TRANSFORMATION OF INTIMACY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIAL CONTEXT IN TEHRAN, IRAN

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Abstract

Making a desired intimate relationship is a challenging issue among young men and women in contemporary urban Iran. The current research examined how the couples' intimacy in intimate relationships is related with the status of modern transformation of intimacy. This research aimed to examine how Giddens's (1992) theory of transformation of intimacy would be applicable in the transitional urban context of Iran, viz. in Tehran.

An online research design and a partially mixed methods approach was used in this study. The quantitative results derived from completed online questionnaires by 567 men and women showed a positive correlation between the level of an individual's transformed attitude towards intimate relationships and gender roles and the level of women's sexual agency. In addition, there was a positive correlation between the level of women's sexual agency and the level of actual intimacy among partners.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results however, showed that the transformed intimacy has not been completely perceived or adhered to by individuals, rather a combination of transformed and stereotypical values were practiced by the respondents. The in-depth interviews amongst 37 male and female respondents revealed that men and women treated the transformation of intimacy selectively and based it on their own benefits.

Theoretical dissection suggests that the incomplete process of transformed intimacy in the context of the study could be explained by three sources: first, the feminist perspective of the interrelatedness of the public and private domains in the society, and the prevalence of patriarchal discourse in personal relationships. Second: the condition of the transitional social context in which inconsistency between traditional values and new needs are dominant, and third: the existence of the market logic in intimate life.

Accordingly, the theoretical discussion suggested that Giddens's (1992) theory of transformation of intimacy is not totally applicable in a transitional social urban context of Iran, viz. in Tehran.

Abstrak

Menjalin hubungan intim yang diingini adalah satu isu yang mencabar di kalangan golongan muda lelaki dan wanita di kawasan bandar kontemporari di Iran.. Penyelidikan ini menyiasat bagaimana keintiman pasangan dalam hubungan intim adalah berkaitan dengan status transformasi moden keintiman. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana teori Giddens (1992) berhubung transformasi keintiman diguna pakai dalam konteks bandar yang melalui peralihan dalam konteks Iran di Tehren.

Suatu rekabentuk kajian dalam talian yang menggunakan kaedah *mixed methods* digunakan dalam kajian ini. Keputusan kuantitatif yang diperolehi daripada soal selidik atas talian daripada 567 lelaki dan wanita membuktikan bahawa korelasi positif ditemui antara tahap perubahan sikap individu terhadap hubungan intim dan peranan gender serta tahap agensi seksual wanita. Di samping itu, terdapat korelasi yang positif antara tahap agensi seksual wanita dan tahap keintiman yang sebenar di kalangan pasangan.

Gabungan keputusan kuantitatif dan kualitatif bagaimanapun, menunjukkan bahawa perubahan keintiman tidak sepenuhnya dirasakan atau dipatuhi oleh individu, malah gabungan nilai-nilai keintiman yang berubah dan nilai-nilai stereotaip diamalkan oleh responden. Dalam temu bual dengan 37 responden lelaki dan wanita didapatibahawa lelaki dan wanita mengamalkan transformasi keintiman secara selektif berdasarkan faedahnya kepadadiri mereka sendiri.

Diseksi teoretikal mencadangkan bahawa proses perubahan keintiman yang tidak lengkap yang diperhatikan dalam konteks kajian ini boleh dijelaskan dengan tiga sumber berikut: pertama, perspektif feminis mengenai saling-kaitnya arena publik dan peribadi (*private*) dalam masyarakat, dan kelaziman wacana patriarki dalam hubungan peribadi. Kedua: keadaan konteks peralihan sosial di mana percanggahan di antara nilai-

nilai tradisional dan keperluan baru adalah dominan, dan ketiga: kewujudan logik pasaran dalam kehidupan intim. Oleh itu perbincangan teori mencadangkan bahawa teori Giddens mengenai transformasi keintiman tidak dapat terpakai secara menyeluruh dalam konteks peralihan sosial bandar di Tehran, Iran.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Problem

Making a "desired intimate relationship" is a challenging issue among young men and women in contemporary urban Iran. Dissatisfaction about intimacy in heterosexual relationships causes conflicts and instability among urban married couples (Etemadi, 2008). Although, intimate relationships are affected by various factors, however, some studies have focused on its extreme relationship with sexual life (Lewandowski & Schrage, 2010; Sprecher, 2002).

According to recent studies, sexual life plays an influential role in contemporary intimate relationships in Iran (Movahed 2011; Foroutan 2008; Fakhraei 2007). Based on patriarchal norms in Iran, sex is defined as a primary male need and desire. While male sexual agency has been determined by stereotypes and rules, women's sexuality has been defined as a commodity to be exchanged in marriage (Helie & Hoodfar, 2012). Besides the sexual life, the traditional stereotypes have constructed all aspects of intimate relationships and couples' roles.

However, urban areas in Iran are undergoing changes due to modernization and higher access to education for men and women. Young people are no longer restricted to traditional roles and expectations. New marriages are mainly based on personal choice, and this affects the nature of relationships that women and men enter into. The traditional view that marriages are based on arrangements between families, for the purposes of two families' bonding is being replaced by marriages and relationships of choice. Moreover, sexual voices are more visible and free from traditional limitations (Mahdavi, 2007). (Mahdavi, 2007).

Debates over women's sexual rights and the importance of intimacy among couples in modern relationships have been rising. Due to recent transformations in the transitional

period, transformed attitudes, needs, roles and expectations are emerging in intimate relationships. However, men and women are facing challenges in relationships due to traditional patriarchal regulations that co-existing with the changes that are taking place.

There is a need to understand transitional societies that are undergoing changes in social life, as well as in perception and performance of gender relationships, and to know how this transition affects contemporary intimate relationships.

Accordingly, the lack of studies on the interrelationship between an individual's attitude, sexuality and intimacy in the transitional context of Iran, led to the proposed study to examine the relationship between the status of the transformed attitude about relationships and gender roles, the level of female sexual agency and the level of intimacy in intimate relationships in urban Iran, Tehran (as a transitional context).

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the associated factors that influence the participants' attitude towards relationship and gender roles?

2. What are the associated factors that influence the level of women's sexual agency?

3. What are the associated factors that influence the level of couples' intimacy in an intimate relationship?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To determine the factors that is associated with the participants' attitude towards relationship and gender roles.

2. To determine the factors that is associated with the level of women's sexual agency.

3. To determine the factors that is associated with the level of couples' intimacy in an intimate relationship.

It is worth mentioning that the three dependent variables (attitude toward relationship and gender roles, women's sexual agency, and couples' intimacy) are derived from Giddens's discussion of the transformation of intimacy in which the transformed attitude of people and the state of sexual agency in women, are assumed as predictors of equal and pure intimacy among couples. Accordingly, the effect of respondents' attitude on the level of women's' sexual agency, and the effect of women's sexual agency on the couples' intimacy are hypothesized in the current research. Therefore, the couples' intimacy is the main dependent variable, as the problem statement of this research started by focusing on this issue (it will be elaborated in the next chapter).

1.4 Purpose of Study

To find out how the concepts of intimate relationships and gender roles are perceived and transformed in a transitional social context of Tehran, Iran.

1.5 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is urban Iran and specifically, Tehran, the capital city, which is representative of the transitional context of urban Iran. The transitional trends had affected both urban and rural areas, as many experts confirmed, urbanism has been recognized as a feature of modern transitions and urban citizens have always been the target of modern transformation: "Urbanism, improving the educational access, and raising the communicational technologies, have led to rapid modernization in contemporary Iran. Subsequently, individualism, non-marital intimate relationships, and the increasing divorce rate have emerged as social consequences of modernization" (Shekarbeigi, 2013, p. 12).

1.5.1 Population of Contemporary Iran

Iran is located in the south west of Asia with a territory that spans 1,648,195km that makes it the second largest country in the Middle East.

According to the last national census carried out by Iran's census centre (2011), in total there are 75,149,669 inhabitants in contemporary Iran. 53,646,661 people (about 72%) are living in urban areas and 21,446,783 are living in rural areas. This data confirms that a high number of Iranians are living in urban areas. Moreover, the province of Tehran with 12,183,391 inhabitants is the most populous area in the country, in which 11,305,832 people are living in urban areas (about 93%). In terms of the sex ratio of the population, about 50.4% of the population is male and 49.6% female. Moreover, based on the census data set, about 56% of the whole population is aged between 20-50 years old. About 85% of residents, who are above 6 years old, are literate among them 43,047,971 people are living in cities (89%). Furthermore, the official state religion in Iran is Islam (Twelve Shia) and about 99.4 % of the people in the census identified themselves as Moslem (Report of Iran's census centre 2011).

1.5.2 Patriarchy and Traditional Social Norms

"Patriarchy is a social and ideological construct, which consider men (patriarchs) as superior to women. Patriarchy is based on a system of hierarchical power, where men control women's production, reproduction and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity stereotypes in society, which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. However, the nature of control of women varies from one society to another as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices" (Ray, 2010, p.1).

Patriarchal traditions in Iran, like in many other Islamic countries are rooted in both religion and customs. According to the traditional socio-cultural structure in Iran, the family is seen as a powerful institution in which the father holds the power and responsibility, his main duty being the breadwinner and to manage his wife (wives) and children. A woman's main duty is recognized as being a housewife: "Patriarchal societies propagate the ideology of motherhood which restrict women's mobility and

burdens them with the responsibilities to nurture and rear children" (Ray, 2010, p. 2).

Price (2006) argued that even in the present time, patriarchy is influential in shaping Iranian relationships:

"Patriarchy has been a major institution in the area since ancient times and is deeply rooted in religious, legal and cultural practices. It is portrayed extensively in Persian literature and metaphors, cultural constructs, ethics, explanatory systems, in both religious and secular contexts. The patriarchal system involves the control of both wives and children by the husband or the father and in their absence, by other male relatives" (p.1).

Beyond the judicial laws, within the cultural traditions, a good girl is supposed to be authorized by her father, brothers and husband. Virginity is perceived as a girl's evidence of modesty and a visible sexual voice for a woman is not acceptable. Marriage is seen, as the main goal of a girl while the social and sexual autonomy is not assumed as appropriate for a girl (Parsi, 2012).

These traditional beliefs, alongside the dominant ideological discourse supported by the government, promote patriarchal regulations in gender relationships, they assume gender differences as natural and biological:

"Keeping the man's authority is his wife's responsibility. This is a part of the instinctive need in men, and women are supposed to respect it. Women who are financially independent or women, who are more educated than their husbands, would make their husband's authority vulnerable" (Mohebbi, 2013).

However, these stereotypical approaches are a part of the social construct and it is not the only voice in the society.

1.5.3 Judicial System and Family Law

The judicial system in Iran has been founded based on civil law, and some attempts has been made to integrate the functions of the civil legal system with Islamic laws, however, the main legal code in contemporary Iran is based on Shia Islamic law or what is called *Sharia* (Mirhosseini & Hamzic, 2010).

As Ziba Mirhosseini and her colleague mentioned (2010) "post-revolutionary -1979- developments in family law have been marked by two parallel trends: validation of the patriarchal mandates of classic *'fighh'*, and protection and compensation of women who conform to these rules" (92). The main legal obligation between a husband and wife in a marriage contract is exchanging sexual services and life expenses. As Mirhosseini explains these obligations in the Shi'a marriage:

"With the marriage contract, a woman comes under her husband's authority, dominance and protection, entailing a set of defined rights and obligations for each party; some have a moral sanction and others have legal force. Although the boundaries between the legal and the moral are ambiguities . . . those sanctions with legal forces - that is mentioned in family law- revolve around the twin themes of sexual access and compensation, embodied in the concept of '*tamkin*' and '*nafaqa*' " (Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 6).

