of techniques of the body in my study is the culture of shame and silence that Iranian women internalize to maintain what Mauss (1973) identifies as cultural intelligibility to avoid cultural punishment. Bourdieu shows how the social order has gradually shaped people's minds through different social systems such as education, language, judgment, values, and everyday life activities. Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory on "habitus" and "capital" elaborates on the social relation and interaction in Iran. Habitus trains individuals to think, feel, and act in certain ways. Habitus describes patriarchy and guides individual's behaviors and thoughts within the society (as cited in Navarro, 2006, p. 16). Such socially created factors may change under

certain circumstances, such as the unexpected cultural shift following the Iranian Revolution. As a result, women's situations are subject to change (Bourdieu, 1986, as cited in Navarro, 2006, p. 16). Inside and outside of Iran, cultural capital plays an important role in social relations and power within Iranian society (Navarro, 2006, p. 17).

Conscientization.

I borrowed Freire's[25] conscientization's theoretical framework to explore education as a vital way for "social reconstruction" and "cultural freedom" (Freire, 1993; Lloyd, 1972, p. 8). "Conscientization" cultivates critical thinking and promotes reflection and action that can lead to liberation and cultural freedom via "dialogical praxis" (Goodwin, 2018, p. 89). Freire defines conscientization as "the process in which individuals, as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (as cited in Lloyd, 1972, p. 5).

The first step to break the chain of oppression is to recognize the "limited situation," which takes place through informal dialogue, critical thinking, and questioning. In addition to intellectual enlightenment and critical thinking, the procedure needs "praxis," which is an inseparable combination of action and reflection (Friere, 1993; Lloyd, 1972, p, 5). In the case of Iranian women, developing critical thinking is a vital step before they can emancipate themselves; therefore, they need to understand their oppression and its sources. As the participants gradually understand the cause of the problem that they have been suffering from, their action is transformed through praxis (Blackburn, 2000). As a central part of emancipation, social change can mean individual self-improvement which eventually leads to liberating themselves as well as the oppressors (Goodwin, 2018; Lloyd, 1972).

[25] Adopting Freire's theory as one of the main theoretical frameworks enables this research to explore the discourse of body autonomy not just as a theory, but also as actions that individuals take in their quest for their rights.

However, fear of freedom and a lack of hope can interrupt liberation at any stage. The changes and responsibilities that come with liberation can generate fear and eventually aversion to freedom. Furthermore, a lack of hope for improvement can take away the faith and constrain individuals in the oppressed situation that they have been in.

Social nonmovement.

In the absence of the power to make visible changes, individuals tend to implement indirect strategies to eliminate the authoritative pressure. For example, the street becomes the site of communication and conflict between ordinary people and authorities, i.e., "street politics" (Bayat, 2013, p, 12). Street politics allows individuals to express their identities and solidarities in a passive manner beyond their personal/immediate circle to strangers despite the potential for more surveillance and increased oppression (p, 13).

One of the most common practices of "street politics" is "social nonmovement." Within an "authoritarian patriarchal" society, social nonmovement empowers women to quest for gender equality through the "collective actions of noncollective actors" (p. 15, 17). It is a quiet, individual, everyday practice and an ongoing action rather than an ideological or organized action (p. 20). Although there is no leadership or direct action against the law, individual acts remain prevalent and resistant to oppression, and there is no requirement for unity or concern over disruption as with social movements.

Silent communication between strangers in public via a "passive network" of "unspoken communication" through their gaze in public spaces, common style, behaviors, and concerns defeats "repressive authoritarian states" and the "unsympathetic attitude of many ordinary males" (Bayat, 2013, p. 23, 86, 100). For instance, a non-conformist woman with improper *hijab* would have empathy towards another woman dressed the same way as they share a common threat from the legal system and the morality police. In moments of intense political threat

"passive network(s)" convert to "communicative action" (p. 100). Collectively the shared concerns of these women are rarely related to women's rights in the sense of gender equality. They push for their rights not necessarily as acts of "defiance" of the patriarchal state or its ideology, but rather in search of better opportunities or to express their "individuality" (p. 102). Ultimately, this form of social nonmovement persisted as a dispersed action that gradually brought changes to society in the form of everyday practice and challenged previously inappropriate conduct such as studying and living in another city or town.

Summary

In Chapters 2 and 3, I critically review the scholarly literature and non-scholarly sources to explore the history of the discourse of body autonomy amongst Iranian women. In Chapter 2, I provide historical background on Iranian women's journeys to claim their rights between the late 19th century and the 20th century—the Qajar and Pahlavi era. As the religious, era. political, and social patriarchal system played a crucial role in every aspect of women's lives during this time, this chapter provides a brief preview of the system and society in relation to the discourse of women's body autonomy. The focus is on the effect this system had on the knowledge and practice of body autonomy amongst women in the public and private realm. Focusing on the Qajar era, I specifically review the effect of public education on women's body autonomy as the new educational system provided women not just with "knowledge empowerment," but also public accessibility from attending school on regular basis. I focus specifically on women's veiling, education, and work to explore their public mobility and exploring their public lives and sexuality. The value of their sexuality in the private realm is one of the main indicators of keeping women constrained in the private space.

Elaborating on the Pahlavi era, I further explain the effect of advanced education on women's liberation, while compulsory unveiling and public participation clashed with

traditional values and created a paradoxical situation for women. Mandatory unveiling hijacked women's quest for equal rights, but some women still managed to gain a bit of relative freedom. However, others became confined more than before. During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, the sexualization of women's bodies in mass communication advanced paradoxical values that had already begun during Reza Shah's reign. Simultaneously, women obtained improved rights in education, the workforce, public mobility, and family law.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the period from the 1979 Islamic Revolution to the current era of technology to explore the experience of body autonomy. Iranian women experienced a sudden and extreme change in their status and practice of body autonomy due to the dramatic shift in the political and legal systems following the 1979 Revolution. In this chapter I explicitly review the effect of the contemporary Islamic regime on the redefinition of women's body autonomy. The main focus is on the discourse of body autonomy in both the private and public realms while exploring veiling, public accessibility, and sexuality within the socio-legal system. The society of Iran has gone through many changes in the past 40 years, and I provide a thorough review of different political eras during this time in order to understand the trend of positive and negative changes that Iranian women have experienced in the practice of their body autonomy. Eventually, the internet, holding both public and private characteristics brought a new and unique space for women to practice body autonomy, with less surveillance and fewer restrictions. This new realm offered more autonomous exercise of body autonomy and provided women with a new source for education with the little social surveillance and patriarchal control of information.

In Chapter 4, I situate my research methodology, epistemology, and positionality. I chose critical and transnational feminist epistemologies in order to identify, describe, and explore women's personal narrations related to the discourse of body autonomy in the era of technology

and the internet. A critical feminist approach enables me to bring forth the personal experiences of women that would be otherwise unknown under the patriarchal socio-cultural system. Transnational feminist epistemology guides me to investigate women's experience beyond locality while taking their socio-historical background and situation into consideration.

Adopting an emancipatory feminist qualitative approach, I collected data from interviews and the observation of women on social media. I collected 20 digital interviews in Farsi with Iranian women inside Iran between the ages of 26 and 42, which I translated prior to data analysis. Due to the sensitive nature of this research and the potential emotional involvement of the participants, I adopted semi-structured interviews to provide my participants with the flexibility to answer the questions and to establish mutual trust and the opportunity to access in depth information about the participants' personal experiences.

In this chapter I elaborated on the interpretation, transcription, and analysis of my data. I chose thematic analysis as a flexible approach that allowed me to explore women's knowledge and understanding along with socio-cultural knowledge and the interconnection between the two that created a meaningful intersectional approach to understand the discourse of feminism. Thematic analysis allowed me to systematically break my data into smaller components and explore the discourse of body autonomy from multifaceted intersectional lenses.

For Chapters 5 and 6, I closely examined and coded the collected data from the interviews. I divided the chapters based on the major themes that I derived from the interview questions. In Chapter 5, I explore the discourse of body autonomy in public and online spaces with a specific focus on mandatory *hijab* and public accessibility. The participants are categorized as those who perceive *hijab* as non-autonomous, those who perceive *hijab* as autonomous, and those who perceive it as a law but practice it improperly. Regarding public accessibility, a majority of the participants are employed and actively participate in public

spaces, and street harassment was flagged as the most important obstacle that women suffered through. I further explore the educational effect of the internet on the level of awareness of women on the discourse as well as practice of body autonomy. In this chapter I show that women are aware of their body autonomy and its limitations surrounding *hijab* and public accessibility while they attempt to resist the imposed limitations on them in the public and digital realms.
In Chapter 6, I examine sexual autonomy as the most private discourse of practicing body autonomy by finding correlated codes of culture of silence and shame, sexual autonomy, virginity, and reputation in order to explore the discourse of sexuality from personal as well as social perspectives. Furthermore, the emancipatory educational effect of the internet on sexual autonomy is explored to understand the participants' journeys toward liberation and self-empowerment. Reviewing my data, I discovered two additional themes that were not directly part of the original research, comprehension of feminism and the participants perception of the internet. I further explore the internet as an emancipatory educational tool that women use, and I assess their perception of it and their level of understanding about feminism as a tool to understand their oppression in the context of women's rights as defined by this study. The presented data shows the interconnection between personal knowledge and socio-cultural knowledge in aforementioned areas.

In Chapter 7, I evaluate the theoretical framework and relevant literature in relation to the findings of this research, followed by summarizing my inquiry. Mauss's techniques of body theory focuses on the importance of social relation and the interaction of personal bodies. The theory describes the influence of social order in exercising body autonomy amongst Iranian women. Techniques of body normalized the culture of silence and shame as a strategy to avoid unpleasant cultural punishment or consequences. Foucault's oppositional duality explains how Iranian women under surveillance and fear are forced to become submissive while they

simultaneously exercise their freedom by borrowing available information and tools from within the system. The struggle between oppression and resistance problematizes autonomy and liberation as the participants still moved within the "oppressed schema." Shahidian's estrangement theory further explains how women experience otherness and a sense of outsider within their own society in the presence of resistance. Estrangement theory rooted in a patriarchal socio-legal system that only benefits the patriarchy imposes sexual objectivity on women. Therefore, they need to conform and remain under control in order to be an acceptable member of society.

I explore the "conscientization" of Freire to understand the emancipatory effect of informal education among the participants. I further examine the process of awareness, critical thinking, and praxis in order to explore the participants level of consciousness of their oppression and its root causes. Along with participants' consciousness and critical thinking, I explore Bayat's theory of "social nonmovement" in order to explore the participants' experience of resisting limitations and restrictions to obtain their body autonomy in the three realms, public, private, and digital. Bayat's theory of social nonmovement elaborates on how Iranian women in non-collective action resist-imposed restrictions that not only limit their autonomy but also reduces the quality of their life. Although it is action-oriented rather than an organized ideological approach, the scattered yet regular action has been enough to reshape many standards and limitations around women's body. The theory of "I act, therefore I am" originates in the cultural productions of some conscious Iranian scholars, writers, and film directors that challenge gender inequality and women's oppression in Iranian society. Adopting cultural productions as a powerful tool, these women's quests for emancipation gradually expanded to the everyday practice of autonomy for ordinary women. Iranian women became involved in self-liberation via their active presence and social participation became an essential part of their movement.

Chapter 2: One Hundred Years Journey in Search of Body Autonomy

Women in the Qajar Era (1785-1925)

Although historians are uncertain about the beginning of the resurgence of Iranian women's quest for emancipation and freedom, it is historically acknowledged that Iranian women's contribution to economic, social, and political causes during the 19th century led to a women's awakening in the 20th century. Between 1849 and 1890, women actively participated in riots and demonstrations to protest injustice, poverty, and famine (Kasravi, 1978).[26] One of the first political movements involving women in the modern history of Iran goes back to the Bahai movement in the 1850s. During the Bahai uprising in Yazd and Zanjan against the Qajar dynasty, women dressed up like men and fought shoulder to shoulder with men. In the second uprising in Yazd, women outnumbered men. Many other women participated in furious riots such as the bread riot in Tehran, Shiraz, and Isfahan in 1871 that led to a response from the army (ibid). Moreover, in 1890, when the clergy declared a boycott on the consumption of tobacco, women—including women in the royal court—objected to the use of tobacco and supported the boycott by breaking all the hookahs (Teymouri, 1982 in Paidar, 1995). Although women's political participation during the 19th century manifested in some autonomous political involvement and independent political decision making, their focus was on patriotism rather than their rights or emancipation (Derayeh, 2006; Shuster, 1912). In fact, women remained veiled and invisible once the demonstrations ended.

The absence of women's bodies in the patriarchal society of Iran led to the manifestation of voice emancipation in women's writing. Pioneering women such as Tahereh Qurrat Ul Ein

[26] Ahmad Kasravi (1890-1946) was a distinguished intellectual, social thinker and prominent historian who promoted anti-monarchical and liberal ideas. He was eventually assassinated by an Islamic group, *Fada'iyan* Islam, for his anti-Islamic statements
(Iranian Chamber Society, http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/akasravi/ahmad_kasravi.php).

(1814-1852) and Taj-al- Saltaneh (1884-1936) challenged patriarchal society by problematizing the absence of women's rights and body autonomy. First through her writing, then with her public unveiling, Tahereh Qurrat Ul Ein challenged the patriarchal order and quested for women's freedom and emancipation.[27] Not only were her efforts aimed at public agency for her voice, but also for her body autonomy by publicly unveiling in 1848. Moreover, Taj-al-Saltaneh, an educated Qajar princess, discussed issues of daily gender inequality in her memoirs, calling for women's education and unveiling (Derayeh, 2006).

Public mobility: veiled, but visible.

Following voice emancipation in women's writing during the Qajar era, Iranian women started to become visible by playing vital roles during the Constitutional Revolution between 1905 and 1911. During the Constitutional movement, Iranian women used their bodies to raise their voices and ask for equality and the support of a boycott against Russian and British goods. Under their *chador* they wore a white shroud to show they were ready to die for their beliefs. They did not just protect *ulama*, but also demanded legal rights (Shuster, 1912). In December 1905, women alongside clergymen and merchants occupied the shrine of *Shahzadeh Abdolazim* and demanded a "house of justice" be established. To protect the clergy, women climbed the roof and threw stones at the soldiers who surrounded the shrine (Doulatabadi, 1947, p. 26 in Paidar, 1995, p. 53). Between 1906 and 1908, when the first *Majlis* refused a foreign loan and instead proposed an internal loan and the establishment of the first national bank, women, even poor ones, contributed to this economic cause by offering their jewelry and belongings to generate capital for the first national bank (Bamdad, 1977; Paidar, 1995). Furthermore, Iranian women's active opposition to Russian[28] and British affairs in Iran culminated in massive demonstrations

[27] Tahereh Qurat al- Ein unveiled herself in 1848 and was imprisoned and killed shortly after (Derayeh, 2006).
[28] Although Russia landed troops in the North of Iran to claim power and control of all decisions by Russia and Britain, this led to a massive protest in Tehran.

against Russia and Britain in December 1911. Thousands of women wearing shrouds blocked the entry of *Majlis* and many women such as Zainab Amin, a teacher and a poet, and Homa Mahmoudi publicly spoke "to call people to stand up against foreign oppression by boycotting Russia and British goods." Eventually, women entered the *Majlis*, many holding pistols under their *chador,* threatening to tear aside their veils and kill their husbands and sons if the authorities did not uphold the liberty and dignity of the Iranian nation (Afary, 1996; Sahimi, 2010).

At that time, women's initial concerns over constitutional and social justice gradually shifted to become a social revolution that allowed them to seek out greater rights and freedom. For instance, in 1911, while Iranian women were selling their belongings to collect money for the country to pay their debt to Russia, women staked their claim to public agency for the first time and began to challenge the traditional female identity of dependence, passivity, subordination, and confinement (Afary, 1996; Derayeh, 2006). Some women took the opportunity to add a slogan against veiling and removed their *chador*, causing a public outcry and motivating the rest of the pro-constitutional women to call the unveiled women prostitutes and to dissociate themselves from the protests (Bamdad, 1977, p 72; Bayat-Philipp, 1978, p. 302; Rafii, 1983 in Paidar, 1995).

Despite their quest for freedom and their increased political participation, women's bodies were still regulated by the patriarchal society, and therefore regular autonomous access to the public and private realms was restricted. Gender segregation in the private realm, *andarooni,* and permission from the husband to leave the house limited women's socialization to homosocial interactions. The norms of a patriarchal realm empowered the husband as head of the household with physical, sexual, financial, and social control over women (Afary, 2009; Astarabadi, 1992; Bamdad, 1977; Najmabadi, 2005).

The tradition of confinement imposed public seclusion under the guise of protecting women's chastity and labeling women's nature as incompatible with social activity. Hence, appearing in public subjected women's bodies to policing and control by men and officials (Afary, 2009). Influenced by religious authorities and patriarchal cultural norms until several years after World War I, public spaces such as movie theatres and tea houses were closed to women, and gender segregation was practiced on some public streets and in carriages. For example, on the busy streets of Tehran, gender-mixed sidewalks were illegal after 4:00 p.m. and women required permission from a police officer to cross the street (Bamdad, 1977, p. 17). Public carriages were also gender segregated at all times, even for a family who travelled together (ibid). Under prime minister Sayyed Zia-Ul- Din Tabatabaei in 1921 the government issued a memorandum in support of *hijab* and *niqab* for all women and provided police with the authority to arrest women who violated the expected dress code. Furthermore, wearing high heel shoes became illegal during this time (Maki, 1979).

Women such as Homa Mahmoudi, Tuba Azmoudeh, Sedigheh Dowlatabadi, and Bibi Khanoom Astarbadi[29] continued to quest for women's rights through their writings by challenging subordination, confinement, lack of education, veiling, and polygamy (Bamdad, 1977; Paidar, 1995). Meanwhile, women's traditional social and religious gatherings became political meetings to exchange news and discuss women's rights (Bamdad, 1977). Furthermore, women established support neworks including associations, hospitals, schools for girls, and adult literacy classes for women without any institutional or external support (Afary, 2009, p. 134). Associations such as the Women's Freedom Society (*Anjoman-e Horriat-e Vatan*), ran political debates and discussions, and provided opportunities for mixed gender interaction to assist women to

[29] Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi was from a lower middle-class family and wrote a book, M*aayebe al rejal,* [Defects of men] in 1896 in response to a degrading book on women, *Tadib al Nisvan* [Edification of women] by an anonymous author. She was also the founder of the first modern school for girls (Paidar, 1995).

overcome their social alienation and shyness, and to develop social interaction skills (Sanati, 1993 in Paidar, 1995, p. 67).

Women's education during Qajar era (1785-1925).

Following the restrictions on public mobility, women's education faced tremendous opposition and hostility from clergy, and traditional society. There were some clergy, such as Bahaei and Behbahani Tabatabaei, who partially promoted women's emancipation and equality, including education, but there were also influential clergy such as Nuri and Modarres who condemned education for women and instead promoted patriarchy. Without having a sufficient base in *sharia,* some clergy claimed that women's education would promote un-Islamic Westernized values and cause sexual exploitation of both men and women. Consequently, the clergy's position provoked public opposition to women's education. Men and women protested against girls' education by looting the schools, harassing teachers and students, and creating an unpleasant and unsafe environment (Bamdad, 1977; Paidar, 1995, p. 67; Sheykh Bahai, 1905 in Paidar, 1995). Among these protesters was a group of women that appeared in public every day and stoned the students and tore up their books while shouting, "Women cannot claim equality with men. They are weaker. Their place is in the home" (Bamdad, 1977, p. 84).

Conversely, women in favor of education publicized the importance of education for girls and demonstrated the lack of evidence for a religious prohibition against schooling for girls. For example, Zandokht Shirazi, a poet and writer in the 1930s actively published articles about education for girls in order to persuade families and society about its necessity (Derayeh, 2011). Furthermore, the founders of girls' schools persevered and attempted to prove to society that the schools were not causing trouble or having a negative moral impact. As reassurance, they hired only female or older male teachers, added religion to their curriculum, performed religious rituals, and recited the Quran inside schools (Bamdad, 1977). In addition to respecting traditional

morality and women's chastity, the schools added domestic science, health studies, and childrearing to their curriculum to prove the benefit of education for future wives and mothers (Najmabadi, 1998, pp. 98-103).

Despite the schools' respect for tradition, the state found it necessary to prohibit all teaching related to women's rights and liberation. For instance, when Safiyah Yazdi decided to educate pupils about women's rights, the Ministry of Education forced her to stop as the subject of women's rights was considered to be outside the curriculum (Bamdad, 1977). Moreover, sexual objectification caused sexualized interpretations of school names and forced schools' founders to choose school names such as Namous[30] (honor) that assured positive and constructive intentions (Amin, 2002). Regardless of all the impediments, many women, including Sediqeh Dowlatabadi and Afaq Parsa, tirelessly advocated for women's education and established numerous organizations and schools between 1910 and 1930 (Moghissi, 2006).[31]

Interestingly, as the educational situation for women gradually improved, the concept of subordination proved resilient, especially at the societal and governmental levels, and continued to hinder women's emancipation (Sedghi, 2007). A review of legislation related to public education and schooling indicates continuous discrimination and gender inequality. The most important article on education was Article 33 of the 1907 Parliament on free compulsory elementary education for all Iranians aged 7–13, which was never actually enforced (Arasteh, 1962; Bamdad, 1977). Furthermore, the interpretation of Article 18 from 1907 that indicated the "study of all sciences, arts, and crafts is free, except in the case of that which is forbidden by *sharia* law" provided an opportunity for the clergy to condemn education for women claiming

[30] School names such as *dushizegan* (maiden) were interpreted as too sexualized and the school was forced to change its name (Amin, 2002).

[31] "Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, for example, was beaten and detained for three months for establishing a girls' school, and Afaq Parsa, was exiled from her native town of Mashhad, first to Tehran and then to Arak, for publishing a feminist journal" (Bamdad, 1977; Moghissi, 2008, p. 544).

sexual decay and harm to women's chastity (Arasteh, 1962). It was not until 1910 that the first progressive legislation granting financial support to both boys' and girls' elementary schools passed. However, this legislation still provided more financial support for elementary and secondary schools for boys (Delrish, 1996). Reiterating the patriarchal ideology of women as secondary citizens who lack the capacity to learn, this law did not consider secondary education an asset for girls.

The government's failure to provide adequate financial and legal support as well as security, left the discourse of women's education in jeopardy (Rostam-Kolayni, 2008). Families who were in favor of modern education for women were often subjected to violence and condemnation from society. Social pressure and an intense fear for the safety and chastity of their girls forced some parents to withdraw their daughters from school and revert to the more traditional home-schooling model (Afary, 1996; Bamdad, 1977; Menashri, 1992). Moreover, the families who resisted socio-cultural pressure and continued sending their girls to school still failed to take further steps for women's liberation such as advocating for women's careers, public freedom, or unveiling (Bamdad, 1977; Najmabadi, 2005; Shirazi, 2014).

The discourse of sexuality.

Although modern pedagogy offered women wisdom, knowledge, and values beyond their physical appearance and sexual function, patriarchal society considered women to be the weaker sex and valued them solely for their sexual and reproductive capabilities. For many young women at the age of nine or ten without any education or sexual discourse, their father, without their consent, determined their future husband (Afary, 1996; Sedghi, 2007). A woman, a sexual object, with virginity as her most valuable possession, was merely a commodity in a financial transaction between two men, father and future husband, who together wielded total legal and

cultural power over her person and sexual organs[32] (Afary, 1996; Sedghi, 2007). Once she married, the husband had control over her body as a tool for pleasure and reproduction. Women's complementary existence often collided with their human rights and freedom, bringing women's autonomous decisions on contraception and sexual pleasure into question.[33]

In Iran, during the Qajar, era women accepted their status as secondary sex and, by doing so, unwittingly contributed to their sexual objectification and subordination. For example, during the traditional Iranian marriage proposal ceremony of *khastegari*, women from the groom's family assessed the potential bride's beauty and body to determine if she was qualified and suitable for marriage. Although women challenged their secondary sex status by seeking abortion rights for unwanted pregnancies and fixing virginity before marriage, their autonomous actions were overshadowed by patriarchal values and earning good marriage qualifications rather than liberation (Bamdad, 1977). Despite the effort of modern educators, social, traditional, and cultural hegemony combined with religious ideology forced women to prioritize marriage over everything. Therefore, confining women's bodies in order to protect her chastity and sexuality became the main concern of society as well as women.

The discourse of *hijab.*

Veiling, the foundation of body confinement and segregation, affected women differently based on geographical locations[34] and socio-economic class. Middle- and upper-middle-class

[32] A girl without virginity was tainted. Some families tried to cover this dishonour by marrying her temporarily to a low-level cleric and then arranging the second marriage with a desirable suitor. However, this was only an option for wealthy women as they still had the opportunity for the second marriage due to their social status and wealth. Another option was marrying the girl to a young inexperienced youth, to stitch her or get a secret abortion (Polak, 1976).

[33] Although it is permitted in Islam, some jurists said permission of the husband is preferred, but not necessary (Polak, 1976).

[34] Tribal women went to work unveiled; poor rural women wore a modified form of the veil; and elite urban women strictly observed the practice. Veil observation was also different from area to area, i.e., northern Gilani women, Kurdish, and southern Arab women had frequent public access and no *chador*. Kashani women were restricted and Tehrani women were in between (Afary, 2009).

urban women had the least public access and the most restricted dress code and interactions with men. Although veiling and face covering provided women with some level of anonymity—therefore autonomy—for the first time, during the Qajar period, middle- and upper-class women found it necessary to begin to challenge the institution of the *hijab* (Ravandi, 1978, pp. 715-723 in Paidar 1995, p. 37). For example, two groups of women in Shiraz and Tehran decided to modify the color of their *chador* from black to brown and navy due to extreme heat one summer, for which they faced opposition and were subjected to a vigorous attack in public. In another incident, Ebrahim Khawjeh-Nuri, the editor of a newspaper, published an article criticizing the institution of veiling and advocating for women's modern education. As a result, he was attacked by the clergy, detained, and sentenced to 3 years in prison in 1923. Ironically, women who attended his trial to show their support for his ideas and ask for his release were completely veiled (Derayeh, 2011). Despite these setbacks, women continued to challenge the institution of *hijab* in their writing, unveiling their voices instead (Afary, 2009).

Summary

For over a century, the complex, restrictive, religious-cultural values of society, government, and the private sphere created a paradoxical situation that caused hardship in women's journey to their emancipation. Despite women's active participation in the success of the Constitutional Revolution, the same constitution failed to recognize women's rights and freedoms, and the government still classified women as secondary citizens without any social, economic, or political rights along with foreigners, criminals, minors, and murderers (Sedghi, 2007). Social anxiety rooted in religion and tradition over women's freedom hindered their emancipation, yet women did not abandon their quest for liberation. In fact, in the next era, in a different political atmosphere, women continued their quest for their rights.

Reza Shah- Pahlavi Era (1921-1943)

During the Pahlavi era, as women's tenacity for emancipation increased, their quest evolved in two distinct phases. The first phase began in the 1920s with the constitution's generation: mainly higher-class women who advocated for women's rights and problematized internal pressures such as domestic and social subordination, dependent identity, and patriarchal culture. Women's tremendous efforts for emancipation resulted in the establishment of organizations, schools, and five short-lived magazines. One of the most prominent women during this time was the poet Zandokht Shirazi, who founded an organization and a publication for women in Shiraz in 1927. Zandokht advocated for gender equality and challenged "unveiling and education" (Derayeh, 2011, p. 13).

The second phase began in the 1930s when, for the first time, women's bodies became the focus of the state. Reza Shah repressed all independent women's organizations and publications, and established a dependent women's center, Women's Association,[35] and promoted women's rights from above. To present the association as a statutory organization dealing with women and their related issues, Ashraf, the daughter of Reza Shah, received the leadership position while at the same time important feminist figures such as Sediqeh Dowlatabadi became influential members of the association (Bamdad, 1977; Sedghi, 2007). The association's activities involved vocational training, education, charity, domestic, economic, and subsequently unveiling as its predominant purpose (Afary, 2009; Amin, 2002; Bamdad, 1977).

[35] In 1935, Ali Asqar Hekmat, the Minister of Education, called on leading female educators, and veterans of the women's movement from the 1920s and early 1930s including Afshar, Argun, Bamdad, Esmat-al-Moluk Doulatdad, Doulatabadi, Parvin E'tesami, Taj al-Moluk Hekmat, Akhtar Kam- bakhsh, Shams-al Moluk Javaher-Kalam, Parsa, Fakhr al-Zaman Qaffari Bayandor, and Pari Hosham Sahidi to form *Kanun-e Banovan* (The Lady's Center). Reza Shah pledged his support and appointed his older daughter, Ashraf, to preside over the "organization" (Amin, 2002; Bamdad, 1977; Sedghi, 2007, p. 83).

Compulsory unveiling: Absence of autonomy.

Mirroring the way that women started to advocate for education in the private realm and later expanded to the public realm, in the 1920s, *hijab* and gender segregation first faded in the private realm and then slowly diminished in public (Shojaei, 2010). Women who problematized *hijab* as a barrier to their body autonomy in their writing and speech, gradually abandoned *niqab* and wore lighter and looser veils. Moreover, some educated urban women, such as Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, publicly unveiled to claim their autonomous body rights. Gradually, appearing unveiled in public became common practice among women from elite families in major urban areas such as Tehran (Afary, 2009). However, in response, Reza Shah and *ulama* condemned and repressed the women's unveiling movement and those who practiced or promoted unveiling were harassed and chastised by people and the government (Amin, 2002; Derayeh, 2011).

Ironically, soon after, Reza Shah began to promote unveiling as a major contribution to his modernization agenda.[36] As a result, Women's Association, under the state's authority, adapted unveiling as one of the main objectives of its activity and began to manage meetings to propagate unveiling under a movement called *kafan-e siah* (a pejorative reference to the black *chador*[37]) (Bamdad, 1977 in Sedghi, 2007, p. 83). In support of unveiling, the association arranged a police escort for unveiled women in order to protect them from harassment and provided moral support for women who wanted to unveil and needed to convince their families.[38] The association also rewarded unveiled women in their meetings by offering VIP seats, traditionally reserved for women academics (Sedghi, 2007).

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[36] "In 1928, following religious authorities' reaction to the Queen's exposure of her face in the holy shrine at Qom, the monarch attacked and humiliated the involved religious authorities (Bamdad, 1977; Sedghi, 2007, p. 85).
[37] Members of the association visited girls' schools regularly and advocated for unveiling to students and school staff (Bamdad, 1977).
[38] Unveiling occurred in wealthier areas first and women living in less wealthy areas came out of their homes veiled and then removed the veil under police protection once they entered areas further from home. This was a way to protect unveiled women from public disgrace and harassment (Bamdad 1977).

After a trip to Turkey, influenced by Ataturk's modernization protocol, including unveiling, Reza Shah hijacked the women's veiling movement and declared compulsory universal unveiling on January 7, 1936. On the day of international unveiling, Reza Shah ordered all women teachers, wives of authorities, ministers, high military officers, and government officials to present unveiled in European style clothing with a hat.[39] While some women attended the ceremony and willingly celebrated unveiling, others were very uncomfortable showing their faces and turned towards walls in order to hide from the public (Bamdad, 1977). Soon after the declaration, the state ordered a march by school girls in Western athletic custom along with their unveiled teachers. Women for the first time were admitted to medical and law schools (ibid). In the following years, January 7th became known as "Women's Emancipation Day."

The state's compulsory unveiling compelled women to appear unveiled in European-style clothing in public. Furthermore, the state dismissed high level government officials whose wives were still veiled with *chador* and penalized lower rank government officials. Police were commanded to remove the veil from all women in public and entrance to public spaces such as theatres, stores, bus stations, and even shrines prohibited to veiled women (Chehabi, 1994, p. 218). Veiling as a symbol of virtue was redefined as a symbol of vice under the new regulation, only allowing prostitutes to be veiled (Derayeh, 2002). In fact, the compulsory decree violated women's historical, psychological, and physical attachment to the *hijab*. Iranian women who had adopted veiling as a sign of piety and protection from the male gaze associated unveiling with a major sin and were forced to be unveiled or confined.

Under the new compulsory decree, women who chose the *hijab* were confined to private spaces and their body autonomy became even more restricted than before (Derayeh,

[39] Although Reza Shah personally admitted that the unveiling decree was the hardest decision he ever made, he ordered his daughters and wife to attend unveiled as the perfect symbol and example for all Iranian women (Bamdad,1977).

2006, 2011; Shahri, 1992). Moreover, some women were forbidden by their male significant others to leave the house, even to go to the public bath. In addition, other women were confined inside as they could not afford the new clothing (Afary, 2009; Nashat, 2003). Although some religious figures such as Rezagholi Shariat-Sanglari pleaded to *ulama* that they should reinterpret and "modernise Islam," the issue of veiling remained problematic[40] (Momen, 1985, p. 251 in Paidar, 1995, p. 108; Paidar, 1995, p. 107). After all, the compulsory decree did not violate all women's autonomy. The verdict offered some level of liberation and body autonomy such as freedom of public appearance, education, and employment for those who were in favor of unveiling. Some of these same women referred to the compulsory unveiling decree as "the great order" (*farman-e bozorg*) (Bamdad, 1977). Nevertheless, compulsory unveiling was simply the statement of dictatorship, and its abrupt implementation converted the body to the site of politics and desire (Bagley, 1971, p. 49 in Paidar; Paidar, 1995). Unveiled women were subjected to more social control and discipline such as conduct, appropriation, and clothing (Afary, 2009; Amin, 2002). Therefore, women remained subordinated members of society, just with a new set of socio-cultural mores and expectations.

Women thriving in education.