"*Tamkin* (submission, defined as unconditional sexual obedience of a wife to her husband) is a man's right and thus a woman's duty; whereas *nafaqa* (maintenance, defined as shelter, food and clothing that a husband has to provide to his wife in return of her sexual services) is a woman's right and a man's duty. A woman becomes entitled to *nafaqa* only after the consummation of marriage, and she loses her claim if she is in a state of *nushuz* (sexual disobedience)" (Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 6).

Iranian family law states that the marriage of a virgin girl requires permission from her father or paternal grandfather (Moghadam, 2004). Polygamy is legal according to the law and the only restriction imposed on men when taking a second wife is that he has to get the first wife's permission if he wants to get married again. "A woman legally can file for divorce if the husband marries another woman without her consent" (Moghadam, 2004). However, the legal law of temporary marriage does not make the wife's permission obligatory. By legally registering in the temporary marriage called as '*sigheh*', "a man is allowed to contract a second marriage without the consent of his first wife if the court decides that he can afford it" (Mirhosseini & colleague, 2010, p. 94).

The right to a divorce is legally recognized as a male right. "Men are not required to provide grounds if they want to divorce their wives. Nevertheless, women can obtain a divorce only upon establishing one of the recognized grounds which are written into the marriage contracts" (Mirhosseini & et al, 2010, p. 93).

Moreover, "the law forces the husband to pay his wife '*ujrat al-mithl*' (exemplary wages) for the housework which was done by the wife during marriage, provided that divorce is not initiated by the wife or caused by any fault of hers. The court allows men to divorce only after he has paid his wife all her dues: bride price (Mahr/Dowry) and *ujrat al-mithl* (domestic wages)" (Mirhosseini & et al, 2010, p. 93) . However, if a woman wants to initiate the divorce, she has to neglect her dues of bride price and domestic wages. Bride price (*Mahr*) is the amount of money that a man is obliged to pay to his wife at the time of divorce or anytime she wants it.

Furthermore, a married woman is not allowed to go out of the home, to work or to travel without her husband's permission.

Generally, all of these laws have been issued based on the patriarchal idea that men are supposed to be the head of the family. According to this higher status, providing for

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living expenses of the family is a husband's responsibility and the wife has no financial obligations in the family. In return, a woman's obligations in a marriage are sexual services, obeying the husband and childbearing.

1.5.4 Sexuality and Gender Policy

The previous section mentioned in the Islamic patriarchal regulations of Iran, the issue of sexuality has been constructed in both legal and social dimensions as a male privilege. Although, as Ziba Mirhosseini stated this is not due to the religion, but it is a social regulation constructed in a traditional and religious context: "Islamic law and rules, like other laws, are the product of socio-cultural assumptions and juristic reasoning about the nature of relations between men and women. In other words, they are man-made juristic constructs, shaped by the social, cultural and political conditions within which Islam's sacred texts are understood and turned into law and social regulations" (Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 3).

Referring to Islamic classical rules and patriarchal socio-cultural norms, the official discourse of sexuality in Iran has been defined as a domain in which men are in need of sex and women are responsible for providing that. Men's duty to compensate the female sexual services and men's right to control the women's body makes female sexuality a male property as stated by Mirhosseini:

"At the core of patriarchal sexual system, there is an idea of female sexuality as a property. A woman is told by social and religious sources that she should keep herself covered so that her beauty is not seen by anyone apart from her husband. And that she should satisfy her husband's sexual needs and his other wishes; otherwise her place will be in the hell" (Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 7).

Mirhosseini also referred to some contemporary Iranian-Islamic theorists whose thoughts are seen as the basis of contemporary official sexual discourse in Iran. For

instance, Allame Tabatabaei – a great Iranian-Islamic theorist (*Faghih*) advocates the proper Islamic education for women through which the sexual desire is perceived as emergent for men and is limited in women. "Women's religious education in an Islamic society –Iran- teaches them chastity and modesty; in this thoughts women's desire for beauty and ornaments is taken as proof of their tendency to be attractive for men, makes women's sexual desire much less than men's. Therefore, a man's desire on average requires him to have more than one wife and even two and three" (Tabatabaei, as cited in Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 139). Mutahhari (1991), a more recent Iranian Islamic thinker argued that men and women perceive sexuality differently by their inherent nature:

"Man is the slave of his own sexual desire and woman is the prisoner of a man's love. A man wants to take possession of the woman's person and to wield power over her; a woman wants to conquer the man's heart. A woman is better able to control her sexual desire than a man is. Man's desire is primitive and aggressive and woman's desire is reactive and responsive. It is admitted that woman is naturally more faithful than man" (Mutahhari 1991, as cited in Mirhosseini, 2012, p. 9).

Accordingly, dominant sexual discourse in Iran that is supported officially, is the one through which women's feeling, their sexual needs and sexual life are subordinated to those of men.

Some scholars have investigated the sexual and gender policies in contemporary Iran. For example, gender politics in the Islamic republic is the main subject of Hammed Shahidian's work (2003). He described these politics as being related to the governmental patriarchy in Iran as follows "Despite basic position of patriarchy in Iranian and Muslim culture, after Islamic revolution we saw refashioning of patriarchy; when it moved from the private toward the public domain" (Shahidian, 2003, p. 8).

Azad Moradian (2009) in his documentary about Iranian society and common sexual regulations, discussed the dominant sexual discourse in Iran which causes injustice against human sexual rights especially in the case of women. He stated some trends and rules, which were opposed to the freedom of human sexuality. Such as frowning down upon homosexuals and premarital relations, the vital role of virginity among girls, honour killing, and the legality of polygamy and restricting sexual life in the structure of traditional marriages. Farhad Kazemi (2000) also argued that gender policies in Iran have been shaped by two aspects: the first is the attitudinal dimension that is based on beliefs and values and the second is related to the legal system. He believes that, a combination of the two created the dominant sexual and gender rules by which female sexuality has been subordinated and sexual life of the people has been controlled by rules and regulations governing it.

1.5.5 Transformation in Gender Relations and Sexuality

Although family law and official discourse still remain patriarchal, however, globalization, women's movement activities, improving levels of education, improving new communication technologies and the implementation of modernization's policies, have led Iranians to confront dominant sexual discourse through a modern life-style and they also try to customize the traditional perceptions of sexuality with new attitudes.

These transformations are remarkable enough to some scholars who called it a kind of sexual revolution. For instance, Pardis Mahdavi (2007) after her long-time investigation on the private life-style of a part of the urban youth in Iran, stated that in spite of legal prohibitions against pre-marital sex, homosexuality, dancing parties and alcohol consumption, contemporary youths in Iran oppose these constrains and make their own definitions of life-style and relationships. The writer proposed a kind of revolution

to represent the new changes. Mahdavi (2007) argued that "the sexual revolution they believe, they are engaging in, is about changing sexual discourse, pushing the limits with regards to restrictions on social behaviors (such as style of dress, youth congregation, drinking and dancing) and attacking the fabric of morality under which the official discourse seek to govern its citizens" (Mahdavi, 2007, p. 11).

Moreover, Azad Armaki and his colleagues (2012) declared, "despite the legal and cultural restrictions against non-marital relationships especially for girls there are varieties of pre-marital sexual relationships amongst Iranian youth" (Azad & et al, 2012, p. 5). Garmaverdi and colleagues (2009) in their study on 2400 high school students in Tehran found out that more than 20 percent of the participants have experienced a sexual relationship. In their study of female university students, Khalaj A badi and Mahyar (2010) argued about 25 percent of single girls in Tehran's universities have experienced a sexual relationship in their lives. These data are supported with the report of the health ministry (2007) in which it is demonstrated that about 20 percent of boys and about 10 percent of girls have experienced a sexual relationship before the age of 20.

Due to the sensitivity and extent of social changes in terms of sex and gender relationships, even some governmental and official discourse representatives have mentioned it, mostly as a threat to family values and traditional culture. The Iranian sexual habits are undergoing rapid changes. According to official data, about 40 percent of adults in marriageable age are single and divorce rate is growing dramatically. One in seven marriages ends in divorce around the country and it is about one in three marriages in Tehran (Azad & et al, 2012, p.10). A reason of these changes is the tremendous transformation in Iranian attitudes regarding sexual relationships.

According to a governmental report in (2008), many male respondents confess to have had sex at least with one woman before their marriage, more than 13 percent of these non-marital relationships ended with pregnancy and abortion. Prostitution is rising fast and it is more visible in cities despite being legally prohibited. Some data declared around 10-15 percent of prostitutes are married women and an interesting phenomenon is male prostitutes hired by rich old women. It seems raising urbanism and the growth of the middle class, the increase in the numbers of educated women who are active in society and the development and growth of communication technology and social media are important elements in these new transformations in Iran (Shahi, 2013).

A parliament member declared that Iran is going to face a phenomenon he called a 'divorce earthquake'. Criticizing the trend of social changes, he stated that the younger generation needs to be educated in terms of marital relationships (Asfani, 2013). A governmental report argued that more than 70 percent of divorces are because of sexual dysfunctions or inefficiency. This report cited sexual infidelity as an important cause of recent divorces (Tehrani, 2010)

Another report declared that family relationship and sexuality discourse is now changing. "Beside increasing the divorce rates and decreasing the marriage and fertility rates, the model of gender relationships has changed. Today women are active everywhere, in different areas of social, political and economic dimensions. The traditional model of the family in which male authority is the core of relationships is going to be abolished and women are challenging their traditional maternal roles. It seems that gender division of roles and duties are no longer as established as before. Family values are being replaced by individualism and pre-marital relationships are increasing" (Iran, Parlement report, 2014).

The new transformation in the private domain of sexuality has challenged the patriarchal rules and values and was mentioned as a 'threat' by the government. Therefore, based on the above mentioned discussions, in contemporary Iran two contrary regulations concerning sexuality and gender relations co-exist; the traditional regulation rooted in patriarchal values and the new transformed regulation caused by modern social changes taking place in urban Iran.

1.6 Significance of Study

This study will be a significant attempt in promoting and advancing knowledge about the transformation of intimate relationships in urban Iran. Another important contribution of this study is to reveal aspects of the crisis in intimate relationships. This study will create a better understanding based on academic research of the relationship between the intimacy discourses with gender and sexuality.

By demonstrating how men and women perceive different aspects of transformed intimacy, the current study will be beneficial to both men and women in achieving the vision to understand each other's perceptions of intimacy and intimate relationships. This study will also corroborate the critical importance of sexuality and couples' attitudes on the quality of couples' intimacy.

By explaining the interrelationship between intimacy, sexuality and attitude, this study will be helpful for couples to expand their understanding of complicated aspects of a relationship. The new knowledge would be their aid in improving the quality of their intimate relationships.

The current study more will also significantly contribute in explaining the asymmetrical situation of people in their transition between traditional and modern values; the study will provide some recommendations in handling these uncertainties. Moreover, by highlighting the stirring situation of current intimate relationships, the study will be helpful for socio-cultural administrators to get a true insight about the social realities and consider them in future social planning.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the current study is that it is a sensitive topic. People are usually not comfortable talking about or exposing information regarding their private experiences and personal attitudes, especially in face-to-face interviews through which more personal information will be revealed. This reluctance would be more in societies like Iran in which traditional and religious beliefs as well as political constraints have made people more conservative.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the main methodological strategy was by giving freedom to potential participants to choose whether they want to participate in the study or not. Therefore, an anonymous self-selective questionnaire was carried out during the data gathering. Because of this limitation, the sample size will not provide generalized results. As participation in the study is up to the participants, the coverage bias in sampling would be a potential limitation of the current study.

Moreover, in carrying out a case study, it is better to select a particular unit and conduct a comprehensive study on the unit. Nevertheless, since the response rate in online surveys is less than paper-based modes, as many scholars stated (Ronald & Fricker 2008, Groves 1989), the non-response bias was predictable. Thus, it was assumed that the desirable sample size would not be met by distributing the questionnaire in just one or two online communities of online users. To make up for this limitation, we expanded the scope to all available online communities of university students in Tehran.