Despite Reza Shah's androcentric dictatorship, his contribution to the modern Iranian educational system brought profound changes to women's emancipation (Arasteh, 1962; Bamdad, 1977; Menarshi, 1992). Under Reza Shah, compulsory elementary education came into effect and the number of primary and secondary schools rose for both boys and girls. As women's education became officially institutionalized and legitimized, demand for education especially at the elementary level grew (Arasteh, 1962; Bamdad, 1977). For example, official

[40] Parvin Etesami was a great poet during Reza Shah's reign. One of her most moving poems was *Zan dar Iran*, Women in Iran, in which she expressed her thoughts on the mandatory veiling decree (Bamdad, 1977, p. 104).

figures show a leap in female students from 16.9 percent to 28 percent by 1942, with a total of 5667 girls having completed elementary school compared to only three in 1910 (Menashri, 1992; Sedghi, 2002). Furthermore, in 1936, Reza Shah established the first university and granted access to women along with men (Bamdad, 1977).

Although significant improvement took place in women's education, gender still played an important role in the number of available schools, enrollments, and the quality and accessibility of education (Arasteh, 1962). Girls' secondary education was completed in 5 years compared to 6 for boys. Women had access to fewer courses, with domestic subjects such as cooking, sewing, and homemaking as the main focus of their education (Arasteh, 1962; Sedighi, 2002). In higher education, the number of women was significantly lower than men and again women's focus was limited, in this case to teaching and midwifery at the beginning. Furthermore, women were excluded from the annual government quota and funding for study abroad (Amin, 2002; Arasteh, 1962). Educated women were expected to become better companions to their husbands and better household managers, while husbands retained the power to control and chaperon women's experience of modernity. Furthermore, schools became sites to convey the state's ideology and to reinforce a new national identity and status rather than support women's liberation (Arasteh, 1962; Amin, 2002).

Although the traditional society of Iran was gradually accepting elementary and secondary education for women, it did not perceive university as a suitable place for women. In fact, seeking higher education for some traditionalists was a sign of departing from true Iranian Muslim identity, seeing it as a source of demoralization. Traditional society imposed a complementary existence on women and expected women to sacrifice education, especially higher education, for motherhood and wifehood (Amin, 2002). Despite expectations that women's higher education would undermine the patriarchal structure of Iranian society, there is

no historical support for that claim, even though education did lead to increased mobility for Iranian women.

Public mobility: shifting from homosocial to heterosocial realm.

Unveiling along with the modernization of education and social participation altered the physical boundaries between gendered bodies and converted the homosocial public realm to a heterosocial one. Interestingly, interaction with unveiled women in a traditional society situated Muslim men in a position to commit three sins—look at her, greet her, and talk to her—yet traditionalist opposition still was unable to halt women's mobility (Afary, 2009). Unveiled women enjoyed increased access to public places such as movie theaters, restaurants, and parks, while public gender-mixed interaction and communication started to normalize. Additionally, women obtained access to non-segregated educational institutions, and the number of women in the service economy and industrial fields such as teaching, nursing, and midwifery surged (Paidar, 1995).

Women's mobility was legally dependent on their male guardian's permission for marriage, work, travel, and residential location. It was in her husband's hands to determine if the nature of the offered job was not degrading to her or the husband (Afary, 2009; Amin, 2002; Banani, 1984 in Sedghi, 2007). Women were still legally and culturally carrying an identity of subordination, a secondary sex. Unveiled women were verbally and physically subjected to harassment and humiliation by men because they perceived unveiled women's bodies as an open sexual invitation (Afary, 2009). Attacking unveiled women with stones and sticks in empty streets and poor neighborhoods in Tehran was common (Bamdad, 1977, p. 58; Sedghi, 2007, p. 83). Police response to the abuse was problematic because the state agenda to mobilize women collided with legal and traditional restrictions on women and therefore created ambiguity (ibid).

As a result, police regulations against harassing women in public places were only partially effective.

Sexuality: visible forbidden bodies.

Unveiled women's bodies redefined women's sexuality. Iranian culture, influenced by Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Jafarism, equated women's bodies with a source of shame and ritual impurity; however, the state promoted body visibility and mobility for Iranian women (Afary, 2009, p. 142). Such a reconceptualization created a unique expectation of a modern, docile body and mind for Iranian women, in which society dictated obedience from the way to wear make-up, attire, and hair, to pleasing the husband. The state as a universal paternal authoritative figure allowed men to control women's sexuality and reproduction while she was obliged to be submissive to the husband and his sexual interactions. Therefore, the presence of women's bodies in public failed to normalize her sexuality. Instead, her sexuality remained under patriarchal values with traditional and religious roots.

Summary

With respect to modernization, although the state seemed to promote women's autonomy and emancipation, women's freedom and agency was not part of Reza Shah's agenda. Instead, women and their bodies became political tools for the state to modernize and limit religious authority. Modernity did provide some women, mainly middle and upper middle class, with the opportunity for body autonomy and emancipation, but for many other women that same modernity remained in conflict with traditional and religious values, hindering their emancipation. Nevertheless, despite all the hurdles and the paradoxical situation, women relentlessly quested for their rights (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995, p. 78).

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's Reign (1941- 1979)

In 1941, Reza Shah abdicated in favor of his oldest son, Mohammad Reza Shah, who would remain in power until 1979. There was political and social instability for the first few years under the new Shah that enabled *ulama* and some traditionalists to urge seclusion for women. They condemned public mobility and education for women and even attempted to close down some schools in cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan. However, women, experiencing a new level of mobility and autonomy, rejected the reintroduction of confinement (Bamdad, 1977). Instead, their newfound autonomy, however limited it was, provided them with an opportunity to freely fight for accessible education and to challenge social prejudices against women (Paidar, 1995, p. 134). In this regard women such as Fatemeh Sayah, a lecturer at Tehran University, problematized the primary responsibility of women in the home and declared that "where there are no rights there are no duties" (Golbon, 1975, p. 146 in Paidar, 1995, p. 127).

Women suffered from innumerous social prejudices and inequalities focused on a variety of issues depending on their social class, political affiliation, and profession. For example, organizations such as the Democratic Union of Women, which challenged class oppression and gender issues for the first time in Iran, neglected issues such as divorce, polygamy, and child custody due to its male dominant leadership (Abrahamian, 1982; Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995, p. 128).

After 1953's coup[41] in favor of monarchism over democracy, the majority of feminist activities were once again placed under direct control of the state. The state limited and policed women's independent quests and activities by controlling and censoring independent

[41] In 1953 Mohammad Reza Shah with the support of the US State Department and the CIA overthrew the democratic government of Prime Minister Mosaddegh (Afary, 2009).

newspapers[42] and organizations (Afary, 2009, p. 10). Consequently, Ashraf Pahlavi, twin sister of the king, created a framework for an "Iran women's movement" in 1956 and incorporated eighteen women's groups into the "High Council of Women's Organizations," which subsequently became the "Women's Organization of Iran" in 1966 (Sedghi, 2007, p. 13). Ultimately, the organization established 400 branches with 7000 members countrywide. Aligned with independent organizations, the focus of this state-based organization was education, vocational training, health care, suffrage, labor force accessibility, and legal counselling for women (Afary, 2009, p. 211).

In the 1960s, long after the Constitutional Revolution, women once again found the opportunity to politically participate during the White Revolution. This time women participated for political reasons as well as for their rights and freedoms (Paidar, 1995). Although some scholars such as Maknun (2000) argue that women's participation during the White Revolution in 1963 was apolitical, state dependent, and immature, decades of tremendous effort to quest for their rights eventually led to women's suffrage and eliminated women's position under the category of minor in Article 2 of the Constitution (p. 189 in Shojaei et al., 2010; Bamdad, 1977). Still, women earned a more freedom, social status, suffrage, work opportunities, and literacy during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign and ultimately rapid and sudden modernization of a traditional religious society developed a paradoxical identity and situation for Iranian women.

Paradox of sexual autonomy.

Discourse on sexuality created the most significant dichotomy for women's autonomy during 1940s and 1950s. On the one hand, a new level of sexual objectification of women introduced via mass media, depicted semi-naked and exotic women's bodies in advertisements,

[42] A large number of women's publication in the 1940s and 50s such as *Ghiyame Zanan*- women's revolt, *Azadiye Znan*- The women's emancipation, *Zanane Pishrow*- Progressive women, focused on political and social issues of Iranian society (Paidar, 1995, p. 126).

literature, movies, and television. On the other hand, imposed values of female piety and virginity in traditional culture reinforced many families' beliefs that daughters were sexual objects that had childbearing as their primary goal and that they were a financial burden to their families (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995; Sedghi, 2007). In addition, Ayatollah Khomeini's *Touzihalmasael* (1983), an Islamic *shi'a* text for clarification of religious questions, constructed women's identity as a passive sexual object with the primary religious responsibility of fulfilling her husband's sexual desires (as cited in Paidar, 1995). Influenced by paradoxical values around women's sexuality, the state's inconsistent laws reinforced another level of dichotomy. The state increased the age of marriage from 15 to 18 for women, but at the same time Article 1031 of the civil code granted marriage for girls as early as 13 (Mir-Hosseini, 1999).

Such paradoxical values influenced and reshaped women's sexual lives from women's presence in literature to intimate relationships. Affected by paradoxical values, publications such as *Towfiq* made women's forbidden sexuality visible in the text, but it problematized their appearance in public. The publisher argued against emancipation as unsuitable for women and described women as sexual objects with a primary responsibility of fulfilling men's desires (Afary, 2009, p. 225). Aside from misogynous publications, some progressive intellectuals began to take advantage of the new situation and wrote about women's sexuality and body autonomy. Although cultural and religious values caused hesitation in the area of sexual autonomy, there were some who decided to break some sexual taboos around the discourse. The writer and poet Forough Farokhzad was one of the pioneers to break the silence on women's sexuality and challenge the taboos around women's sexual desire, body, and gender relations (Milani, 1992). Furthermore, Shamlou was the first man who spoke about his beloved wife and openly celebrated heterosexuality in marriage life (Papan-Martin, 2005 in Afary, 2005).

In the 1970s, the culture of women's sexuality reformed, and sexual attitudes gradually progressed: dating, courtship, pre-marital sexual engagement, and companionate marriage became acceptable among some sectors of the middle class (Afary, 2009, p. 325). Still, relentless paradoxical values in the context of men's authority over women's sexual autonomy remained significant, such as expecting virginity as an asset of piety, dominance over female sexuality and contraception, and the requirement of the father's legal permission for marriage (Afary, 2009; Bauer, 1985, p. 122). However, as women became more educated and mobile, they began to talk about contraception, abortion, and sexual interaction. At times, women secretively exercised their autonomy by repairing their hymen or receiving an abortion. According to Sedghi, there was a report of 20–30 unauthorized abortions per 100 births in 1972 (2007, p. 140). Furthermore, following the failure of state promotion for contraception and population control in 1977, and in compliance with *sharia* law,[43] the state legalized abortion for the fetus of 3 months or younger (Iran Almanac, 1977, p. 423 in Paidar, 1995; Sedghi, 2007). While unmarried women could benefit from this law if they were pregnant up to 8 weeks, married women were still required to obtain their husband's consent (Afkhami, 1984; Sedghi, 2007).

Body autonomy- *hijab*.

Despite the compulsory unveiling decree during Reza Shah's reign (1925-1941), most clerics and religious people were reluctant to adopt unveiling. Many clergy such as Ayatollah Khomeini interpreted unveiling as the root cause of family deconstruction and social corruption and demanded a return to the *hijab* (Afary, 2009, p. 192; Ayatollah Khomeini 1984, pp. 270-271 in Afary, 2009). Following Tabatabaei Qomi's *fatwa* against the government's restriction[44] on veiling in 1944, a number of women from lower-middle-, middle-, and upper-middle-class

[43] Despite some opposition from the clergy such as Ayatollah Khomeini, the majority of clerics accepted the new rules and did not overtly consider those laws in contradiction with *sharia* (Paidar, 1995).
[44] The state did not allow women to wear *hijab* in universities or workplaces as it signified a political statement (Vatandoust, 1985, p. 125 in Paidar, 1995).

families readopted *chador*—although in a more casual and looser format—for religious and moral reasons, from pressure from families and the neighborhood, or as a revolt against Western ideology. In addition, in 1948, in opposition to those women who chose to remain unveiled, 15 clergy signed a *fatwa* to ban unveiled women from shopping centers and markets. As a result, some *bazari* people (people in private business) refused to serve unveiled women (Abrahamian, 1982; Akhavi, 1980, p. 63). Women's organizations perceived the *fatwa* to be against women's rights and expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the decree as well as the governments insufficient response[45] (Abrahamian, 1982).

The conflicts over the discourse of veiling converted veiling to a "complex moral device" even more than before (Fischer, 2003). While women from the middle and upper classes still wore jeans and miniskirts, *hijab* became a significant marker of class and cultural differences (Afary, 2009, p. 188; Fischer, 2003, pp. 192-208). Liberalization from 1960 to 1963 led to the reappearance of national and religious oppositions to the state's Westernization agenda (Paidar, 1995, p. 139), and some college students began to wear a new Islamic outfit that consisted of a headscarf with fully covered hair, loose long sleeves tunics, and loose pants. This new Islamic outfit was meant to convey a political rejection of the state's Westernization and modernization agenda; however, women remained mobile and active in the public realm (Vatandoust, 1985 in Paidar, 1995).

Autonomous public mobility.

In the 1960s and 1970s, rapid modernization and urbanization along with economic growth based on oil revenues led the economy to flourish. Consequently, career opportunities in service sectors, along with educational opportunities for women, flourished (Sedghi, 2007).

[45] The state demanded the clergy, Tehran's leading Ayatollah Mohammad Musavi Behbahani, to stop women's harassment in public (Sedghi, 2007).

While women were mainly employed in teaching, mostly pre-school and elementary, and the service sectors, gradually they gained access to previously prohibited job opportunities such as the civil sector, police force, army, navy, and air force. By 1963, three women had successfully entered parliament, two appointed as senators, and two, Shirin Ebadi and Farokhroo Parsa, as ministers of government (Sabahi, 2002 in Afary, 2009, p. 205).

Women became mobile and joined the workforce for more than just emancipation. Even though there were a number of educated middle- and upper-middle-class women who joined the workforce to be financially independent, the effect was that they also renegotiated their identities, relationships, and responsibilities. In addition, the growth of income inequality, inflation, and changes in consumption patterns forced women from all social backgrounds, especially from the lower middle class, into the workforce (Arasteh, 1969, p. 93; Sedghi, 2007; WOI, 1975, p. 8 in Paidar, 1995).

Despite increasing job opportunities and legislation for workforce gender equality, the traditional discriminatory attitude towards women limited their autonomy. Women tended to be more vulnerable, as child care, gender discrimination, and harassment at work would often lead women to leave their jobs (Sedghi, 2007; Shojaei et al., 2010). At the same time, men were still expected to be the head of the household and women required permission from their husband in order to join the workforce, obtain a passport[46] and to travel (Khomieni *toziolmasael* in Paidar, 1995). Within the patriarchal state, sexualized and politicized women's bodies led to public policing and sexual harassment for both veiled and unveiled women (Vatandoust, 1985 in Paidar, 1995; Afary, 2009, p. 9). Moreover, the clash between modernity and tradition enabled religious authorities opposed to women's mobility to limit their mobility and autonomy. Many of them, such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Kashani, were against women's employment, mixed gender

[46] Women required the husband's permission to obtain a passport for each trip. In 1976 the government modified the law and once granted permission it could be used for multiple trips (Akhavan, 2014, p. 352; Paidar, 1995).

environments, and gender socialization, and they supported abolishing gender mixed educational institutions and public spaces such as swimming pools (Afary, 2009, p. 192; Ayatollah Khomeini 1984, pp. 207-271 in Afary, 2009). Nevertheless, in response to religious authorities, the state encouraged women to participate in the workforce and education (Afary, 2009, p. 9).

Women's education.

Despite religious and traditional opposition to women's education and calls for women to return to their traditional role, the state, educators, and women persevered. The state continued to limit the clergy's influential role in educational institutions and in political and cultural affairs (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995). Consequently, urban women's literacy rates increased from 22.4% in 1956 to 38.3% in 1966, and to 49.4% in 1971 (Afkhami, 1984, p. 335; Fischer, 2003, p. 192; Menashri, 1992, pp. 183-184). For the first time, the number of high school attendees reached gender equality in urban areas and the number of higher education institutions expanded (Arasteh, 1962). Women gained access to all fields except mining and were granted the ability to study abroad (Ahmadi, 1964 in Paidar, 1995).

Although women were prone to drop out, especially in non-feminine fields, due to involvement in physical work, household responsibility, reproduction, social prejudice, lack of confidence and motivation, harassment, or lack of family financial support for women's education, they continued to pursue education (Mirani, 1983). With all the social, cultural, and religious challenges, educational opportunities improved women's feminist consciousness and autonomy (Sedghi, 2007). By 1973, education as a benchmark for success or to be a better mother was insufficient. Instead, women such as Afkhami problematized predefined traditional roles of women by arguing that women cannot be fulltime mothers/wives and still work outside. In fact, men also needed to take responsibility and share duties inside the home. For the first

time, women demanded an independent identity and quested for full gender equality rather than remaining an ancillary gender (Afary, 2009, p. 212).

Paradoxical identity and discourse of autonomy.

Although, women were able to exercise body autonomy to a certain degree during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979), women's agency and rights became more complex with paradoxical values produced by the *sharia*-based constitution, traditional culture, and rapid modernization. On the one hand, women exercised free mobility, educational and career opportunities, sexual autonomy, veiling choice, and financial empowerment; however, at the same time women were subjected to sexual objectification and politicization of the body in the public realm. While middle- and upper-middle-class women benefited from modernization the most, they were also subjected to discrimination due to their autonomous conduct within a religiously traditional society (Paidar, 1995, p. 87). Therefore, the dichotomy flourished and the different acceptable identities available for women caused social and class differentiation and created a paradoxical identity among the new generation of women in the 1960s (Bauer, 1985).

To deal with an ambiguous paradoxical identity crisis, the state introduced an ideal role model for Iranian women: the queen. She was the ideal woman and a perfect example of an "emancipated woman": a "beautiful, feminine, elegant, loyal to family, subservient, caring, devoted, and conscientious mother" (Paidar, 1995, p. 149). In reality, the cultural practice of such an ideal identity granted much higher status to men and denied women access to prestigious male dominated areas most of the time (Shirazi, 2014).

One Hundred Years Journey in Search of Body Autonomy: Conclusion

Nationalism and anti-foreign economic and political influence counted as the first prominent reasons that women became politically involved in the public realm in the mid 1800s

and early 1900s. Consequently, women's participation in the Constitutional Revolution led to a women's awakening that eventually stimulated their feminist consciousness; therefore, the quest for their rights started to flourish. Women's quest for education was the first and foremost step that women took in their emancipation journey (Sanasarian, 1982, p. 21).

During the Qajar period, women's elementary education became a cornerstone of being a successful woman and also offered a better quality of life to her husband and children in traditional society's eyes. However, the concept of modern education offered more than just a better quality of life to her family: modern education challenged patriarchal power over women. Women's bodies began to challenge homosocial public boundaries, seclusion, sexuality, and veiling as women began to gain power by being involved in learning and social participation as teachers or students (Najmabadi, 2005, p. 196). Despite religious authorities' opposition, between 1909 and 1926, this feminist progression continued through women's writing, organization, and schooling and carried over to the Pahlavi era (Bamdad, 1977; Derayeh, 2011, p. 14).

Under the reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941), while women were gradually empowering themselves and questing for equal rights and freedom, they became the subject of state interest for the first time. Consequently, their bodies fell under the control of the state, as did their quest for emancipation and freedom. When Reza Shah hijacked the women's unveiling movement and instead commanded compulsory unveiling in 1936, it was for the sake of modernization and the elimination of clerical power rather than women's liberation. Compulsory unveiling was the cornerstone for the efforts to redefine women's body autonomy. This compulsory decree empowered some women from the private realm and allowed them to have access to education and actively participate in a non-segregated public realm unveiled; however, the same decree confined and immobilized many others who wanted to practice veiling or failed to break free

from private patriarchy. Social anxiety increased after the introduction of modern concepts such as formal education and unveiling.

Despite the social anxiety and paradoxicality, the politics of abrupt rapid modernization continued during Mohammad Reza Shah (1941-1979). Women with relative freedom of expression and body autonomy voiced and acted upon their quests for gender equality, educational opportunity, and career opportunity. In addition, the sudden appearance of women's bodies in mass media in a patriarchal society redefined women's sexuality altogether. Although the sexual redefinition allowed some women to claim their sexual autonomy, it created a new level of sexual objectification for women. Once again, women were caught between the values of "pre-modernity and modernity," and they struggled to establish a new sense of identity influenced by secular society and their religious background.

During the Pahlavi era (1925-1979), power over traditional society and its values shifted to the paternal government and the king, as an absolute father figure, who challenged the traditionally defined gender roles and gender segregation and division in the workforce, education, and the family that had been promoted and imposed by Iran's religious authorities for centuries. Pahlavi's politicization of women's bodies for the purpose of the state's modernization and Westernization created different types of relationships with women based on their class and location (Najmabadi, 1991, p. 61; Sedghi, 2007). Therefore, women's access to freedom under both dynasties was defined by class and geography. Although some working-class women were able to obtain low paying jobs during the Pahlavi era, mainly middle- and upper-class women benefited from the changes (Sedghi, 2007). None of these sudden changes really transformed women's beliefs, and the anxiety over paradoxical values between tradition and modernity led women to further quest for a meaningful independent identity in 1979.

Chapter 3: Islamic Republic of Iran

Women and the Islamic Revolution of Iran

Politically active women in the 1960s and 1970s who quested for "open political space" and against Westernization and imperialism played significant roles in the revolution in Iran in 1979 (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995, p. 190; Sadeghi, 2011). The genderless environment of the time allowed women, secular and traditional, to actively participate in the socio-political future of Iran over the next several decades (Sadeghi, 2011). Although scholars such as Paidar (1995) argue that women's political participation did not derive from feminist thought, they still demonstrated and demanded socio-political justice shoulder to shoulder with men.

Unexpectedly, this genderless atmosphere did not offer further liberation after the success of the Islamic regime in 1979. Soon after the success of the Islamic revolution in 1979, the "supreme Islamic ideological" regime strictly focused on *sharia* law as the major source of the Iranian Constitution (Afary, 2009; Kian, 2013; Paidar, 1995, p. 255). As a result, women lost many legal and social rights that they had gained over the past 75 years in areas of marriage, veiling, employment, and education (Paidar, 1995; Sadeghi, 2011). The primary role of women reverted to their traditional complementary gender role of wife, mother, daughter, or sister (Paidar, 1995, pp. 257-260). For example, a section about women in the Constitution states:

> The view of the family unit delivers woman from being regarded as an object or instrument in the service of promoting consumerism and exploitation. Not only does woman recover thereby her momentous and precious function of motherhood, rearing of ideologically committed human beings, she also assumes a pioneering social role and becomes the fellow struggler of man in all vital areas of life. Given the weighty responsibilities that woman thus assumes, she is

> accorded in Islam great value and nobility. (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1989, p.4)

Although Article 21 of the Constitution stated that "government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria," the vagueness and generality of the article allowed clergymen such as the Council of Guardians[47] to interpret the laws pertaining to women. Additionally, the ideal role model shifted from the Queen to Zainab, granddaughter of Muhammad, and later to Fatemeh, daughter of Muhammad, a perfect daughter, wife, and mother (Sadeghi, 2008). As a result, Iranian women carried a relational identity, becoming the property of the state and men, with little control over their personal freedom or legal rights (Razavi, 2006; Sadeghi, 2008).

However, the Islamic regime was not a counter modern regime. The state aimed at eliminating secularization that was rooted in the Constitutional Revolution and replacing it with its own version of modernity to sustain the regime (Afary, 2009). Ayatollah Khomeini and other Islamist *ulama* blamed Westernization for the sexual objectification of women and the disruption of families. They advocated for women's suffrage, education, and political participation in order to promote politicized Islamic identities for women (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995). Such duality confined a woman and her body under complex paradoxical values of modernity and tradition (Paidar, 1995, p. 186). The new paradoxical modernity suppressed women under restricted Islamic regulations, but also empowered women, individually and collectively,[48] to challenge the patriarchal Islamist protocol on *hijab*, gender segregation, and mobility from the very beginning of the revolution in 1979 (Afary, 2009).

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[47] The council of Guardians is a 12-member council appointed by the supreme leader in charge of Islamic rules and the Constitution. The council is assigned to ensure that laws passed by parliament are in accord with the Islamic Constitution (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iran/guardian.htm).

[48] Although women remained relatively active for the first two years, women activists faced difficulties promoting women's rights, and individual daily activity was difficult due to fear and public policing (Sadeghi, 2011).

Reoccurrence of the compulsory *hijab*.

During the revolution, Iranian women, influenced by Shariati's ideology of anti-consumerism and anti-Westernization, adopted veiling as a unified symbolic gesture in opposition to the ousted monarchical regime. *Hijab* as a desexualisation signifier in the masculine political realm of the time offered women autonomous mobility and identity protection from the secret police (Afary, 2009; Sanasarian, 1982, p. 116). However, soon after the revolution, the meaning changed: *hijab* became a "symbol of piety" and a "religious mandate" (Cooke, 2001, p. xi; Sadeghi, 2007). Moreover, veiled bodies became the most significant political indicator of the new regime, and women were obliged to adopt *hijab* in order to avoid seclusion (Abdmolaei, 2014; Hoodfar & Ghoreishian, 2012; Paidar, 1995, p. 232).

Although the discourse of veiling is deeply rooted in Iranian history, its compulsory re-introduction caused social anxiety and resistance among women, which in turn undermined the legal implementation of mandatory *hijab* in two stages (Milani, 1992; Paidar, 1995). In 1979, the first stage of mandatory *hijab* targeted women employed in the public sector and those utilizing public services. A day after the mandatory *hijab* declaration on March 8, 1979, some 20,000 Iranian women, veiled and unveiled,[49] along with male supporters demonstrated against compulsory *hijab* with slogan of "*na roosari na too sari*,"[50] (no to the veil, no to persecution) in front of Tehran University (Paidar, 1995; Sadeghi, 2011). The demonstration, which lasted five days, was brutally suppressed by *Hezbollah's* hostile attack with stones, knives, and guns. Three days later, in opposition to women's anti-*hijab* demonstration and in support of Ayatollah Khomeini's decree on mandatory *hijab*, fully veiled women marched under the full protection of the state (Afary, 2009, p. 274). In response to both demonstrations, Ayatollah Khomeini decided

[49] Bayat (2007) reports that some prominent religious veiled women such as Zahra Rahnavard, Fereshte Hashemi, Azam Taleghani as well as Ayatollah Taleghani were against mandatory *hijab* (p. 162).
[50] In addition to removing mandatory *hijab*, women demanded family law protection and a return of female judges (Sadeghi, 2011).

to announce that the *hijab* mandate was a misunderstanding and women were not obliged to wear *hijab* (Paidar, 1995, p. 235).

Women's demonstrations and public disagreements between significant people such as Taleghani[51] and Bani Sadr[52] slowed the process of universal compulsory *hijab* for a couple of years. Eventually Ayatollah Khomeini declared that "without Islamic families and *hijab*, there will be no Islamic society"; *hijab* became compulsory in July 1981 (Paidar, 1995, p. 337; Ayatollah Khomeini, 2005, 72; Afary, 2009, pp. 270-273). Following Ayatollah Khomeini's verdict, all women in Iran were required to at least wear "a long and loose cloak or overcoat, loose pants and large scarf" while showing a string of hair, make up, and nail polish became legally forbidden (Afary, 2009, pp. 270-273; Paidar, 1995, pp. 232-236; Sadeghi, 2011). Once again women were prohibited from public spaces such as government sectors, shopping malls, and schools, but this time for being unveiled or improperly veiled (Paidar, 1995).

As the image of women covered with black *chador* became the symbol of a loyal Iranian Muslim woman, improperly veiled women were harassed and sometimes threatened by men in some cities and refused as customers by *bazari* people in other cities (Shirazi, 2001, p. 100 in Afary, 2009). Consequently, in 1983, *Majlis* passed Article 102 to enforce punishment for "women who appear on the street without the prescribed Islamic *hijab* to be condemned to 74 strokes of the lashes," with the possibility of jail for a period of 10 days to 2 months (Bayat, 2007; Paidar, 1995). Morality police under different names—*Sar-Allah, Edare Amaken, Amre Be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar*—began to prosecute improper veiling. According to an official report during a 4-month period in 1990, 607 improperly veiled women were arrested, 6589 improperly veiled women were forced to submit affidavits, and 46000 received official warnings (Bayat,

[51] A *shi'a* reformist cleric.
[52] The first president of Iran after the revolution in 1979.

2007, p. 29). Additionally, the state-funded *Hezbollah* created fear by attacking stores who accepted *bad hijab* customers or sold un-Islamic products (Amir Ebrahimi, 2006).

As expected, previously unveiled middle- and upper-middle-class women who were active members of society in the past suffered the most. In response, violating the dress code, such as showing a string of hair or wearing nail polish, became a way of resisting the new situation (Afary, 2009, p. 270; Paidar, 1995, p. 342). Pressure from the state in its attempt to control women's bodies through *hijab* on the one hand and women's resistance to *hijab* by disobeying the dress code on the other hand established a schism between women and the state. Compulsory *hijab* as a new identity, with its political and religious components, became a symbol of social conflict that reshaped women's public mobility (Fischer, 2003; Koo, 2014).

Public mobility: confinement in the absence of *hijab*.

The new gendered "technologies of bodies" rooted in theocracy politicized women's bodies not just through veiling but also public regulation and surveillance. Women's mobility became restricted due to gender segregation policies in hospitals, educational institutions, and government sectors followed by complete seclusion from some public spaces such as stadiums and beaches. The state attempted to ethically challenge and problematize mixed gender interaction in the workplace and introduced new sets of hiring and employment regulations that excluded women from joining the army and from a variety of careers such as judge, singer, and athlete. Professions with late shifts or far distances from home became less accessible to women (Afary, 2009, p. 272; Sadeghi, 2007). Furthermore, women lost their rights to many activities such as sports participation, decision making positions, many university fields, and education abroad[53] (Afary, 2009, p. 272; Derayeh, 2006; Paidar, 1995, p. 340; Thomson, 2003).

[53] This statement is open to interpretation and therefore open to gender discriminatory consequences. In 1985, the Ministry of Higher Education permitted education abroad for qualified married women accompanied by their husbands (UNICEF, 1998, p. 46).

To paralyze women's public mobility even further, the state shut down many daycare facilities and dismantled maternity leave rights. Women's protests[54] against discriminatory employment laws remained futile. In addition to the state, women remained under men's authority for work,[55] education, residency, and travel rights. The Council of Guardians, inspired by the Qur'an,[56] modified Article 1117 of the civil code to declare that "a woman cannot leave her home without her husband's permission, even to attend her father's funeral" and that "the husband may ban his wife from any profession that conflicts with family life or her character" (Civil Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2006; Paidar, 1995, p. 284).

Despite the state's efforts to impose gender restrictions, economic hardship, sanctions, and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) made such gender discrimination impractical. Economic hardship forced men to work longer hours, and their absence left previously shared responsibilities such as taking children to school, banking, and shopping solely on women's shoulders (Bayat, 2007, 22; Sadeghi, 2011). As a result, women, even traditionally unemployed ones, spent on average two hours daily in public, including traveling by public transit. Consequently, active social participation for women of all social classes raised their consciousness and socio-political awareness while giving them the courage to search for employment either due to financial hardship or for financial independence (Bayat, 2007, p. 19, Nashat, 2004). Women's socio-economic participation proved that the social, political, economic, and legal barriers were rooted in hegemony rather than women's nature (Sadeghi, 2011).

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[54] June 1979, female employees of Commission Corporation protested against a daycare closure at their work place (Paidar, 1995).

[55]According to a declaration of the High Council of the Judiciary "if a woman worked before marriage the husband cannot prevent her from working after the marriage. Even if she started to work without his permission, he could only prevent her if he could prove that the job is in contrary to the interest and reputation of family." However, culturally, men were in control of women's careers (Paidar, 1995, p. 284).

[56] The Qur'an imparts control of a woman's place of residence to her husband or guardian.

Although women's social participation increased, women were still defined as sexual objects in Islamic jurisprudence, *fighh-e Islami*, and by traditional cultural values (Fitnah Sabbah, 1984 in Sadeghi, 2011). Sexual objectification, n*egah-e hame jensi*, of women and a lack of proper public education for establishing healthy and respectful relationships encouraged gender discrimination. Women's bodies were politicized and became the site of a patriarchal power struggle over her body and her mobility (Sadeghi, 2011). Consequently, sexual obsession, elimination of love and respect, and single mindedness of social interaction forced women to hold sole responsibility for their public safety with minimal socio-legal protection (ibid). Moreover, women's public presence and lack of proper *hijab* provided full justification for any unsafe public behavior such as street harassment. Women maintained public visibility through mandatory *hijab* and surveillance, they refused to submit to the constraints and remained a visible part of society (Paidar, 1995, p. 337).

Islamized education.

The ideology of Islamization elicited further cultural revolution in educational institutions, with major revisions to curriculum, textbooks, dress code, and co-education (Paidar, 1995, p. 314). During the "purification" of un-Islamic components in the cultural revolution between 1980 and 1983, universities were closed by the state, course materials were Islamized, secular students and faculty were dismissed, compulsory *hijab* was implemented along with gender segregation and the elimination of 55 fields of study for women. Furthermore, Farrokhroo Parsa, Minister of Education between 1963-1968 during the Pahlavi reign, was executed after the revolution (Afary, 2009; Paidar, 1995, p. 314; Rezai-Rashti & James, 2009).