The next potential limitation of the current study is about its unit of emphasis. Obviously, intimate relationships and sexual life are not just constructed by individuals' attitude and practice, but rather it is also influenced by social-political structures. Although this study focuses on individuals' actions within larger structures, and structural effects was reviewed in general. However, it is assumed that many obstacles

to intimate relationships are due to economic restrictions as well as social-political forces. The outcomes of this study will shed light on some aspects of reality, while a natural limitation of any study in human sciences (in contrast with natural sciences) is that there could be numerous related variables that are out of control of the researcher. Any study in human sciences can claim to focus on limited variables and try to take a deep study on them. The other effective variables could be emphasized through other independent researches. That is why statistical findings that indicated on the scores of prediction and effect of independent variables of dependent variables, mostly revealed the moderate scores (below 50%). That is due to the limitation of working on human subjects and impossibility of controlling all influential factors. Of course, many different factors can affect peoples' attitude, women's sexual agency, and couples' intimacy (such as structural factors), however, in accordance to the theoretical basis of this study I focused on some specific variables only. As Habibpour and Safari (2009) state on interpreting regression results, "any field that attempts to predict human behavior, such as sociology and psychology, typically has R-squared values lower than 50%. Humans are simply harder to predict than physical processes…" (p.150). The other reason to justify statistics of below 50% is about homogeneity of respondents. The frequency analysis showed that respondents, who were randomly selected, totally expressed similar responses. A statistical fact is the low the variation of responses, the low the influence they could have (Habibpour and Safari, 2009).

1.8 Organization of Chapters

The current study is organized in seven chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction and provides the general information regarding the topic such as research questions and objectives, the problem statement, the scope of study and the significance and limitations of the study.

The second chapter features literature review in which the main concepts of the study, theoretical debates and existing academic literature regarding each issue are provided. At the end of this chapter, the theoretical achievements of the current research are discussed.

The methodological discussion of the study is provided in the third chapter. The research design, participants of the study and sampling approach, data collection instruments, procedures and measures of the study are outlined in this chapter.

The fourth chapter reports quantitative and qualitative results to answer all research objectives and questions. To figure out related factors to the women's sexual agency, couples' intimacy and individuals' attitude with regards to intimate relationship and gender roles. The qualitative data also elaborated the gender differences in perception and adherence to the transformed intimacy.

Finally, the fifth chapter provided the theoretical discussion regarding all mentioned concepts and tried to answer the theoretical arguments of this research.

The last chapter of the research provides conclusion of the study and some recommendations for conducting future studies in the related field.

References, bibliography and appendixes are attached at the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many theories and academic studies have tried to explain different aspects of intimate relationships. Although existing literature covers a wide variety of theories, the current review will focus on six major subjects as the main aspects of this study. Besides the definition and theoretical views of each subject, a historical review on available empirical works will be discussed both within the context of Iran and the world. The main subjects are modernity, transitional society, intimacy in intimate relationships, transformation of intimacy, women's sexual agency and attitudes about intimate relationship and gender roles.

This review tries to find out the similarities, differences and the gaps within the existing literature in relation to this study.

2.1 Definition and Concept of Modernity

The concept modernity is always seen as a location in time or state of being that is beyond traditional and it covers institutions, organization and impacts on the person. According to Barker (2005) "Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period, one marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) toward capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state and its constituent institutions and forms of surveillance" (Barker, 2005, p. 444). As Gay Craig (1998) stated, "modern can mean all post-Medieval European history, in the context of dividing history into three large epochs: Antiquity, Medieval and Modern. Likewise, it is often used to describe the Euro-American culture that rise out of the enlightenment and continuous in some way to the present" (Craig, 1998. p. 3). Accordingly Anthony Giddens (1990) point out that when we talk about modernity it refers to institutional transformations that have their roots in western countries, however, it is not exclusive to the western world:

"In terms of institutional clustering, two distinct organizational complexes are of particular significance in the development of modernity: the nation-state and systematic capitalistic productions. Both have their origins in specific characteristics of European history and have few parallels in prior periods or in other cultural setting. However, in close conjunction with one another, they have since swept across the world; this is all because of the power they have generated. Modernity is universalizing not only in terms of its global impact, but in terms of the reflexive knowledge fundamental to its dynamic character". (Giddens, 1990, p. 174-175).

Besides organisation and institutions of modernity, the person is also seen as transitioning from a traditional self to a modern self. Craig (1998) refers to a modern self as possessing special features such as:

"The modern self assumes an autonomy that seeks to reject the claims of authority, tradition, or community. The modern self, searches for personal therapy that only results in the subjective experience of well-being. The modern human has moved from an emphasis on redemption of character to liberation from social inhibitions. Identity is self-constructed through self-consumption of products of desire. Such claims about identity and truth call for a technical mastery of the environment, as well as a division between the public and private spheres of reality" (Craig, 1998. p. 5).

Modernity varies from all previous forms of social order because of its vigour; it's deep undercutting of traditional habits and customs, and its global impact. It also radically modifies the wide-ranging nature of daily life and the most personal features of human activity. Modernity needs to be understood at an institutional level but the transformation introduced by modern institutions

intertwine in a direct way with individual life and therefore the self (Giddens, 1991).

2.1.1 Theories of Modernity

Academics especially in the field of sociology, have attempted to provide a range of explanations to understand what modernity is. Among classic sociologists, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber had given comprehensive explanations regarding modernity and the modern period.

Marx (1977), saw class struggle as being brought about by modernity as a source of fundamental division in the capitalistic order. He argued about the concept of 'alienation', for Marx, alienation is an especially significant problem of modern employment and the modern division of labor. On the other hand, he assumed this as a potential opportunity for the emergence of a more humane social system. In fact, alongside the concern about alienation, the emphasis on man's agency to transform the economic and social relation is an important part of Marx's understanding of modernity and the modern society. This idea of human agency is very well described by Marx in the statement "Men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama" (Marx, 1977, as cited in Giddens, 1990, p.135).

Durkheim, however, focused more on individualism as a sign of modernity. He stated that further expansion of individualism would establish a harmonious and fulfilling social life, integrated through a combination of the division of labor and moral individualism (cited in Giddens, 1990, p. 138). Moreover, Durkheim's theory of 'anomie' is the center of his sociological analysis of modernity. Comparing the pre-modern historical period, Durkheim (1977) argued:

"The level of normative integration in pre-modern societies was the result of their mechanical solidarity. In such conditions, similarity of individual's

circumstances and occupations did not allow societies to face pathologic levels of anomie. However, in modern societies that are characterized by complementarities and advanced division of labor, a kind of organic solidarity would emerge. These societies face challenges in providing and keeping the norms for diverse individuals" (p. 180).

Pessimistically, Weber perceived modernity as a paradoxical system in which material progress could be obtained only at the cost of losing individual creativity and autonomy due to expanded bureaucracy. For example, in his book; 'The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, Weber argued:

"No one any longer knows who will live in this steel-hard casing and whether entirely new prophets or mighty rebirth of ancient ideas and ideals will stand at the end of this prodigious development. However, if neither, whether a mechanized ossification, embellished with a sort of rigidly compelled sense of self-importance, will arise. Then, indeed, if ossification appears, the saying might be true for the last human in this long civilization development: narrow specialists without mind, pleasure-seekers without heart; in its conceit, this nothingness imagines it has climbed to a level of humanity never before attained" (Weber, 2001, p. 124).

However, through the above mentioned and other works, Weber admired other aspects of modernity and modern society, such as individual autonomy, increasing subjectivity and human's freedom.

Jurgen Habermas (1987) on the other hand identified the modern society as an incomplete project in which a set of problems have raised, problems related to the issue of time, problems produced by the transformation of the European society in accordance with the principle of subjectivity, and the notion of individual autonomy as the essence

of man. However, he believed that modernity's problems should be tackled rather than rejected. He believes that "social systems have grown increasingly complex, differentiated, integrated, and characterized by instrumental reason. At the same time, the life-world of human has witnessed increasing differentiation and condensation, secularization, and the institutionalization of norms of reflexivity and criticism. A rational society would be one in which both the system and the life-world were permitted to rationalize following their own logics. However, in the modern world, the system has come to dominate the life-world. The problems in the modern world could be devised if the life-world had a better ability to guide the system" (Habermas, 1987, p. 52).

Anthony Giddens (1990), however, saw modernity as a future-based project in which due to fundamental transformations of human lives on both the micro and macro levels, a spectrum of intersection and reflexivity is happening. He sketched a phenomenology of modernity in terms of four dialectically related frameworks of experiences as stated by him:

"Displacement and re-embedding: the intersection of estrangement and familiarity, Intimacy and impersonality: the intersection of personal trust and impersonal ties Expertise and re-appropriation: the intersection of abstract systems and day-to-day knowledgeability. Privatism and engagement: the intersection of pragmatic acceptance and activism" (Giddens, 1990, p. 140).

According to Giddens, through all these intersections, a modern individual has perceived a different concept of the time and space. "Time and space distant refers to the tendency of modern relationships to be increasingly distant. Relatedly, dis-embedding involves the lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens, 1990, p. 48). In

a modern time and space, the meaning and function of trust, risk, security, danger, friendship, intimacy and relationship has been changing and re-emerging through self-exposure of a responsible individual. Giddens also argues that the reflexivity of modernity extends to the core of the self and becomes a reflexive project of identity formation. Ulrich Beck (1992) on the hand defined modernity as a risk related period.

"We no longer live in an industrial society and are moving toward a risk society. Risk society is a form of reflexive modernity in which the central issue is how risks can be prevented, minimized, or channelled. These risks are being produced by the sources of wealth in modern society. Industry, for example, produces a wide range of hazardous consequences that reach across time and space." (Beck, 1992, p. 93).

He also suggested that science and subgroups like large companies would be protectors of people and nature and will lead the way when encountering risks. In general, classic sociologists were deeply concerned with cultural as well as structural aspects of modernity. It seemed, they were ambivalent between the various aspects of modernity's outcomes. They almost agreed that the arrival of modern society came with losses as well as gains, and a modern society needed to be perceived in both cultural and structural dimensions. However, some theorists like Giddens and Habermas were optimistic of modernity and articulated it as a future-based project that should be evaluated and implemented.

2.2 Definition and Concept of Transitional Society

Although the origins of modernity were from the west and had their roots in specific characteristics of European countries, it is not limited to just the western world. As Giddens (1990) stated "one of the fundamental consequences of modernity is globalisation. This is more than a diffusion of western institutions across the world, but

introduces new forms of world inter-dependence and life-styles" (p. 175). According to him, modernity is universalising not only in terms of its global impact, but also in terms of the reflexive knowledge fundamental to its dynamic character. However, the modern transformation has not applied across the world equally. Unlike modern societies where modernity is well developed, there are a variety of countries mostly out of the west, in which modernity has not yet developed in all aspects of life, but it is challenged by traditional orders of local values. Tinder (Tinder 2003 as cited in Nabavi, 2011) stated, "In a transitional situation, the old values are not effective anymore and the new ones are not applied yet; therefore, the society suffers from the lack of meaning. This crisis would be dominant in various aspects of people's lives" (Tinder 2003, as cited in Nabavi 2011, p. 12). In a transitional society there would be considerable indication of change away from some discernible ideal type with which it had formerly been identified with.