Nevertheless, women's education became an important element of the Islamic national process as a way of learning and transferring Islamic knowledge and piety (Afary, 2009). Women as mothers and primary educators connected the private and the public realms and

were required to convey Islamic values and culture to their children. Therefore, the "political urgency" of women's education placed women in a crucial social, political, and economic position for the state (Paidar, 1995, pp. 312-313). Furthermore, scholars such as Hoodfar argue that *hijab* and the Islamic environment worked as catalysts for some women of traditional background to increase their socio-educational involvement due to perceptions of safety and appropriateness (Hoodfar, 2003). Women who were prohibited from education in the past were able to demand permission from their father/husband to attend university (Afary, 2009). Secular unveiled women adopted Islamic regulations in order to maintain their access to education. Consequently, while the rate of literacy began to increase, the establishment of more universities in different locations enabled women of all social classes to seek higher education[57] (ibid).

Sexual autonomy and relational identity.

Despite the number of women in higher education rapidly increased, the predefined relational identity of women enabled the state to define women's sexuality within the traditional Islamic framework. The discourse of sexuality that has been controlled by *urf* and religion, became part of the state's agenda (Afary, 2009; Ahmadi, 2016; Sadeghi, 2008). The state regulated women's sexual objectification by promoting virginity,[58] chastity, a young marriage age, polygamy, and temporary marriage, while making pre-marital sex illegal and prohibiting contraception and abortion (Afary, 2009; Aghajanian & Mehryar, 2005; Nomani & Behdad, 2006, table 4.1). The religious manual on sexuality and related rituals was the only available educational source, and it confirmed women as a secondary sex with emphasis on women's chastity and modesty (Mir-Hosseini, 1999, p. 206). In this new sexual reconstruction, Article 1108 of Iran's Islamic Civil Code legally obliged women to fulfill their husbands' sexual needs

[57] Furthermore, in the 1990s women took action to informally educate each other. For example, through the Ministry of Health's volunteer programs, women began to educate lower-class families on hygiene and birth control (Bayat, 2007).
[58] Although the state encourages men to marry widows of war (Afary, 2009).

and desires and those who denied the sexual demands of their husband without any religious reasons would lose their maintenance, *Nosuj* (Kaar, 2000, p. 144).

In addition, women lost their reproductive rights through the state's banning and criminalizing of abortion and limiting the availability of contraception under the political guise of Islamic population growth (Afary, 2009, p. 278; Aloosh & Saghai, 2015). During a Friday sermon (1981) president Rafsanjani indicated that birth control is against women's Islamic duty to bear children and thus birth control and breast feeding are not decisions that women have the right to make (Paidar, 1995, p. 287). Although this proclamation followed a baby boom and a socioeconomic crisis in 1989, the birth control policy was re-implemented and abortion remained illegal (Afary, 2009; Jarahi et al., 2013; Paidar, 1995, p. 289).

Although the theocratic state has never advocated gender equality, it modified its initial gender discrimination in order to use women as political tools to attain its goals. The state encouraged women's participation in education and politics, but at the same time the state maintained women's traditional relational identity. Under these new conditions, women with *chador* and believing in *Muttah* (temporary marriage), had a better chance to enjoy a bit of sexual freedom (Afary, 2009). However, young women without *chador* did not conform and they continued their premarital relationships in the private realm, married at later ages, practiced abortion, and fought for their autonomy on birth control (Aghajanian & Mehryar, 2005; Kaivanara, 2016; Nomani & Behdad, 2006, table 4.1). In addition, women's presence in public, the power of knowledge and education, as well as increased financial stability enabled them to challenge the state and traditional mainstream beliefs through their choice of attire, employment, education, sexual expression, and conduct. In addition, over the next twenty-five years, Iranian women began to challenge discriminatory laws from within the Islamic framework (Kian, 2013; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010).

Cyber Revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran

The theocratic Islamic structure of Iran with power centered on the supreme leader, the Council of Guardians, and the Expediency Council started to erode after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988 and the passing of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Consequently, the reinterpretation of conservative ideology and the arrival of a more moderate Islamic government alleviated women's restrictions to a certain degree. Women as writers, poets, journalists, novelists, directors, filmmakers, and researchers began to globally excel (Mir-Hosseini, 1999). In the film industry prominent women such as Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Tahmineh Milani, Manijeh Hekmat, and Samira Makhmalbaf were among successful film directors that brought women's issues to international attention (Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2015). In literature, bestselling authors such as Shahrnoush Parsipour, Goli Taraghi, Zoya Pirzad, and Fatemeh Haj Seyyed Javadi further focused on the destructive role of patriarchal mores in women's lives. Moreover, publications such as *Zanan* (Women), *Huquqe zanan* (Women's Rights*), Jense Dovom* (Second Sex), and *Zan* (Woman) challenged gender inequality and gender discriminatory laws to the point that some like *Zanan* bluntly expressed its solidarity with Western feminism and its achievements (ibid).

As women continued to quest for their rights through public participation and voice emancipation in mass media, they also played a crucial political part in the success of the first reformist government, under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), which promised women's rights, social justice, and freedom of speech within Islamic dynamic jurisprudence, *fighh- e pooya*[59] (Kian-Thiebaut, 2002. pp. 56-57; Sadeghi, 2009). During this time, women successfully founded NGOs, such as Women's Society Against Environmental Pollution, and Islamic feminism began to evolve with the support of some clerics such as

Mohsen Said Zadeh, Kadivar, and Abdullah Nuri (Hoodfar, 1998 in Hoodfar and Sadeghi, 2009; Nashat, 2004). In this more relaxed political atmosphere, women successfully gained some autonomous social and legal rights. Women flourished in previously prohibited university fields and professions, such as agriculture studies, law, and engineering, and the legal enforcement of *hijab* and expectations against casual relationships in public became more relaxed. Iranian women presented an international image that contradicted the stereotypical Western view of Iranian women as oppressed under the Islamic political principle (Kian-Thiebaut 2002, p. 56).

From 1997-2005, women were still hindered by political instability because of a dispute between new reformists and hardliners. Shortly after the resurgence of reformists in 1997, freedom of expression and the press were suppressed, and several journalists, including women, were detained and imprisoned. At the same time, public access to the internet propelled women to adopt the internet as an alternative tool to demand their rights (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017; Khiabany & Sreberny, 2004, p. 33). Activists, journalists, and ordinary women began to raise their voices and share their narrations on the global platform of weblogging (Rahimi, 2007). For example, Sahar Maranlou, scholar, poet, and journalist, used her weblog space as a free and personal realm to critically review and reinterpret Islamic modesty for Muslim women, and she problematized the crime of immodesty, *bad hejabi*, nationally and internationally. Maranlou further argued that the state failed to explain the reason for the enforcement of mandatory veiling in Iran (ibid).

Online newsletters, weblogs, and websites such as *Zanestan* (Women's State), *Iran-Dokht* (Daughter of Iran*)*, *Bad Jens* (The Mean One), Women in Iran, and the Iranian Feminist Tribune launched and advocated women's rights and problematized gender inequality (Bayat, 2013, pp. 103-105; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010), while the rise in popularity of social media platforms such as Facebook created a more accessible space for all women. Social media as an

open political and social forum and information-sharing platform via videos and images enabled women to cross the lines of *urf*[60] (tradition) and break legal and social restrictions more often (Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2014; Jenks, 2003, p. 3). Borrowing Gofman's theory of self and stages, the absence of body, gender, and socio-political identity in the digital realm provided women with an opportunity for true self-narration, self-discovery, and communication, empowering them in public as well (Amir-Ebrahimi 2004, p. 4; 2008; Koo, 2016). Online interaction boosted Iranian women's consciousness and constructed a global solidarity that led to real life women's rights movements such as the one million signature campaigns[61] and the Green movement.[62]

At the same time, during Ahmadinejad's populist presidency, the state took advantage of the internet. Between 2005 and 2013, the government utilized the internet and mis-veiled women as a propaganda tool to succeed in the election. Soon after the victory, women's voices were squelched, and their online activities suppressed. The government filtered websites using the words *zan/zanan* (woman/women) considered the primary words for pornographic searches. In response, some activists changed the URL of their sites and, as a result, women continued to find refuge in the digital realm and were still able to challenge and criticize the male dominated political arena and the limited perspective on gender equality in the new government. Adopting the internet as a tool, women established different campaigns to show their dissatisfaction with social and legal injustice (Afary, 2009, p. 332; Hoodfar & Sadeghi, 2009). Women's collective action against gender disparity and gender inequality on June 12, 2005, and March 8, 2006 and 2007, were among the examples of women's autonomous action against gender discrimination during Ahmadinejad's presidency.

[60] An implicitly accepted unwritten code of conduct and a way of living that is influenced by Islam, as well as Iranian tradition.
[61] A campaign by Iranian women against discriminatory gender law in Iran.
[62] A political movement in 2009 to protest against the result of the presidential election.

Despite women's tremendous efforts, Ahmadinejad denounced feminist activities and women's NGOs as a "Western plot" with the evil aim of destroying Islamic principles (Sadeghi, 2011). The conservative government dismantled the Center for Women that was established under Khatami and converted it to the Center for Women and Family, which claimed to promote a culture of modesty and relational identity among Iranian women. Sadly, the head of the center Ms. Tabibzadeh Nouri stated that "So long as I am alive I won't allow Iran to join CEDAW or any other international treaty for women" [63](Sadeghi, 2009, n.p.).

In 2013, under the new reformist government of Rouhani, women's situation gradually began to improve. The new president, Rouhani, supported women's empowerment by encouraging them to enter into socio-political participation and education. He assigned women to key decision-making positions, including three women ministers in his first cabinet. Nevertheless, the Rouhani government's handling of women's rights was inconsistent and at times contradictory[64] and, as a result, Iranian women continued to quest for their rights in the public and digital realms. For instance, since 2013, the number of online feminist activities with different agendas expanded inside and outside of Iran. Several outside pages with feminist agendas launched, including My Stealthy Freedom with its focus on compulsory *hijab, Zanan* online TV[65], established by Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, with a transnational platform bringing global artists, scholars, activists, and journalists together under in its virtual space.

Another transnational feminist anti-capitalist platform is The Iranian Feminist Everyday[66] that focuses on discrimination, marginalization, and sexuality (Batmanghelichi &

[63] Some women MPs during Khatami's presidency tabled a motion that the parliament would ratify CEDW, however, the new election and the new pro-Ahmadinejad MPs rejected the motion.
[64] For example, Rouhani promoted the belief that women's social participation should not negatively influence their family responsibilities (Rezai-Rashti, 2015).

[66] The Iranian Feminist Everyday, 2015, modeled after the US-based Everyday Feminism site, is an intersectional feminist educational platform for women's liberation focusing on violence, discrimination, and marginalization. It covers taboo subjects such as women's sexual enjoyment, menstruation, virginity, and marital rape, and people share their personal experiences related to each topic (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017).

Mouri, 2017; Koo, 2016). The Iranian Feminist Everyday began in 2015 and was modeled after the US-based Everyday Feminism site. It is an intersectional feminist educational platform promoting women's liberation, focusing on violence, discrimination, and marginalization. It covers taboo subjects such as women's sexual enjoyment, menstruation, virginity, and marital rape, and people share their personal experiences related to each topic (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017). Pages with authors based inside Iran such as Women Watch, *didehban zanan,* and *Badarzani* challenge gender inequality within the Islamic framework by criticizing discriminatory marriage laws and prohibitions on riding bicycles in public, while also advocating a woman's right to attend sports matches (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017). Later they expanded their activities and raised awareness around gender equality, sexual health, reproductive and labour rights, and violence against women (cyber3, 70). Moreover, individual women such as Faranak Amidi, Mahnaz Afshar, and Tahmineh Milani openly challenge patriarchal norms in their personal pages. In response, conservative individuals and organizations criticized online activities related to women's rights and promoted Islamic identity and values instead. For instance, websites such as *Kowsar*, run by seminary religious women, expresses political and social perspectives and, oddly, answers religious questions (Akhavan, 2013). Iranian women are trapped in a triptych of *urf* (custom), modernization, and *sharia*, and face social and legal roadblocks to their mobility, attire, and sexuality. The exercise of body autonomy led to *nafarmani madani* (civil disobedience) in the digital realm along with the public realm (Amir Ebrahimi, 2008, p. 94).

***Hijab* as a fashion statement.**

In the 1990s, after a decade of war and socioeconomic repression, Rafsanjani opened up borders and satellites to the public. Young Iranian women's perceptions of unveiled women in Western media as happy, mobile, and confident proliferated and their unconscious desire to

reclaim their body autonomy flourished. Although the last organized movement against compulsory *hijab* occurred in 1980, women's subtle non-collective disobedience to mandatory *hijab* started to become more prominent (Abdmolaei, 2014; Bayat, 2013; Hoodfar & Sadeghi, 2009). Bayat (2005) describes women's disobedience as "loose imagined solidarity," which spontaneously "forged" among different individuals who "subjectively constructed" common interests and shared values (p. 893). Furthermore, prominent women, inside and outside of Iran, such as Shirin Ebadi, Mehrangiz Kaar, Fatemeh Sadeghi, Shadi Sadr, Golshifteh Farahani, and Marjane Satrapi joined this loose solidarity by challenging mandatory *hijab* in their writing, plays, and research (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017).

Women persistently pushed the boundaries of proper *hijab* within an Islamic framework, creating a fashion statement out of compulsory *hijab.* They successfully defied conservative stigmatization of women's new innovative and colorful fashion as Westernized and harmful to Islamic society (Hoodfar, 1998 in Hoodfar and Sadeghi, 2009). Consequently, women's resistance to full *hijab* started to debilitate the institution of *hijab* under the reformist government of Khatami (1997-2015). Surveillance of "*bad-hijab*" by morality police was no longer about a string of hair out of place, but rather about short or colorful manteau, heavy make-up, and looser head scarves. Furthermore, the ideology of *chador* as the most important signifier of a true Muslim woman's identity was challenged by Khatami's government and some women MPs permanently removed their *chador*[67] (Razavi, 2006). In contrary, due to inconsistency between the reformists and hardliners, in 2002, the state launched a new line of *hijab* called, *chador*

[67] Eventually in the sixth *Majlis* several bills regarding women's rights, mainly based on CEDAW, passed; however, opposition from Islamists and some clergy announced that accepting CEDAW meant a "declaration of war against Islam" and caused "sexual ethos and prostitution." Therefore, the Council of Guardians rejected the proposed law in areas that were contrary to Islam such as heritage, *hijab*, polygamy, and divorce (Iranian leader, 2000 in Afary, 2009, p. 330).

melli[68] (national veil) to encourage young women to choose *chador* by emphasizing the ideology of nationalism and religiosity.

Under Ahmadinejad's conservative government (2005- 2013), the discourse of *hijab* became more politically complex. Ahmadinejad claimed his government was not interested in *hijab*; however, soon after his election, conservative propaganda increased, and surveillance and enforcement of women's veiling became more rigorous. In this environment, clerics found opportunities to more openly oppose mis-veiled women. In March 2010, Alam Al Huda made the following statements about women who wear improper *hijab*: "those women place men in lust path. You women will be less than animals on the resurrection day." During a Friday sermon in Tehran a cleric stated, "improper *hijab* of women causes flutter in our young men." He further claimed that improper *hijab* is the cause of natural disasters such as earthquakes! Still, Iranian women, who now had access to the new alternative realm of the internet, continued their imagined solidarity by appearing unveiled in the digital realm, and mis-veiling in the public realm without concern for the impact on society, the government, or the workplace (Ebrahimi & Salaverria, 2015).

The resurgence of reformists in 2013 coincided with the emergence of non-collective cyber campaigns such as My Stealthy Freedom and White Wednesday, which brought international attention to women's quest for body autonomy. The digital realm provided women with a uniquely interactive opportunity to globally support each other by liking and commenting on each other's posts, while their smartphones became weapons documenting their daily experiences (Koo, 2016). Starting with the My Stealthy Freedom online movement, women shared their symbolic unveiled images and held their veils away from their bodies, along with their personal narration on the Facebook page. Moreover, in 2017, the White Wednesday

[68] *Chador Melli's* style can offer more comfortable mobility due to its design (Sadeghi, 2008).

movement emerged from My Stealthy Freedom with women wearing a white piece of clothing in public every Wednesday, while some shared their civil disobedience through videos and images on social media (Bayat, 2007, p. 30). Inspired by White Wednesdays' non-collective movement and aided by social media, *dokhtaran-e enghelab* (Daughters of Enqelab), originated. On December 27, 2017, Vida Movahed stood on a utility box on Enghelab street, one of the most crowded streets of Tehran, and tied her white headscarf to a wooden stick in a symbolic protest against compulsory *hijab*. Soon after, her image went viral and in a non-organized spontaneous movement, women repeated the gesture in different public areas and shared their images online. Once again, the ideological conflict between reformists and hardliners created a paradoxical situation: on the one hand the state arrested and imprisoned some of these women, while on the other hand Rouhani's government indirectly supported women's action against compulsory *hijab*.

Influenced by the autonomous unveiling movement in the digital realm, and more recently by individuals or small groups, women have been appearing unveiled in populated public spaces to record themselves with smartphones and share the images online to voice their objection against compulsory *hijab*. While some scholars interpreted women unveiling or mis-veiling as a political challenge to *urf* (custom) and *sharia*, their actions do not necessarily indicate political protest in their minds. In fact, they often hesitated to openly challenge political matters in public and private affairs (Sadeghi, 2008). For instance, Shaparak Shajari, one of the first women detained by the government for participation in Daughter of Enghelab's movement, indicated in her interview that freedom of attire is a social/individual action, not a political action against the state.

Although women achieved a certain level of freedom in their *hijab* despite the massive investment in propaganda and surveillance, the state still regulated women's attire in the public

by tirelessly implementing various forms of propaganda, mass education, and legal surveillance to promote full conservative *hijab* as the only appropriate form of clothing for "proper" women. For example, in more recent years, the state established kiosks run by *Basiji*[69] in public areas such as parks in the hope of promoting the more conservative form of *hijab* via role modeling and conversation. Although the state failed to take Iranian women back to the dress code of the 1980s, *hijab* propaganda positioned women against other women by valuing those observing *hijab* as "a pearl in the shell" and insulting the others, calling them a distraction and loose. Furthermore, Rouhani's government's attempt to exclude *chador* from the perfect *hijab* failed under the Islamic attire law. In fact, women are still required to observe *hijab* with *chador*, as a legal veiling, to obtain their civil rights, such as maintaining their jobs.

Although Abdmolaei (2014) concludes that the power imbalance and presence of oppression take away the ability of oppressed to initiate conscious resistance, Iranian women's continuous unconscious and conscious acts of mis-veiling have been reshaping the legal and social values of the Islamic society of Iran even though paradoxical values and practices continue to cause confusion and anxiety.

Women's dominance in education.

While women gradually and subtly challenged mandatory *hijab*, they also had remarkable achievements in higher education and constructed their active social participation and financial independence (Abdmolaei, 2014; Hoodfar, 2008). Women have successfully participated in undergraduate studies at a fairly high-rate, at times outnumbering men and exceeding 50% enrollment in the past 20 years. By 2017, women had attained 46% of seats in MA programs and 42% in PhD programs (Portal, 2017). Moreover, women successfully dismantled gender restriction in fields such as agriculture and veterinary medicine. Although women's participation

[69] A para-military group that is under the control of the supreme leader.

in male dominated fields such as engineering is only at 25%, women have managed to keep the percentage consistent at the post-graduate level.

In addition, university has become a space for women to socialize, gain status, and access better job opportunities (Bayat, 2007; Haghighat-Sordellini, 2011). More families have realized the social and financial values of higher education for women and not only encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education, but also urged them to pursue their education in more masculine fields, which promised better job opportunities and higher pay (Afary, 2009). Although Ahmadinejad's neo-fundamentalist approach disrupted women's access to higher education by prohibiting women from more than 77 fields in over 33 universities, implementing a gender quota for university acceptance, only accepting women at their hometown university ,*boomi sazi*, dismantling women's studies, changing course contents to abolish gender equality, closing women's research centers, and forbidding activities related to pathology of vulnerability for women, women did not stop pursuing higher education and managed to successfully lift these restrictions under the government of Rouhani (Nouraei-Simon 2005; Sadeghi, 2011; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010). Along with women's achievements in formal education, the internet as an informal educational tool with its unique pedagogical platform reshaped the experience of learning for women. The internet's surfing, information sharing, and communication strategy exposed women to massive amounts of unfiltered information. Hence, the combination of formal and informal education provided unique knowledge empowerment and autonomy to women.

Public mobility.

Higher education aligned with social participation empowered women to break some patriarchal gender stereotypes by gaining access to previously prohibited socio-political realms (Sadeghi, 2011). Women gained access to non-conventional jobs ranging from taxi drivers and truck drivers to fire fighters. Moreover, women achieved high profile political positions

including vice president, members of parliament, cabinet ministers, mayors, university chancellors, and deputy ministers (Mehran, 2003).

Even though women's relational identity still legally impeded their mobility by requiring permission to study abroad, obtain a passport, or travel, women have still become more socially, financially, and politically autonomous over the past 30 years (Ebrahimi, 2011). Additionally, the *Majlis* passed laws to reestablish public daycare facilities, offer 4 months maternity leave, allow single women to study abroad, and curtail the absolute authority of men over women's employment and pregnancy leave.

In reaction to women's autonomous mobility, Ahmadinejad cited women's participation in higher education and the workforce as the main reason for Iran's high unemployment (Kian-Thiebaut, 2005; Sadeghi, 2011). Ahmadinejad's use of mass media propaganda that identified working women as the root cause of moral decay in society and the creators of inappropriate working environments that diminished men's power. These reckless accusations cost many women their careers, their livelihood, and their freedom (Sadeghi, 2011). Ironically, these blatantly misogynous acts on the part of the state were supported by female MPs such as Marzieh Dabbagh, Rajaei, Dastgheib, and Behroozi, who advocated for gender segregation in the workplace and emphasized Muslim women's Islamic obligations rather than women's rights (Bayat, 2007).

Despite the persistence of hardliners, women's presence in the digital realm through self-expression, self-narration, and personal image and video sharing in the quest for public freedom led to the failure of the state's misogynous and discriminatory protocols. They began to actively participate in public realms from which they had formerly been absent and their participation in professional, national, and international sports competitions flourished under the presidency of Rouhani (Bayat, 2007). After many years of demonstrations and campaigns, women gained

access to sport's stadiums for the first time during the 2018 World Cup.[70] With respect to practicing body autonomy, in July 2018 videos of young Iranian women dancing surged across the internet challenging the forbidden act of dancing.

Although digital participation provided women with a degree of freedom and a freer voice, patriarchal culture continued to dominate even their digital autonomy. The value placed on being a "good girl" forced women to veil themselves and their identity on the internet. For example, in June 2018 there was a series of sexual assaults and rapes committed against women, but only one of them, under an anonymous name and voice, agreed to talk about her experience on social media.

Street harassment: public space non-Avoidance.

Achieving more public and digital accessibility did not eliminate double standards and gender discriminatory behaviors such as street harassment. Although some scholars such as Drew et al. (2004) claimed that sexual harassment is rare in Iran due to protocols surrounding gender segregation—which Drew et al. believes women prefer—the fact remains that street harassment continues to have a significant impact on Iranian women's mobility (Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefnejad, 2012). Goffman (1963) blamed people's unusual conduct or attire as the cause of harassment, but he neglected the crucial ideology of body regulation and social and sexual submission in Iranian women's street harassment experiences (Abdmolaei, 2014). Based on similar forms of patriarchal ideology, Iranian society laid the responsibility of harassment solely on women, while women remain accountable to dress accordingly, behave properly, and avoid spaces if they wish to be immune from street harassment.

[70] Women occasionally cross dress in order to be able to enter stadiums (Hoodfar & Sadeghi, 2009).

Article 169 indicates that harassment of children and women in public spaces is punishable by a prison sentence of up to 6 months or 74 lashes, lack of women's awareness, a complicated legal process, the prevalence of harassment, and a social attitude that blames women ultimately hinders women's legal protection (Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefinejad, 2012). Ironically, safety programs such as Ahmadinejad's *Tarhe amniat e ejtemayi*, (social security program) focused on arresting mis-veiled women rather than ensuring public security (Sadeghi, 2008, 2011).

Harassment forced women to re-veil their bodies, identities, and voices in public and digital realms, however, in the digital realm the opportunity to voice their concerns over the discourse of harassment remained. For instance, a weblog called *Raha,* criticized women's harassment experiences such as name calling and argued that is how men show their opposition to women entering their spaces (Raha Blog, posted on April 15, 2008; Mehdipour et al., 2013; Standley, 2006, p. 59 in Mehdipour et al., 2013). Despite political instability and serious experiences of street harassment, online voice emancipation increased women's awareness and their participation in the public realm and workforce continued. Moore (1988) rightly calls this phenomenon "everyday forms of women's resistance" (p. 178).

Sexual revolution or modern sexual inequality.

Women's active presence in social, political, economic, and educational realms further empowered women's sexual autonomy. During Khatami's presidency (1997- 2005), women gained an increase in the legal marriage age to 13[71]; legal abortion for married women in the case of life danger for the mother or the child before the fourth month; mandatory family planning for

[71] Marriage age was increased to 15 from 9 but did not receive approval from the Council of Guardians and eventually was set to 13 (Afary, 2009).

university students, soldiers, and couples[72]; and easier access to contraception (Jarahi, 2014; Kolaee, 2006, in Afary, 2009, p. 330; Paidar, 1995). Despite the legal consequences of courtship, Iranian women began to renegotiate gender inequality by negating the sexual power imbalance through their autonomous sexual actions (Kaivanara, 2016). Consequently, women's sexual autonomy led to a sexual revolution in the 2000s, which redefined sexual practice and morality for the majority of young women (Hojat et al., 2015; Sadeghi, 2008).

In conjunction with the sexual revolution, the patriarchal definition of women as a sexual commodity tied to chastity and virginity remained paramount (Afary 2009; Mahdavi, 2009; Merghati-Khoei, 2008). According to medicalization theory of Foucault (1975, 1976), in the patriarchal society of Iran virginity is a physical normalcy (Ahmadi, 2016). As a result, gender double standards regulated sexual engagement and pressured women to maintain their virginity and chastity. These paradoxical values empowered some women to refuse patriarchal norms, but also forced other women to abide by them and maintain their virginity through reconstructive virginity surgery or alternative sexual interactions. However, all women involved in the experience of sexual pleasure perform a form of "covert resistance" that indicates the ineffectiveness of power on the sexual limitation of women[73] (Abu- Lughod, 1990, p. 121; Ahmadi, 2016, p. 232). Women empowered by knowledge, mobility, and sexual freedom continued to exercise their sexual autonomy despite Ahmadinejad's protocol for the reduction of the legal marriage age to 9[74], discontinuation of a population control program, and increased

[72] Furthermore, Iranian society found sex education contrary to their culture and religion. For example, many parents, teachers and policy makers linked sexual education to early sexual activity and the destruction of childhood innocence, especially among girls (Bostani Khalesi, et al., 2017, p. 382; Geshtasbi & Azin, 2012; Javadnoori et al., 2012).

[73] Although, religious clergy attempted to own hymen surgery through reinterpretation of Islamic law some clergy such as Rouhani issued a *fatwa* on permissibility of the surgery by indicating that "no difference between a real and fake hymen," this is women's autonomous decision to participate in premarital sexual relation that shaped the decision not the clergy (Farshidi, 2011).

[74] Jafari Shiite jurisprudence considers the age of maturity 9 for girls and 15 for boys in lunar calendar (Derayeh, 2006).

difficulty in accessing birth control (Afary, 2009; Aghajanian & Mehryar, 2005; Nomani & Behdad, 2006, table 4.1).

Despite women's successful journey toward sexual emancipation, prohibition of affection in public, the culture of silence and shame, and lack of legal protection made women prone to violence (Mahdavi, 2007; Sadeghi, 2008). The culture of shame and silence is one of the most internalized mores that prevented women from expressing their sexual desires for fear of wounding their partner's manliness and being labelled as improper (Janghorban et al., 2015). Although some women left the silence and negotiated their sexual needs, sacrificing of their sexual desires remains the common practice (ibid). The culture of silence and shame integrated with the illegality of women's sexual interaction or lack of legal protection in the case of married women placed all women in a disadvantageous situation and diminished their opportunity to exercise their body autonomy. Married women remained obligated to fulfill a husbands' sexual needs as a subordinate gender in Islamic law, *tamkin*, and unmarried women were also confined by the same cultural expectation to fulfil men's sexual desire while maintaining their chastity and virginity (ibid).

In a situation where women have no legal sexual rights and hegemonic culture suppresses their autonomous actions, the presence of the internet as a new realm of expression and discussion reshaped sexual discourse and relationships. The internet enabled women to negotiate sexual inequality through online dating, digital relationships, and discussion of the discourse of sexuality. For instance, weblogs such as *Dokhtar Boodan* (being a virgin girl) and *Hamaghooshi-hyae yek zan*, (One Woman Love Making) claimed autonomy in the digital realm by focusing on women's non-pornographic personal erotic sexual experiences and criticized the duality of heterosexual relationships. There are feminist-related channels and pages such as everyday feminism that aim at raising knowledge in areas such as virginity, marital rape, and child

marriage. Interlaced with paradoxical values, women tended to experience criticism in the case of sexual autonomy (Akhavan, 2013). There are feminist-related channels and pages such as Everyday Feminism that aim at raising knowledge in areas such as virginity, marital rape, and child marriage. Still women continue to grapple with paradoxical cultural values, reaping criticism for their efforts to gain sexual autonomy (ibid). One popular critic, Natoori, argues in his weblog that sexual discourse (sex and sexuality) is a very private matter and women need to maintain secrecy (Natoori Blog, posted in April 7, 2008). This kind of admonition is rife in Iranian culture. Add to that lack of education and proper knowledge and unreliable sources, the result is limited sexual emancipation with ongoing gender inequality, passivity, and sexual double standards (Hojat et al, 2015; Messing, 2011).

Summary

The non-gendered Islamic revolution of 1970s with main slogans such as "independence, freedom, and Islamic Republic" soon shifted to a women's rights quest in the 1980s with slogans such as "no to the veil, no to persecution." Gradually, women's daily transgressions of public appearance, mixed gender interaction, wearing make-up, showing hair and body parts, participation in higher education, non-conventional jobs, political participation, and sexual involvement functioned as spontaneous non-collective civil disobedience for women to claim their body autonomy (Abdmolaei, 2014; Hoodfar & Ghoreishian, 2012; Sadeghi, 2008).

The internet, as an optimistic educational sphere containing both public and private characteristics, empowered women through construction and reconstruction of identity (Turkle, 1993). The global nature of the internet provided accessibility to a broad range of information and allowed women to successfully experience self-expression and knowledge sharing. Adopting the internet as a tool enabled women to quest for their rights through organized and non-

organized movements such as the Green Movement, One Million Signature campaigns,[75] and White Wednesdays (Fathi, 2002).

Although the digital realm offers positive outcomes for women, a tradition that veiled women's bodies, lives, thoughts, and desires, with silence as its hallmark, bound women's body autonomy (Gheytanchi, 2015, pp. 52-53; Milani 1992, p. 6). In fact, the paradoxicality of hide/show, veiled/ unveiled, and prohibition/permission created incongruity in women's daily lives in the public, private, and digital realms (Khiabany, 2015; Koo, 2016). However, the imposed limitation and boundaries that distinguish between power and powerless and resisting and transgressing became a form of empowerment as women's feminist consciousness rose (Mernissi, 1994, p. 242; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010). Therefore, the internet was transformed from a tool to become a way of living, conveying women's voices and quests transnationally (Ahmadi Khorasani, 2007).

[75] Another important movement was the One Million Signatures campaign to protest discriminatory gender laws (Tahmasebi, 2010).

Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this feminist study is to problematize the oppressive experiences surrounding body autonomy of Iranian women and their effort to increase their awareness and to become "smart." In order to "get smart," there is a temptation to find a methodology that offers research techniques that "eliminate theoretical and social distance between researcher and researched" (Lather, 1991, p. 163). Emancipatory research offers a "transformative agenda" that shapes the "social structure" and the "methodological norms" while taking "research as a praxis" (ibid, p. 52). Even though emancipatory research is not the most common research in social science, it provides an opportunity to understand the power distribution within society while suggesting "social transformation" towards equity (ibid, pp. 51-52).

Adopting a feminist qualitative research approach, this research embodies women's knowledge and experience while engaging with the question of emancipation and autonomy. To elucidate the above concepts, this chapter will unpack the epistemological and methodological foundation of this research to discuss the technical aspects of the methods of the study. The design of my research is derived from Derayeh, Foucault, Shahidian, Mauss, Freire, and Bayat to provide an understanding of critical and transnational feminist theories. Moreover, the research design involves data collection methods and analysis techniques that are consistent with general qualitative methods and addresses credibility, validity, positionality, reflexivity, and power (Yin, 1994, pp. 18-20). As this chapter will show, I primarily focus on research methods and tools that bring to the fore the multifaceted intersectionality of the participants, while adopting research practices that emphasize participants' personal knowledge and experiences.

Feminist Epistemologies: Grounding the Research

Many feminists define epistemology as "a theory of knowledge which addresses central questions such as: who can be a knower, what can be known and what constitutes and validates

knowledge" and "can subjective truth count as knowledge?" (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p. 26; Harding, 1987, p. 3). Feminist epistemologies take the social, cultural, political, and historical conditions of women into consideration (Luke, 1992). Feminist epistemologies also resonate with Foucault's theory of "power-knowledge," which explores how male-dominated knowledge constructed and shaped women through history. In addition, feminist epistemologies carry the political task of exposing the matter of gender and power over knowledge and power production (ibid). Hence, from a feminist perspective, knowledge is multilayered, contextualized, and constructed in nature (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 26; Reinharz, 1992, p. 46).

A feminist epistemological approach contrasts with positivism in "which a singular objective reality [is] produced by a value free researcher" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, pp. 14-15). "Feminist objectivity" means being accountable for one's "limited location" and "situated knowledge" and "investment in research" (Haraway, 1998, p. 538). Therefore, "any transcendental 'objectivity' only works to mask the power relations that frame the process of knowledge production in practice" (Abbas, 2013, p. 42; Naples, 1997, p. 74). Feminist methodologies, stem from feminist epistemologies with respect to knowledge processing and "socially situated perspectives" (Luke, 1992).

My research is grounded in critical and transnational feminist epistemologies. Critical feminist epistemology is a framework that approaches knowledge in order to review historical and socio-cultural phenomena regarding excluded/ignored women's everyday experiences and taking patriarchical locality into consideration (Nast, 1994; Miles and Crush, 1993 in Nast, 1994). According to Smith (1990), men and women live in different worlds and therefore have different experiences. Adopting critical feminism as a theoretical framework for the purpose of emancipation produces a form of resistance to "hegemonic oppression" through the practice of "politics of the self" and autonomy (Allen, 2008; Saxe, n.d., p. 197). Critical feminism

influenced by socio-political reflection explores the power relations that shape women's subjectification as well as their motivation while seeking freedom (Allen, 2008). This framework is particularly beneficial to determine the current barriers to consent that leave Iranian women at risk of not being able to practice body autonomy.

Furthermore, transnational theories explore the situation of Iranian women regardless of their locality while exploring how a society without boundaries can reshape its identity and autonomous practice (Graham & Khosravi, 2010). Although a theory of transnationality transcends locality, it still takes individual and community experiences and history into consideration to deconstruct emancipation and freedom (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 111). Furthermore, transnational feminism empowers women "from their own realities" of their location beyond the internet (Sharify-Funk, 2005). This empowerment, via the internet, can potentially lead to the creation of a "transnational identity," which can connect and bring women together regardless of their geographical location and personal background. In fact, one common element that unites emancipation and empowerment is autonomy (ibid). This transition in body autonomy can further lead to "de-ideologization and de-radicalization" while global consciousness problematizes patriarchal oppression and recognizes women's experiences in multilayered, cross boundary dialogue (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 65). Global consciousness along with "transnational identity" drove women's awareness of their oppressive traditional politics of knowledge production and the effect of power on women's standpoint, knowledge, and experiences (ibid). These feminist frameworks offer a way for me to theorize the discourse of body autonomy among Iranian women and explore participants' perspectives and personal experiences while problematizing patriarchy and its power imbalance regarding body autonomy.

Research design and methodological approaches that are grounded in a feminist understanding of deconstruction and the multiplicity of knowledge support my intention to prioritize women's awareness and experience around body autonomy with respect to both the individual meaning as well as the socio-cultural meaning. The design of my research is also based on an understanding of feminist critical and transnational theories situated within the notion of "I act therefore I am" because it prioritizes and analyzes women's personal experiences and the impact of informal education. The aim of this feminist research is to gain access to the silent voices of the marginalized and interviews give you access to their ideas, thoughts, memories, and emotions (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). Additionally, my research explores the life of women inside Iran with the following goals in mind: to un-silence women's voices, to contribute a new account to feminist scholarship that accurately reflects the "social transformation" of Iranian women globally, and to understand women's unique experience by focusing on "how being a woman is different" (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 75).

The Research Design

The participants.

My advanced knowledge of Farsi enables me to access a vast amount of knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible. I collected comprehensive qualitative data to explore the internet's informal educational role in the practice of body autonomy among Iranian women living in Iran. I use the terminology "participants" to refer to the women who participated in this study in order to consider these women as joint partners and to emphasize their contribution to the study (Reinharz, 1992, p. 22).

While the data collection method relies on "partially localized knowledge," the participants' experiences represent a primary step toward knowledge production, I adopted a

snowball sampling method as the most suitable method to locate participants through trusted intermediaries (Cassell, 1988).

Since this purposive sampling method depends on networking, establishing social access through interpersonal contact was an asset (Lee, 1993, p. 123; Silverman, 2006). It is worth noting that the social networks I used to obtain snowball sampling were not limited to my affiliations and educational field. It was my participants who provided me with access to individuals that my network did not reach. I began with a set of contacts I had access to inside Iran, who then provided me with more contacts (Lee, 1993, p. 65). Some of the introduced contacts were the participants' online friends, whereas others were part of their real social life.

Gaining access to participants through the internet broke the barriers of class and education and created the opportunity to gain access to women from diverse backgrounds. Even so, it is necessary to keep in mind the potentially limited diversity that snowball sampling can produce, referred to as the "referral chain" that can produce homogenous characteristics (Holland, 2004, p. 182; Lee, 1993, p. 67). The social networks of the participants were limited by their access to the internet as well as education, interests, online interactions, and class. That said, the association of trusted intermediaries reduces the level of skepticism and distrust the participants may have toward me. Therefore, I was able to depart from my social positioning through my network and social accessibility. For example, when I was introduced to individuals by a trusted intermediary, I had a significantly better chance to establish trust with the potential participant and they were more likely to be forthcoming in the interview.

I conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Iranian women between the ages of 26 and 42 who have been actively participating in social media for at least the past 3 years. The size of the research sample was influenced by the women who were able to provide insight into body autonomy in different realms and those who could shed light on the awareness

and practice of body autonomy amongst Iranian women. Originally, I intended to limit the participants to women between 35 and 40 because my initial assumption was that they were the first generation after the revolution in 1979 who were exposed to the post- revolution Islamic educational system from the start of their education. However, as my research and interviews progressed, I recognized my chosen age group was more limiting than enriching. Furthermore, younger women began to show an interest in participating in this research, and I realized that younger Iranian women also experienced the same complications in terms of their body autonomy and social reality related to the discourse of body autonomy. In addition, they had only been exposed to and taught in the post-revolution educational system, which was heavily influenced by fundamentalist Islamic ideology, and were also exposed to the world of the internet in the years following their formal education. Consequently, I broadened the scope of my sample to include a wider range of post-revolution women who were exposed to the internet after completing their high school education to explore the "different nuances" of patriarchal ideology on body autonomy.

While my research focus was on one particular articulation of feminism, body autonomy, the sample was not restricted to feminists only. In fact, in order to understand the different aspects of an increasing practice of body autonomy among young Iranian women—and the potential changes that such practice can offer—I decided to widen the age range in order to include the voices of women from different backgrounds with different experiences regardless of their feminist affiliation. This research, therefore, focuses on ideology as well as the practice of body autonomy.

I attempted to choose participants from various social positions in order to be inclusive. For instance, 12 of the participants came from middle-class backgrounds while the other 8 came from upper-middle-class families. Despite the participants' different social classes, all hold at

least a 2-year post-secondary degree, except 1 with a high school diploma. Eight of the participants held a master's degree, 9 held a bachelor's degree, 1 held a college diploma, and 1 completed 3 years of university without obtaining a degree. While the interaction of class and educational degrees might introduce some biased sampling for this research, it can actually be evidence of uniformity of mindset in the post-revolutionary generation of Iranian society. Post-secondary education has become "socially mandated" even more after the revolution and more specifically in the past 15 years. Post-secondary education became not only a tool for socio-economic empowerment, but also an important socio-cultural value for women to qualify for a better future. Therefore, most Iranian families, regardless of their class background, aim to provide their children with the opportunity for higher education. Furthermore, the increasing number of universities in the past 3 decades opened more opportunities for higher education. However, it is important to note that this is not the case for all Iranian women and those from lower class families tend to have restricted access to higher education, mainly due to financial difficulties such as paying for tuition. Financial barriers also limit access to digital devices and the internet and, as a result, my access to women from lower class backgrounds was limited.

In terms of occupation, 14 of the participants were full-time employees, 2 were pursuing graduate degrees, and 4 were housewives. Marital status varied with 11 of the participants married, 1 divorced, 1 widowed, 1 in a common-law relationship, and 6 singles but in relationships. With respect to areas of expertise, they came from different academic disciplines, including accounting, literature, language, human resources, management, planning, counselling, fine arts, statistics, architecture, communication, computer science, and engineering. While some were employed in fields related to their degrees such as human resource management, school principal, accountant, painter (gallery owner), English teacher, programmer, and banker, others were employed in different fields from their degree such as management, sales representative,

business researcher, and recruiter with a degree in architecture, communication, and fine arts. The majority are employed in non-government sectors, except for two.

All the participants were residents of Iran, mainly from Tehran, except for 5. Three resided in Karaj, 1 in Bojnoord, and 1 in Tabriz. However, there were 2 who originally came from Kurdistan and Qom and only moved to Tehran in the past 5 years. The others have lived in Tehran all their lives. Within Tehran, participants were scattered in different areas. Ten of them resided in the North and North Eastern parts, which represent the more affluent areas, and 7 of the participants were located in the East and West, which are more middle- and lower middle-class areas. Even though it is important to note that city divisions are not homogenous, the geographical location imposed certain restraints on women's mobility and body autonomy. Therefore, the participants often experience body autonomy violations differently based on their area of residence. For example, they experienced more difficulty exercising and riding bikes in certain areas such as Karimkhan St.

With respect to the religious beliefs of the 20 participants, they range from practicing Muslim to secular. There were 4 practicing Muslim women who chose to wear full *hijab*, 3 women who were previously veiled but abandoned the practice, and 13 secular, non-veiled women who only veiled due to social coercion. The veiled practicing Muslim women in this research chose fully covered head scarves with loose garments and occasionally full *chador*. While the style of their *hijab* might be different, they all commonly wore a loose and long garment that fully covered their body including hair. Although they tended to choose colorful or tighter garments under the black *chador*, they ensured that they followed cultural and religious expectation to be completely covered (see Appendix A).

The previously practicing Muslim participants often tended to wear loose fitting attire that covered the body but wore looser scarves that revealed their hair; they remained completely

unveiled in the private realm. The previously practicing Muslim participants still tended to be more modest in choosing the attire. Furthermore, the non-veiled secular participants wore different styles of veiling that varied in terms of showing their figures. They tended to wear fashionable, fitted, short, open front manteau, tight and short pants that revealed some parts of their bodies such as arms, ankles, neck, or part of their legs.

Despite the variations in religious belief and public and private attire, none directly linked veiling, mobility, and sexuality to religiosity and the discourse of body autonomy. Instead, the participants seemed to be more influenced by cultural values, indicating that understanding personal choice is intertwined with religion but also with cultural and social values to the point that the lines of separation between them became blurry and unclear.

My positionality as an Iranian woman living in the West (Canada) where I pursue my study of Iranian women inside Iran, along with working on the sensitive discourse of body autonomy, often limited my opportunity to get access to the participants as it limited women's willingness to disclose information to me. For instance, in two cases women consented to participate but answered the questions very generally instead of focusing on their personal experiences. Even though both continued the interview, I had to discard their answers because they were either impersonal or inconsistent, and therefore not authentically representing their experience. In addition to trust, concerns about socio-political safety was another obstacle that hindered some participants. Four women initially agreed to participate but changed their mind and withdrew for reasons of socio-political safety. Moreover, marital status and having children played a role in limiting women's participation due to more household responsibilities and less available personal time.

Although I am not aiming to represent all Iranian women of the post-revolution era in this research, I have addressed the structural limitations of the research sample by focusing on

enhancing its diversity where possible. For example, while I was unable to gain access to people from diverse class backgrounds, I attempted to find different points of view among the participants in the hopes of gleaning some information about those to whom I did not have access.

It is important to note that qualitative research usually chooses small, precise sample sizes for exploring personally experienced reality through social construction rather than focusing on the frequency of a fact (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 70). Due to the cultural sensitivity of the discourse of body autonomy, finding 20 women who were willing to openly discuss the discourse of body autonomy and share their personal experiences and feelings with an outsider was a challenging task. As a feminist qualitative researcher, my goal was to understand the particularity of each individual experience rather than claiming "representativeness" and generalization. Research interested in "meaning" rather than "generalization" focuses on the depth of participants' experiences and realities rather than the number of the sample (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 119). As a result, the small nature of the sample size allowed me to meet the epistemological and methodological goal of this research by focusing on both the "particularity and diversity" of body autonomy among the participants in order to engage in feminist research on the discourse of body autonomy.

The structure of the interviews.

Working with a sensitive topic can cause stress for the researcher as well as the participants due to ethical concerns about safety and the intense emotional involvement (Brenner, 1978; Reinharz, 1992). Often, the researcher clings to the consent form as a safe step to control her anxiety over ethics as well as the participants' emotions (Holland, 2004). I paid close attention to all ethical aspects of the research including confidentiality and consent. A Farsi consent form was virtually signed by each participant before starting the interview session.

However, the consent agreement can potentially create complications as it only introduces the participants to the general purpose and terms of the research. As a result, being mindful of the power discrepancy, the nature of the research and the conveyed questions, and the chances of re-living an unpleasant and emotionally demanding experience needed to be taken into the consideration.

I approached consent as an ongoing process through the interview rather than a one-time agreement. I prioritized their emotions and comfort over obtaining the desired answers, and often reminded them of their freedom to refuse to answer any questions (Farberow, 1963). Moreover, I provided participants with an option to completely withdraw from the study in order to reduce potential anxiety and stress caused by the interview. I sometimes had to diverge from a topic that seemed to cause discomfort or distress for the participants. For instance, due to taboos surrounding sexuality in Iranian culture, some participants did not feel comfortable discussing sexuality in detail, and I withdrew from pursuing further questions related to the topic. Following ethical protocols regarding the dignity of the participants, I always ensured the security and anonymity of the data and the participants. Therefore, the data is stored in a locked folder on a USB only accessible to the researcher. Moreover, to foster trust, I let the participants choose their code names for the interview and their preferred timing and communication application.

Interviews.

The interviews were a single 60-minute focused, flexible, reciprocal, semi-structural one-on-one "virtual interview" to generate a "personalized account" of each participant's knowledge and experiences on different aspects of body autonomy including *hijab*, public mobility, and sexuality in public, private, and digital realms (Holland, 2004, p. 184 check the text; Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 97 in Denzin book). The interviews were done in Farsi via Skype, Whatsapp, or

Facetime, depending on the participant's preference. Because the interviews varied slightly in content, each interview varied in flow, in the questions addressed, in the participant's willingness to elaborate, and in the time limitations (Lee, 1993, pp. 113-114). For example, some interviews lasted 45 minutes, while others exceeded 2 hours, and if clarification was needed on a particular point after the interview was completed, I contacted the concerned participant via digital applications.

The "issue oriented" nature of the in-depth interviews enabled me to explore the "lived experiences" of the participants in a given situation in order to gain intricate personal information on the discourse of body autonomy (Hesse- Biber, 2007, p. 118). As a feminist interviewer, I sought the unspoken and hidden realities of my participants' lives through deconstruction/reconstruction of the discourse of body autonomy in the three realms (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006; Visweswaran, 1994). I had a list of general topics that I was interested in discussing with my participants, namely: 1) the conceptualization and experience of human rights and body autonomy; 2) the influential factors in exercising body autonomy; 3) the possibility that the internet, more specifically social media, helped women pioneer the practice of their body rights and agency; and 4) the exercise of body autonomy as a sign of equality and freedom. Some of the potential open-ended questions in my interviews were: On average how often do you check your social media? Are you following any human rights activity pages? How do you define body autonomy? Do you see any improvements in your autonomy since you learned about body autonomy through the internet and social media? In addition, to ensure that the participants have their complete voices—and to eliminate any complicated emotions, thoughts, paradoxicality, and culturally problematic viewpoints due to the sensitive nature of the research—I ended all the interviews by asking the participants if there was anything else that they might want to discuss (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

The loose structure of the interviews enabled me to prioritize and encourage participants to organize and lead the exploration (Laslett & Rapoport, 1975, p. 968). The participants had the opportunity to shape the direction of the interviews, challenge the researcher and her understanding or the definition of the situation, while exercising their right to refuse to answer any of the questions (Brenner, 1978). The loose nature of semi-structural interviews encourages participants to become involved in the exploration and can potentially reveal information that the researcher has not considered (Laslett & Rapoport, 1975, p. 968). Working from a flexible approach allowed me to hear the participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives on body autonomy based on their personal experiences and understanding. Moreover, such interviews can problematize the researchers' unliteral control in the process of the interview while it promoted an opportunity for the participants to shape the direction of the interviews, provide their own definitions, and reshape some of the questions through the interview (Brenner, 1978; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 126).

Keeping the question of power in mind, my main concentration was to structure the interviews solely around the participants' understanding of body autonomy. Structuring the interviews according to participants' needs and what is most relevant to their personal experience encouraged a broader understanding of the practice of body autonomy in the age of the internet. Therefore, the semi-structured approach enabled me to deal more effectively with the cases where the participants hesitated to answer particular questions (Abbas, 2013, p. 45). For instance, as the topic of public harassment is a sensitive and taboo topic to discuss, some of the participants hesitated to elaborate on street harassment related experiences. In such cases, the chosen flexible approach allowed me to continue the interview as my focus was on the participants thoughts and perceptions on the discourse of body autonomy rather than a fixed question to answer.

It is important to keep in mind that although this kind of flexible interview strategy offers advantages over other forms of interviewing, the ability to interrupt the power discrepancy between the researcher and participants remains limited. In fact, the researcher still has the ability to control the content of the interviews through selective listening and by choosing specific questions to ask (Lee, 1993, p. 110). Moreover, the researcher continues to remain in a position of power and the participants remain vulnerable as a result of the confidential information being shared (Brenner, 1978).

In addition to the power discrepancy, the absence of face-to-face interaction during the online interviews made establishing rapport and assessing visual cues more difficult. Adopting reciprocity in the interviews as an essential element for building trust and to dismantle the power hierarchy led to chatting on Telegram and Whatsapp before the interview to build trusted communications (Oakley, 1985; Reinharz, 1992).

The pilot interviews.

Before I began the main interviews, I conducted three pilot interviews, two with Iranian women inside Iran and the other with a group of three Iranian-Canadian women to assess the effectiveness of the interview questions and to redefine my project and questions accordingly (Yin, 1994, p. 74). The initial pilot interviews allowed me to identify the type of questions that seemed particularly problematic to the participants in areas such as street harassment and sexuality. I initially did not take the effect of street harassment on women's practice of body autonomy into consideration. Furthermore, the interviews allowed me to revisit my initial focus and then re-write and re-word some of my questions accordingly. Consequently, I added more detailed questions in areas such as public mobility for future interviews. Despite gaining valuable knowledge through the pilot interviews, I did not include them in my data due to their exploratory nature and inconsistency with the other interviews. Furthermore, the pilot interviews

with Iranian-Canadian women were excluded due to the incompatibility of their residential locations with the desired locations for this research.

Transcription and Interpretation

All interviews were digitally recorded in Farsi, and I transcribed them into English using Silverman's transcribing system (1993). Transcriptions are a "textual representation" of the interviews which can eliminate the emotional aspect of experience between the interviewer and interviewee. Transcribing involves a form of interpretation that converts the oral narration to written narration, and the participants speech may be distorted through rearrangement of the wording when formatting paragraphs and sections during the transcribing process (Birch, 1998, pp. 178-179; Kvale, 2007, p. 93; Mishler, 1986, p. 48).

The researcher processes the interview materials "intentionally or unintentionally" and so the participants' reality does not produce direct information. Rather, the researcher's perception constantly shapes and reshapes the reality. Therefore, the researcher's personal impressions and understanding of the participants influences the transcription as the researcher is never an unbiased medium to transfer the participants' stories (Spivak, 1988). Moreover, "the nature of the materials" and the purpose of the researcher can potentially reshape the transcription process (Kvale, 2007, p. 94). As a result, misinformation, "contextual knowledge," and personal experiences can potentially influence the data (Wengraf, 2001, pp. 10-11). Mindful that the researcher's subjectivity and personal positionality interfere with the way she listens and hears the stories during transcription and analysis, I transcribed as accurately as possible the version of the story that was narrated by each participant (Birch, 1998).

Although the researcher's memories of the interview can help to recall interactions and emotions from the interview, it is crucial to note that the transcriptions are the core data base of this research (Kvale, 2007). Therefore, in the transcription and interpretation process, I

endeavored to remain faithful to the participants' narration and experiences by examining my own biases and remaining aware of them during the transcribing. Using the same language as the participants (informal oral Farsi) enabled me to translate their exact word choice, which sometimes represents class and educational background as well as certain meanings (Abbas, 2013). Familiarity with the informal language also provided me with an opportunity to be able to detect the moment they hesitated to answer questions or if they felt uncomfortable through their word/phrase choice.

Furthermore "verbatim descriptions for linguistic analysis" is essential for validation, including tone of voice in their talk and the meaning of denials (Kvale, 2007, p. 98). Therefore, adapting "culturally available resources" to construct their personal stories was an asset (Miller & Glassner, 1997, pp. 103-104 in Silverman, 2003). For reliability I randomly listened to and transcribed some interviews twice to check the correspondence between the two transcriptions by comparing word compatibility (Kvale, 2007, pp. 97-98).

Data analysis.

Thematic analyisis one of the most commonly used analytical techniques for qualitative approaches enables this research to explore the discourse of body autonomy in public, private, and online spaces from a multidiciplinary perspective. Thematic analysis as "the most useful in capturing complexities of meaning within textual data set" allowed me to identify and explore individual narrations around the discourse of body autonomy (Guest, et al., 2012, p. 10). Using thematic analysis to transform emancipatory knowledge into a new common sense allowed the researcher to critically analyze the power imbalance and the inequality within social relations (ibid). The analysis combines descriptive and exploratory approaches to develop cultural models that shows the involvement of researcher in the interviews. Moreover, it allows the researchers interpretation and exploration to uncover silent/hidden oppression around body autonomy.

The flexible nature of the analysis allowed me to use data bricolage analysis techniques to check the data for multiple potential readings and themes in order to uncover the absolute intersectional positions of the participants by using different analytical techniques (Kvale, 2007, p. 115). The purpose of this data analysis was to reveal the hidden meanings embedded in the interview data while seeking to address social, cultural, historical, and educational problems (Wodak, 1997). In order to understand the participants' depiction of their experiences and perceptions in detail, this analysis broke the data apart in order to create relevant codes and themes (Charmaz, 1995, p. 28; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

As a first step, I created relevant themes by identifying implicit and explict ideas within the data (Guest, et al., 2012, p. 10). Furthermore, creating themes led to code development. I adopted "open coding" to unpack my data in order to investigate similarities, differences, selective patterns, and to develop themes and classify data into categories (Charmaz, 2004, p. 507; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 349). I used focused coding in order to create "abstract categories" that would be useful for producing "theoretical ideas" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 334). Furthermore, thematic analysis identified patterns in the participants' interviews by exploring their personal knowledge as well as socio-cultural knowledge. Thematic analysis "involves the migration of local concepts and ways of readings to the participants' words: operationalization" (Fairclough, 1999, p. 16 in Gouveia, 2003, p. 53). Adopting systematic analysis puts the pieces together in order to understand the discourse of body autonomy based on obtained knowledge as well as the relation between the factors. In fact, it is the meaning and knowledge interaction that clearly allows us to discover "structures of discourse" (Dijk, 2003, p. 97). As the analytical process does not easily disclose hidden meaning in the data as the meanings are multiple and constructed, constant checking of validity of data interpretation by positioning it against other possible interpretations became crucial (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

Validity.

Although the advantage of the interview is the opportunity to explore what happens in reality to people, it is important to note that the interviews did not directly provide the researcher with what happened; rather, the interviews are about the "indirect representation" of the participants' experiences (Silverman, 2006, p. 125). Narratives live in memory and perception where the meaning can be reconstituted in narrating (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p, 471). Meaning should be constructed through negotiation with participants' interpretations, not through the interpretative impositions of the researcher (Lather, 1991, p. 59; Wengraf, 2001, p. 62). As a result, at times I expressed my understanding and interpretation of what the interviewee said with them during the interview in order to reconfirm my understanding and have stronger grounds for future interpretation (Kvale, 2007). In addition to the impact of the researcher on the interview, including my personal values, I was aware that there was a chance for discrepancy between what the participants said and what they meant, and therefore I applied different methods to check whether the claims I was making were valid (Silverman, 2006, p. 289).

Since the data was based on multiple deconstructed narrations, it was my responsibility to ensure the data delivers accurate meanings through interpretation and explanatory processes (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, pp. 160-161; Wengraf, 2001, p. 227). Such constant checking is doable via systematically checking for "negative cases" which assist to detect unmatching patterns that the researcher argues in the participants' data (Hesse-Biber & LEavy, 2006, p. 63; Kvale, 1996, p. 241). For example, I checked for the potential pattern against the "negative cases" while I chose more than one informational sources in theory and data collection. Negative cases that did not match certain themes or patterns were closely examined.

Triangulation as a strategy of mixing different methods in establishing validity applied in this research played a vital role (Silverman, 2006, p. 290). I enhanced the triangulation validity

of my gathered data by using secondary sources of information, both theoretically and through the interviews, while still considering participants' interpretations (Lather, 1991; Yin, 1994, p. 33). For this purpose, I used both scholarly and non-scholarly materials to gather sufficient information on the topic. Therefore, in addition to articles and books, I also critically reviewed movies, online platforms, and novels written by Iranian women on the discourse of feminism and more specifically on body autonomy. Furthermore, the presence of women on social media and the internet provided me with the opportunity for direct observation and at times enabled me to have a discussion with women on the internet related to the discourse of body autonomy and feminsim. Relevant literature is examined in the analytical sections of this dissertation (see Chapter 7).

Along with triangulation, I adopted construct validity to establish theory construction on my observations to make sure that my preconceptions and personal interpretations did not have a negative impact on the research. To further examine construct validity, I applied different theoretical frameworks. For instance, I borrowed Foucault's theoretical framework to explain "oppositional duality" through social control and self-construction, and Shahidian's framework on "estrangement" and its impact on shaping women's understanding of their rights in society. Catalytic validity with focus on social change, which Freire named as "conscientization," is an asset in emancipatory research. Applying validity, not just enabled the researcher to consciously check her personal biases during the research, but also recognizing the impact of the research on the participants' self-awareness and liberation.

Reflexivity.

While the interviews tended to be conversational, the researcher exercised discrete control over the interview by deciding which part of the talk to continue, whether to ask more questions, how to direct the interview in general, and how to interpret the participants' narration.

Furthermore, my interpretation and presentation of the findings can complicate the research outcome (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Applying reflexivity assists in problematizing the limitations of research procedures due to power imbalances and "critical consciousness limitation" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 27; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 118).

Reflexivity is an essential part of the research process for identifying and understanding ones' values and experiences in relation to the research (Hesse- Biber, 2007, p. 129). Reflexivity enables the researcher to critically reflect on her positionality, gender, ethnicity, class, and personal experiences that are influenced by her political, religious, cultural, and emotional background, all factors that shape her perception and may play a role in the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 143; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 148). Being aware of reflexivity empowers both the researcher and participants in the interview by negotiating similarities and differences. This enables the researcher to gain access to a new level of insight in to the data as well as information related to the participants' personal experiences that she might not have had access to otherwise (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 144; Wengtaf, 2001, pp. 4-5). Moreover, reflexivity considers the limitations of the research process as it represents "how we think we know" rather than "what we know" because "knowing" is neither clear nor harmless (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 80). Therefore, relying on a "phenomenological paradigm" and "interpretation" is insufficient; instead, interactive research is the way to reveal reality (Lather, 1991, p. 64).

The baggage that I brought into this research reflects certain cultural and feminist aspects of my identity that in part shaped the project and limited my understanding of the discourse of body autonomy. For instance, while familiarity with Iranian culture and my own personal experiences provided me with a comprehensive understanding of existing challenges related to body autonomy, they simultaneously restricted my emancipatory power to exercise body autonomy. Such positionality was clear in some of the interview questions and the way I

conveyed the questions. For instance, at times I detected my non-conformist attitude toward compulsory veiling during the interview with unveiled participants. My interview questions in this research clearly exposed my wishes to claim body autonomy as a free exercise rather than as conformity to socio-cultural values.

Furthermore, my feminist stance complicated my construction of the discourse of body autonomy. Working from within a feminist framework enabled me to acknowledge the body autonomy of practicing Muslim participants who tend to endorse body limitation as a way of control over their bodies; however, simultaneously I remained skeptical of such claims. In fact, identifying body autonomy for practicing Muslim women can be problematic due to the relational and institutional factors constructing women's bodies through patriarchy.

The combination of feminism and religious, cultural, and social aspects of my identity positioned me both negatively and positively along the spectrum of insider-outsider, while my intersectional identity problematized my authenticity as an Iranian woman. Being perceived as an outsider can potentially limit access to the desired information (Hesse-Biber, 2007). As a result, most of the participants who considered me an outsider did not end up participating in the interviews. Some women were suspicious that I would use their stories to show Western countries the weakness of Iranian society; they too declined to participate. As a result, my outsider status restricted my relationship with several of the women and affected my understanding of their viewpoints.

On the other hand, being perceived as a partial outsider offered a level of understanding that was not otherwise possible (Collins, 1986). The insider-outsider position reduced the effect of researcher blindness through cultural familiarity by allowing me to establish a distanced self from the culture while remaining familiar with it (Reinharz, 1994). Having age, gender, class, and ethnicity in common with the participants made the process of dialogue easier and they

tended to be more open (Hesse-Biber, 2007). For instance, based on my class, feminist politics, and residency, one participant perceived me as an outsider who could understand her experience due to our shared background. Consequently, my insider-outsider status enabled me to build stronger and faster trust with the emancipated women who broke socio-cultural taboo and elaborated on views and experiences that they would rarely, if ever, share. My status as an insider made the participants comfortable due to our shared culture and familiarity, while simultaneously being an outsider tended to make them more open when talking about what they do not usually discuss. As the researcher, I was able to shift between insider and outsider status to help the participants share information and remain comfortable while doing so (Hesse- Biber & Leavy, 2006; Naples, 1997).

Possessing certain identities eased access to the participants, while a lack of some characteristics also granted better access to some while making it harder and more complicated in other cases. For instance, being secular facilitated my access to secular women more easily within my social circle; however, it made accessibility to more conservative women harder. It is noteworthy that since the definition of insider and outsider can vary for each individual, it is hard to conceptualize the terms and I view them from an intersectional lens.

As the participants disclosed personal and intimate information, I became more aware of the power discrepancy between us. The participants were positioned in a vulnerable situation not just because the researcher gained access to personal information, but also because I am in a position to interpret the information. In order to reduce the effect of power discrepancy, I chose methods that empower the participants in the research, in order for both of us to experience powerlessness and powerfulness constantly via the interview (Lee, 1993). For instance, when discussing the notion of feminism, I often had to listen to misogynist remarks about the nature of women's behaviors and their individual quests without expressing my perspective or challenging

the participant's ideology. At other times I disclosed my personal experiences, and while disclosure in areas such as street harassment eased the participants expression of their thoughts, at the same time it placed me in a vulnerable situation creating a shift in the power dynamics (Reinharz, 1992). My personal disclosures allowed me to truly experience the intensity and complexity of disclosure for the participants while I attempted to think beyond my experiences (Haig-Brown, 2003).

In feminist-related research, the matter of interpretation involves more than ethical concerns, it is also about the "epistemological commitment" and the researcher's "obligation to empower and not to oppress" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 343). As a feminist researcher, I am aware of the nature of my relationship with the participants and my role and personal standpoint and power imbalance due to "social structure and institution" (ibid, p. 113). I adopted reflexivity to establish rapport through attentive listening and focused language forms and expression in the interviewees' speech. As a feminist researcher, I am obliged to detect the power discrepancy in interpreting the participants' voice related to experienced inequality, while personal experience can assist me in better understanding the issues (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 341). There will always be voices that are going to be left out while the researcher struggles to discover the best way to convey her understanding of the reality of her participants (ibid).

A feminist epistemology discusses obtained knowledge and knowledge production and social construction while taking the participants' multifaceted identities and awareness into consideration (Reinharz, 1997). Feminist epistemology advocates "strong objectivity" which reflects on the implication of identities, emotions, politics, and the personal experiences of marginalized individuals in patriarchal society (Harding, 1993, pp. 49-82). Furthermore, feminist epistemological framework underscores the array of participants' realities and experiences. As a result, the epistemological ground of this research required close listening to the participants'

narration instead of reifying my own. In addition, the epistemological framework introduces participants' different conceptualizations of feminism as well as their disassociation from feminism both as acceptable and respectful feminist approaches for truthful and real knowledge. My aim as a critical researcher is to minimize "self-otherness including the influence of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, apologetic positions, and nationalism" (Derayeh, 2002, p. 7). A feminist perspective mediated my interpretation of the participants' perceptions, and the feminist framework allowed me to effectively acknowledge and work around my biases. Therefore, a feminist framework enabled me to reflect on my personal predispositions and positionality, which drove me to "strictly implement validity" measurements.

The methodological and epistemological approaches discussed in this chapter shed further light on the structure of this research. This chapter elaborated methods of the study and the importance of the discourse of body autonomy to construct emancipation and claim freedom. The following chapters will examine the discourse of body autonomy by articulating a method to approach emancipatory pedagogy to support women's rights. The internet as a means of informal education has become an emancipatory tool to explore similarities and differences in the level of knowledge and practice of the discourse of body autonomy among Iranian women inside Iran. Additionally, the impact of social, religious, cultural, and historical factors on the discourse of body autonomy will be analyzed to understand the role of the internet as an informal educational tool among women. Finally, this research will create a connection between the discourse of body autonomy and the power of emancipation among Iranian women. The next two chapters will focus on data transcription and interpretation.