2.2.1 Theories of Transitional Society

Sociologists have explained the concept of 'transitional society' through different points of view. On one hand, there is a classical view of modernization by which a transitional society has been identified as a context that is going to transform from traditional to modern frameworks. For these scholars (eg. Nisbet, 1976), moving from a traditional context to a modern one is an inevitable single way that all societies have to pass. For example, Robert Nisbet (1976) articulated and divided the features of the traditional and modern societies. According to him, a traditional society is identified as focusing on community, power, religion and dignity. However, in a modern society there are values like individualism, authority, status and rationality. A transitional society in Nisbet's mind would be a context in which there are some levels of all these modern values while none of them has power to completely undermine the traditional values.

On the other hand, some scholars (eg. Weber, 1978; Durkheim, 1977) argued against the linear approach. In this view, the modern and the traditional are not inherently opposed to each other and any society would have its own model in being modern, based on its unique traditional roots. For instance, Max Weber stated that there is neither an inherent traditional value nor an inherent modern value. For him "a society is traditional when most people have a strong conviction of the current values and follow them. In this situation there is no doubt regarding the accuracy of the current social order…" (Weber, 1978, p. 254). Based on this view, a transitional condition is when the strong belief in the current and dominant values are doubted, because the dominant system becomes unable or too weak to responds to the realities of life. In other words, in a transitional society, there is a break between the needs of real life and values of the dominant order. When a society perceives these limitations and paradoxes, it would be at the beginning of its transitional time. In this situation, the traditional system tries to fix the paradoxes, however, in competition with new transformed values. As long as a society is undergoing these challenges, it would be identified as a transitional context. When a system is able to solve the paradoxes and respond to the new demands of life, it would start its modern time (Weber, 1978).

Based on Durkheim's points of view, a transitional society could be seen as an anomic situation in which the mechanic solidarity of traditional regulation is not responsive, while the organic solidarity of modern relations is not yet stable; there is neither traditional normal regulations nor the modern ones (Durkheim 1977).

Based on the above definitions, and according to contemporary investigations about the social problems in Iran, urban Iran could be seen as a transitional society in which the traditional and transformed values are co-existing. As Abbasi-Shavazi and his colleagues (2003) argued: "The most important change in recent decades is the increased level of education. Education brings with it the confidence to hold and express

one's own views and increased ability to engage with the modern world and its ideas. For example, the more liberal attitudes and values expressed by women were related to this trend in education levels" (Abbasi-Shavazi & et al, 2003, p. 30). In another work, Ghobadzadeh (2004) states, "during the second and third decades of the Islamic republic, the weight and importance of religious values has reduced amongst Iranian, while secular values have been increasing" (p. 29).

Emerging social transformations such as increased level of education, increase in the age of first marriage, women's participation in the social, economic and political arena and more demands for gender equality, has caused a break between the new needs and existing social values. New emerging needs entailed gender equality in the relationship and family law, acceptance of pre-marital relationship, and tolerance with new individual identities, while the traditional values reinforced the stereotypical definition of gender relationship, and emphasize on the family power against the individual choices. Like what Weber (1978) declared, the gaps between new demands and dominant traditional values, caused a challenge between two sets of beliefs; while there is a doubt on the accuracy of the existing norms, the new values has not yet been embedded. According to Ghazimoradi (2012) a feature of the transitional society is conflict and he stated:

"Conflict is a feature of social transition that we are experiencing in Iran. In this situation, an individual has some opposite characteristics that come in part from traditional values and in part from modern values. For instance, while contemporary young generation tend to make a mate selection based on love and personal choice, the traditional values encourage them to give priority to the familial values. We often see the overlapping of these contradicting tendencies" (Ghazimoradi, 2012, p. 8).

As Durkheim (1977) argued, the mechanic solidarity that came from the traditional bond, based on kinship ties and familial networks, is not responsive anymore, and organic solidarity emerges from the interdependence that arises from specialization of work and individualization of interest, but this is not yet stable in a transitional society.

2.2.2 Studies of Transitional Society and Social Change

Academic researchers of different fields have tried to understand the real conditions and probable problems that are experienced in transitional societies. Not surprising, most of these studies have been carried out in non-developed countries. Gebremedhin's (2004) work tried to understand the challenges of in a transitional society in developing legal institutions. The book was a case study in the Eritrea. In this historical and comparative study, the author has attempted to explain the role and growth of law during the different transitional period that Eritrean society has passed in its different phases of history. His study covered different dimensions of internal and external factors involved in Eritrea's process of legal development. He concluded that there are various institutional problems, which caused drastic law reforms in transitional societies. The author confirmed, "even if resources were available to implement convergence on a universal idealized body of doctrine, the idealized code would be ill-suited for the particular social and cultural context in which it was to operate". (Reviewed by Holter, 2004, p. 10). At the end of his comparative study, the author suggested a pragmatic model that offers a more sensible approach of legal development in transitional societies.

Raili Nugin (2010), tried to figure out how perception of adulthood would be transformed among the young generation of a transitional society in Estonia. 170 high school students were asked to write an essay entitled 'what will happen when I become an adult?' through a qualitative content analysis, the author figured out that the social changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union has also transformed the context, process

and perception of becoming an adult in the minds of the younger generation. He argued that the conceptualisation of adulthood is contextual and young people conceptualized themselves through the recent social transitions of their context. Alongside the old fashion attributes of adulthood like employment, marriage and parenthood, the Estonian youngsters stressed on intangible features such as responsibility, mental mutuality and freedom as their imagined perceptions of being adults.

Valentine Moghadam (1992) published a comprehensive study on Islamic Middle Eastern countries to understand how the new social and economic changes of modern transitions in these contexts have been encountered with embedded patriarchal regulations. Her scope of study was Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Jordan, North Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Comparing case studies, she concluded that state expansion, economic development, oil wealth and increased integration with the world system, have changed the social and demographical features of the urban context in the Middle East. These transformations, created more educational and employment opportunities for women alongside raising the number of middle class citizens. The legal and conventional reforms have reinforced women's position in both family and society. More education, more job opportunities, later marriages, smaller families and greater decision-making chances, have enabled women in urban areas to re-define their own roles in their life. These transformations have undermined the patriarchal attitudes and life-styles. The author argued, although women are now stronger than they used to be, however, some cultural and political obstacles, set up by conservative movements has been raised against the women's freedom to embrace change. Women's participation in the labour force and social-political roles are obviously lower than men's, however, Moghadam confirmed that "the relative rise in the female position would have the greatest potential to destroy patriarchal rules" (Moghadam, 1992, p. 57).

To examine the challenges between the rule of law and gender in transitional societies, Fionnuala Aolain and Michael Hamilton (2009), did a theoretical overview on the discourse through which institutional and legal transformations take place in transitional societies. The authors asserted that institutional gendered binaries are still alive within the modernization attempts. Finally, the authors mostly raised substantial questions regarding the functions of legal transformations in women's life experiences in transitional societies. "In recognizing the corrosive effects that the legal production of certain kinds of rules have for women in transitional societies, we may, at least start to take remedial steps" (Aolain & Hamilton, 2009, p. 23).

Jamie-Leigh Ruse (2011) carried out a qualitative study to examine how modern transformations of the social and economic context in Mexico have affected the process of gendered identity construction amongst Mexican youths. She asserted, in the context of new transformed values, young girls and boys have different perceptions of gender roles and romantic relationships. Emphasising the context-dependent feature of identity construction, Leigh Ruse explained how Mexican youths increased their understanding and practice of gender identity and sexual-romantic relationships, by negotiating modern values and the social traditions. She concluded, in the context of the highly developed local tourist industry, the advent of mass media and online social media, the new generation of Mexican youths, have changed their perceptions of romantic relationships and gendered identity by making a kind of balance between traditional and modern values.

Besides transforming in the gender identity and relationships, the functions of traditional communities would be changed because of modern transitions. Kairi Kasearu and Dagmar Kutsar (2010) examined this affect in the Estonian transitional society. Using data from two national representative surveys in the year 1994 and 2004; they assessed how the family's and kinship's function in supporting its members has been

replaced with the informal support of non-relatives in social communities such as neighborhoods, friends and colleagues. The authors concluded that, during the mentioned period, due to social and institutional transformations like the establishment of a new welfare system, overall increase in living standards, diversification of family forms and an increase geographic mobility, family support have lost its functionality in favor of modern networks of relationships.

Another article by Raudsepp and et al (2013) however, articulated the variation of life value patterns in Estonia between 1985 and 2008. Their results showed that, due to the institutional social transformations during the time, the structure of values remained relatively stable while the meaning of some life values changed. Comparing changes in the 90s, the authors concluded that most changes in social values happened between the 1990s and 2000s. "In 2008, Estonian people revived the pattern of life values that was observed before the beginning of societal turmoil in 1985" (Raudsepp & et al, 2013, p. 15). Finally, the authors concluded, in some structural aspects, people revived the traditional frameworks, but justified them by transformed meanings.

Trust, always has been a challenging issue in transitional societies. As the traditional sources of solidarity are not as strong as before and the modern sources are not well established yet, the lack of inter-personal trust would be a source of tension. Donna Bahry and Rick Wilson (2004) through a case study in Russia examined how transitions from authoritarian rule over the past 25 years have affected inert-personal trust amongst people. They asked in a transitional society, where the potential for ethnic conflict is high and old mechanisms for social control have weakened, to what extent do individuals trust each other? Through a combination of face-to face surveys and experimental methods, they concluded that individuals need a new stable source of trust. Their results were correlated with confidence in political and economic institutions, inter-ethnic conflict and generational change (Bahry & Wilson 2004).

2.3 Studies of Sexuality in a Transitional Society in Iran

Alongside the research and academic work that have been conducted to figure out the various aspects of social-economic transition in Iran, recently, a growing body of studies are addressing the transitional modern approaches of Iranian sexuality. For instance, Pardis Mahdavi (2007) offered a unique look into the on-going Iranian sexual revolution. Mahdavi's work argues that the social and sexual practices of the urban young adults who comprise two-thirds of Iran's population constitute a form of political dissent and rebellion. While the punishments for premarital sex, drinking and dancing are severe, the author's results reflected the interests and activities of the highly mobile, highly educated and secular young people in Tehran. Mahdavi observed over a seven-year period a group of urban youths and finally documented that the controversial changes in sexual attitudes and behaviours are real, present, and a major factor in the transformation of Iranian life.

Through a comprehensive study, Azra Etemadi (2009) explained how expectations and priorities of couples have changed among married Iranians. Her participants who were married university students, considered love and intimacy, sexual satisfaction and having an emotional bond as main reasons for marriage and marital satisfaction. She stated that for most of the participants, the reasons and perceptions of satisfaction in marriage are based on individuals' priorities rather than meeting the familial responsibilities. Integrating theory and fieldwork, Etemadi proposed a new theoretical model in order to apply and increase couples' intimacy.

Through a comparative quantitative research, Mohammad Jalal Abbasi and colleagues (2003) explained how Iranian family values, behaviour and attitudes regarding fertility and marriage have changed. Using the cross-sectional survey and data from national surveys, they focused on three periods to study; before 1980s, during 80s and after 1980s until the time of the research. Their results showed, generally, people's attitudes

and behaviour in terms of marriage, family planning, gender roles, choosing a spouse and child bearing have transformed from traditional values of familial bond to individual-choice. The authors argued that the family planning program (by which the Iranian family size decreased), alongside the social and economic changes such as promoting higher education and more egalitarian gender-regulations, were important causes of the transformation amongst Iranian families.