Chapter 5: In Quest of Body Autonomy in Public and Online Spaces

Introduction

The next two chapters draw upon data coded from the interviews to interpret the discourse of body autonomy in the public, private, and digital realms and, more specifically, to assess the educational impact of the internet and its reshaping of body autonomy practice. The aim of these two chapters will be to categorize the relevant findings via coding to rediscover interconnected themes of body autonomy in different realms. In order to understand the discourse of body autonomy and emancipatory knowledge among the participants from multiple and diverse perspectives, each theme went through focused coding to detect the relevant points for each section. Then, using sub-coding, I categorized the similarities and differences among the individuals' perspectives and experiences for each theme. I took individuals' perspectives in a relational manner to understand the interconnectedness of individual knowledge and socio-cultural values. Furthermore, borrowing the established theoretical framework in this research, the categorized data will be interpreted.

Body autonomy can be practiced differently in particular realms, and I categorized the discourse of body autonomy according to the type of practice performed in each realm. Going through the interview questions, in Chapter 5 I uncovered the discourse of *hijab* and public mobility and its relation to harassment in public and online realms. I explored the participants' insight into the discourse of body autonomy and the related experiences from their daily lives to unpack connections amongst individuals' narration, their everyday lives, and the theoretical frameworks utilized in this study. Furthermore, I captured the participants' construction of the discourse of body autonomy in the public and digital realms to shed light on the regulation of women's bodies in the hierarchical structure of power.

As lives of Iranian women are constricted, contradictorily in private and public, Chapter 6 will focus on the discourse of body autonomy in the private and online realms with specific focus on discourse of sexuality. I explored the hierarchical structure of power on women's sexual autonomy and sexual education. Furthermore, in the journey of data interpretation, I discovered additional themes that guided me to a better understanding of the participants' knowledge of body autonomy. Feminist knowledge and the perception of the practicality of the internet on women's emancipation are explored as additional themes in Chapter 6.

As explained previously, this research is a feminist qualitative study that seeks to ask questions about personal experiences via narration on the discourse of body autonomy in different realms. The participants' insights in the following pages arise from personal and social experiences within a specific context. The majority of participants are from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds with at least a college degree, yet their perceptions and experiences are varied.

The Discourse of Body Autonomy

Before categorizing different elements of the discourse of body autonomy into separate themes, it is essential to understand the general knowledge of the participants surrounding body autonomy. Adopting body autonomy as a theme and using the definition of body autonomy that is codified as the right to make independent decisions, the Iranian women in these interviews demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the discourse of body autonomy defining it as: "having authority over one's body," having "personal power to make decisions for one's body," "valuing the body," "taking care of the body in an autonomous way," and a "lack of coercion." The participants' personal definition of the discourse of body autonomy is directly influenced by their daily socio-cultural struggles and the "right to make independent decisions" and thus varied accordingly. Some participants focused on *hijab* as the main characteristic of their body

autonomy, while others focused on sexuality, and yet others focused on a combination of *hijab* and sexuality. For example, in correlating mandatory *hijab* as a violation of women's rights in defining body autonomy, Elena, a 36-year-old married housewife states:

> Body autonomy is to have freedom on my *hijab* and relationships. Veiling comes to my mind the most when I think about body autonomy (May 19, 2018).

In terms of violation of body autonomy, some participants, including Elena, believe the discourse of veiling is the most immediate sign of body coercion in their personal lives. For others it is sexual freedom and the right to choose how, when, and with whom to become sexually involved, which indicates the most significant body rights violation when defining body autonomy. For instance, Mina, a 43-year-old married statistician, states:

> The meaning of body autonomy to me is… often times I do not want anyone (husband) to have sexual interaction with me, but I have to because I am a woman (June 23, 2018).

Mina's definition of body autonomy involves being free from coercion in sexual interactions. The sexualization of her body in her intimate relationship was the most significant struggle for her when defining body autonomy. Body coercion and a lack of rights when making decisions was mentioned by participants in both the public and private realms. For instance, Nazgol, a 29-year-old married researcher, explains:

> You own your own body. The first thing that comes to my mind [about body autonomy] is sexuality. If you were a man, you could show any part of your body that you wish or have sex [with whoever you want] (June 23, 2018).

Nazgol's stated lack of sexual autonomy is not the direct result of her intimate relationship; rather, it is the subordinated socio-cultural values that impose the limitation on her sexual freedom. Although she has never felt coercion from her partner, growing up with a sense of guilt and shame over the discourse of sexuality restricted her sexual freedom in her intimate

relationships. None of the participants connected body autonomy and public mobility in their initial definition.

Whether it is personal experience or the result of the socio-cultural values of society, the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology of the culture promotes subordination and asexuality for women. Furthermore, the participants' understanding of the discourse of body autonomy is relational, which indicates the importance of social relationships and its interconnection with their bodies (Mauss, 1973). They connect body autonomy to ho*w "they present the self to others, what they show to others, if they allow others to get close to them, if they allow others to see part of their bodies*." For example, Shiva, a 30-year-old common-law engineer, says:

> [Body autonomy is] how much I let people in my personal relationships get close to me physically and mentally. How much I can think independently, far from the cliché. Am I going to be ok if a person gets close to me or touches me without feeling guilty for letting that happen. (July 8, 2018).

The participants' definition of the discourse is relational, influenced by social relationships and expectations, and according to Bekker et al. (2008), individual acts or behaviors of self-determination while maintaining satisfactory social relationships is autonomy. In the current era of education and technology, Iranian women's rise in consciousness enables them to understand, to a degree, their lack of body autonomy (Freire, 1993). However, partial consciousness without praxis does not necessarily provide the participants with freedom of autonomous action. Rather they are required to develop critical thinking and to comprehend the root causes of their oppression in order to take action (ibid). Additionally, the practical implication of body autonomy is constantly shaped and reshaped by socio-cultural and legal limitations and this creates a paradox (Mauss, 1973). The first and most visible paradox is the practice of compulsory *hijab* among the participants.

The Discourse of Body Autonomy and the *Hijab*

Once the discussion of body autonomy is broken into more specific categories, participants construct different interpretations on the discourse of body autonomy in relation to *hijab* in the public realm. From the participant's responses, I coded *hijab* as an autonomous act (a personal choice for practicing Muslims regardless of the existence of the mandatory law), as a dichotomic act (justified it as a law but act otherwise for some secular participants) and as a non-autonomous act (a violation of body autonomy for some secular participants).

Practicing Muslim participants tend to veil themselves in more conventional ways and interpret the *hijab* as an autonomous personal choice that enhances their status and safety in public. For instance, Mina, a 42-year-old married statistician, on her practice of veiling says:

> My cover gives me more autonomy and the gaze bothers me less. I experienced street harassment before, but now that I observe my *hijab* more, I encounter street harassment less or maybe men are not as voracious as they used to be. I had to practice conservative *hijab* for my personal comfort in order to escape from the gaze. *Hijab* does not take away my autonomy, rather it made me more comfortable. (June 24, 2018).

Although Mina's statement seems to indicate autonomous choice, a contradiction is apparent in her justification for choosing the *hijab*. *Hijab* is her personal choice, yet her decision is directly influenced by patriarchal coercive values directed toward women. In the absence of any socio-legal protections, she was forced to choose the *hijab* to benefit from its protection in public spaces. Borrowing Mauss's techniques of body, Mina became accustomed to the conventional *hijab* as a tool that enabled her to fulfill her responsibility for self-protection in a homosocial space. However, such techniques clearly indicate a lack of consciousness and understanding of the root causes of her oppression (Freire, 1993).

In addition to practicing Muslim participants who personally choose *hijab* mainly for self-protection, some secular participants accept *hijab* as a legal demand but as a dichotomic act. They accept *hijab* as a civil law, but they fail to abide by the expected legal standard. For instance, Shadi, a 38-year-old married artist, perceives *hijab* as a legal dress code in Iran for women. In this regard, Shadi explains:

> Because of being an artist, I always have had a different outfit due to my mentality. I always have had more freedom in color and type of cover [due to the nature of my job]. Beside the scarf that I have on my head any color and any style that I wish I can wear. I have never been mentally occupied with the discourse of *hijab*. I have never thought that [the *hijab*] restricted me or bothered me. Probably there were many places I would prefer that [the *hijab*] did not exist and I could feel the wind on my hair, but it did not bother me much. In fact, because [Iran] is an Islamic country and the *hijab* was chosen for me I accepted it and it did not bother me. (June 6, 2018).

Shadi avoids problematizing compulsory *hijab*; however, the nature of her career enables her to exercise body autonomy by choosing her attire with lower than expected legal restrictions. Ironically, she accepts *hijab* within her chosen limit of practice, meaning she does not agree with the practice of *hijab* but rather she suppresses her desire for more freedom. Furthermore, Homa, a 34-year-old single banker who previously was a practicing Muslim, states:

> In my opinion each place/country has its own covering requirement. You need to have suitable cover based on where you are. I don't feel dissatisfied because of the current veiling situation. Maybe if we were freer it would be more comfortable, but I am fine now. (May 18, 2018).

Like Shadi, Homa avoids problematizing mandatory *hijab* and accepts it within her chosen socio-cultural and legal limit. The centrality of *hijab* in participants' lives as something that has

been imposed on them from early childhood led them to equate mandatory *hijab* with civil law in other countries in order to be culturally viable.

The desire for exercising autonomy creates oppositional duality. Social discipline regulates their bodies within public spaces but borrowing available sources from within the same society they resist the law by pushing the set boundaries of mandatory *hijab* via their mis-veiling. Repression and resistance work together, and they are not necessarily able to deconstruct the hidden cause of oppression (Foucault, 1979). Paradoxically, the desire for exercising autonomy led them to violate the "proper" *hijab* expectation and oscillate between modesty, obedience, acceptance, and desire for freedom of choice. These participants adopt resistance tools from within available sources without challenging the root of mandatory *hijab*. They engage in mis-veiling in public, unveiling in the digital space and outside of Iran, but they do not consider their actions as resistance due to fear, surveillance, and a lack of consciousness. This conflicted behavior is demonstrated by Gisoo, a 35-year-old, single English teacher:

> In our society, veiling provides me with peace of mind, because of people's gaze. But when I travel outside of Iran I always do my hair and I am always unveiled. *Hijab* is not what I want, but I have to conform with the society. I accepted *hijab*. Veiling might not be my desired choice, but I have to wear what the society accept. (July 5, 2018).

Compulsory *hijab* is incompatible with Gisoo's personal ideology; however, she conforms because of the importance of social relationships and for fear of losing her career. She seeks justification instead of finding a way to avoid mandatory *hijab*; however, she resists the same accepted *hijab* in other contexts when she can safely disobey. Conformity of this nature is a very common practice within the social order of Iranian women, but it should not stereotype them as unaware. Rather, conformity is a way to gain other rights such as public mobility or a career.

The participants who associate the discourse of body autonomy with mandatory *hijab* in the previous section denounce mandatory *hijab* as a violation of their body autonomy and personal freedom and are less likely to choose conformity as a survival strategy in society. For example, Nazgol, a 29-year-old married researcher, says:

> My understanding of *hijab* is that it completely violates your body autonomy in a society with mandatory *hijab*. You feel others own your body and they do not allow you to show your hair or your body. Therefore, it is incompatible with body autonomy. (June 23, 2018).

Nazgol expresses her sense of frustration over her lack of body autonomy and the imposition of masculine norms on her body in public while she interprets the discourse of mandatory *hijab* as one of the main causes of body restrictions. Participants such as Nayerreh perceive the *hijab* as rooted in socio-culturally mandated values, and the absence of the legal legislation does not necessarily promise more autonomy in their eyes. Participants who perceive *hijab* as a non-autonomous action tend to overtly challenge the compulsory *hijab* through their action and choices. For instance, Dornaz, a 28-year-old single manager, explains:

> I have been living independently since I was 19. During my undergraduate study my family wanted to move to Hamedan with me, but I said either I go alone or put off my study. After I graduated, it was hard to find job in my home town and I did not want to work for the government sector due to their restrictive dress codes. I moved to Tehran to pursue my education and started to work at the same time. (July 8, 2018).

Dornaz's journey to quest for her body autonomy began in her private life and expanded to her public life. Participants such as Dornaz, who consciously quest for their freedom, challenge masculine cultural values at every level to emancipate themselves and their bodies by redefining boundaries. Aligned with Dornaz, Paria, a 27-year-old single architect, clarifies:

> I do not dress up out of the ordinary, but I always wear an open front manteau. At the company that I worked, the way I dressed up was unconventional. For the first time in this company I felt my autonomy was under question regarding my attire. This was one of the reasons I resigned. (July 4, 2018).

Although Paria's body is regulated through social discipline, she consciously refuses to conform to techniques of body and resists a dress code that is beyond her definition of self-cover. She resists the hierarchical repression of her body by taking control, within available limits, of her attire away from the society and the state (Foucault, 1979). However, both above-mentioned participants' actions are paradoxical. On the one hand they problematize the mandatory *hijab*, but on the other hand they are satisfied if they have the option to choose their way of veiling.

Although the participants who perceive *hijab* as non-autonomous action are more likely to denounce compulsory *hijab* overtly, silent resistance remains the most common approach among the three groups (Bayat, 2007). They commonly challenge compulsory *hijab* through fashion, but choose the *hijab*, to different degrees, for the sake of self-protection in order to conform with the socio-cultural values and a legal system.

The *hijab* as a silent resistance.

Over the past forty years, Iranian women have converted compulsory *hijab* into a popular fashion statement as a means of reclaiming body autonomy. This fashion statement as a form of progressive resistance provides women with choices by introducing colors and modifying the style of the traditional conservative *hijab*. Although such disposition of the body is "deemed improper" in Islamic society and challenges the restrictive *hijab*, women are able to renegotiate their bodies' disposition and mis-veiling through available sources. Mona, a 33-year-old married artist who perceives *hijab* as non-autonomous, explains:

> Since I became familiar with fine arts, I started wearing colorful and unique clothing. The color of my clothing might bother some people (June 24, 2018).

Mona's desire for body autonomy led her to find an alternative way to disassociate herself from the expected and restrictive dark-colored *hijab* and therefore obtain a sense of control over her body. Although *hijab* used as a fashion statement is a common practice amongst all the participants, the extent of such autonomous exercise and resistance of oppression varies by class, residential location, and family background. For instance, Shiva, who grew up in a restricted family, explains:

> I have a very restrictive father, the type that doesn't think [logically], and all his honor is summarized into the *hijab*. I was very limited especially when I was younger. As I grew up I wanted to make decision for myself and now I have the same freedom as other women. But there are certain things that I cannot do such as wearing leggings in public. I feel everyone is staring at me and I become very uncomfortable. (July 8, 2018).

In Shiva's case, the feeling of shame and guilt imposed by the hegemonic culture interferes with her emancipation. The hegemonic values and regulation of her body are deeply intertwined with her self-confidence and morality to the extent that they limit her ability to obtain her autonomy despite her freedom of choice. In fact, partial awareness of oppressive experiences without a comprehensive understanding of the root cause limits her emancipation (Freire, 1993).

Embedded reputation.

Despite the secular participants' resistance to mandatory *hijab*, the technique of body created a habitus of modesty and self-protection. Their statements wishing to be unveiled are immediately followed by concern for self-protection and modesty in almost all the cases. The participants resist the mandatory *hijab* but adopt the *hijab* as a tool for self-protection, and so the

paradox persists beyond socio-legal expectations. Ziba, a fashionably unveiled 26-year-old, clarifies:

> In some places I felt the positivity of being covered, veiled, because it protects my body; however, in other places I was very annoyed with *hijab* as I needed to be more comfortable. For example, when the weather is too hot or when I go to the beach. (August 18, 2018).

Ziba perceives *hijab* as a useful tool for self-protection, but also wishes for more freedom and less restrictions on her body. She avoids "otherness" through social conformity and by taking responsibility for her public presence, but she also resists *hijab* as an oppressive sign, though without much awareness of the root cause. As Shahidian describes, such socially imposed responsibility for self-protection, modesty, and being "proper" inclines the participants to be sexually disruptive members of society that are required to take responsibility for their public presence. As a result, most participants report thinking about their outdoor attire in a way that would draw less attention and provide them with safety and social approval.

While many of the participants wish to be freely unveiled, they still include modesty and a certain level of covering as part of their core values due to the normalization of the social principles of modesty. Shiva, a secular woman who challenges *hijab*, explains:

> Although veiling is a law, I completely disagree with it. I like to have complete rights to choose. But if I gain this right now I think it will take years before I can comfortably wear a short skirt (July 8, 2018).

Although the ideal for most participants is freedom of choice regarding attire, the patriarchal values of piety, reputation, and propriety remain deeply rooted in the participants' ideology and technique of body and as such will require time and social reconstruction to overcome. Modesty

as a habitus and lack of awareness of the root causes of their oppression limit their emancipation journey (Freire, 1993; Mauss, 1973). Dornaz who lives on her own, explains:

> I lived in a small town and I was controlled by the males in the community rather than my family (20-28).

Masculine hegemony and body regulation tend to exist differently in private and public. Participants such as Dornaz learned that they were obligated to abide by social values even at the expense of their own autonomy. The participants demand their autonomy by indirectly challenging compulsory *hijab*, but hegemonic values often forced them to lose their connection with their bodies. Furthermore, "women locate the problem in their bodies" and perceive some autonomous activities as a complete violation of being modest. Hence, it is often difficult to practice independence in a restrictive society, but this does not necessarily demolish women's agency either (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 8, 32). The coexistence of oppression and resistance enables them to resist compulsory *hijab* via their actions, while their autonomous exercise is about constructing a desired acceptable self, which gradually weakens the hegemonic social mandate (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 31-32, 158, 195).

The *hijab* in the digital realm.

In the journey of self-construction, access to the internet enables the participants to continue their resistance in another realm. Although the internet offers the participants more freedom compared to the public spaces, it is noteworthy that the internet is an extension of public space, and therefore the participants are not invulnerable to the paradoxical values that have already been shaped in the public space. Reviewing the use of *hijab* by "autonomous," "non-autonomous," and "dichotomic actors" enables me to understand their online experiences in order to explore similarities and differences in the various realms.

The participants who identified themselves as a practicing Muslim and who report experiencing more autonomy and freedom due to their personal veiling choice, encounter the least amount of autonomy in the digital realm due to their *hijab* observation. For practicing veiled participants, being veiled on their social media such as Instagram hinders their body autonomy as they must carefully regulate their body exposure. Participants like Mina who is more comfortable to express herself in the digital realm talks about her experience with autonomy online:

> Often because I was unveiled in a picture, I had to cut myself out of the picture [before I could post it] (June 24, 2018).

Such editing limits the participants' self-expression and sharing. Although she autonomously decided to veil herself in public, she discovers such restrictions limit her desired level of autonomy in social media. Access to the digital space raises the veiled participants' awareness and enables them to re-evaluate their veiling as an autonomous practice in the public space. For instance, Raha, a 37-year-old single mother and teacher from a traditional family, goes beyond her claim of personal choice for the *hijab* and states that the internet causes her to question her faith at times. Raha chooses to be veiled in public, but the digital realm contains characteristics of a private as well as a public space and exposed her to a new level of autonomy, which problematized her belief in practicing *hijab*:

> Internet made me wish to be unveiled in many places or there were pictures that I wanted to share but because my *hijab* was not proper, I could not, and it limited me. The internet caused my *hijab* to become more relaxed and my religious tendencies were reduced as well. (May 26, 2018).

Although Raha considers her *hijab* observation to be linked to her religiosity and personal choice, the internet as an emancipatory educational tool increased her awareness and

challenged her beliefs about body autonomy, allowing her to revisit her values on *hijab*. Women's awareness on body autonomy is increased through the internet, placing Raha in a paradoxical situation where she begins to question the discourse of *hijab* and its effect on her body autonomy but does not become unveiled due to hegemonic pressures.

While the practicing Muslim participants face a new level of restriction in the paradoxical yet educational digital space, the secular participants who perceive *hijab* as non-autonomous and the dichotomic individuals gain some freedom in the same space. The socio-cultural ideology of body coercion and regulation remain in place in the internet, this new space offers the secular participants a relatively freer space with looser surveillance to exercise their body autonomy through unveiling. Being unveiled in social media often does not cause any problem on the surface, but the socio-cultural mores supersede the participants' freedom. They tend to avoid appearing with revealing clothing, bathing suits, short shorts or skirts to avoid consequences such as job loss, public judgment, and being labeled as "improper." Dornaz, an autonomous woman, explains:

> I shared veiled and unveiled images, but I have some limitations. I do not share some of my pictures because I have my coworkers on my Instagram. I do not share many things [my images] because I do not want to make my family upset. (July 8, 2018).

The socially mandated value of modesty and the hegemonic values of being good and proper do not just control the internet and limit the participants sense of body autonomy, they also negatively influence their public lives. Dornaz's concern over job security, which is an essential element for her financial independence and public accessibility, constantly overshadows her online conduct. Sometimes the fear of public consequences completely disables the participants' autonomy in the digital realm. Ava, an unveiled independent woman reports,

> I share almost only veiled personal images not to give any excuses to my coworkers who follow me [on Instagram] (June 23, 2018).

Social discipline, body and space regulation, and carrying "viable bodies" endure in the digital space and hinder some participants' body autonomy due to shame, avoiding socio-cultural punishment, and minimizing the sense of "otherness" in society (Foucault,1979; Mauss, 1973; Shahidian, 2002). Once more, confirming that the participants' online behavior is directly influenced by their personal values as well as the social order that oppresses women's freedom.

Role of the internet in silent resistance.

Although the public realm's mores permeate digital spaces as a continuation of oppositional duality, the internet plays a vital role in social reconstruction and cultural freedom (Papacharissi, 2002). In fact, the women I spoke with talked about how the internet raised their awareness and consciousness allowing them to comprehend their limited oppressed situation (ibid). Due to increased awareness, they became more courageous in exercising body autonomy through mis-veiling in public (Freire, 1993). The internet makes access to fashion easier, and it exposes the participants to more women who practice mis-veiling, further normalizing the act. Homa, one of the participants who transgresses the restricted veiling via her stylish *hijab*, speaks of how social media works as a source to create her own fashion style:

> Different ways of wearing a scarf, different styles of manteau, [anything] new fashionable, even color combinations. You learn about these and get fashion ideas [for your attire] (May 18, 2018).

In this process, Homa negotiates her autonomy through learned fashion styles while she uses the internet as a tool to materialize her body autonomy in the public space despite the restrictions imposed by mandatory *hijab*. This fashion statement along with access to the internet became powerful tools for resistance that redefined *hijab* and its boundaries. Mis-veiling blurs

the line between proper and improper *hijab* and reduces the socio-legal enforcement of the *hijab*. Instead socio-legal enforcement shifts from full covering of hair and body to toning down color and style. Freire describes such changes as reconstructing social values (Freire, 1993).

Furthermore, the participants who are not interested in seeking the latest fashion trend on the internet still benefit from the fashionable mis-veiling practice of other women via changes to the social order and potential cultural freedom. The participants regular exposure to women who exercise mis-veiling in a fashionable way leads to normalization of mis-veiling and empowers them to resist the more restrictive *hijab*. For instance, Elena explains,

> [The internet] gave me the courage to mis-veil, but I am not really interested in the fashion statements on the internet (May 19, 2018).

Despite Elena's lack of interest in the fashion, the internet exposes her to it and she becomes more courageous in exercising mis-veiling in public. Therefore, the exposure to the practice of mis-veiling normalizes the "improper" *hijab* for her and consequently provides her with the courage to demand her body autonomy.

Although the participants' demands for their rights and body autonomy are evident in their narration, the masculine hegemonic social orders and social discipline demand that women be modest and pious, which ultimately reshapes their mindset. They search for body autonomy and resist imposed submission and repression, but at the same time being a "proper" woman according to the social order and a fear of surveillance and otherness—along with limited learning situations and awareness—hinders their emancipation journey. They continue to follow these paradoxical values by exercising their body autonomy in less restricted and less risky situations, but they also conform to social discipline and fall under social body regulation in public and private spaces to maintain their public mobility.

Discourse of Body Autonomy and Public Mobility

In a patriarchal society where, public space is also a homosocial space, the presence of women's bodies can be precarious. In order to understand the public mobility of Iranian women, it is essential to delve into the effect of a patriarchal hegemonic culture that restricts women's visibility and mobility (Butler, 1993, pp. 122, 105-106). Women's politicized bodies illustrate the impact of socio-religio-cultural values on women's mobility, while women's resistance to such values challenge homosocial public space. Although the majority of participants anticipate that they have access to almost all the public spaces, the unwelcoming feeling, and sense of estrangement redefine the level of public access (Shahidian, 2002). In this research, the participants are categorized based on their common public experiences under autonomous accessibility and limited accessibility. For example, Mona, an artist who lives in Tehran explains:

> There is not much freedom for sport activities and besides you have to fully cover yourself in the first place and this is difficult (June 24, 2018).

Shiva, an employed woman who lives in Tabriz, elaborates:

> Sports activities including biking is a very uncomfortable and impossible to do alone. If my boyfriend comes with me I feel comfortable and will do it (July 8, 2018).

In the absence of legal protection and given the oppressed position of women, the hegemonic cultural norms that promote a homosocial space cause gender estrangement and discomfort for some of the participants in public, forcing them to become dependent on male significant others (Shahidian, 2002). Although not all of the participants experienced the same limitations to public access, male ownership of the public space in the patriarchal hegemonic society regulates women's mobility by normalizing these occurrences. Street harassment was a common experience among the participants, and it is important to understand the types of social

interactions in Iranian society along with "women's potential site of resistance" to shed further light on women's public mobility.

Street harassment.

Street harassment is one of the most destructive traits of Iran's patriarchal homosocial society because it relentlessly obscures women's body autonomy in the public. The most frequent incidents such as gazing, cat calling, whistling, followed by more disturbing incidents such as touching, violent behaviors, and exhibitionism often cause a sense of insecurity and dehumanization among the participants. While most experience street harassment regularly, the intensity and frequency of it vary from location to location. For example, Dornaz, a single working woman shares her personal experiences:

> I experienced unwanted inappropriate touching by male strangers in the Grand Bazar a lot. Sometimes they make some weird inappropriate noises which is very bothersome, I experienced it a lot (July 8, 2018).

Although street harassment such as inappropriate touching in busy male dominated areas like the Grand Bazar is very common, it does not hinder the participants mobility. Oppositional duality motivates the participants to challenge the homosocial space by maintaining their public presence, but it also forces them to compromise their bodies through more modest and covered attire due to surveillance and fear (Foucault, 1979). Moreover, the sense of "otherness" described by Shahidian imposes sexualization and immorality on women's bodies, which causes a sense of shame and silence in women's conduct. In order to avoid cultural punishment, women are forced to choose silence over resistance in many street harassment incidents. For instance, Dornaz explains:

> In Hamedan after one of my university exams a car stopped right front of me and he exposed his private parts (July 8, 2018).

Despite the participants' active reaction to improper touching, they remained unprotected and helpless in more intense situations like non-consensual exposure. Shame, self-blame, and lack of socio-legal support force women to remain silent and passive, while maintaining modest attire remains irrelevant in such cases. In addition to exhibitionism, physical violence damages the participants sense of body autonomy. Mona, a working married woman, explains:

> I was using a public pay phone while a male stranger got out of his car and rubbed his saliva on to my face and left for no reason. I did not even have time to react. After 5-6 years I still have this incident vividly in my mind and still I do not know why and what happened. (June 24, 2018).

Masculine hegemony gives men a sense of entitlement and ownership over public space and any trespasses into such a male dominated space can position women's bodies as recipients of unpredictable retribution as a social punishment for entering somewhere they do not belong. Under some circumstances the participants take control and remain part of the public space, but in violent and abusive encounters they become victims with no rights and no protection.

Street harassment on public transportation.

Both groups—autonomous and limited accessibility—experience feeling unsafe and suffer from harassment on public transportation, the most commonly used public space by women. Among all the different forms of public transportation, the participants experience the most harassment in public taxis.[76] The participants tend to avoid riding in taxis due to frequent occurrences of inappropriate touching and violation of their personal space. For instance, Negin, a veiled woman who reports autonomous access to public spaces, indicates:

[76] Public taxis pick up multiple passengers on one trip and all passengers pay their own fare.

> I barely take a taxi because I have my own car. If I take a taxi, I am very careful, for example, I place my handbag between myself and the person sitting beside me (June 6, 2018).

Harassment and gazing have become natural consequences of participating in public spaces, and to avoid these consequences, women are responsible to limit themselves. Women as "other" members of society with the potential to cause sexual disruption are obliged to find a protective strategy in order to be able to use taxis, and they often suffer in silence during their ride (Shahidian, 2002). As a result, gendered public transportation such as buses or subways became the only safe venue for the participants. Ziba, a graduate student, talks about her experience in the subway:

> Mostly I ride in the women's wagon in the metro and I am very comfortable. I also ride in a mixed gender wagon, but I suffer, and I prefer to avoid this (August 18, 2018).

Although gendered public transportation provides the participants with a safer environment, its homosocial ideology restricts women's mobility via gender segregation and otherness (Shahidian, 2002). Ziba, along with many other participants, has no choice but to choose gender segregated areas in order to avoid body violations and socio-cultural "punishment." Gender segregated sections within homosocial male dominated spaces do not always guarantee safety. Public buses are divided into gender segregated parts, but women still suffer from the gaze during the bus ride and suffer from assault while boarding the bus. Shiva, who tends to appear in public in modest, simple attire, states:

> About 8 years ago I was waiting for a bus at a bus stop. Someone touched my buttock. I turned, and I saw a man with a shameless smile who was staring at me. I hit his shin with my boot and he slapped me very hard in return. I could not hear for a few minutes. We were taken to the police station and I filed a complaint. The attorney general told me

> there is not much you can do unless you receive paid treatment, therefore, it is better to take back your complaint and let him free. I said I only agree if I can slap him the way he slapped me. The attorney laughed at me and asked how do you want to do this with such a tiny wrist?! Eventually, they agreed, and I slapped him. I have a very heavy hand and the mark of my fingers remained on his face. (July 8, 2018).

Despite the partial legal protection in Shiva's case, patriarchal ideology still dominates legal procedure and, as a result, women often avoid seeking legal protection. Patriarchal ideology perceives women's appearance in the public space as unnecessary and moreover as trespassing in a male dominated space; as a result, they are outsiders. Unpleasant experiences in the public space and a sense of otherness through gender segregation has built a strong sense of resistance to using the public space. Consequently, the participants tend to prefer personal vehicles. For instance, Mona says:

> I hate the mandatory gender segregation so much that I stopped using public transportation because of that reason (June 24, 2018).

Although the participants are not completely immune from street harassment inside their personal vehicles, private cars remain the only viable and safe transportation for women who can afford it.

Coping mechanism.

In the absence of socio-legal support for women, the participants choose private transportation and various other coping mechanisms in order to minimize the effect of street harassment and remain publicly mobile. Some normalize the existence of street harassment, while others adopt self-protection strategies such as more covered attire, avoidance, or self-expression. Many participants normalize street harassment because of the importance of social

relationships and interaction with their own bodies (Maus, 1973). Paria, who actively claimed her autonomy in public through her conduct, explains:

> Street harassment is not any less than before, but I do not have the same level of sensitivity as I had as a teenager, I do not get upset anymore. I say that is the limit of his understanding why should I bother myself. (June24, 2018).

Paria's normalization approach does not necessarily indicate acceptance of street harassment; rather, it is an alternative approach to resist patriarchal public space by suppressing the incident and continue her public appearance and public mobility. In fact, such silent resistance might gradually normalize the presence of women in every public space, but at the same time limit women's awareness of their oppression and its root causes.

Furthermore, participants who experience limited public access are more likely to act passively in shame and silence when they experience street harassment and prefer to withdraw themselves from the situation due to social consequences. The ones who report autonomous access to the public are more likely to challenge street harassment by voicing themselves and remaining visible. They tended to respond to violent behavior with violence that often involved a physical fight, yelling, or swearing to stop the harassment. In fact, they break their submission by risking their social reputation and social acceptance. They chose non-conformity and accept the consequence of estrangement and otherness (Mauss, 1973; Shahidian, 2002). Nazgol, a working married woman, explains:

> A stranger guy in Tabriz randomly molested my breast and left. I went after him and punched his face, he punched me back. Meanwhile, the wind blew away my scarf and the guy along with his friends started laughing at me as they expected me to run after my scarf. But instead, I stayed and kept punching the guy. (June 23, 2018).

She demands her body autonomy by showing her frustration in her conduct. However, as she empowers herself by claiming her body rights, the masculine culture still ignores her rights and instead attempts to impose body regulation and discipline on her body by mocking her failure to observe her *hijab*. Even though it might seem that participants such as Nazgol do not gain any meaningful rights, challenging social norms and resisting social discipline on bodies is a significant autonomous act that imposed limitation and oppression.

The hijab as a protection tool.

Street harassment is the most commonly cited negative influence on the participants' autonomy over their attire. In order to maintain their public mobility, the participants sacrifice their attire. Even though many of the women exercise fashionable veiling, the majority of the participants explain that street harassment can become less pronounced by appearing in more modest, loose, and plain attire. Gisoo, a teacher with a tendency to conform says:

> I think about what to wear every day if I am going somewhere that I know I will be prone to street harassment. I dress up accordingly. I may do that on a daily basis (July 5, 2018).

In this sense, the participants adopt the *hijab* as a form of self-protection that maintains their public mobility regardless of their religiosity, social involvement, and socio-cultural background. Veiling was converted to a mere piece of clothing to cover themselves in order to maintain their mobility and avoid social consequences. Shadi explains:

> Yes, sometimes I tried to be more covered than usual by wearing a long manteau and a more covered scarf (June 6, 2018).