Many Iranian feminists however, argued that the current family law in Iran has not modernized at the rate that the people's lives had. Azadeh Kian (2008) conducted a quantitative survey to explain the extent of social changes in both rural and urban areas that caused tremendous transformation in women's attitudes. Her study also shows how far the current family laws contradict with the people's beliefs and needs. She stated, "The crucial change in women's behaviour and the contradictions between the laws of the land and the actual attitudes of Iranian women are illustrated in the results of this opinion poll" (Kian, 2008, p. 10). The author asked women to give their opinions regarding issues such as desired number of children, the ideal age of marriage, temporary marriages, spouse selection, sexual division of labour, gender division in household roles, education and social activities. The results asserted that women's attitudes were mostly against the dominant law or official ideological discourse. She also argued that education has a crucial impact on women's attitudes and their behaviour. Kian (2008) concluded that:

"Despite ethnic, religious, class or age differences and significant inequalities among women, the profound social, demographic and cultural changes which have occurred in the lives of Iranian women over the past 30 years have also led to an increase in women's awareness. Traditional perceptions concerning men's authority in the family structure and the patriarchal order founded on male domination are gradually being weakened. Women have also started to question

the enforced laws that promote gendered relations within the family and submit women to men's control" (p. 19).

Shahla Kazemipour (2013) stated that the fertility decline in modern Iran which she called the second demographic transition in Iran, was a result of transformations in patterns of marriage and divorce. She asserted that: "beside the socio-cultural changes in society, many fundamental changes have happened in sexual relations, marriage and family" (Kazemipour, 2013, p. 3). Through a secondary analysis of data provided by the 'centre of civil management and the results of DHS project in 2010', Kazemipour confirmed that, due to the social changes from 1986-2011, family as a social institution has changed, new forms of joint living has increased and individuals' freedom of choice has been at the centre of decisions. As a result, the society lives with the consequences such as a decline in marriages, a rise in age of first marriages, a rise in divorce rates, delays in childbearing, a rise of women's age at their first childbearing, and a rise in the number of childless couples or having a limited number of children. All of these changes have caused the total fertility rate in Iran to decline from 7 children in 1985 to 1.9 children per woman in 2006 (Kazemipour, 2013).

To understand the socio-cultural changes in the Iranian family, Azad Armaki et. al. (2003) and his colleagues carried out a comprehensive research by way of a systematic sampling of 383 families in Tehran. This was done to study the extent to which the participants' attitudes and values have been changed among the different generations. They concluded that changes in the functions and values of the family are inevitable in a globalized world; however, it seemed that the familial transformations in Iran did not exactly reach the level it has in western countries. Although the modern transformations had consequences such as a decrease in the importance of familial bond, a decrease in family's authority and an increase in new forms of families and relationships, however, the main familial values have survived. The authors stated:

"Almost none of the traditional values of marriage and family have vanished during three generations; many of them have continued their functions in the new forms. In modern Iran, combinations of traditional and modern values are living together and the family is still alive and functional in spite of its transformations" (Azad Armaki & et al., 2003, p. 23).

In his recent research, Azad Armaki and his colleagues (2012), tried to categorise various forms of pre-marital sexual relationships that is common in modern Iran. They argued, due to modern social transformations, the attitudes and behaviour of people have changed in many aspects including sexual life. Many scholars confirmed that pre-marital sexual relationships have been on the rise in recent years amongst Iranian youths, however, in different forms. Through qualitative in-depth interviews with non-randomized sample of 54 unmarried girls and boys who were sexually active, the authors came up with a categorization of their sexual life's patterns. They asserted that there are six main patterns in pre-marital sexual relationships of Iranian youths: "Prostitution pattern, temporary marriage pattern that could be included in the pre-modern discourse; girlfriend-boyfriend pattern, cohabitation pattern (loving relationships) and deceiving relationship's pattern that all would be categorized as modern discourse. And finally, liquid love pattern (open relationship) that is seen as a postmodern discourse" (Azad Armaki & colleagues, 2012, p. 27). They conceded that this should be seen as a complicated social reality in modern Iran that all of these patterns of sexual relationships are co-exciting and functional.

According to the mentioned researches, in spite of modern transformations in the transitional context of Iran, the traditional values and functions are still alive. However, the existing researches have not investigated on the reasons behind this contradiction.

2.3 Definition and Concept of Intimacy in Intimate Relationships

Heterosexual intimate relationships are relationships between men and women that involve emotional, psychological, and physical closeness. Intimate relationships involve physical and sexual attraction between people, liking and loving, romantic feelings and sexual relationships (Miller & Perlman, 2008). In relationship research, intimacy is posed as an indicator of relationship satisfaction and has been described as a transactional process in which individuals interact with each other, collaborate in personal validation, and coordinate their relational well-being (Burke & Young, 2012). A common conceptualization of intimacy is: "a couple's level of closeness, sharing of ideas and values, shared activities, sexuality, knowledge about each other, and acts of affection such as holding hands" (Heller & Wood, 1998, p. 4; Moss & Schwebel, 1993, p. 31; Waring, 1984, p. 6).

According to Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999), intimacy includes three main dimensions. First, intimacy involves the mutual disclosure of personal information resulting in an empathic, sympathetic mutual understanding that enables each person to feel that the other understands him or her. Second, it includes having a strong favourable attitude towards the other, which is manifested in positive, warm feelings as well as in a motivation to benefit the other. Third, intimacy involves the communication of affection (whether verbally, physically, or sexually).

According to Stahmann (2004) and Gelperin (2003), the concept of intimacy among couples could be evaluated in the following four aspects:

(a) Sexual intimacy

It may be characterized by the ability to be comfortable with the levels of sexual closeness and satisfaction which are acceptable to both partners. This form of intimacy

includes a broad range of sensuous activity and is much more than just sexual intercourse. (Stahmann 2004, Gelperin 2003, Handbook of Intimate Relationship 2009).

(b) Emotional intimacy

It refers to a situation in which couples share feelings, opinions, dreams, fear and frustrations. They trust one another and it makes them feel safe and secure (Stahmann 2004, Gelperin 2003, Handbook of Intimate Relationship 2009).

(c) Cognitive intimacy

Cognitive or intellectual intimacy is a position in which partners exchange thoughts, share ideas and enjoy similarities and differences in their opinions. If they can do this in an open and comfortable way, they can become quite intimate in the intellectual area (Stahmann 2004, Gelperin 2003, Handbook of Intimate Relationship 2009).

(d) Experiential intimacy

It implies a situation in which couples involve in mutual activities. They usually have mutual task to carry out, willing to share, discuss and enjoy together (Stahmann 2004, Gelperin 2003, Handbook of Intimate Relationship 2009).

According to the definitions, couples' intimacy refer to a situation in which couples are involved in a close, trustable and equal relationship by which both partners are satisfied sufficiently and equally. This definition of intimacy is similar to what Anthony Giddens (1992) proposed as a pure relationship and transformed intimacy:

"A good relationship is a relationship of equals, where each party has equal rights and obligations. In such a relationship, each person has respect, and wants the best for the other. The pure relationship is based upon communication, so that understanding the other person's point of view is essential. Talk, or dialogue, is the basis of making the relationship work. Relationships function best if people don't hide too much from each other — there has to be mutual

trust . . . Finally, a good relationship is one free from arbitrary power, coercion

or violence" (Giddens, 1992, p. 94; 2000, p. 80).

Therefore, the concept of 'intimacy' in current research is equal with the concept of

'transformed intimacy' (pure relationship) as proposed by Anthony Giddens (1992).

2.3.1 Theories of Intimacy in Intimate Relationships

Scholars of human sciences have attempted to theorize the concept of 'intimacy' in

different modes. The traditional dominant assumption of intimacy is seeing it as an

innate human need that can be achieved in romantic, heterosexual couples' relationship

based on equality and physical closeness. As Debra Langan and Deborah Davidson

(2010) stated, "this view ignores contextual features of interactions or relationships,

such as current practices, historical locations, or the pressure of day-to-day life in

contemporary society" (p. 3). These scholars tried to explain intimacy as a discourse

that has been constructed through cultural and historical contexts. In this view, intimacy

is not a solid concept, but a contextual based fluid phenomenon that is related with other

phenomenon in a society. Weingarten (as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010) similarly

argued: "When understood as a discourse, intimacy is no longer viewed, in an

essentialist way, as any of these things. Intimacy is no longer a need or a state of being.

Rather, as discourse, intimacy is framed as a cultural and historical construction that is

mediated by social processes… [and]… inextricably linked to the other discourses –

discourses of gender, power, domination, and sexuality" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 287, as

cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 21).

2.3.1.1 Intimacy as a Discourse

Discourse analysis is a type of social constructionism by which a useful approach has

been provided for the analysis of intimacy. According to Weingarten (1991) a

discourse: "consists of ideas and practices that share common values, reflects a specific

world view, constrains what we can feel, think and do, shapes our experiences, and evolves through collective conversations people have about their lives" (p. 290, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 12). Weingarten (1991) explained and criticized two main discourses on the subject of intimacy and then clarified her own suggestion of theorizing intimacy as a discourse. Therefore, three main discourses of intimacy are as follows:

2.3.1.1 (a) Individual Capacity

The first discourse is called 'individual capacity discourse'. According to this discourse, "achieving intimacy depends upon an individual's ability to talk about his or her private thoughts and feelings of intimacy" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 292, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 12). Weingarten however, argued that unlike the individual capacity discourse that sees the self as a coherent entity, the self is socially constructed through narratives, and this means that "individuals sometimes may have the capacity to be intimate and sometimes may not" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 289, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 13). Accordingly, intimacy would not be seen as an innate entity in individuals, but as a fluctuated status that is adventitious.

2.3.1.1 (b) Quality of Relationships

The second discourse involves the idea that intimacy grows out of long-term, committed relationships, and it does not depend on the characteristics of the individuals. Weingarten criticized this assumption and argued:

"The second discourse suggests a relationship as a static entity, rather than a series of processual interactions, giving the impression that your relationship either is or is not intimate. However, I stated that an understanding of self and relationship as a more fluid phenomena would better reflect people's fluctuating potential for and experience of intimacy" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 289, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 13).

2.3.1.1 (c) Intimacy as an Interaction

After challenging the exciting discourses of intimacy, Weingarten (1991) proposed her figuration of the subject of intimacy. She advocates thinking of intimacy as taking place at the level of interactions, so that the potential for both being intimate and non-intimate increases.

By locating intimacy firmly within context of interaction, Weingarten moves beyond essentialist assumptions of what is and is not intimate, and who is and is not intimate. Her approach allows for a wide range of interactions to count as intimate, she makes intimacy as an outcome of social construction and broadens the possibilities with respect to how intimacy can be achieved and what intimacy would be associated with. Weingarten (1991) emphasized two concepts involved in the process of making intimacy; meaning making and coordinating the action: She propounds that "Intimate interaction occurs when people share meaning or co-create meaning and are able to coordinate their actions to reflect their mutual meaning-making" (p. 287, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 13). Based on this view, a relationship could be perceived as intimate if those involved in are both co-creating meaning and co-ordinating action.

In other words, Weingarten believed, we can call a relationship intimate when a mutual interaction happens and both partners participate in meaning making and managing the actions.

2.3.1.2 Historical Changes in Family, Sexuality and Intimacy

To understand how intimacy could be perceived as a discourse that is constructed culturally and historically, it is necessary to find out how the meaning and function of families, sex, relationships and intimacy have changed over time. Understanding the historical development of the concepts provides insight into how intimacy as a discourse is a cultural-based subject and would be related to a variety of elements.

Charles Lindholm (1998) in his cross-cultural analysis argued, "The beloved is very rarely the person one marries, reproduction and romantic attraction usually do not coincide" (p. 246). For example he demonstrated, "in Victorian times, sexual desire was not fulfilled in middle class marriages, rather, married women were expected to remain virginally pure, and married men were expected to satisfy their sexual passions with prostitutes. The sexual contact between husband and wife was seen as an unfortunate necessity of marriage (Lindholm, 1998, p. 247).

Prior to the industrial revolution, family members lived and worked together. Langan and Davidson (2010) draw our attention on Wynne's (1986) work and argued:

"Family relations were based on work and economics, such that each family member had a specific task and contribution, their activities were closely coordinated and one member was subordinated to another. As a result, family members were exposed to similar experiences, pressure and common efforts, resulting in what Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1999) called an obligation of solidarity" (Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 23). However, as a traditional relationship, this solidarity between family members was not

based on free choice of individuals, but as an obligation, each member had to act based on his or her gender and family role.

Langan and Davidson (2010) state, "after industrial revolution of the 19th century and it's social, economic and cultural outcomes, obligations of solidarity transformed into obligations of individualism" (p. 23). At the time of rising individualism, work at the labour market and welfare state, the necessity of close relationships and family bonds has decreased and individuals became more independent and self-authorized. Therefore, in the individualistic society, notion of intimacy emerged as a new need, because the closeness and shared areas were not innate in relationships anymore. "Analysis of intimacy as a discourse focuses on how as economic conditions changed and familial relations individualized, the notion of intimacy was born" (Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 24).

Alongside with rising individualism and women's increasing social and economic participation in the society, their tendency to exercise agency in making individualistic choice grew alongside their attention to sexual life. Because of transformations in sexuality, sexual activity became more of a choice of the individual. Traditionally, sex was defined as a male priority and romantic love as a female priority in terms of intimate relationships. However, after this period, sexual pleasure has played an important role in relationship's decision-making, for both men and women. Although, the traditional romantic ideology is still being reinforced through the gendered binary, but as Langan and Davidson (2010) stated, "the recent changes in sexuality are in keeping with the ways in which the family and relationship's relations have become increasingly individualistic" (p. 25). New transformations that were called the 'sexual revolution' in 1960s in the west had similar effects on non-western societies that has undergone modern social and economic transformation. Lindholm (1998) pointed to the parallels between western and non-western societies with highlighting the ways in

which individuals become more self-reliant and isolated as their societies experience new transformations (Lindholm 1998).

Therefore, in contemporary societies, a rise in divorce and remarriage show that relationship, marriage and intimacy have become more elective based on an individual's free choices. It seems that, intimacy in contemporary societies is correlated with individuals' freedom and sexual transformation, especially liberating the female sexuality. As Langan and Davidson (2010) declared: "The historical portrayals suggest that the onset of the need for intimacy resulted from the rise of individualism and resulting weakened social ties among family members" (p. 28). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) propose their thesis of individualisation that suggests a new age of modernity has replaced the old predictabilities and brings new risks and opportunities. They argue that these changes have fundamentally altered the experience of love, sexuality and family life, placing intimacy at the heart of de-traditionalised life. According to them, liberated from traditional perceptions, individuals become authors of their own life scripts. While the process of individualisation weakens the traditional social and familial ties, love and intimacy are becoming more dominant in couples' relationships to ease the individuals from modern isolation: "For individuals who have to invent or find their own social setting, love becomes the central pivot giving meaning to their lives" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 170).

Similarly, Giddens (1991, 1992), found that intimacy is a need and an outcome of modern individualism. He describes a post traditional society in which men and women, progressively freed from the roles and constraints associated with traditional social ties, are compelled reflexively to create their selves through day-to-day decisions. According to Giddens, people are increasingly seeking intimate connections with others that are sustained based on mutual knowledge and understanding. Such 'pure relationships' are

entered into for their own sake and are sustained only on the grounds that each party continues to derive sufficient personal satisfaction.

However, some scholars do not see a positive correlation between modern individualism and authority with developing interpersonal intimacy. For instance, despite affirming that intimacy is a modern need, Langan and Davidson (2010) stressed on a kind of binary opposition between modern individualism and intimacy. They asserted that individualism and emphasis on individual freedom, pleasure, agency and choice are in contradiction with demands of intimacy in contemporary societies:

"We can begin to see the lack of fit between discourses of individualism and intimacy within contemporary society. These are competing discourses; individualism discourse demands independence, while intimacy discourse demands dependence" (Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 29).

According to these scholars, new transformation in gender roles and couples' expectations creates some challenges for couples to balance between their individual priorities and mutual task to keep intimacy as stated below:

"For couples to be successful interpersonally, they must create ways in which to negotiate and plan together, and this requires their ingenuity and cooperation. However, the problems raised when individuals have not learned ways of successfully dealing with these situations" (Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 29).

According to historical review, it could be perceived that the notion of intimacy has been dealt with differently over time based on different social contexts and also based on changes in other related discourses. In contemporary times, intimacy would be seen in relation to individualism, sexual desire of individuals, power relations and new expectations of couples in terms of gender roles.

2.3.2 Studies of Intimacy in Intimate Relationship

Some researchers especially in the field of social sciences have focused on the subject of intimacy in order to evaluate intimate relationships among both married and non-married couples. Lisa Hurley and Marla Reese-Weber (2012) examined how the level of intimacy and conflict strategies are related in emerging adult intimate relationships. The authors focused specifically on the relationship's duration as well as gender, for differences in conflict strategies and intimacy. Using self-reported measures, they found out the linear increase in levels of intimacy in correlation with duration. However, women reported higher levels of intimacy as compared to men; but no gender differences were reported for either positive or negative conflict strategies. Finally, they found a positive correlation between the levels of intimacy and positive conflict strategies.

Laura Buckler (2005) examined the relation between gender identity development and levels of intimacy. Examining Erikson's (1968) theory, Buckler surveyed a sample of 301 college students. An association was predicted between the women's identity and their intimacy development; Buckler's results indicated that there was no significant correlation between the identity and intimacy in females. Furthermore, the results claimed that intimacy was a predictor of identity in men. Buckler posited intimacy as a state of closeness and a sharing of feelings, ideas and dreams with an intimate partner (2005).

In addition, marital literature has identified partner intimacy and autonomy as important determinants of marital satisfaction. Catherina Goodman (1999) examined how the balance of intimacy and autonomy play a role in the success of long-term marriages among older couples. Goodman surveyed 88 men and 92 women in long-term stable marriages to understand the effects of partner intimacy and autonomy on marital satisfaction. According to her results, a higher level of autonomy was related to fewer

problems, suggesting that couples who have greater autonomy may avoid problems, have resources to cope, or may construe their lives as being more problem free, especially among middle aged couples. However, intimacy and avoidance of hostile control were more important than autonomy among long-term married couples.

Judy Pearson and her colleagues (2009) examined the effects of biological sex and perceived use of intimacy rituals on relational quality and relational intimacy. The focus of their study was to determine the role that intimacy rituals play in dating relationships, particularly in relation to perception of relational quality and relational intimacy. Ritual intimacy is posited as relating to sexual intercourse and displays of affection. Their results suggested that the perceived use of intimacy rituals has an effect on perceptions of relational quality. Dating couples, who perceived more intimacy rituals in their relationships, reported a higher level of relational quality. However, researchers found biological sex as a significant predictor of both perceptions of relational quality and perceptions of relational intimacy. Women reported a higher level of both compared to men.

Gabb et. Al (2013) conducted a study using online questionnaire among UK participants. In this study, they aimed to understand how quality and stability are experienced and imagined in long-term relationships, and to examine the gendered relationship work that women and men do to stay together. Findings showed, younger men and older men tend to score higher in their relationship quality, relationship maintenance and happiness with relationship/partner than middle aged men. The youngest group of women (up to age 34) score significantly higher on these measures and on relationship satisfaction than older women. They also found that childless married and unmarried participants are happier with their relationship and their partner than parents. Unmarried parents are slightly happier than married parents.

2.3.2.1 Couples' Intimacy and Sexual Relationship

As the association between sexual relationship and couples' intimacy, has not been specifically examined by academic studies, most literature in this part have been taken from researches regarding the relationship between sexual relationship's quality and relational quality.

Kevin Lewandowski and Tara Schrage (2010) focused on sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction as a predictor of intimacy among couples. The purpose of their study was to look at the differences between couples in short-term and long-term relationships with regards to their relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction and sexual conflict. While individuals in long-term relationships were hypothesized as having higher relationship and sexual satisfaction as well as lower levels of sexual conflict, but the results of the online survey indicates no statistically significant differences between individuals in short and long term relationships. The findings yielded a statistically significant positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. The results also found statistically significant negative correlations between sexual conflict and relationship satisfaction, and sexual conflict and sexual satisfaction.

Moreover, Susan Sprecher (2002) also pointed to sexual satisfaction as an important factor in a relationship's quality and intimacy, although among unmarried couples. Her investigation focused on how sexual satisfaction is associated with a relationship quality and stability among unmarried couples. With data collected at multiple times over several years from a sample of heterosexual couples, she examined how at each wave of the study, sexual satisfaction was associated positively with relationship satisfaction, love and commitment for both men and women. In addition, change in sexual satisfaction between Time 1 and Time 2 was associated with change over the same period in relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment. Furthermore, some evidence

showed that sexual satisfaction was associated with relationship stability. Overall, sexual satisfaction had stronger links with a relationship's quality for men than for women. This result might suggest a kind of stereotypical tendency in female respondents to underestimate the importance of sexual life in a relationship.

Furthermore, Julia Heiman and her colleagues (2011) have examined the relationship between sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. Evaluating sexual satisfaction based on sexual functioning and physical intimacy, they hypothesized that it would be related with relationship happiness in midlife among older couples. To examine the hypothesis, they carried out a survey on 1009 middle-aged and older couples in five countries; Brazil, Germany, Japan, Spain and U.S. and their results confirmed that relationship happiness and satisfaction is positively correlated with sexual satisfaction for both couples. However, while both physical intimacy and sexual functioning were correlated with the level of male relationship satisfaction, in women only sexual functioning predicted the relationship satisfaction. Moreover, unlike women, for men, longer relationship duration was positively related with greater relationship happiness and sexual satisfaction. In general, Heiman and colleagues concluded that relationship satisfaction and happiness is predicted by sexual satisfaction for both men and women in stable long relationships.

2.3.3 Studies of Couples' Intimacy and Sexual Relationship in Iran

There are not many academic research conducted in the field of couples' intimacy, sexuality and its obstacles in Iran. Considering the rise in relationship conflicts in recent years, some scholars emphasized on the problem mostly under the name of relationship satisfaction and closeness.

Majid Movahed and Tahereh Azizi (2011) published a study aimed at examining the correlation between women's sexual satisfaction and couples' conflicts, by distributing

surveys among 400 married women. They elaborated the term of sexual satisfaction in four dimensions: sexual happiness, sexual communication, mutual understanding and sexual anxiety. The authors operationalized couples' conflict as verbal, mental and physical. The results showed significantly negative relation between women's sexual satisfaction and couples' conflicts. The researchers also declared women's low awareness about sexual relationship and couples' misunderstanding in terms of sexual needs as some of the main causes of sexual dissatisfaction among couples.

The relation between sexuality, intimacy and marital satisfaction among Iranian first-time parents was examined by Zarea Nezhad and Moazami (2011). Their results from a quantitative survey demonstrated a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction for both genders. However, they emphasized the importance of emotional intimacy through which the negative effects of sexual dissatisfaction could be diminished. Moreover, they concluded higher levels of sexual desire reported by husbands compared to wives.

Asoodeh et al (2011) also conducted a research on Iranian successful couples. From the view point of happy couples, they tried to identify successful family communication, and the results showed that happy couples indicated on some factors of transformed intimacy as their model of communication, such as; solve their own problems, have mutual understanding in financial management and costs, spend their leisure time together, being good friends, and respect each other. In a separate paper, Daneshpour and et.al (2011) stated that happy Iranian couples formulated some effective factors for their successful marriage including; we trust each other and committed, we consult with each other, we think our relationship is intimate, we solve our problems, we cooperate with each other in children uprising, we share common beliefs, and we express our love to each other (Daneshpour et al, 2011). Many aspects of transformed and pure intimacy

are mentioned by happy couples; however, the sexual life has not been addressed in these studies.