Influenced by the masculine culture and a lack of socio-legal protections, the participants became accustomed to perceiving the appearance of their bodies as a cause of sexual disruption and immorality, therefore, they take responsibility for street harassment. Interestingly, participants do not see any connection between attire limitation and hegemonic culture; instead,

they take responsibility for men's public behaviors. Consequently, the mentality of being responsible for self-protection can distort their sense of body autonomy, even if they remain publicly mobile even at the cost of their autonomy with respect to attire.

Mobility on the internet.

The same way the participants attempt to demand public mobility, they exercise their mobility by actively participating on social media such as Instagram and Telegram. Although the internet has not been immune from space and body regulation, popular social media such as Instagram provide the women with a new level of autonomy that is often prohibited in the public space. The participants actively post their images, thoughts, and experiences for the purpose of raising awareness and sharing feelings, information, and enjoyment. The new realm enables them to express themselves and their bodies in a chosen way, visit desired pages, and seek information. Therefore, the internet provides them with the possibility of increased awareness of their oppressive situation via informal dialogue, critical thinking, and questioning.

While communicating and self-expression play vital roles in their autonomous online conduct, their approach to communication and self-expression is still bound to socio-cultural criteria. The participants mainly choose to have online interaction with familiar individuals such as friends and families. They only occasionally interact with users that are outside of their close circle as commenting and liking unknown posts can lead to socio-legal consequences. For example, Mina states:

> I like/comment on certain people that I know. If I feel there is something with political intention I avoid liking/commenting on it because I do not want that post to be used against me (June 24, 2018).

Public surveillance and fear of labeling are the main consequences that hinder Mina's autonomous action on social media, meaning the incongruity between the participant's thoughts

and actions continues in the digital realm. Participants express concern over their posts' viewers and their judgments, and act based on being "proper" and receiving approval from their followers and people who have access to their social media account. Their posting decisions often tend to be shaped by their followers' values due to the importance of social relationships. For instance, Raha reports:

> [When I want to post something] I have in my mind who is going to see my post, what are the things that some of my followers do not like or I do not want them to know influence my posts. (May 26, 2018).

Moreover, Ziba explains:

> I usually post my personal pictures or something that I like to share with others following a good feeling I usually write my purpose under the post. However, sometimes I hesitate to share my writing or my pictures. I am afraid that my writing is not good enough, or I that I will be judged or won't receive approval [from the followers]. (August 26, 2018).

The participants suffer from limitations that are directly caused and shaped by socio-cultural values and legal regulations. They often report that they feel the same limitations in both the public and digital realms. It is the mindset of society and their habitus that shapes their online conduct and made it impossible to separate the digital realm completely from the real world.

Silent Learners.

The internet enables the participants to surf and learn what socio-cultural values prohibit in the public, yet socio-cultural mores along with surveillance often interrupts free online mobility and learning. Gisoo, a government employee, is very cautious about her searches and hesitates to visit many desired pages due to surveillance:

> There are many pages that I like, and I visit them, but I do not become a member of the page on Telegram neither do I follow or like them on Instagram. There were a couple of

> cases at work where employees followed sex or political pages and they got fired. (July 5, 2018).

Gisoo's concerns over surveillance and fear of legal consequences force her to lurk, not actively participate. Although she is still able to visit the desired pages, her free interaction with those pages remains limited due to her fear of surveillance. Furthermore, socio-cultural values and fear of judgment curb the participants' ability to act freely in the digital space-law relationship, argues:

> I can visit any page that I like, but I cannot follow or make comments on a post that I like. I am afraid of people's [my followers] reaction (July 8, 2018).

In contrast to her private life, she tends to be more careful on her social media and allows masculine cultural values and the significance of her social relationships to control her online activity and mobility. She became silent in order to avoid socio-cultural punishment/consequences. Although the participants still exercise autonomy by visiting preferred digital spaces, this limited autonomy is overshadowed by legal and socio-cultural values and creates a paradox: They need to remain invisible and silent in order to be mobile.

At the same time, accessibility, even though invisible, can enable participants such as Ziba to partially cross that level of hesitation:

> For example, I follow pages related to psychology of sex, but I still think about the fact that I will be judged for it (August 18, 2018).

Ziba broke through her hesitation and fear and started to follow and interact with what she desired, but she remains preoccupied by outsider judgment and attempts to repress it. Moreover, due to the restrictions and concerns over online consequences, some participants choose to remain invisible members of social media by being only an observer. They follow and read, but do not like or comment on any post, nor do they post any personal images. Once again, the

participants experience the limitations, but challenge them by attempting to find a way to break the restriction. Even though such efforts might cause them frustration, it is still more desirable than inaccessibility. Being open and more flexible, the realm of the digital world promises educational values in the area of body autonomy and leads to the participants' empowerment and emancipation.

Harassment in the digital space.

Despite better freedom of mobility for both groups, "autonomous accessibility" and "limited accessibility" on the internet, it is misguided to assume that the participants are protected from harassment in the digital spaces. As the sexualization of women's bodies continued on the internet, the participants report unwanted friend requests and messages, and inappropriate comments and images from male strangers. For instance, Paria and Shiva report receiving an image of male genitals from a stranger on their Instagram. Paria an active member of social media explains:

> Someone sent me an image of his genitalia. Sometimes, I receive inappropriate comments, but I delete them, and it is pretty rare (July 4, 2018).

The same masculine values, sense of entitlement and the same social order making demands on the body of women in public spaces continues in digital spaces, causing frustration and limitations for women. Still, the participants' sense of control tends to be better and more effective in social media. Participants can exercise more protective autonomous actions such as deleting, blocking, and declining unwanted behaviors without being worried about the consequences of their autonomous decisions or suffering from otherness and estrangement (Shahidian, 2002). For example, Niloo, a moderate social media user, says:

> Just like in the real world [harassment] can happen in the digital realm. If you have a private page you can decline, or block and it will be over, but in the real world you do not have such options you will suffer more. (June 23, 2018).

Niloo's comparison between the public and social media spaces, describes how her body and identity can remain more real and unhidden due to her increased personal control. The sense of control in social media provides women with a better sense of body autonomy. Online autonomy changes the participants sense of insecurity over her body, and the way she experiences the space is more empowering in relation to the real world.

Veiled digital space.

In addition to the caution that the participants exercise on social media, all their accounts except two are private. Private accounts are used as an alternative to veiling for self-protection and to eliminate oppression due to social discipline. Nazgol, for example, had to change her account from public to private due to harassment:

> I had a public account until a few years ago and a bunch of inappropriate people started following me and I had to deactivate my account completely (June 23, 2018).

The absence of socio-legal protections for women online and the inability to solve the root causes of oppression force them to find alternative ways to protect themselves, i.e., using private accounts. The same way that women avoid high risk public spaces or modify their attire in public, in social media they protect themselves and their bodies through private accounts. Even though they move within an oppressed schema, self-protection offers them some mobility, and they feel more in control their digital space as they can choose their audience. While the sense of control seems empowering, their hesitation in social media even within a private account indicates that their behavior and autonomy is not limited by the space but rather by the patriarchal ideology and techniques of bodies and oppositional duality.

Educational role of the internet and harassment.

While the participants can exercise more autonomy online, the impact of the internet has reached beyond the digital realm to the public realm. Street harassment has been impacted by online activity in significant and complex ways, participants expressed a sense of appreciation for the educational benefit of the internet in reducing the level of harassment in public spaces. For instance, Sama, a moderately online active housewife, explains how the internet reshapes the safety and comfort of women in the public by exposing men to many things that they did not regularly encounter before:

> [Due to the internet] men have become more open minded, they don't cat call anymore [mis-veiled women] have been normalized. Their attitude influences me, and I do not have to cover myself like before (May 17, 2018).

The internet allows Sama's sense of body autonomy to become less occupied with self-protection in public due to the nature of online cultural freedom. The internet converts the public space to a safer place for women, which provides the participants with a sense of public mobility (De Preester & Tsakiris, 2009, p. 713). On the other hand, there are participants who are skeptical of the constructive effect of the internet in eliminating harassment. Paria, who feels autonomous control over online harassment, explains:

> I do not know if the influence of the internet [reduces street harassment], but people are becoming more aware [in the age of the internet] (July 4, 2018).

In this context, Paria confirms that the frequency of street harassment has been reduced due to higher awareness in society; however, she cannot conclude that such changes are the result of the educational impact of the internet. Furthermore, Shadi clarifies:

> The internet provides you with the information and the problems present and this will help to prevent worse incidents, for instance about sexual harassment. However, I do not

> know if the internet reduces the level of street harassment or not. And nowadays the experience of harassment is also added on the internet. It is our responsibility be aware and protect ourselves. (June 6, 2018).

The discrepancy in the experience of body autonomy in public and online is the result of the level of freedom over the participants' bodies. Yet, at the same time the concept of sexualization of women's bodies and their predefined "otherness" continue in the digital space, and once again Shadi feels the necessity of carrying the responsibility on her shoulders to protect herself. Shadi's statement indicates that a lack of social and legal support hinders women in the digital space while the patriarchal values impose the responsibility on women rather than on those who violate women's rights. Therefore, the participants are forced to remain veiled, using a private account, in order to protect themselves within the hegemonic society of digital space.

Summary

Drawing upon the established theoretical framework, masculine hegemonic culture along with the Islamic state restricts the participants' body autonomy both in ideology as well as in action. Women's access to education and technology empowered them to become aware of their limited oppressed situation. They challenge limitations by consistently appearing in public and resisting mandatory *hijab*. The participants—whether they perceive the *hijab* as law or coercion—problematize it by resisting restrictive Islamic rules. Ironically, they are simultaneously trapped in a duality with the adoption of the *hijab* as a tool for self-protection, modesty, and maintaining their public mobility.

With the birth of the internet and easy access to the internet women have found an alternative realm to continue exercising body autonomy. They adopted the internet as a tool to exercise unveiling and build the courage to be more mis-veiled in public. Furthermore, the internet enables them to become more mobile and publicly visible. Therefore, they become silent

learners and observers, while they sacrifice their voice to remain mobile online. Such interconnectivity provides more opportunity for freedom, awareness, and the courage to exercise their autonomy in both realms; at other times it imposes restrictions due to a lack of legal and social protection and restrictions on their body autonomy. This dichotomy creates a paradoxical situation for exercising body autonomy for the participants. Women resist oppression by problematizing *hijab* observation and public mobility. Despite borrowing resistance tools, they are still confined within a masculine constructed social order. As a result, they take responsibility for their body as they fear surveillance and otherness.

Chapter 6: In Quest of Body Autonomy in Private and Online Spaces

Introduction

Chapter 5 explored women's personal body autonomy experiences from socio-cultural and individual perspectives in the public realm. I compared the discourse of body autonomy in digital space and public space while taking into consideration the emancipatory educational effect of the internet on the participants' body autonomy. In continuation of the previous chapter, this chapter presents more data from the interviews to explore the participants' body autonomy practice and perceptions in the private realm. Focusing on the discourse of sexuality as the most private practice of body autonomy. This chapter elaborates on the impact of socio-cultural and individual knowledge on the participants' body autonomy and sexuality, while examining their insights into the emancipatory educational impact of the internet as a new space for claiming their rights and moving beyond submission and subordination. To distinguish sexual autonomy from the patriarchal values associated with pleasing men, it is essential to understand the different ways of "inhabiting the norm" and the way the participants' experience their autonomy (Mahmood, 2005).

In addition to the discourse of sexuality, to comprehend the participants' perception of the constructive effect of emancipatory education on body autonomy, it is vital to develop further themes of feminism and the emancipatory effect of the internet. Such themes allow the researcher to further explore the participants' level of awareness and praxis in their quest for body autonomy. In fact, feminism is an inseparable part of the emancipatory process as it clarifies the participants' awareness of their rights and how they exercise their body autonomy. Furthermore, exploring the participants' approach to the internet will shed further light on the practicality of the internet in the quest for emancipatory knowledge.

The insights explored in this chapter are particular to specific individuals and experiences and the participants remain a crucial illustration of the discourse of body autonomy and women's emancipation. As explained previously, this research is a feminist qualitative study that seeks personal narrations on the discourse of body autonomy in the private and digital realms, rather than constructing a quantitative statistical analysis.

The Discourse of Body Autonomy and Sexuality

The paradoxical situation arising from socio-cultural mores and women's emancipatory desires that confines the participants in the public and online persists in the private realm. While women struggle for sexual freedom, Islamic androcentrism reinforced by a patriarchal culture determines women's sexuality in the context of suppression, submission, and a culture of silence and shame. Socio-cultural values and the regulation of women's bodies restricts sexual pleasure to men only and assigns asexuality to women (Sadeghi, 2008). Women's sexuality is defined as devotion to the marital relationship, the mental desire for sexual interaction, and respect for the husband, all of which are indicators of social expectation and body regulations (Foucault, 1979; Merghati-Khoei, 2014). Moreover, the masculine discourse of sexuality imposes appropriateness and submission on women; hence, their voices remains unheard.

Partial sexual autonomy.

Using the participants' statements on sexual autonomy as a theme, I codified sexual freedom into either autonomous or non-autonomous experiences. The first group consider themselves autonomous due to participation in decision making and the ability to voice their sexual needs. The non-autonomous participants reported a lack of self-expression and dissatisfaction with their level of participation in decision making. However, both groups are influenced by social relationships, and interactions with their bodies suffer from shame, fear of judgment, and subordination to different degrees (Mauss, 1973).

Oppressed by a hegemonic culture, some participants consider the self sexually autonomous since they actively participate in making decisions on conception, contraception, and sexual initiation. Negin, a 42-year-old housewife, who was married in her youth explains:

> I [always] have the final word on conception and pregnancy. My husband wanted more children, but I decided that I do not want more, and I did not get pregnant (June 6, 2018).

Participants such as Negin perceive sexual needs and desires apart from sexual autonomy, and so the limited autonomy of decision making satisfies the participants' sense of sexual autonomy. Despite a lack of social and legal rights, women still successfully gain control over specific parts of their sexual interactions, but the hegemonic expectation of women as an asexual gender overshadows their emancipatory progress and oppositional duality continues in the private realm. In fact, the participants internalization of asexuality leads to self-suppression of their sexual needs and desires.

A majority of the participants express satisfaction with their sexual autonomy in decision making, contraception, and conception, yet the male dominated culture and expected subordinate identity still limits the participants' experience of autonomous sexual interaction. On this note Sama, a 34-year-old housewife who regrets her abstinence before marriage, talks about her sexual experiences:

> Although it has been a few years, I still feel there is something between us that prevents me from expressing my wants and desires. I do not have control over contraception. I always have stress over contraception and if you really do not want to get pregnant this is going to bother you, that you do not have any control over it. (May 17, 2018).

Sama's partner's unilateral sexual expectation aligns with the normalizing culture of subordination that oppresses her body autonomy while engendering a sense of distress and helplessness in her sexual interaction. She is forced to be a sexual object without control over her

sexual interactions as the masculine sexual culture expects her to remain passive and carry a culture of shame and silence.

Despite the relative sexual autonomy in decision making, a majority of the participants, both autonomous and non-autonomous, struggle with sexual submission either due to a lack of awareness or the influence of society and women's expected asexuality (Foucault, 1979; Mauss, 1973). This struggle causes complications due to cultural sensitivity of the discourse of sexuality and body regulations.

Culture of shame and silence.

A culture of silence and shame as a technique of body within Iranian society is embedded in the patriarchal subordinate mores continues to undermine the participants' voices and oppresses their sexual desires and needs in their intimate relationships. As a result, women are expected to be sexually passive in order to be "proper." Being "proper" has become "habitus" and normalized passivity and subordination even among the participants who have successfully claimed their voices to express sexual desire. As a result, while practicing their sexual autonomy, they still struggle with modesty, guilt, and fear of judgment. For instance, Nayereh, a 29-year-old married woman who considers herself sexually autonomous, states:

> I felt it is wrong to say that I enjoy sex and that led me to never experience an orgasm. I learned to have a feeling of guilt intertwined with shame. Such feelings gradually faded, and I slowly realized that I am bisexual, and I became more comfortable during sex. However, the fear of judgment stays with me. (June 23, 2018).

Nayereh's conscious journey of self-construction disclosed her true sexual identity and empowered her to leave behind the feeling of guilt in her sexual relations. However, trapped within the paradoxicality of her emancipation and body discipline, her sexual desires remained a source of embarrassment that mandated her to silence in order to remain a 'proper and

acceptable' woman. Furthermore, Paria, a single autonomous woman, explains:

> I have always talked about sex and sexuality with my friends. I learned about women's orgasm from one of my friends. However, I still have difficulty to express my need to reach orgasm. I am worried to turn him off or that he might not want to do it. I feel ashamed. (July 4, 2018).

Although Paria successfully emancipated herself from many gender stereotypes and body regulations such as a culture of silence, the culture of shame along with mores of unilateral masculinized sexual pleasure still oppress her sexual needs. Evaluating women's body autonomy, the concepts of shame and guilt hinder women's sexual autonomy through a fear of being labeled as having excessive sexual desire, receiving negative judgments about their chastity, and of hurting their partners' feelings, all of which acts against women's sexual autonomy (Janghorban, 2015). Even for the most rebellious participants, the concept of shame and silence play a significant role in shaping how they interact and express themselves in their sexual relations, while sexuality and pleasure remain masculine rights.

Virginity as a sign of chastity.

In addition to the culture of silence and shame and women's limited knowledge of sexual autonomy, the patriarchal values surrounding virginity as an indicator of piety and chastity further complicate the participants' sexual autonomy. Women challenge virginity and the ideology of sexual submission by being sexually active. However, confined within an oppositional duality, social discipline still hinders women to freely practice their sexual autonomy. As a result, virginity as a trap between piety and sexual freedom has become a source of frustration among the participants (Butler, 1993, pp. 95, 122). For instance, Hana, a sexually autonomous woman, explains:

> Everything including virginity is under control and that creates complex individuals. On

> one hand women want to be independent and autonomous, on the other hand societal acceptance is important to them. Adult women are still occupied with the concept of virginity. The society forces them to maintain their virginity in order to be desirable. (July 7, 2018).

Silent resistance to sexual submission among participants such as Hana has changed women's attitude towards virginity, but the participants still suffer from socio-cultural control over their bodies and sexuality. Although most participants denounce the concept of virginity and perceive it as an unnecessary practice against women's body autonomy, the concept of virginity remains a complex unresolved issue in the participants' lives. Moreover, some participants affected by the traditional social order and a fear of negative consequences still tend to perceive virginity as an important factor and believe that their virginity has the potential to offer a better/more suitable marriage. On this note, Ziba, a single secular 26-year-old woman, tells her story:

> I freely expressed my sexual desires in my relationships, but I have never been honest in expressing my emotional needs such as wanting a simple hug. I have problems with the concept of virginity and I could not have full intercourse interaction and it is a scary subject. However, if I want to choose my future partner, I will choose someone who the concept of virginity is unimportant to him. I do not want to have full intercourse in the relationship I have now. In my past relationship I did not feel he deserved me and even when I offered full intercourse he refused. He said taking your virginity put responsibility on my shoulder and I do not like to engage in such interaction. (August 18, 2018).

Ziba was confused by socially imposed modesty and her personal desire for liberation. She denies virginity as an essential indicator of piety for women in general, but at the same time, she values her virginity as a dependent factor for finding a suitable partner. Ziba's perception of

sexual intercourse as a “scary subject” clearly indicates the encroachment of social discipline and body regulation into her personal values.

Aligned with the masculinization of sexuality, intercourse is not about her sexual pleasure; it is a tool to find the right partner. Therefore, male hegemony and guardianship over women’s bodies restricts her sexual freedom and the pressure to control her body become more prominent. As a result, prioritizing virginity as a part of socio-cultural mores might not even alarm as violation of their body autonomy. Such paradoxicality between a desire for sexual liberation and valuing virginity is the result of hegemonic subordinated values along with misperception of the notion of sexual autonomy. Although women in search of their sexual autonomy still tend to be trapped by patriarchal cultural values and social order, when discussing sexual autonomy, it is vital to understand that sexual autonomy does not fall under submission or willingness; rather, it is a spectrum that includes both, but with submission tending to be stronger in the absence of knowledge and information.

The discourse of sexual autonomy in the digital realm.

As the participants begin to illustrate their partial sexual autonomy, the educational influence of the internet cannot be underestimated. In fact, it was internet access that introduced women to a pool of information that they had not had access to before. The participants learned about their bodies, intimate relations, contraception, women’s sexual desires, different ways of sexual pleasures, sexual harms, sexual health, and personal hygiene. Moreover, the internet enables the participants to re-evaluate socially mandated values and rethink sexuality in the context of non-masculine rights. As a result, the educational effect of the internet empowers women via awareness and consciousness and allows them to problematize restricted patriarchal values such as asexuality. For example, Mona, who autonomously expresses her sexual desires to her partner, states:

> I learned a lot about woman's body through chatting in the past. Chatting broke the taboo of sex for me and many of these chatters were men (June 24, 2018).

Shiva, another self- defined autonomous individual, agrees:

> Almost anything I know [about sex] I learned from the internet (July 8, 2018)

Moreover, Homa, a single previously practicing Muslim woman, explains:

> I had very little information on sexuality and I learned a lot [on the internet]. Especially for someone like me that I am uncomfortable talking about sexuality with anyone [the internet] helped a lot. [I learned about] sexual relationships, health, ways of communication in sexual relation. Any sexual question that comes to my mind first I search for it online. (May 18, 2018).

The free knowledge that the participants gained empowers them to challenge hegemonic predefined values of subordination, submission, and asexuality amongst women. For these participants, the internet as a sole sex educational tool allowed them to migrate from asexual object to sexual human being by departing from imposed male dominated knowledge. The internet as an educational tool empowers the participants to be able to learn with fewer limitations, which potentially offers cultural freedom and social reconstruction around the discourse of sexuality and sexual autonomy.

Online sex education.

Women's orgasm is one of the main discoveries of the participants in surfing the internet and this reconfirms the oppressive asexualizing patriarchal subjectification of women's bodies for males' desires. For instance, Sama, a non-autonomous woman, explains:

> I read [on the internet]. For a long time, I did not know what women's orgasm was, then I read about it on the internet and learned that I can experience orgasm and enjoy. [I

> further learned] what can cause sexual harms, personal hygiene, and contraception and I applied them in my life. (May 17, 2018).

Sama's lack of autonomy in her sexual interaction, due to her limited knowledge, soon diminished with the introduction of the learning process. The new level of knowledge on sexuality empowers Sama to partially renegotiate and reconstruct her sexual autonomy in her intimate relationship, but unilateral male rights still hinder women like Sama. Therefore, despite the emancipatory effect of online learning, the paradoxicality between emancipation and hegemonic values often brings hesitation and silence to women such as Sama. As Freire (1993) explains, awareness and praxis both are required to reach emancipation and cultural freedom.

Online learning experiences limit autonomous women such as Nazgol as well. For instance, Nazgol, an active member of social media, explains:

> Yes [I learned] a lot. For example, I learned about different ways of orgasm in women (June 23, 2018).

The new learning experiences empower Nazgol to enhance her body autonomy and depart from some restrictive traditional values, but she still struggles with the notion of judgment and fear that she learned from socio-cultural values. Nazgol and many other participants attempt to separate the self from the traditional socio-cultural values, but the socio-cultural norms are not completely eliminated through education and learning despite the appearance of emancipation and empowerment.

The "blurry" line between morality and modesty and sexual emancipation in this context permeates different levels of empowerment and emancipation among the participants. Paria, a sexually active individual, structures her sense of body autonomy and her sexual desires as follows:

> The internet helps us to be able to see and read and learn about our bodies and our body autonomy. Its first influence was on [learning about] sex and sexuality (July 4, 2018).

Although Paria learns about sexuality on the internet and has gained the necessary knowledge to emancipate herself, she previously illustrated how she remains uncomfortable asking her partner to meet her sexual needs and so she continues to struggle with duality in her sexual relationship, largely due to her unawareness of the root causes of her oppression. Despite the participants' partial successes, women's bodies remain under men's guardianship and as a result they struggle to emancipate their bodies from oppression. On the one hand they attempt and successfully exercise autonomy in their sexual interaction via active learning, expression of their sexual needs, and control of contraception, but on the other hand the societal culture of silence and shame along with socio-legal restriction and body regulation limit their autonomy by imposing piety and chastity on them.

Although the impact of patriarchal values continues to enforce paradoxicality in women's learning and action, the above examples illustrate significant educational emancipation for the participants' sexuality, which then raises their awareness and empowers them. In addition to the emancipatory impact of the internet on women's awareness and body autonomy, exploring feminism and their level of knowledge on the root causes of oppression is an essential part of their emancipatory journey. However, as the newly obtained knowledge only allows them to exercise body autonomy selectively in the context of hegemonic cultural values, their online experience works slowly to undermine patriarchal culture and open the way for cultural freedom.

Role of Feminism in Discourse of Body Autonomy

Feminism as an ideology is essential in obtaining body autonomy in all three realms, and participants were divided into groups of individuals who define themselves as non-feminists and the ones who consider themselves feminists. The non-feminist participants negotiated women's

empowerment and advocated for a feminist lifestyle without perceiving themselves as feminist. Their lack of a comprehensive understanding of the discourse of feminism is the main reason behind this duality. More importantly, the discrepancy between advocating for women's rights and avoiding being a feminist seems to create a new space for rethinking feminist acts as a viable tool for women's empowerment rather than relying on the feminist label. For example, Mana, a single working mother in search of her rights, explains:

> [Feminist is] a person who prioritize women all the time. I do not consider myself feminist because I believe in equality between men and women (May 26, 2018).

Furthermore, Mona explains:

> I do not exactly know what [feminism] is and many name themselves feminists by mistake. I do not think if I am a feminist, humanity is more important than gender to me. Being human and avoid differentiating based on gender is more important than being a feminist. My definition of feminist is advocating for women's rights that they do not have. To decide and act freely. You cannot ask for dowry because it is your right and then be a feminist. (June 24, 2018).

From technologies of self-perspective, these participants—who reject body policing and had previously demanded their body rights—deny their affiliation with the term feminism due to a lack of a comprehensive understanding of the discourse of feminism. Although signs of awareness and consciousness of the root cause of their oppression is evident, the socio-cultural values and Westernized perceptions on feminism reshape some of the women's perceptions on the discourse. For instance, Raha, a 37-year-old widow and teacher, elaborates:

> In my opinion [feminism] is an extreme and fanatic vindication (hemayat) of female gender with no logic. I do not consider myself feminist but advocate for women's rights. Everybody, man or woman has the right. But women's legal rights are violated in Iran,

> but in society and family so often women are bully, but men also want to be in power compared to women. (May 26, 2018).

She is aware of the lack of women's rights and her inner struggle over women's rights in her daily life is prominent, but she has failed to understand the root causes. Paradoxically, at the same time she is influenced by the limited availability of information, and she condemns feminism as a Westernized discourse.

While the non-feminist participants are aware of a lack of equal rights for women and have been struggling to obtain their rights and deny policing of their bodies, a lack of clarity on the discourse of feminism combined with unawareness of the root causes of their oppression pushes them to disassociate themselves from the term. For instance, Shadi, a 38-year-old artist, interprets feminism as abnormal and a restriction by emphasizing that feminists are extremists. As a result, she does not align herself with them in definition even though her beliefs still identify her as feminist:

> [I believe in] normal regulation and respect for women's rights, not restricted which they named feminist. Feminists are a bit restricted and exaggerated. Men and women are equal, and their rights should be equal, the social status should be equal. [this is what] I support. Honestly, I do not really believe in feminism and I am not a feminist, but I believe in equal rights for both men and women. (June 6, 2018).

Self-disassociation with feminism while acting and thinking like feminists was the common trait of all the participants who consider themselves non-feminist. Therefore, the non-feminist participants are in fact feminist, but due to a lack of accurate knowledge disassociate themselves from the term feminist in order to maintain the importance of social relationships and social acceptance.

The feminist participants provide an equally interesting bridge between the intention of feminism and its actual practice as a dominant discourse. More than half of the participants endorse feminism and clearly associate it with an individual who believes in gender equality, women's independence, women's rights advocates, and women's awareness. The feminist participants are more aware of the root causes of their oppression and borrow the discourse of feminism as a practical tool to embody women's rights in the Islamic society of Iran. For instance, Shiva, an active follower of feminist-related activities, says:

> Everyone has a different definition of feminism. But if feminism is gender equality in every aspect, I am definitely a feminist (July 8, 2018).

Furthermore, Saba explains:

> [Feminist is] a person who believes in equality of two individuals. I am totally a feminist, because men and women have to have equal social rights although the role of women is different than men (May 19, 2018).

Although feminist participants such as Shiva and Saba possess a definition for feminism and consider feminism an essential step to obtain gender equality, they are still affected by socio-cultural values and are therefore limited in their understanding of the discourse. They clearly understand the concept of feminism in relation to gender equality, but they distinguish between men and women based on their assigned gender roles that have been imposed upon them by socio-cultural values.

Although a comprehensive understanding of feminism seems to be the major difference between feminist and non-feminist participants, a lack of education and the influence of socio-cultural values are apparent for both groups to a different degree. In fact, there is a minimal difference between feminist and non-feminist participants' actions and beliefs on gender equality. They have equally suffered from gender inequality in their daily lives and still demand

gender equality and women's rights. Although both groups were exposed to the internet and benefited from its educational components, their different approaches demand further exploration of feminism in the internet space to explore the educational impact of the internet on shaping the ideology of feminism in the participants. A lack of awareness of the root causes of oppression, the limited situation in which they find themselves, and the absence of dialogical approaches around the topic precludes critical thinking and, therefore, problematizes their emancipation.

Feminism in the online realm.

The participants' perception of the impact of the internet on women's emancipation supports their personal actions more than their definition of feminism. The participants rethink what counts as courage and autonomy and how to renegotiate their body's disposition in the public realm in the context of learning from the internet. They seek emancipation on the internet by following different pages and visiting different posts. Furthermore, they perceive the internet as an educational tool for shattering women's subordination.

Despite their online activities and learning from the internet related to women's rights, the feminist participants' views on autonomy and emancipation are somewhat perplexing. Although they tend to follow inside and outside activists such as Masih Alinejad, Faranak Amidi, Hoda Rostami, Taraneh Alidoosti, Mahnaz Afshar, and Nasrin Sotoudeh, they are inclined to be more skeptical of outside feminist-related online activity and often hesitate to adopt it as their inspiration on their emancipation journey. They do not believe that these pages bring their voices and their concerns to attention. Moreover, some participants perceive these pages as "show off" or a "failure" to understand the reality of Iranian society. For instance, Nazgol, a feminist and business researcher, explains:

> Feminist pages might voice my quests, but sometimes I feel it is a show and slogan. Sometimes they cannot understand Iran's situation (June 23, 2018).

Nazgol, as a young, active, feminist woman, criticizes outside activists' lack of understanding of Iranian society's reality, and so it became hard for her to believe them and follow their activities. Shiva criticizes the activists for taking less important matters as their priority:

> [Feminist pages] do not present my concerns. Their hot topics nowadays are [women] going to stadium and *hijab*. and in my opinion, they do not have the courage to concentrate on the main topic which is women's financial independence. I read about women's rights mainly on Twitter, but I am not familiar with who they are, but I am familiar with their activities not their personal lives. [Activists such as] Masih Alinejad, Nasrin Sotoudeh, Taraneh Alidousti, and Mahnaz Afshar. (July 8, 2018).

Although the internet as an informal educational tool potentially offers learning through information sharing and role modeling, autonomous women like Shiva, who broke many taboos to emancipate herself, found their personal experiences and perception of society altered by online activities, yet they still hesitate to share their true-selves regularly due to social norms and values. While many of the activists focus on compulsory *hijab* and access to stadiums, the participants' demands for women's rights is deeper. They prioritize women's independence and legal rights over immediate relief such as *hijab* or access to a stadium. They are searching to overcome the root causes rather than fixing surface level limitations. For instance, Dornaz, a single independent woman, states:

> I do not have any specific opinion about Masih Alinejad. I feel she shows off, she feels she was very successful leader in women's movement. Masih was only set fire at all near the barn (July 8, 2018).

Lack of interest in women's online activities is not always directly related to skepticism. Sometimes a sense of helplessness and lack of hope push the participants to avoid following feminist activists. Hana, a traveler and business woman, expresses her sense of helplessness in this regard:

> I check Masih Alinejad's page, but I do not follow. I see these activists and violated Iranian women's rights, but I cannot change anything, and I only get upset (July 7, 2018).

Skepticism is a promising indicator of the participants' ability to think critically, but hopelessness can be a destructive coping mechanism that can lead to resignation with the current situation instead of seeking changes due to a fear of change and the potential responsibility that comes with it (Freire, 1993). Moreover, some participants avoid following feminist activists because of a fear of judgment and surveillance, which can cost them their job and have legal consequences. Although they tend to check the pages and learn about the posts, their conformity hinders their autonomous action to freely interact with the pages. Mina, a religious and feminist woman who practices veiling by choice, embodies her feminism and her perspective on online feminism differently by the level of her acceptance of online activities:

> Yes [I am a feminist]. Even when I hear sexist jokes from my male coworkers it is unpleasant to me. I always respond that we work outside and inside and raising children. But in my opinion those men who think that they have an important role in life, their absence will not cause any disruption in the woman's life. I grew up in a male-centered family and often I was invisible and if I was visible I might have had different situation now. Sometimes I feel like a loser because of being a woman. My definition of [feminism] is advocating for women's rights. Women's activity and responsibility is unseen/invisible. I visit [women's activists online], but I do not follow them. I agree with many of them for example [campaign against] mandatory *hijab*. I do not follow them

> because they are not all authentic and none of them express my quests and needs. (June 24, 2018).

Although Mina follows online activists and agrees with some campaigns against compulsory *hijab*, she avoids any direct interaction in fear of surveillance and potential negative political consequences. Although she is interested in following the pages, she remains skeptical of the authenticity and purpose of most of the online activities. Mina's cautionary action around online activities indicates her critical thinking and her level of awareness.

Problematizing online feminist-related activities does not convey that the participants underestimate/belittle/ignore women's feminist-related activities in the internet realm. In fact, they are cognizant of women's movements while admiring the potential for freedom on the internet. Rather it is more the type and location of the activity that define their attitude towards online activists. Paria explains:

> Iranian women have been very active on Twitter regarding their sexual irritation. But Instagram slowly brought indecency, ghobhe hame chiz rikht, and introduced awareness and learning shifts. The internet influenced my lifestyle from designing my home and make up to… and I follow many women that I am inspired by their lifestyle. The internet showed me that there are possibilities for different lifestyles. Even our parents moved away from their dogmatic way as a result of using the internet. (July 4, 2018).

Clearly, the participants are aware of Iranian women's resistance and their various movements as well as the power of knowledge sharing. As a result, they do not completely reject outside activities but tend to own the changes by avoiding giving credit to the outside activists. For instance, Paria continues:

> I do not follow Masih Alinejad, but I follow up with her news. In my opinion her campaign was successful in Iran. It is true that 40 years of Iranian women's resistance has been working, but her campaign plays a role as well. (July 4, 2018).

Many of the participants, such as Saba and Elena, challenge the hegemonic culture in their personal lives in order to emancipate themselves. Therefore, as individuals experience the process of emancipation, they respect and dignify the women's movement and demand their rights. However, for the feminist participants, their living experiences and ideology are often divided between their personal ideology and societal values on the discourse of feminism as a continuation of oppositional duality. For example, Ava, a previously practicing Muslim woman who self-identifies as feminist, thinks of feminists as questing for women's rights and is skeptical of society in this regard:

> Now yes, it has been awhile [I consider myself feminist]. Feminism in general advocates for women's rights. Iran's laws are anti-woman, for example men inherit twice as much as women. It got better lately since women obtained the right to divorce and gain custody and they obtained these by using the internet. (June 23, 2018).

From an emancipatory perspective, Ava is aware of women's legal issues in society and believes that the internet enables women to raise their voices and bring forth their rights and therefore make changes. However, as a feminist woman living in a patriarchal society, she still perceives societal values as oppressive.

A majority of the participants who identify as non-feminist mention that they do not follow feminist-related pages for reasons such as disagreement with feminist movements, the absence of their voice, anti-male movements, avoiding changes, or it never occurred to them. As previously stated, this is fueled by the negative connotation attached to the word feminism and as a result they tend to ignore or avoid these activities on the internet. Similar to the feminist

participants, the non-feminist participants do not perceive that online women's activists represent their quests. For example, Sama shares:

> I do not follow women's [rights] pages. I feel the more I get involved with these issues the more mental conflict I will experience (May 17, 2018).

Participants such as Sama avoid following feminist-related activities as a strategy to suppress their discontent and maintain the status quo in their current life. Their comments indicate that they already know that feminism and women's rights activities can change their perception, so they avoid it to circumvent any potential conflict in their personal life. Although Sama and others are aware of their biased resistance to feminism amid the ongoing violation of their rights, this awareness does not make them more involved with online activities due to a fear of change and the increase in responsibility that comes with it. The internet was certainly successful in raising women's awareness in general, but it does not necessarily teach them about the concept of feminism. Furthermore, the online activists' rate of success remains unclear.

The participants' learning, and awareness fluctuates from one discourse to another; therefore, it is vital to understand their participatory approach on the internet in order to explore their level of knowledge and their perception of the emancipatory effect of the internet. In fact, their online behavior and related attitude towards the usefulness of the internet can potentially indicate the success rate of the internet in women's journey for emancipation.

The Internet as an Emancipatory Educational Tool

The participants adopt the internet as the primary source of learning and information for any unknown before seeking information offline. They escape to the internet seeking emancipation; searching and communicating are the most common activities that they are involved in on the internet. Furthermore, the unlimited information of the world wide web exposes the participants to other women on their journey for information and emancipation.

Taking a transnational feminist approach, the participants' world views are amplified by the webpages and women they encounter on the internet. This level of unfiltered exposure introduces a new level of consciousness and awareness to the participants' way of thinking. The participants' exposure to other women's lives as well as the participants' ability to convey their own voice in the online realm draws the most significant attention during coding. The participants' interest in other women's lifestyles, activity, resistance, and struggles introduced a deep familiarity with other women's stories and ways of life, hence empowerment. For instance, Elena, a rebellious woman who took back her autonomy after a restricted marriage, states:

> I admire their [women outside of Iran] level of activity and their happiness. Iranian society treats women very differently compared to other countries (May 19, 2018).

Ava, a working mother elaborates:

> The type clothing, their entertainment, the activities they have… sometimes you feel how lucky they are and why can't you be like them (June 23, 2018).

As the participants began to explore other women's lifestyles on the internet, they perceived women outside Iran as happier and more autonomous. Such comparisons offered a new level of awareness regarding the rights and freedoms that Iranian society withholds, and this new awareness in turn fosters self-reconstruction and increased demand for emancipation. However, at times the participants experience a sense of hopelessness on their journey to body autonomy due to socio-cultural discipline and regulation. For example, Homa, a Telegram page administrator, explains:

> For example, I know a woman [on Instagram] who works pretty hard, but on weekends whatever she likes to do she does. In Iran you have a type of fear that if you want to go on a trip alone will make you uncomfortable. I always feel comfortable and safe on my

> abroad journey, but in Iran I must have someone with me or travel in a group. Women outside Iran do not have the same anxiety and worry we have. (May 18, 2018).

Although the participants' awareness about their rights and freedom has increased because of the internet, they still tend to accept that other women's lifestyles and achievements are not feasible for them in Iran's patriarchal society. While such perceptions are validated by socio-legal surveillance, as previously mentioned, higher levels of awareness have enabled women to problematize and resist patriarchal values more than before. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that despite all the restrictions, the participants positive perception of their online learning experience permanently changed their life perceptions, lifestyle, resistance to compulsory *hijab*, sexuality, and fashion. For example, Dornaz talks about her personal experiences:

> The internet has had a tremendous effect on my choices, my aspiration, the books I chose to read, my taste in theatre, and my clothing (July 8, 2018).

Sama further illustrates:

> Since we have access to the internet everything got better. In the past our level of information was limited to the Iranian radio and television, but now we can get information from everywhere without filtering. (May 17, 2018).

Obviously, the internet opens a new window for participants such as Dornaz and Sama, allowing them to benefit from the information available in the online realm. The unfiltered exposure not only increases the women's level of awareness, it also changes their ideology and perceptions of life. For instance, Ziba states:

> Before I had a certain definition for a good person and I used to judge people. For example, I judged a woman who wears bikini as a bad person. But now I even know

> women who wear bikini and they are very good individuals and they have a healthy lifestyle. (August 18, 2018).

Although Ziba's changes seem to relate mainly to her superficial judgments of other individuals, peering deeper into her comment, the internet changes her lifestyle and her interactions, opening her to more knowledge. Therefore, the internet has the ability to offer changes in body autonomy in a multilayered format.

Furthermore, the participants adapt the internet to partake in information sharing and storytelling to become active and mobile members of the internet. Sharing their experiences, expressing themselves, voicing their concerns, and communicating with each other enables them to develop their critical thinking through "dialogical praxis" (Ife, 2001, p. 152). The result is the emergence of a form of social reconstruction that undermines the subordinate restrictions placed upon them. Having a voice on the internet enables the women to gradually depart from fear for their reputation and being concerned about their modesty. For instance, Homa states:

> I have a channel on Telegram and I share music and psychological texts. [On Instagram] I share my feelings and what I really enjoy (May 18, 2018).

Mona agrees:

> Sharing my feelings on Instagram makes me feel better. I like posting (June 24, 2018).

Although the participants' level of sharing does not seem to indicate any immediate emancipatory action in most cases, it provides them with a unique space for self-expression and communication that can raise their awareness of their oppression and limitations. In addition, such practice of self-expression eventually makes them more visible and brings forth their voices to be heard, a key feature of emancipation.

Women's emancipation.

In addition to the participants' personal gains on the internet, they believe that the internet offers emancipatory tools to most Iranian women who have access to the internet. They argue that with the appearance of the internet, women in general became more courageous, find their voices, become aware of their rights, and gain more self-confidence. As a result, Iranian women depart from subordination through exposure to the unknown and through storytelling and information sharing as a form of informal dialogue on the internet. For instance, Saba, a working single woman, interprets the relationship between the internet and women's empowerment as follows:

> [Women's situation] improved. The level of women's awareness has risen, and they became aware of their rights that they might not know that existed for them in the past. Women became more courageous via the internet. Because of the internet when one woman takes an action everybody learns about it through the internet. (May 19, 2018).

Women's actions and narration have become an educational tool that offers other women not just a higher level of awareness, but also the courage to demand their rights. Ziba expresses a similar view:

> For example, often I do not know what type of achievement individuals have had and, on the internet, they talk about it and everyone sees and learns about it. We are becoming united (August 18, 2018).

For Ziba, the power of online interaction goes beyond empowerment. She perceives the online realm as a universal community for women. The online community has the potential to empower groups of women to demand and obtain rights that might not be accessible in the public space. In addition, the participants extended the impact of the internet to housewives and women who are

not necessarily socially active. In the participants' minds, such women also benefit from the emancipatory effect of the internet. For instance, Elena says:

> Women's perception has changed a lot. They became brave and talk about their problems and defend themselves and they gain this power through the internet. Women without any social participation or restricted might have more freedom on the internet. Social media increase the awareness of those women who are not socially active, and they become more active and it seems that they become part of the society. (May 19, 2018).

Thus, the participants perception of the effectiveness of the internet on women's emancipation includes not just themselves, but also other Iranian women from diverse backgrounds and varying levels of autonomy. The internet will provide some with knowledge and awareness that they never had and others with the courage to take autonomous action. They tend to conclude that the internet potentially empowers all women who have regular access to the internet.

Critical minds

Although the participants express positive perceptions on the constructiveness of the internet, they recognize that the educational power of the internet is complicated and not only positive. In this regard, the participants do not perceive the internet as an independent informal educational tool; instead, they remain critical of the educational impact of the internet on their emancipation and the emancipation of other women. The participants are cognizant of socio-cultural and legal restrictions as well as a lack of proper internet literacy. Their perception of the educational usefulness of the internet also varies based on their personal experiences and their perceptions of Iranian society. Mina, a working married feminist woman from a traditional family background, expresses her perception:

> Somehow [the internet] makes women aware, but they still do not have [digital] literacy and as a result it can become more destructive than constructive. Person's wisdom and

> sufficient education are required [in order to get more constructive result]. (June 24, 2018).

Although Mina acknowledges the existence of the positive educational outcome of the internet, she remains skeptical because of digital illiteracy and potential negative consequences. In fact, Mina and many other participants believe awareness and education are the primary elements necessary prior to using the internet in a productive and useful way for emancipation. Saba criticizes the practical effect of the internet by saying:

> The internet requires acculturation in a proper path and the internet cannot evolve a society the way it is (May 19, 2018).

Shadi explains further:

> We should have learnt the culture of using the internet first, but we have never learned. We are always after destructive and bad information (June 6, 2018).

Saba and Shadi further criticize the emancipatory effect of the internet by focusing on general women's conduct in the public and on the internet. They tend to believe that if Iranian women were able to emancipate themselves through the internet, they would not make their appearance like "porn stars" or go after futile information. While the participants believe that the internet can empower women, at the same time they tend to question the educational usefulness of the internet for Iranian women at their current level of awareness. The majority of participants do not underestimate the learning and acculturation the internet can bring, but they believe that awareness and education are essential before women can benefit from the internet. Lack of proper systematic acculturation remains a major hurdle in using and benefiting from the internet.

Summary

The traditional culture and patriarchal system of Iranian society promotes a culture of silence, shame, piety, modesty, and chastity as desirable qualities for the subordinated secondary

sex of women. Hegemonic hierarchy regulates women and their perception of body autonomy by imposing a submissive ideology on women's minds. The common practice of social acceptance and conformity cost the participants' body autonomy. Influenced by the culture and societal values, women's ideology is tightly intertwined with predefined patriarchal values, but at the same time their desire for emancipation cannot be denied. Consequently, they practice social acceptance and conformity while also searching for ways to transcend societal values and emancipate themselves.

As Foucault (1976, 1979) argues that body and space regulations create incompatibility between socio-cultural values and women's personal desires, and it creates frustration and opposition among the participants. The participants often report behavioral modifications such as modest clothing and suppressing sexual desires for fear of judgment and avoiding "estrangement." Being a "good girl" connotates passivity, subordination, and being a feminist and seeker of rights connotes irresponsibility and inappropriateness with potential socio-legal consequences. Thus, socio-cultural values combined with the participants' desire for emancipation created a duality in the private, public, and online realms. Although each realm has unique characteristics that separate it from the other realms, the exploration of the three realms of public, private, and online in relation to the discourse of body autonomy clearly indicates a strong multilayered interconnection between the realms.

The participants take an autonomous approach in public spaces by actively participating in public. They resist the homosocial limitations and ignore the patriarchal constraints and remain active in public. However, they are often forced to follow restrictive rules that promote modesty, chastity, and submissiveness in order to maintain their access to public spaces. On the one hand, the participants obtain public mobility, while on the other hand, that same mobility costs them their body autonomy through conformity. Influenced by cultural values and social

discipline, the participants attempt to eliminate males' misconduct through self-protection strategies, while they resist the loss of mobility due to homosocial male domination. Consequently, compulsory *hijab* keeps women as sexual objects without autonomy but allows them to maintain their access to the public. Women's bodies remain the possession of society, while the patriarchal culture imposes its values on them.

The internet opens a whole new space with unique characteristics for the participants. The new realm enables the participants to exercise body autonomy more than in the public space. It provides women with a greater sense of body autonomy by allowing them to have control over their interactions and attire which eliminates obstacles over their mobility. Along with obtaining control over their personal space, they gained freedom of self-expression and mobility by appearing unveiled on the internet.

The paradoxicality between conformity and emancipation continues in the private realm. The patriarchal culture perceives sexuality as a masculine need and right, while women are expected to remain asexual and passive. Therefore, the participants hesitate to practice their sexual autonomy due to fear of judgment, loss of chastity, and lack of sufficient sex education. A culture of silence, shame, and conformity still hinders them in the private realm; sexual autonomy remains outside of the norm in the collective cultural consciousness. Meanwhile, the internet empowers the participants through knowledge and learning and they become aware of their sexual needs and rights. They begin to exercise their sexual rights by communicating their sexual desires and actively participating in making decisions. As a result, women become more aware of their sexual needs and desires and are willing to break their asexuality, even if the socio-cultural values stop them from exercising sexual autonomy. Therefore, they might know the truth, but traditional values do not allow them to practice the truth and they still fear judgment and rejection from society or family, which shapes their attitude and behaviors.

The internet introduces a tremendous amount of constructive change into women's lives, which changes many limitations in the public and private realms; however, the realm of the internet is not immune to socio-cultural imposition. In fact, socio-cultural values quickly caught up with the new realm and implemented restrictions, subordination, and body policing, creating a fear of judgment that shapes women's online behaviors and activities. Therefore, while the internet as a learning tool improved women's knowledge, that knowledge is restrained by socio-cultural values and has failed to become fully practiced in the real world. Still, the internet has enabled the participants to learn beyond the masculine controlled knowledge available in their society and to become more mobile. Having access to open information with limited policing allows the participants to successfully gain knowledge and information in silenced areas such as sexuality. Furthermore, exposure to people's lives makes it possible for them to see alternative lifestyles and alternate views of women's rights. The combination of body freedom and access to information offered the participants a new level of awareness on their body, and their autonomy began to increase.

Despite the paradoxicality and all of the obstacles, I theorize that the participants problematize and challenge the hierarchical values through their actions, even if they avoid affiliating with the term feminism. It is important to note that their resistance is as gradual as their online learning. They challenge the *hijab* by pushing it further every season, they demand public mobility by gradually appearing in more public spaces, and they become sexually autonomous by taking one step at a time to participate in decision making within their sexual interactions. In order to break the socio-cultural values that have been rooted in Iranian history and have become part of their identity, exposure along with timing are the most prominent factors they need for their emancipation.

It is important to note that some of the participants have better conditions than others for exercising their body autonomy, but they are all seeking the body autonomy that they lack. Women from different social backgrounds are empowered by the educational tool of the internet and become more autonomous and more courageous every day. Regardless of their social class, as long as they can break the concern over social conformity and social judgment, their exercise of body autonomy will flourish in the presence of their increased awareness. The progress toward recognizing limited situations along with critical thinking and praxis are an asset in the quest to shatter the paradoxicality between the desire for emancipation and concern over social conformity.

Chapter 7: We Are Different than our Mothers

Introduction

Reviewing the patterns in Iranian women's quests for liberation and emancipation across different generations showcased the scarcity of literature on the discourse of body autonomy for Iranian women who were born and raised after the revolution in 1979. The post-revolution generation of women who grew up in Islamic society experienced a new set of dualities. They tended to be raised in families whose values were more aligned with the previous, less Islamic society, but at the same time they were obliged to abide by the restrictive religious rules of the Islamic state when in public. The children of revolution are the most active sector in Iranian society with respect to women's liberation, it is essential to understand their perception and acts of body autonomy. On the discourse of autonomy, the limited analysis of body autonomy, oppression, and lack of gender parity encouraged me to incorporate all the layers of body autonomy—veiling, public mobility, and sexuality in the public, private, and online realms—to create a multifaceted analysis of body autonomy among post-revolution women. This doctoral dissertation explored the discourse of body autonomy and the role of the internet as an informal emancipatory educational tool for the post-revolutionary generation of women who differentiated themselves from the older generation through their unique social, legal, and educational experiences in the emergent technological era (Afshar, 1998; Chubin, 2014; Merghati- Khoei, 2008).

Focusing on women's silent voices, I adopted feminist critical and transnational theories to collect women's personal experiences and assess the impact of the internet as a new, informal educational tool on their lives (Reinharz, 1992). Critical feminist theory enabled me to explore the discourse of body autonomy in the context of gender power dynamics and the personal experiences of women within an Islamic social and educational framework. Critical feminist

theory facilitated the differentiation between the experienced context of the older generation and the younger generation and helped me to understand how history, society, culture, personal experiences, and education shaped women from the same society and culture differently. The internet became a cornerstone of separation between the older and younger generation in action and awareness of body autonomy. Adopting transnational feminist theory broadened analysis of the impact of the internet by adding important considerations such as geographical and experiential locality. Together, these analytical frameworks supported a multifaceted analysis that made clear how the new generation deviates from previous ones.

As I moved away from a common misinterpretation of Iranian women as passive, oppressed individuals under the name of religion and culture, I attempted to unpack Iranian women's freedom and autonomy as a blend of politics, history, religion, and culture that has complicated the status of being a woman in Iranian society (Ansari, 2002). I specifically discovered that Iranian women adopt the internet as an emancipatory tool to inform, shape, disrupt, and practice body autonomy and to seek self-empowerment and liberation in the online and offline world. Although it might seem that they are not liberated, taking their progress into consideration, they have successfully emancipated themselves as well as society on many different levels over the last 4 decades. In a continuation of Chapters 5 and 6, this chapter offers a multifaceted analysis of the research data in the context of the relevant theoretical frameworks and the current literature in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the discourse of body autonomy for Iranian women in the public, private, and online realms.

Compulsory *Hijab*: The Obvious Obstacle in Body Autonomy

After 1979, Islamic society politicized and regulated women's bodies as a cornerstone of a national and international identity, and the meaning of *hijab* was redefined as a socio-political uniform that conveyed a "symbol of piety" and a "religious mandate" (Cooke, 2001, p.

xi; Sadeghi, 2006). *Hijab* became a fixed part of women's attire and mobility. They were obliged to adopt *hijab* to avoid confinement, seclusion, and blasphemy (Afshar, 1998, p. 201; Kaar & Lahiji, 1998; Paidar, 1995, p. 232). Despite the tremendous amount of propaganda within the Islamic education system and society women experienced difficulties following the state's regulations on compulsory *hijab*, especially fully abiding by their new veiled identity.

This study's interviews made it clear that all the women were seeking body autonomy and freedom of choice even if they had their own justification and practice with respect to the discourse. When searching for body autonomy in the practice of compulsory *hijab*, the participants soon realized *hijab* is part of a multifaceted conflict rooted in social, cultural, historical, and legal history, subject to very gradual change. Awareness of the social and legal consequences of sudden unveiling led women to use mis-veiling and fashion statements as their tools to problematize mandatory *hijab*. In the presence of oppression, silent and non-organized individual acts such as mis-veiling and fashion statements were used to indirectly problematize compulsory *hijab* laws (Bayat, 2013). Bayat (2013) explains that the "noncollective actors" challenge the restrictive rules and make social changes through a form of non-organized "collective action" in society (p. 20). He argues that resistance to compulsory *hijab* is a form of "communicative action" that can unite like-minded individuals based on their appearance. Adopting resistance in a passive manner, most participants exercised mis-veiling. However, in the three groups that I interviewed, the individual's appearance did not express their ideology; therefore, communicative action might not always be the case. For example, all the practicing Muslim participants declared opposition to compulsory *hijab* and none perceived *hijab* as a law that needed to be followed, despite not practicing mis-veiling themselves. On the other hand, some of the mis-veiled participants accepted the legality of mandatory *hijab* and did not support the ideology of overt opposition but instead allowed for degrees of compliance. Their actions

become inconsistent with their appearances and this indicates a lack of full consciousness and presents a discrepancy between their thoughts and actions. Such paradoxicality problematizes the theory of communicative action in real life. Furthermore, a lack of awareness and duality in thought and action complicates one's understanding of the role of consciousness in women's emancipation.

According to Freire's (1993) conscientization, actions without consciousness and awareness fail to produce liberation and emancipation; however, in the case of the participants in this study, their actions challenged oppression and brought changes to the society. Oppression as a relational social interaction does not turn the oppressed completely powerless. In fact, these women do not suffer from complete imposition of social values or a lack of awareness/ consciousness in their actions. The fact that the women bent the rules around compulsory *hijab* indicates their resistance to oppression even though they are not necessarily aware of their demand for equal rights. In practice, their intention is to seek a better and easier quality of life through individualized mis-veiling (Bayat, 2013).

As Nafisi theorized (2006), the outcome of the normalization of mis-veiling through its everyday practice among the women brought social reconstruction and cultural freedom even though the changes are very gradual. For example, practicing Muslim individuals' attire became more colorful and flexible, while the rest of the participants' attire became more relaxed and revealing irrespective of their attitude towards mandatory rules of veiling. Regardless of their intention and level of awareness, their actions carried the "non-organized collective action" that challenged legal boundaries and brought changes. Through the nature of their action they participated in social "nonmovement" and potential "social reconstruction" (Bayat, 2013; Freire, 1993). Consequently, the state's restrictions become more flexible every day as the state tried to catch up with their resistance.

Simultaneously, looking at the daily practice of mis-veiling, as normal conduct, using oppositional duality and estrangement theories, it did not completely diminish surveillance and otherness amongst the women. The participants problematized compulsory *hijab* by mis-veiling, but they complied with a degree of veiling in order to remain publicly visible and socially acceptable by practicing, often unconsciously, oppositional duality. Paradoxically, some participants expressed conformity and acceptance of *hijab* as a social rule but failed to observe the expected *hijab* and instead practiced mis-veiling. In line with oppositional duality theory, the participants tended to adopt a new alternative instead of fixing the root cause. This was not much different for more autonomous participants who claimed their body autonomy and refused to conform to social expectation and discipline. Both groups of participants need to conform, regardless of their belief, because in order to participate in society they needed to maintain a minimum level of *hijab* but can satisfy their autonomy by choosing the type and color of *hijab.*

Internet, a new space for unveiling.

The participants experienced different levels of body autonomy in the new realm of the internet. The internet not only offers women a unique environment to choose to be veiled or unveiled, but it also allows broader and more common mis-veiling. Additionally, the internet is an easily accessible channel to learn about other women's practice of autonomy—women who fashioned mis-veiling as a tool to push the boundaries of mandatory *hijab* and normalized mis-veiling in public. The internet as an educational tool successfully improved the participants' awareness about their lack of freedom of choice and sped up the resistance to mandatory *hijab.* The internet has become a tool for cultural freedom and social construction while "power knowledge" has become weaker due to the nature of free online information sharing. However, the same fear of judgment, estrangement, and surveillance that hinders the participants in the public affects the individuals' liberation online. For instance, some participants reported that they

avoided posting personal images with revealing clothing, while other participants chose to remain veiled to avoid social estrangement and potential legal consequences.

The discourse of *hijab* rooted in Iranian history intertwined with the participants' "ethical and cultural practice" became a symbol of political conformity that created complications, anxiety, and resistance amongst women's process of liberation (Derayeh, 2011, p. 3; Milani, 1992; Moghissi, 1999; Nafisi, 2006; Paidar, 1995). However, referring to the definition of body autonomy by Friedman (2003), it is fair to conclude that although the participants were not able to practice "being true to oneself," they still gained partial autonomy in that seeking can be the beginning of emancipation (p. 2). Their fashion statements became their voice to express their individuality and body autonomy by exercising choice over their own attire (Kaar, 2006). Whatever the intention behind the disobedience, Afshar (1998) describes mis-veiled women as "silent rebellions" who refused to accept mandatory *hijab* in their own unique ways (p. 206). Although Moghissi (1999) argued that an individuals' understanding of social, cultural, and political root causes is an important asset in achieving liberation in both public and online spaces in the context of "I act therefore I am," the participants' awareness of the oppressive nature of mandatory *hijab* along with their resistance indicates liberation even though they are still forced to observe a certain level of *hijab*.

In the case of this study's participants, it is vital to pay attention to the influence of the act of mis-veiling on the reconstruction of cultural and legal values. They have been successful in socio-cultural reconstruction around *hijab* and hence bring changes to the norm of practicing *hijab*, and this is an autonomous emancipatory act. Even those who do not directly participate and are not fully aware of their actions cause change; the phenomenon of normalization explains the change in their practice of veiling. Through increased access to information from the internet, they became part of the mainstream that follows the new normalization.

The issue of mandatory *hijab* is not the participants' primary concern; whenever they chose between mis-veiling or other types of social rights, they sacrificed mis-veiling. The participants challenged compulsory *hijab* via mis-veiling as a gradual practice, but at the same time they conformed in order to gain other rights that were more important to them. They prefer to be veiled, but autonomous, in the public rather than being unveiled but voiceless. Therefore, they veil their bodies in order to unveil their voices and actions in public realms.

Forfeit Public Mobility

In addition to the compulsory *hijab* decree, after the 1979 revolution, reimplementation of *sharia* law required women to have permission from their father, or their husband after marriage, to travel, work, and continue their education (Civil Code of Islamic Republic of Iran, 2006). Moreover, public gender segregation and mobility restrictions under the guise of social purification in different public spaces created further obstacles for women's public autonomy. At the same time, the socio-economic situation of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war and women's persistence in remaining publicly active did not allow such segregation and restriction to last for long. Forty years later, the participants of this research prove that Iranian women's resistance to the homosocial patriarchy's confinement and seclusion was successful in that they gained access to workplaces, educational institutions, and most public spaces. However, participants' successful public access did not completely defeat the homosocial ideology, and male possession of public spaces continued to regulate and objectify women's bodies (Chubin, 2014; Gardner, 1995). As a result, the majority of the participants suffered from street harassment in their public mobility, despite the claims of scholars such as Drew et al. (2004) that sexual harassment is rare in Iran due to gender segregation. Based on Goffman's (1971) conclusion, women remained accountable and must dress appropriately, behave properly, and avoid high risk spaces to be immune from street harassment. Ultimately, each of these scholars neglects the role of body

regulation, and social and sexual suppression in Iranian women's social experiences (Abdmolaei, 2014; Lahsaeizadeh & Yousefnejad, 2012).

Choice of attire in the public.

Pro-patriarchal scholars such as Muttahari (1989) have placed responsibility for men's lust on women's shoulders, but Moghissi (1999) argues that the restrictive dress codes for women have never been proven to be a form of protection against sexual harassment and sexual violence. *Hijab* did not work in favor of public morality, as the state claims. On the other hand, as Foucault and de Beauvoir explain, human attitudes and behaviors are socially learned and reflect social norms. Therefore, women internalized modification and responsibility for street harassment instead of problematizing the patriarchal homosocial nature of the violation of their rights. Shahidian's (1996) sense of "otherness" and "estrangement" explains how women internalize their status as a secondary sex and feel shame and an urge to conform in order to gain social acceptance in public. Most participants—influenced by estrangement and social discipline but eager for autonomous public participation—chose alternative solutions such as moderation in their attire and silence if they were to remain publicly visible. Furthermore, the experience of street harassment among all groups of the participants and their attempts to modify their clothing indicated that their appearance did not eliminate street harassment. Moreover, a lack of social and legal protection led to the continuation of street harassment, yet women still refused to accept public restrictions.

For scholars such as Moghissi (1999), *hijab* itself is a form of gender segregation that imposes mobility limitation by restricting access to the public realm. Relinquishing veiling autonomy demonstrated the importance and prioritization of public mobility over *hijab.* In fact, despite what Cohen et al. (2008) concluded, this kind of compromise is intended to prevent mobility limitations in that the participants' conformity provides them with better public access.

Moreover, acceptance does not mean *hijab* acted as catalyst as Hoodfar (2003) explained in her work. Women's conformity was not a solution to their oppression; rather, it was a quick fix for survival in a society where sexual objectification continued.

Applying Freire's theory of oppression to the power imbalance experienced by Iranian women, it appears likely that if women believe their non-compliance with gender expectations is the cause of street harassment, they will remain oppressed. However, in the case of this study many women chose attire modification to avoid sexual attention and, with an awareness of the oppressive nature of their choice, look for alternative ways to fight street harassment. For instance, some of the participants who show higher levels of consciousness on women's oppression chose to voice themselves about the occurrences of street harassment. This non-conformist reaction, instead of silence and shame, results in momentary individual liberation and empowerment, but does not bring freedom to their oppressors despite what Freire concludes (1993). The direct challenge to patriarchy from these participants introduces unexpected behaviors which causes further resistance from the oppressor.

The power of the internet in public mobility.

The internet enabled the participants to move freely to desired spaces and gain unfiltered knowledge without being immediately concerned over social discipline or suffering from knowledge limitations. On the internet, they remained autonomously mobile and free to seek knowledge that would be otherwise unavailable. The internet provided the individuals with the possibility of increased awareness about their oppressive situations through informal exposure, which can lead to critical thinking and questioning of their situation. While the sense of control seems empowering, the participants' hesitation on social media, even within a private account, indicated that their behavior and autonomy is not limited by the space but rather by the patriarchal ideology and techniques of bodies and oppositional duality.

Although the participants still have a better chance to voice themselves and move freely on the internet, harassment and non-compliance with gender norms along with social discipline force women to re-veil their bodies, identities, and voices on the internet. In the absence of legal or societal protections and with an inability to solve the root causes of their oppression, women are forced to find alternative ways of maintaining their anonymity such as using private accounts to protect themselves from social discipline and otherness. Trapped by body discipline and a patriarchal social order, they are forced to silently participate in online communities. Conformity, common amongst all the participants, hindered their autonomous online mobility and voice as they avoided communication and interaction. Although there are weblogs such as Raha that criticized women's harassment experience, the participants did not really gain knowledge or engage in learning about harassment according to the results of this study (Raha Blog, posted on April 15, 2008; Mehdipour et al., 2013; Standley, 2006, p. 59 in Mehdipour et al., 2013).

Applying Friedman's (2003) definition of autonomy as a "critical self-reflection" of one's circumstance and making personal choices uninfluenced by manipulation or coercion (p. 4), the participants were only able to gain partial body autonomy in relation to mobility in both realms. The participants experienced progress in their public mobility through their everyday practice of public participation and their continued presence, visible and invisible, in the online realm. Applying "I act, therefore I Am," they have already achieved mobility and challenged patriarchal values in social and legal arenas by actively participating in society, holding careers, and being involved in higher education, as well as remaining active members of the online realm. However, a lack of awareness about the root cause of limited public mobility and taking responsibility for men's lust in public clearly indicates that they are far from what Freire calls emancipated. On one hand, they remained visible in both public and online spaces, but on the

other hand social order and social discipline forced them to conform to maintain their mobility in both realms. Such partial paradoxical resistance is the result of a lack of awareness and proper consciousness but does not rule out the emancipation process. Consequently, their persistence brought changes to society and some reported less street harassment compared to the previous years. In a non-collective manner and without having any specific political ideology in mind, these participants maintained their public mobility on a daily basis and that constantly pushed the boundaries of estrangement and normalized women's active presence in the public.

The Discourse of Body Autonomy and Sexuality

In the 1990s, Iranian women gradually gained limited sexual rights such as an increase in the legal marriage age, legal abortion for married women, and access to contraception (Jarahi, 2014; Kolaee, 2006, in Afary, 2009, p. 330; Paidar, 1995). However, the discourse of sexuality, controlled by *urf* and religion, remained part of the state's agenda and the state attempted to suppress women's sexuality within the traditional framework (Afary, 2009; Ahmadi, 2016; Sadeghi, 2008). As a result, the state regulated women's sexual objectification by promoting virginity, chastity, temporary marriage, and illegalized courtship and pre-marital sex (Aghajanian & Mehryar, 2005; Afary, 2009; Nomani & Behdad, 2006, table 4.1). Despite the state's propaganda on the necessity of women's sexual passivity and submission, young Iranian women—the generation of the children of the revolution—including some of the participants of this research, began to renegotiate gender inequality by negating the sexual power imbalance through exercising autonomous sexual actions (Hojat et al., 2015; Kaivanara, 2016; Sadeghi, 2008).