2.4 Definition and Concept of Transformation of Intimacy

Anthony Giddens (1992) originally proposed the subject of 'transformation of intimacy'. Giddens suggests 'transformation of intimacy' as a consequence of modernity, and refers to a situation in which the traditional relationships have been transformed into modern ones. In these transformations, due to de- traditionalization of pre-modern relationships that were based on essentialist assumptions about natural gender differences, intimate relationships have been transformed to a kind of pure relationship that is characterized by equality and autonomy of each partner. According to Giddens, the transformation of intimacy raises the possibility of equality and intimacy in personal life and democratising gender relationships (Giddens 1992).

To figure out what Giddens means exactly by the concept of transformation of intimacy, it is necessary to concentrate on his explanation of modern times. For Giddens, globalization and developing expert systems are central concepts of de-traditionalization in the scope of personal relationships. In Giddens's thoughts (1990), a key dimension along which social systems would change is in the degree to which these systems are organised around interactions between agents who are distant from one another. As he argues, "in pre-modern times, societies were formed through local interactions between place-based kinship and friendship networks. In modern societies, however, the level of time-space distinction is much greater" (Giddens, 1990, p. 18). Weakened local solidarity and interaction besides the growing industrialism and capitalism, leads to the modern times contributing to interactions with physically absent others, as a routine feature of social life for modern citizens. At the same time, with the onset of modernity, people's lives become tied to the world capitalist economy, the international division of labour, and the world military order (Giddens, 1990). These

global interactions, Giddens argues, "along with the new communications and transportation technologies have facilitated the development of international trade and world financial markets and have accelerated the pace of cultural diffusion" (Giddens, 1990, p. 64, 1994, p. 88). As a result, Giddens states that, distant events affect modern individuals more directly and immediately than before. Giddens proposed the concept of 'disembedding' as a result of increasing time-space distanciation. For him, disembedding refers to the process of "lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their re-structuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens, 1990, p. 21).

Giddens also asserts that the challenging issue of this new situation is 'trust'. "Modern social intercourse would be imperilled were individuals unwilling to trust the legion of physically absent others on whom they are dependant". However, modernity provides the authority of expert systems to meet the problems of trust. Individuals put their trust in such systems like medical system, financial system or the aviation system (Giddens, 1990, p. 34, 1994, p. 89-90). He states that

"An expert system disembeds… by providing 'guarantees' of expectations across distanciated time-space. This is achieved via the impersonal nature of tests applied to evaluate technical knowledge and by public critique… used to control its form" (Giddens, 1990, p. 28).

Moreover, Giddens believes that globalization and the rise of expert systems are not only related with stretching the time-space, but they affect every personal relationship, especially his central aspect of emphasis; intimate and sexual relationships. He argued "transformations in terms of intimacy, caused relationships to undergo a shift from the ideal of romantic love to the pure or confluent relationship" (Giddens, 1992, p. 42).

According to Giddens, the pre-modern relationships that he calls romantic love were based on traditional intrinsic beliefs that identify gender roles and expectations as being naturally different. While in modern transformations, individuals could be involved in pure relationships that stand on the equality and autonomy of each participant (Giddens, 1992, p. 42). In addition to globalization and the growth of expert systems, Giddens believes in some other social changes that caused intimacy to be transformed. Two crucial factors in his mind are, on the one hand fertility decline and the developing contraceptive technologies, and on the other hand, the rising women's sexual autonomy, by which plastic sexuality was allowed to appear as stated by him:

"a progressive differentiation of sex from the exigencies of reproduction and ushered in an era of plastic sexuality in which, especially for women, sexuality became malleable and a potential property of the individual…Plastic sexuality, in turn, militated in favour of the pure relationship. Women were freed from much of the fear previously associated with sex, fear of repetitive pregnancies, and therefore of death, given the substantial proportion of women who perished in childbirth and could now make sexual fulfilment a life-goal and a condition for remaining in relationships…A 'revolution in female sexual autonomy', that is in women finding sexual pleasure in ways which are not dictated by men, and the flourishing of homosexuality (1992:28) are manifestations of plastic sexuality. In confluent love, sexuality and intimacy are tied together as never before…" (Giddens, 1992, p. 27-28).

Therefore, in Giddens's view, transformation of intimacy is a process along which traditional perceptions of relationship and gender roles have been transformed to kinds of relationships in which satisfaction, equality in rights and responsibilities and expectations of both parties are at the centre of the arrangement. Moreover, human sexuality has been emancipated from traditional boundaries; female sexual life specially

has become as autonomous and important as male sexual life is. Due to the transformation of intimacy, traditional gendered relationships are replaced with pure relationships or transformed intimacy.

2.4.1 Feminist Critiques of Transformation of Intimacy

Although Giddens does not suggest that all contemporary relationships achieve the ideals of pure love, nevertheless, he claims that "reasonably durable sexual ties, marriages and friendship relations all tend to approximate today to the pure relationship" (Giddens, 1992, p. 87). He states, "The degree to which intimate spheres are transformed in this way, plainly varies according to context and differential socioeconomic position, in common with most of the traits of modernity" (Giddens, 1992, p. 98). However, some scholars have criticized Giddens's account of transformation of intimacy. The most popular critics of his views came from feminist scholars when they argue that Giddens neglects the effect of patriarchal structures that exist in the realm of modern relationships. Lynn Jamieson (1999) claimed Giddens's theory of transformation of intimacy is too far from the reality. Referring to the related researches and literatures, Jamieson tries to explain how Giddens's assumption would not be functional in the real world. For example, expanding David Morgan's proposition on (1991, 1992, and 1996) attitude of ideological simplification of social changes, Jamieson argued that "Giddens's account of the pure relationship fits well with a therapeutic discourse that assume the value of self-disclosure in therapy and in the relationships which therapy hopes to cure" (Jamieson, 1999, p. 4). However, it is just a hope, rather than a reality.

Moreover, Jamieson argues that the structure of gender inequality is still playing a role in the transformation of intimacy. She criticized Giddens for not discussing feminist works that have "subjected the interrelationships between private and public, personal and political to intensive theorizing and empirical exploration over the last decades" (Jamieson, 1999, p. 5). Following the other feminist scholars, Jamieson believes it is impossible to focus on the private and personal sphere without paying attention to the

political and social forces by which personal relationships would be affected. She states that

"It is not clear, for example, that change in the quality of heterosexual relationships would shatter the interconnection of gendered labor markets, gendered distributions of income and wealth, and gendered divisions of domestic labor" (Jamieson, 1999, p. 6).

Jamieson also states that, neglecting the relations of existing patriarchal structures with personal relationships, Giddens is cut off from both values of feminist research and his own earlier theories of the interrelationships of structure and action. She also refers to David Morgan's (1996) argument on the possibility of surviving patriarchal regulations within debates of equality:

"It may be that the family and heterosexuality are not the place to start when trying to change gender relations .Moreover, it should be noted that many leading theorists of gender and power could envisage gender equality in a heterosexual personal life within and despite patriarchal arrangements. Further, if we see patriarchy as referring to properties of a system as a whole rather than to the individual actors who make up the system, it may be possible to find at the more individual or interpersonal level, examples of non-patriarchal [non-oppressive] yet gendered practices" (Morgan,1996, p. 91, as cited in Jamieson, 1999, p. 6).

Furthermore, Jamieson argues that Giddens's discussion of plastic sexuality in which sexual pleasure and desire would be equally shared between couples are not empirically proven. She refers to a large-scale survey held in Britain and the United States (Wellings & Lauman 1994) and their results that showed there are still gender differences in terms of sexual desire and sexual satisfaction:

"On all measures of sexual activity investigated, ranging from questions on thinking about sex and masturbating (asked only in the United States) to questions on number and type of partners and forms of sexual activity engaged in with them, more men are sexually active than women. The US survey revealed that men are still more likely to experience orgasm during sex than women are and the British survey showed that men think orgasm is more essential to sexual satisfaction than women" (Jamieson, 1999, p. 7).

Jamieson also believes that although transformation of intimacy and pure relationship promise more equality and democratic regulations in intimate relationships, however, she argues that, empirical works have not supported this argument:

"Empirical work on heterosexual couples routinely continues to find that men tend to exercise more power than women in the partnerships: for example, having more choice concerning opting in and out of domestic work and child care (Brannen and Moss 1991), and exercising more control of money (Morris 1990; Pahl 1989; Vogler 1994)" (cited in Jamieson, 1999, p. 8).

Generally, Jamieson concludes her criticism that Giddens's discussion on transformation of intimacy is optimistic rather than realistic, since it seems that "personal relationships remain highly gendered and intimacy and inequality continue to co-exist in many personal lives. Men and women routinely both invoke gender stereotypes or turn a convenient blind eye to gendering processes when making sense of themselves as lovers, partners, mothers, fathers and friends"(Jamieson, 1999, p. 15).

Gabb (2001) on the other hand has raised the other feministic critical ideas of egalitarian intimacy. She argued that the ideology of heterosexual relationships in terms of intimacy and love discourses promotes and reinforces patriarchal relations.

"Love is linked to women's search for identity and value in a society in which they are marginalized. The literature on gender differences supports the idea that men and women cannot meet one another's needs, and that it is women who become the victims of love (Gabb, 2001, p. 316).

Langan and Davidson (2010) similarly argued:

"Women hold expectations about intimacy, and engage in intimacy work not because their experiences are profoundly shaped by Intimacy Discourse. By investing in, or 'buying into' intimacy discourse, women engage in an inordinate amount of 'intimacy work', expending considerable time and energy pursuing the ideological, and frequently unrealizable dream of intimacy" (p. 31).

They discussed intimacy even in the contemporary era as not necessarily an equal notion in which both partners involve have the same expectations and rights. They also referred to Jamieson's critical points of transformed intimacy. She asserted that even when couples identified their relationship as intimate; it would not necessarily lead us to capture an equal relationship: "Couples often overlook their inequalities, and define their relationships as intimate even though they are contributing differentially to the maintenance of their relationships" (Jamieson, 1999, p. 484).

Besides the feminists' critiques of Giddens, advocators of social exchange theory also raised some debates against the discussion of equal intimacy. While Giddens believes that the heterosexual relationship is a pure relationship, in which mutual satisfaction, equal responsibilities and equal rights of both partners are at the center of attention, and both partners want the best for the other, in social exchange theory, an intimate relationship, like other relationships in the society is a matter of benefit and cost. This argument has been put forward by Baumeister and Vohs;

"Social exchange theory analyzes interactions between two parties by examining the costs and benefits to each. Interactions are only likely to continue if each party gains more than it loses. Crucially, the exchange analysis assumes that in each social interaction, each person gives something to the other and gains something from the other (hence the exchange). The value of what is gained and exchanged depends in part on the preferences of the individuals and in part on the broader market" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p. 3).

Unlike Giddens's opinion, the social exchange theory argues men and women are not involved in relationships to pursue the intimacy and equality, but rather, they enter into the relationship to achieve more benefits and less loss. In other words, each party tries to gain more outcomes and make less investment; more rights and less responsibility. Following the social exchange logic, Catherin Hakim (2011) proposed another criticism against Giddens's discussion on transformation of intimacy and pure relationship. Hakim accused Giddens of standing on patriarchal ideology. Emphasizing on the female advantage of erotic power, she argued, men naturally are in more sexual needs and fantasy than women are:

"Due to men's sexual deficits and their obvious greater sexual needs, sex attraction would be seen as a feminine advantage and a resource by which women could promote their bargaining power against men" (Hakim, 2011, p. 23).

Therefore, Catherin Hakim states that, the women's motives to engage in sex should be towards getting some advantages in return for sex and there is no similarity or equality in sexual life between men and women. Hakim finally declares, "Giddens's discussion on pure equal relationship makes men

completely free of any responsibility to compensate the sexual and emotional services women provide for them" (Hakim, 2011, p. 127).