Borrowing Foucault's theory, young Iranian women adopted "social identity surveillance" and learned about social regulation and restriction in the public realm, while discovering ways to by-pass the regulations of their traditional fixed identity via the private

realm (as cited in Sadeghi, 2008). As Kian (2013) elaborated, the duality between the public and private realms allows women to be less traditional in private, and pre-marital relationships became more common despite socio-political values of chastity and virginity (Asadi 2006; Movahhed, 2009; Sadeghi, 2008). Consequently, young women's sexual involvement led to a sexual revolution in the 2000s, which redefined sexual autonomy, sexual practice, and morality for the majority of young Iranian women (Hojat et al., 2015; Sadeghi, 2008).

Although scholars such as Afary (2009) and Mahdavi (2002) concluded that these young women, empowered by knowledge, mobility, and sexual freedom, continued to exercise their sexual autonomy, the patriarchal definition of women as a sexual commodity without sexual needs and tied to chastity and virginity remained paramount amongst the participants. Such paradoxicality empowered some of the participants to resist the patriarchal normalcy, but also forced them to abide by the normalcy and remain concerned over their virginity and chastity. In their silent search for sexual autonomy within the double standards of patriarchal society, the participants attitude towards virginity was negative but convoluted. Most of the participants were involved in pre-marital sexual relationships, detested virginity as a value, and tended to choose to exercise their sexuality. However, they still often conformed to the socio-political values of chastity and virginity that were promoted by the double standards of masculine culture. As Butler (1993) states, virginity has become a source of frustration and paradoxicality that held the participants in oppositional duality. On one hand, some participants valued virginity as a commodity rooted in social expectations for a successful marriage, while on the other hand they silently exercised their sexual freedom and autonomy by engaging in premarital sexual activity. As Foucault predicted with his medicalization theory (1975, 1976), virginity elucidates normalcy, forcing the participants who rejected abstinence to be silent about their sexual

experiences. In the silence, a culture of shame and personal conflict precluded voice and self-expression around virginity, but not necessarily around sexual desires and needs.

Voiceless sexual autonomy.

Although all the participants except one reported no difficulties in expressing their sexual needs and desires, the desire to remain "proper" according to social norms made their sexual expression more complex. Ahmadi (2016) explains that the experience of sexual pleasures is a form of "covert resistance" that proves the ineffectiveness of power in women's sexual limitation and the trace of power imbalance was evident among the participants when expressing their sexual desires (p. 232). Aligned with Janghorban's findings (2015), the participants feelings of shame, fear of being labeled as "improper," fear of judgment, and fear of hurting their partner or being rejected by their partner led them to hesitate to express their sexual needs and desires. The participants, even the empowered participants, were heavily influenced by the culture of shame and silence and the expected relational identity. As a result, those who expressed their sexual desire still tended to sacrifice their sexual desire for their partners as they perceived sexuality as a man's right (Janghorban, 2015; Merghati-Khoei, 2014).

Voicing their sexual desires is a form of resistance, but influenced by social discipline and social values they suffered from guilt and fear of otherness. In addition to the cultural expectation of sexual passivity and chastity that strengthened the culture of silence and shame amongst the participants, Freire's theory of conscientization justifies the assertion that the participants suffered from the lowest awareness of the root cause of their sexual objectification as their values were more internalized according to an androcentric social order (Merghati-Khoei, 2014). Sexuality as a taboo topic has never had an opportunity to reach communication and dialogical levels.

The complex discourse of sexuality allowed the participants to separate sexual autonomy from sexual needs. They believed in their autonomy whenever they had a voice to decide on when to get involved in sexual interaction, contraception, and conception. Despite their legal obligation to submit to their husband's sexual needs, separating decision making from sexual needs, they successfully felt autonomous to voice their choice (Kaar, 2000, p. 144). The participants, influenced by social discipline and the social order of a patriarchal society, often struggled to understand their right to enjoy sexuality or express their desires, yet still felt control over sexual decision making. The vivid oppositional duality between what the participants learned and what they expressed strongly indicated the paradoxicality of their autonomy more than any other type of body autonomy.

Educational impact of the internet on the discourse of sexual autonomy.

Although Janghorban (2015) concluded that women already affected by androcentric social norms perceived sexuality as a taboo topic that should remain private, this does not mean that the participants supressed their yearning to learn about sexuality. In the absence of sex education and legal sexual rights, the internet as a new realm of expression and discussion reshaped sexual discourse and relationships (Jarahi, 2014). The participants embraced the internet as a tool that could answer all their questions about sexuality. The participants learned about their bodies, intimate relations, contraception, women's sexual desires, different ways of sexual pleasures, sexual harm, sexual health, and personal hygiene. The internet gradually empowered the participants to re-evaluate sexuality out of the context of masculine rights and to problematize the relational gender identity of asexuality. However, trapped in duality, they tended to remain silent about what they learned while they were often concerned over receiving criticism in their search for sexual autonomy (Akhavan, 2013).

Although the appearance of the internet weakened the socio-religious "power knowledge" manual on sexuality, chastity, and modesty, the internet was not immune to their socio-cultural values (Mir-Hosseini, 2004, p. 206). For instance, Natoori weblog, influenced by social discipline and patriarchal values, argued that sexual discourse (sex and sexuality) is a very private matter and women needed to maintain privacy (Natoor Blog, posted in April 7, 2008). As a result, the new education left the participants with a blurry line between social order and desire for sexual emancipation. Despite Messing's (2011) argument that women do not suffer from insufficient knowledge regarding gender inequality, passivity, and sexual double standards, the participants' bodies remained under men's guardianship. Whether they have successfully accessed valid information or not, the socio-legal impact on their learning process remains restricted by gender inequality and sexual double standards. The new level of awareness has not allowed them to fully emancipate themselves from sexual oppression but was the beginning of social reconstruction around sexuality.

Borrowing Bekker's definition (2008), the concept of autonomy is an act or behavior of self-determination while maintaining satisfactory social interactions. The participants voiced their desires and quests and actively participated in decision making, attempted to disassociate themselves from virginity, and their search for knowledge indicated a positive journey towards sexual autonomy. While the internet's educational aspects play the most significant role in sexual autonomy, the participants began an emancipatory journey that gradually diminished patriarchal masculine values as the participants internalized new values. Although as Sadeghi (2008) and Khalaj-Abadi- Farahani (2015) indicated, society defined sexuality as a masculine right and women were only expected to fulfil such rights for men, the participants broke these social and religious sexual expectations via their search for freedom. The participants' silent and gradual resistance to asexuality and relational identity in a scattered but consistent manner challenged

patriarchal social expectations and influenced the cultural reconstruction of the discourse of body autonomy. The participants have taken steps but due to the sensitivity of the discourse and body regulation their level of awareness is insufficient for full emancipation. Although Bayat's "silent revolution" (2005, p. 60) and Foucault's (1979) "oppositional duality" explained oppression and resistance in public spaces, the same theories can apply to private space resistance as well. This indicated the deep interconnectivity of patriarchal ideology and culture in all spaces that women participate in. Even when women resist oppression, the feeling of guilt and fear imposed on them by social discipline and body regulation remains.

The Discourse of Body Autonomy and Feminism

Feminism contains different ideologies and approaches in academia, and Islamic feminist scholars perceive body autonomy as contrary to cultural, moral, and religious values. However, if we take a generalized definition of feminism as gender equality in the practice of body autonomy, we are able to understand the participants perception of feminism and more thoroughly comprehend their journey towards body autonomy and liberation. Moreover, the discourse of *their* feminism offers potential knowledge about the root cause of oppression and patriarchy in their lives.

In this study, some of the participants identified themselves as feminists and others completely distanced themselves from feminism, but both groups of participants lacked sufficient information and a clear understanding of feminism due in part to "power knowledge" and patriarchal socio-cultural values. Their limited knowledge became an obstacle in their approach to emancipation even for those self-identified feminist participants whose desire for emancipation led them to associate with feminism to obtain gender equality. However, in action, all the participants were in search of gender equality and body autonomy and are therefore feminists.

Although incompatibility between comprehension of feminism and their search for gender equality might restrict their recognition of oppression, according to Leckenby (2007) such disassociation is a form of feminist approach that offers awareness and liberation. In fact, patriarchal socio-cultural values and social discipline limitations on understanding feminism do not completely hinder women's quest for their freedom or their awareness of their oppression. Ironically, pursuing gender equality provides them with an emancipatory action of "I act, therefore, I am" regardless of their level of comprehension of the discourse of feminism.

Feminism in the online realm.

The internet became an essential tool to challenge the social restrictions that Iranian women experience (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010). This new knowledge tool raises women's level of consciousness and awareness and theoretically guides them to emancipation. Adopting critical feminism, exposure to other women's lives on the internet enables women to understand the influence of power imbalance on their freedom and oppression. As Sharify-Funk (2005) argues, transnational feminism adopted the internet as a tool that empowers women from their own experiences beyond their location. Transnational feminism via the online world led to "transnational identity" amongst Iranian women and connects them regardless of their location or personal background. In fact, one common element, the quest for body autonomy, united them all (ibid).

Despite the participants different approaches to feminist activists, they mainly agreed that the internet offered emancipatory tools to most Iranian women who have access to the internet. They argued that the online realm exposed women to alternative, classless, and borderless lifestyles, and empowered women to understand their limited situation and oppressive condition (Fathi, 2002). The participants concluded that the internet enabled women to become more courageous, express their voices, and become aware of their rights and hence gain more

confidence. However, despite Fathi's (2002) argument that Iranian women began to support each other online and to create a community, the participants in this study did not experience community support, nor did they support outside feminist activists. Rather they still struggled with patriarchal social values, even online.

Although the participants quest for their body rights defined them as feminists in action, their perception of the definition of feminism as well as their level of consciousness influenced their quest and online learning. Achieving consciousness in their quests, the participants simply do not support/agree with online feminist activities due to the absence of their voice, hopelessness, fear, and surveillance, while some others simply were not interested in feminist matters. For instance, while many of the online activists advocated for freedom of *hijab* and access to stadiums, the participants did not perceive unveiling as a primary solution to end their inequality. They had already begun to take gradual resistance actions to claim their body autonomy around *hijab* and did not feel any necessity to discuss or politicize it further. In fact, their immediate quest was financial independence and social respect.

The participants might fail to understand the general definition of feminism as a quest for women's rights, but their quest for body autonomy indicated that they are conscious of gender inequality and demand body autonomy in their everyday life through their practice. Their level of consciousness combined with the borderless internet realm provided them with a unique opportunity to challenge social restrictions and body discipline in a unique noncollective manner. Although they still carried cultural and social values to the internet realm, the unique presentation of body on the internet enabled them to eliminate the impact of body regulation and otherness more than in public and private spaces. Additionally, they learned emancipation via exposure to unfiltered information regardless of their intention to learn about body autonomy. Aligned with Jones' (1997) finding, the participants began to depart from subordination through

information sharing as a form of dialogical critical thinking practice and constructed a new definition of private and public realms. Consequently, they became important elements of cultural reconstruction due to their everyday action.

Conclusion

The initial participation of Iranian women in public political protests by boycotting foreign goods to resist European economic and political expansion in the nineteenth century did not have a feminist nature, but it signified the beginning of women's liberation (Kandiyoti, 1996). The cultivation of women's quest for equal rights, rooted in social, religious, and cultural factors, began with individuals such as Tahereh Qurat al Ein and gradually converted to more collective feminist activities such as demands for women's education in the twentieth century. Although women's quests for formal education in the early 1900s were opposed by the clergy and traditional society often through the looting of schools and outright denial of education under the guise of sexual decay, women's persistence in accessing education and rethinking veiling provided them with an essential level of autonomy and liberation that they had never experienced before (Bamdad, 1977; Sheykh Bahai, 1905 in Paidar, 1995; Paidar, 1995, p. 67). As women's resistance to misogynous social acts grew and they successfully gained access to formal education, they gradually began to problematize veiling—another body limitation—in their writing and acts. Sedigheh Dowlatabadi was among the first women to demand body autonomy by appearing unveiled in the public (Bamdad, 1977). Escalation in women's consciousness enabled them to become aware of their body restrictions and eventually quest for their body autonomy in different realms.

Women's feminist related demands and achievements were hijacked by Reza Shah's compulsory unveiling decree in 1936. The state's new regulation failed to equally benefit all Iranian women and instead Iranian women became trapped in a paradoxical situation. On one

hand they gained better access to education and public spaces, but on the other hand mandatory unveiling confined those who believed in *hijab* as a part of their identity. Therefore, women's freedom fell under the authority of the patriarchal state and women's bodies became the state's property through mandatory unveiling decrees. In fact, women remained a secondary sex and sexual objects who only gained access to education and the public under specific conditions. The homosocial public space and patriarchal ideology made women's bodies a public space and therefore males and the state were entitled to dictate the way women appeared and carried herself.

Following the 1941 abdication of Reza Shah in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, patriarchal ideology rooted in religion and culture along with a homosocial public space attempted to impose further restrictions and misogynous regulations to oppress and confine women. Under the name of chastity and modesty, the clergy attempted to reimpose subordination via mandatory veiling and the seclusion of women (Afary, 2009, p. 192). Consequently, under the influence of the clergy, *bazari* people refused to serve unveiled customers to show their disgust and demand the reimplementation of veiling (Abrahamian, 1982; Akhavi, 1980, p. 63). Women resisted restrictions and for the first time were able to choose veiling or unveiling. Women continued to challenge restrictive boundaries by presenting in public, focusing on their education, and joining the workforce. Around this time, women's autonomy began to become more realistic even though feminist related activities were still restricted.

Despite improvements and increased freedom, the paradoxical situation between modernity and tradition that started to trap women during Reza Shah's rule continued to complicate women's situation under the new regime. Women were forced to adopt incongruous values and life styles in order to remain acceptable members of society, and they continued to suffer from a lack of socio-legal rights and remain a secondary asexual sex while superficially

gaining increased public freedom and body autonomy. For instance, women slowly began dating and breaking some sexual taboos, but they remained sexual objects and their virginity remained crucial to their dignity and chastity (Afary, 2009). That is, her body became a sexual commodity in the mass media era while simultaneously her modesty was encouraged by socio-cultural and religious values.

During the 1979 revolution, Iranian women's demands for their rights faded away, and Iranian society became a genderless society that protested social injustice and dismantled a Westernized materialistic regime. After the revolution, Iranian women's status did not improve; instead, they lost the rights they had previously gained. Once again, Iranian women's bodies became politicized, but this time through mandatory veiling. Religious ideology attempted to restrain and limit women's access to public spaces, the workforce, and higher education. Women became sexual objects with a primary relational identity encouraged by the state to marry young in order to protect their chastity and men's modesty.

Although Islamic public space worked as a catalyst for some women from traditional family backgrounds, the rest of the women had no choice but to adopt the mandatory public regulations in order to maintain their mobility (Hoodfar, 2003). Women who experienced marginal levels of body autonomy and freedom in the past had not given up on their rights and continued to resist the imposed restrictions in a silent but dualistic way. They refused to abide by the oppressive regulations whenever they had the opportunity and when the opportunity was not available, they would conform with the regulations minimally to avoid further socio-legal restrictions.

After the Iran-Iraq war and the appearance of reformists in the 1990s, Iranian women's body autonomy began to improve. Women's participation in higher education dramatically increased, the restriction on mandatory *hijab* became more relaxed, and women actively

participated in public space more than any previous time. Coincidently, the appearance of the internet during this time introduced women to a new realm with safer opportunities to problematize gender inequality and quest for their rights. The new realm introduced a unique space that encompassed both public and private factors that provided the opportunity to communicate, discuss, and interact, but unlike the public space, there is no physical appearance in the realm; therefore, their identity and body can remain autonomous as in the private space (Hague & Loader, 1999; Sardar & Ravetz, 1996; Turkle, 1995). The internet as a medium with less surveillance exposed women to a new world of unfiltered information. Eventually, the internet became an informal educational tool that provided women with access to new, less masculinized levels of knowledge and information that helped them to increase their knowledge and practice of body autonomy (Papacharissi, 2002). Although the internet did not offer justice and democracy, it reconstructed societal values via access to information (ibid). The internet provided women with an alternative strategy to challenge and defy traditional masculine culture through "connection and communication" and "identity transformation" (Nouraei-Simon, 2005).

Following the revolution, Iranian women became the subject of scholarly studies; however, most of the studies tended to generalize without giving voice to Iranian women and their personal experiences (Derayeh, 2002). Throughout my graduate studies, I was taught to avoid generalizations and focus on individual narrations, understanding that there are still perspectives that were not represented. In my exploration, I showcased women's quests for freedom and body autonomy, demonstrating that they had taken different shapes and forms depending on the space they were in and the type of body autonomy they tried to understand or engage with.

Both feminist frameworks of critical feminism and transnational feminism theorize the discourse of body autonomy and pay close attention to the notion of patriarchy and individual experiences and perspectives. Adopting a feminist qualitative approach, I explored Iranian women's personal experiences in understanding and practicing body autonomy in the internet era and how the presence of manmade traditional culture and Islamic law played a significant role in regulating women's bodies and autonomy. Borrowing a critical feminist approach allowed me to bring forth some post-revolutionary women's voices and narrations to problematize the power imbalance of women's oppressive experiences in the private, public, and online realms. While the internet as a new space contains a mixture of public and private features, the unclear break between public and private spaces on the internet should not eliminate the importance of locality and socio-cultural roles in the experience of a new space (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 111). Transnational feminist theory takes into consideration individual and societal experiences, knowledge, and history to deconstruct and reconstruct the discourse of body autonomy on the internet and to provide an understanding of the impact of the internet on reshaping the participants identity and awareness via unlimited shared information and community (Graham & Khosravi, 2010). Furthermore, women's feminist-related demands are not a uniquely Western phenomena, and even though many of the Iranian participants held an inaccurate definition of feminism, their actions and quests were aligned with the logic of feminism. Scholars have argued that the demands that began with Tahereh Qurat al Ein's "consciousness raising" that revolted against the patriarchal "norm" in the nineteenth century never stopped (Derayeh, 2002, p. 214).

My answer to the main question that I raised—"did the internet, as an informal educational tool, empower women's body autonomy"—is in general yes. The internet enabled the participants to become more mobile, to be exposed to new ways of life and information, and to practice body autonomy more than in the public. The internet empowered women to normalize

mis-veiling through exposure and online unveiling practice. The internet enabled women to be more mobile and have increased access to spaces that provided them with information that they would not otherwise have access to. The internet played a significant educational role in improving women's knowledge in the area of sexual autonomy.

My research led me to discover that there were several factors that influenced women's educational benefits derived from the internet, especially with respect to socio-cultural values and knowledge. On one hand, their perception of feminism influenced their behaviors when searching for emancipatory knowledge, but on the other hand they adopted the internet as an educational tool in areas where they lacked the most information, such as sexuality. Meanwhile, exposure to the lives of other women and experiencing different levels of access to information led them to question their emancipation and challenge their traditional ways of thinking and therefore raise their level of consciousness. Use of the internet is becoming an inescapable and integral component of daily life regardless of their beliefs, what they search for, and their prior knowledge.

Throughout this research, I seek clarification on the role of *hijab* in shaping body autonomy amongst Iranian women in a culture where the discourse of *hijab* has never been a strange or a foreign practice. During the interviews and through online observations, my research brought me to a new level of understanding on the discourse of *hijab*. I noticed that there are mainly two types of research on this topic: those that justified veiling and those that opposed mandatory veiling. In my findings, based on the experience and perception of post-revolution women within the framework of their everyday life experience, I concluded that the lines between veiled and unveiled practice are not as clear or distinguished as in the texts. Rather the discourse of *hijab* is a very complex discourse rooted in Iranian history, culture, and religion, trapped in paradoxicality between women's desire for freedom and social discipline governing

women's modesty and chastity. Pressure on women's modesty through veiling eventually was implanted into the culture and forced women into seclusion or conformity (Ahmed, 1992). As presented in Chapter 5, the majority of participants related modesty to moderate clothing and body covering rather than veiling despite popular beliefs on the modesty of women, the participants association between body autonomy and *hijab* depending on their background, religiosity, personal experiences, and whether they accepted the *hijab* as a societal rule or not. Although the level of conformity varied among individuals, they maintained the minimum coverage required to be present in public. Moreover, the internet opened a unique educational window into their perception and enabled them to revisit the value of *hijab* in their lives, resulting in mis-veiling and disobedience becoming normalized in a more widespread form.

Iranian women are in search of their socio-legal rights, so I further explored the discourse of body autonomy with regard to the concept of public mobility and public accessibility. As I examined Iranian women's achievements in higher education, the workforce, and public accessibility, I realized that the notion of homosocial patriarchy persistently affected the participants' body autonomy in the public. Street harassment was one of the most significant experiences that often hindered women's mobility or forced them to conform to maintain their mobility. Although the participants' approaches to confront street harassment varied, they all attempted to find a way to minimize the level of harassment they experienced while they resisted threats to their public access. This finding enabled me to challenge existing apologetic approaches, such as Muttahari (1989), that contribute to the elimination of women's body autonomy rights by blaming women for the occurrence of street harassment as well as perceiving women as a vulnerable and dependent sex within society. I based my argument on the fact that women who empower themselves in their education and careers cannot remain confined. Rather they resisted confinement in order to claim their body autonomy in the public space. Even

though the participants did not know much about their legal rights and did not have faith in the system to seek their rights, they found alternative ways to remain visible in public such as choosing their private cars over public transportation, moderation in clothing, and being quiet and passive in order to avoid harassment. Education and social participation raised the participants level of awareness and consciousness and empowered them to challenge their oppressed position. Harassment with connotations of trespassing in a homosocial realm in a patriarchal society failed to confine them. The participants tended to sacrifice other types of autonomy to maintain their public mobility.

Even though religious values do not forbid sexual education, Iranian women suffer from a lack of proper knowledge and education in this area. As I showed in Chapter 3, the only available sex education was run by the clergy or religious women and focused on Quranic interpretation. My research found that religion combined with patriarchal socio-cultural values contributed to women's asexuality. Women became a secondary sex expected to remain available to their husband but asexual at the same time. Finally, by looking at the concept of sexual autonomy within private life, I concluded that it was the paradoxicality between modernity and tradition in the absence of information that held the women down more than expected. Patriarchal ideology from the public realm hinders the participants in private as well. They considered sexuality a very sensitive topic directly related to their reputation, and they struggled the most with it. The same women who problematized mandatory *hijab* regardless of their attitude towards their personal experiences and who challenged homosocial culture so as to remain a visible part of society became hesitant in the discourse of sexuality. On one hand they searched for information on sexuality and learned the most in this area, but on the other hand, despite empowerment via knowledge, the patriarchal socio-cultural values of modesty and chastity confounded their sexual autonomy.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I presented the efforts of some Iranian women to break patriarchal limitations and gain body autonomy in the public, private and online realms. Iranian women soon learned to take scattered, individual, autonomous actions instead of relying on organized movements in order to obtain their rights and reconstruct socio-cultural values. Women avoided challenging hierarchical values directly, and instead demanded their rights through silent everyday actions. The participants adopted different approaches—mis-veiling, active public participation, and claiming sexual autonomy—to problematize discriminatory values. However, they tended to remain silent and avoided sharing their emancipatory achievements. As the participants sought their rights and equality within society, their lack of understanding about the root causes of their oppression often slowed their emancipatory journey. The gradual cultural changes introduced through women's actions remained dependent on the participants' level of consciousness and awareness.

Furthermore, in this study I showed that Iranian women's quest for freedom after the emergence of the internet in 1998 began to accelerate while more women had the opportunity to be exposed to demands for gender equality expressed on the internet. On the internet, the participants learned about other women's achievements and freedom and gained the courage to act more autonomously. Raising awareness on the internet has been the most essential achievement for women's liberation while online knowledge enabled the participants to revisit their experience of autonomy and gender equality and to find their voices in different realms. Less online policing and surveillance enabled the participants to deal with the body autonomy restrictions that they had experienced in the public and private realms. Consequently, the new online learning experiences allowed the participants to reflect and improve their socio-cultural rights.

The globalizing effect of the internet provided women with a unique opportunity to share, exchange and access broader, unfiltered information (Fathi, 2002). Consequently, the participants became part of a global feminist community by actively participating in the realm of the internet. However, despite Fathi's (2002) arguments on women's mutual support of each other on the internet, the participants' support of other women was only apparent in their minds. For instance, practicing Muslim participants condemned compulsory *hijab* for women who did not wish to exercise veiling; however, they did not share their support on the internet, rather they kept silent.

Finally, the internet offered tremendous positive educational and constructive outcomes by holding public and private realm characteristics simultaneously, its limitations cannot be ignored. The effect of cultural values and knowledge on women's emancipation on the internet is stronger than what I anticipated. Although culture is dynamic, and women successfully reconstructed its values and norms, patriarchal values have not vanished. I concluded that patriarchal socio-cultural values directly and indirectly influenced Iranian women's attitudes and practice of body autonomy in public and private. These values also hindered their autonomous practices on the internet. Often the participants hesitated to take autonomous actions despite their awareness of their rights and a desire to act. In addition to socio-cultural values, the Islamic state of Iran regulates women's bodies via veiling, sexuality, and public mobility in all three realms. Legal barriers and fear of legal consequences intertwined with socio-cultural values hindered the participants emancipatory action more than anything else. Simultaneously they suffer from many gender-based limitations, which maintain the practice of duality amongst Iranian women. However, such limitations did not prevent them from questing for their rights and education online (Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010).

In sum, the participants incompatibility between their act of veiling and their ideologies created complexity around the discourse of *hijab.* The normalization of mis-veiling as a result of online informal learning and everyday practice suggested social reconstruction on body autonomy and *hijab*. At the same time, if the participants had to choose between public mobility and mis-veiling they tended to sacrifice mis-veiling. They challenged street harassment by rejecting the homosocial ideology of male dominated public spaces through their active public presentation. However, patriarchal values embedded in their identity, often led the participants to take responsibility to protect themselves by wearing more modest attire. Such self-protection and veiling continued in their online world as well. On one hand they remained active online, on the other hand they re-veiled their identities and bodies online in order to ensure their security and safety. Online informal learning played the most noteworthy role in their sexuality. Many of the participants defined themselves as sexually autonomous because they had a voice in decisions about conception, contraception, and sexual initiation. Still, it wasn't until the internet exposed them to new learning about their bodies and sexualities that these women were able to redefine themselves as sexual human beings outside of socially mandated values on sexuality as a masculine right.

On a final note, with no doubt Iranian women have gone through tremendous changes and obtained their rights throughout history despite the state's and society's attempts to impose a passive role on them. Women's consistent demands for gender equality and autonomy have pushed the boundaries of veiling, public restrictions, and asexuality in the past 40 years. Through their active informal online learning combined with everyday actions and silent resistance, women successfully reconstructed societal values without being involved in any major political movements. It is fair to say that years of persistence and resistance along with exposure to the new online space has empowered women and shrunk patriarchal boundaries and limitations. In

such socio-cultural reconstruction, the pedagogical characteristics of the internet makes it almost impossible to push women back to restriction and limitation. Therefore, the pedagogy of emancipation is taking place on the internet, and “I act, therefore I am.” However, I must acknowledge that my research attempted to give voices to some ordinary women and their daily experiences without any intention for generalizations; hence many voices remained unheard.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Demographic Information

Education	Employment	Marital Status	Location	Veiling Practice
Bachelor's Degree (9)	Housewife (4)	Married (11)	Tehran (15)	Practice Veiling (4)
Masters (8)	Full time (14)	Divorced/ Widow (2)	Other cities (5)	Unveiled (13)
High School/some college (3)	Graduate Students (2)	Single/ Common Law (7)		Previously veiled (3)

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form
Faculty of Education, York University

Study Name: Iranian Women's Quest for Self-Liberation Through the Internet and Social Media: An Emancipatory Pedagogy
Researcher: Tannaz Zargarian, PhD Student, Faculty of Education
Contact Information: tannaz_zargarian@edu.yorku.ca

The purpose of this study is to explore the discourse of body autonomy among Iranian women. This study will focus on the role of the Internet and social media as informal educational tools in reshaping the perception and practice of body autonomy among Iranian women in Iran and in diaspora while taking cultural, social, and religious aspects into consideration.

This research is interested in exploring individuals' experiences and perspectives on the discourse of body autonomy, with a particular attention to attire, sexuality, and public mobility. While the focus is purposefully broad, I hope, by adopting semi-structural interviews with Iranian women between the ages of thirty to forty, inside Iran and in diaspora, to understand how individuals perceive the discourse of body autonomy and how they exercise their body rights.

The goal of this research in which you are invited to participate is to speculate upon the discourse of body autonomy and what informal education can potentially offer to self-liberation of Iranian women. The rationale for asking for your participation in this study is because you are an adult Iranian woman who completed primary and secondary education inside Iran, have regular access to the Internet and participate in social media.

Should you consent to participate, by signing or accepting the terms in this form, you will be interviewed for up to one hour. The interview will be arranged at your convenience and will take place in an office at York University or online through Skype. You will have the option to choose the language of the interview, Farsi or English. The interview will be audio-taped, transcribed, and then translated to English, if conducted in Farsi.

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. Y**ou can refuse to answer any questions and can withdraw your consent at any time without consequence. Your withdrawing from the study will not influence your relationship or the nature of your relationship with the researcher or with York University now or in the future. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.**

All data from this study will be kept confidential and stored in a locked folder on a USB in a locked drawer in my supervisor's office at York University. Participants will choose a coded name that will be used instead of their given name in all of the files. Furthermore, any information that may identify their actual identity will be altered in the transcription process to ensure anonymity. Within two years of the final publication (October, 01, 2020), all consent forms, audio tapes, and data will be destroyed through digital and manual shredding and by

permanently removing the data from the USB. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.
All information derived from this study will be used only for research purposes. The interview transcript, a summary and explanation of the results will be sent to the participants.

The researcher or the supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Jenson, will respond to any questions you have during or after the interview. Any concerns and questions regarding this research can be addressed to the researcher or supervisor via email tannaz_zargarian@edu.yorku.ca or JJenson@edu.yorku.ca. You may also contact the Faculty of Education Graduate Office via phone 416-736-5018.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Senior Manager and Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University, telephone 416-736-5914 or email ore@yorku.ca"

I ……consent to participate in Iranian Women's Quest for Self-Liberation Through the Internet and Social Media: An Emancipatory Pedagogy conducted by Tannaz Zargarian. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

_____ _____
Participant Signature Date

_____ _____
Principal Investigator Date

Appendix C: Demographic/Introduction Questions

Demographic and Introductory Questions

1. Age
2. Sexuality
3. Education (highest degree)
4. Occupation
5. Marital Status
6. Father's Occupation
7. Mother's Occupation
8. Partner's Occupation
9. City of Residence
10. Approximate Address (major intersection)
11. Religion
12. Do you practice veiling?
13. How often do you go online?
14. How long have you had regular access to the internet?
15. What is the main device you use to go online?
16. What are the most common social media platforms that you use?

Appendix D: Main Interview Questions

Main Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself? (Self-identification)
2. What is the meaning of body autonomy to you?
3. What is your experience with body autonomy related to hijab?
4. What is your experience with body autonomy related to sexuality? (virginity, orgasm, contraception, conception, and communication of sexual needs/desires)
5. How would you describe your body autonomy in public?
    a. Do you feel autonomous when accessing public places, recreational spaces, and public transportation?
    b. Do you feel autonomous when going to work or participating in social activities?
    c. Do you ever ask your father or partner for permission before leaving the house?
    d. If you go out with your friends where do you usually go?
        i. Is there any reason why you choose those places?
6. How would you describe your experiences with street harassment?
    a. How often have you experienced street harassment? Where are the most common locations? What type of harassment?
    b. Has street harassment ever affected your choice of attire? If so how?
    c. Has street harassment ever affected your public mobility? If so how?
7. Have you ever travelled outside of Iran?
    a. Where?
    b. How often/How many times?
8. Do you have any close friends or relatives living abroad?

   a. How often do you contact them?
   b. What is the most common method of communication?
9. What do you think of the role of the internet in connecting Iranian society with the outside world?
10. What do you use the internet for?
   a. How active are you on social media?
   b. What type of activities? (do you run any channels, do you post, like, comment, etc.)
11. When you share something on social media, in that moment of sharing what do you have in your mind? What is the purpose of you sharing?
12. Do you share veiled personal images or unveiled?
   a. If you share unveiled images do you have any limits that you place on the images?
13. Do you have private accounts or public accounts?
14. How do you describe yourself in the online realm?
   a. Do you perceive yourself differently online?
15. Are there any specific pages that you follow? why?
16. Are there any pages related to women's rights that you follow? Why?
17. Do these pages represent your personal concerns/quests about women's rights?
18. Do you think that the internet plays a role in increasing your awareness and understanding of your body autonomy regarding hijab?
19. Do you think that the internet plays a role in increasing your awareness and understanding of your body autonomy regarding sexuality?

20. Do you think that the internet plays a role in increasing your awareness and understanding of your body autonomy regarding public mobility?
21. Do you think you have more/less body autonomy online? Why?
22. Have you ever experienced harassment online or on social media? If so how?
23. Do you think the internet decreased the frequency and intensity of street harassment?
24. What do you think about patriarchal culture?
25. How do you think the internet affects such a culture?
26. Can you define feminism?
27. Do you perceive yourself as a feminist? How so? Why?