2.4.2 Studies of Transformation of Intimacy

During the recent decades, some researchers have focused on new forms of intimate relationships and explained how the relationships have transformed in both form and content. Moreover, these studies tried to figure out the consequences of the changes. Neil Gross and Solon Simmons (2002) through a self-selected online survey among US adults aged between 25-74, tried to examine a part of Giddens theory on transformed intimacy and pure relationship. According to Giddens's theory, while pure relationship assures human freedom and happiness, at the same time, it would cause feelings of insecurity and anxiety among the individuals involved, because of the frangible nature of commitment in modern relationships. The empirical examinations of Simmons however did not support Giddens thesis. Her results showed that people in pure relationships gain the rewards that Giddens pointed, the negative side effects of such relationships were not found. In fact, the anxiety and feelings of insecurity were not confirmed by participants who were involved in pure relationships.

Ray Pahl and Liz Spencer (2003) in their qualitative study explained to what extent families of choice are replacing traditional given families. Through sixty in-depth interviews conducted in England and Wales, the researchers proposed the concept of 'personal communities' to articulate the new familial relationships. They stated contemporary family relationships are more friend-like; however, it is still a combination of modern and traditional regulations and values. Finally, the researchers concluded that, unlike what Giddens argued about pure relationship and transformed intimacy, it would be more realistic to view new families as being based on personally chosen communities rather than identifying them as completely modern and egalitarian

relationships, because some traditional rules are still playing a role in contemporary families.

Some scholars have investigated how transformation of intimacy over time has influenced different aspects of a couple's life. For example, Marieke Voorpostel and her colleagues (2009) conducted a study to find out to what extent the amount of time partners spend together has changed over forty years. Referring to intimacy theories especially Giddens's discussion on transformation of intimacy, the researchers declared that changes in the society have led to changes in the nature of marriage and relationships, placing more emphasis on shared time among couples. Using data from the American heritage time use study and covering the years 1965, 1975 and 2003, the researchers concluded that not only in proportions but also in absolute minutes, partners spend more time together now than forty years ago. Their results confirmed Giddens's idea of transformation of intimacy in which it is argued that due to social changes, personal ties would be stronger by self-disclosure and close mutual activities and understanding.

Maciej Musial (2013) tried to articulate the modern intimacy as a double-sided phenomenon. On the one hand, referring to Giddens's theory, the researcher believes that due to the transformation of intimacy in the modern age, individuals become free from the customs and traditions and they have more autonomy, intimacy and equality than before. On the other hand, Musial argues that the other side of modern relationships has been articulated by Beck, Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Hochschild (2003). Accordingly, Musial discussed, disadvantages of modernization are the situation in which intimacy has been emancipated from traditions, but simultaneously it has been colonized by capitalism and market. The writer finally concluded these features would not be seen as contradictory approaches but as complementary perspectives to see both

advantages and disadvantages of modern transformation of intimacy in contemporary modernity.

In her qualitative study of middle-class Americans, sociologist Ann Swidler (2001) demonstrates the countervailing forces of Giddens's theory about transformation of intimacy and its rival discussions. She found that people usually talk about relationships and love contradictorily; while participants advocated that relationship is hard work that never promises permanence, at the same time, they invoked elements of romantic love ideology, such as the idea that true love could be permanent. Swidler argues that people are fluctuating between what Giddens called pure relationship and traditional perceptions of romantic love. The researcher concluded, "The ongoing influence of marriage as a social institution keeps the romantic model of intimacy culturally relevant, despite the emergence of a newer model of intimacy that sees love very differently" (Swidler, 2001, p. 200). Swidler's findings partially contradict both ideas of completed transformation in notions of intimacy and diminish the influence of marriage as a cultural model of intimate relationships.

Similarly, Carol Smart and Beccy Shipman (2004) carried out interviews with British families in which one or more close family members are living in another country. Their results showed that people often try to make a balance between individualistic approaches to marriage and traditional values of marriage within their cultures, families and religions. They finally declared Giddens's theory of radical transformation of intimacy as neglecting the diversity of cultural values.

However Andrew Cherlin (2009) speculated that American families are somewhere between two contrary cultures; marriage and individualism. He argues that although the nature of marriage and relationships has transformed throughout modern times, the influence of marriage institutions has not diminished. The researcher explains how

American individuals have established a pattern of high marriage and re-marriage rates, frequent divorces and separations, and short-term cohabitations. He argued this revolution in relationships could be call as "carousel of intimate partnerships" (Cherlin, 2009, p. 11).

Tina Kogovsek and her colleagues (2011) examined the idea of transformation of intimacy amongst Slovenian online users who use the internet to find a date. Their findings shows that internet daters' attitudes regarding relationships, love and monogamy were almost transformed in some ways, but not as revolutionary as it was assumed based on theoretical arguments. According to their results, internet daters still advocate the long-term emotionally and sexually exclusive relationship as a normal value, however, their expectations of a satisfying relationship was not based on ideas of romantic love, but rather based on confluent love and pure relationship that is standing on values of equality and autonomy.

Kate Hughes's (2005) study on Australian participants however proved Giddens account of transformation of intimacy. In her study, Hughes attempted to examine the extent of Giddens (1992) and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) discussions regarding the fragile nature of modern relationships and their possibilities of reflexivity and contingency. To find out how young people perceive intimate relationships and family, the researcher selected adult children of divorce from Generation X as participants. This group was chosen, Hughes argued, because they grew up in an age where the pressures of a stable marriage and holiness of traditional values had almost disappeared, and because they were raised in a single parent, step or blended families. Her results demonstrated that the notion of a fragile family is almost normalized among individuals in the study. They argued that the nuclear family as an institution is limited to meet modern needs. The participants declared that future families would be a temporary agreement that is determined more by the quality of relationships rather than by biology

and formal structures. Hughes finally concluded that participants' perceptions of family and relationships fully support Giddens's idea of modern transformation of intimacy.

Some researchers advocate the idea that women and men perceive the notion of intimacy differently. For example, Gayle Kaufman (2000) in his longitudinal study in 1987/1988 and 1992/1994 waves of national surveys examined how the men's and women's attitudes about gender roles have been transformed over time. The results indicated a gap between men's and women's attitudes in both egalitarian and traditional groups. While egalitarian women are less likely to have a child and more likely to get a divorce compared to traditional women, egalitarian men in contrast, are more likely to have a child and less likely to divorce compared to traditional men. His findings also confirmed the gap between traditional women and traditional men in their attitudes regarding divorce, fertility intention and fertility outcomes.

In another academic study, Catherine Bolzendahl and Daniel Myers (2004) examine how women's and men's attitudes from 1974 to 1998 have been transformed in terms of feminist outlook and gender equality. They found out in relation to attitudes towards premarital sex, both men and women have become more liberalized. However, in a remarkable gap, men show significantly more liberal attitudes every year. On the other hand, in terms of supporting the egalitarian family responsibilities, it shows levels have risen steadily each year, although, they declared that women have more egalitarian attitudes compared to men. However, the researchers state that, the lower standard deviation scores for men suggest that there is somewhat more agreement among them than among women in terms of opinion about family roles. The researchers concluded that predictors of changing attitudes in both men and women are almost the same. However, similar to the previous study, Bolzendahl and Daniel (2004) did not articulate why men and women perceive some aspects of attitudinal changes differently. Thus, the

current study aims at exploring the approaches through which women and men react towards the modern values of relationships and gender roles.

2.5 Definition and Concept of Women's Sexual Agency

The concept of women's sexual agency is adapted as an equivalent of what Giddens called women's sexual autonomy. In his thoughts, female sexual autonomy was a situation in which women could enjoy sexual pleasure and control their own sexual life by themselves. In fact, women could be as autonomous as men in exercising power, control the sexual life and enjoy the same pleasure as men do (Giddens 1992). According to Giddens account, in this study, women's sexual agency is assumed as an aspect of transformation of intimacy.

Sexual agency includes:

"the ability to define yourself sexually - whether that means along the heterosexuality/homosexuality spectrum, along the spectrum that runs from asexual to highly interested in sex, or both. The ability to choose whether you want to experience sexual activity - both in general and with a specific person at a specific time in a specific way -, the ability to choose how you want to engage in sexual activity. And the ability to stop engaging in a sexual act that is no longer wanted or to refuse an act that was never desired" (Boskey, 2011, p. 1).

Accordingly, women's sexual agency has been defined as "women's power to initiate, to enjoy sex, to experiment, to control own sexual life and have a sense of self in sexual behavior" (Hooks, 1984, p. 42). Crown and Roberts (2007) also define sexual agency as "the ability to act according to one's will in a sexual realm. In her qualitative research, Piage Avert (2004) has discussed sexual agency as initiative taking, awareness of desire, and the individual's confidence and freedom to express their sexuality in behaviors.

Based on these definitions, four main factors were identified as indicators of sexual agency and autonomy in women:

(a) Sexual Activity

Many sex research scholars, operationalize sexual agency as being active in sexual relationships, being able to follow one's own sexual desire and needs, being assertive and taking the initiative in fulfilling own sexual needs and expressing passion and willingness for a sexual life instead of shyness and fear (Avert 2004; Pitard & Robertson 2008). Pitard and Robertson (2008) define the activity as "making and asserting decisions and participating by one's own sexual will" (p. 12). Avert (2004) identifies a woman as a sexual agent and active when she initiates and is able to vocalize and express her sexual desire.

Accordingly, the term of 'activity in sexual life' refers to women's status of being assertive, initiative, responsible and able to follow their own sexual desires and needs.

(b) Sexual Power

Many writers report that gendered power differences are reflected in women's intimate relationships and sexual behavior. According to Dixon-Mueller (1993), there are differences in women and men's access to power, influence and decision making about intercourse, including the type and frequency of sexual practice (Dixon-Mueller, 1993 in Pulerwitz, Gortmaker & DeJong, 2000). They state that power imbalance can manifest itself in control over sexual initiation and refusal. It can also lead to male control over the process of safer sex negotiation (Pulerwitz, Gortmaker, & DeJong, 2000). As mentioned before, the ability to have control over sexual intercourse and contribute to the decision making about sexual life and having a voice in sexual intercourse (Avert 2004, Robertson & Pitard 2008) have implications for women's sexual agency.

Therefore, examining women's power in sexual life in terms of their control over sexual life and their ability to make decisions would be the other factor to assess women's sexual agency.

(c) Sexual Awareness

Sexual awareness is defined as a condition in which an individual has conscious knowledge about physical as well as emotional aspects of sex. She/he can recognize sexual desires and preferences. It also covers the awareness about safe sexual behavior, sexual function and the importance of sex (McCarthy, 2012). In some academic works, female sexual agency has been defined in relation to the status of women's awareness and understanding of their own sexual desires (Wood, Mansfield & Koch, 2007, Avert, 2004). Accordingly and based on the Snell's operationalization of sexual awareness through his standard questionnaire (Snell, 1997), this study defines sexual awareness as women's consciousness of their own sexual desire, preferences and sexual functions as well as their awareness of the importance of sexual life in an intimate relationship.

(d) Sexual Motives

Sexual motives are "Reasons or motives that guide women's decision to engage in sex with a partner (Impett & Tolman, 2006, p. 4)". As Tang, Bensman, and Hatfield (2012) defined 'sexual motives' as "the conscious and subjective reasons that men and women give for participating in sexual activities" (p. 8). Cultural theorists, psychological perspectives and social historians provide evidence as to the variety of motives that have motivated people to seek out or avoid sexual activity. According to Meston and Buss (2007), important motives to pursue sex is categorised in four categories:

 i. *Physical factors*: stress reduction, pleasure, physical desirability, experience seeking.

 ii. *Goal attainment*: resources, social status, revenge, utilitarian

iii. *Emotional factors*: love and commitment, expression

iv. *Insecurity factors*: self-esteem boost, duty or pressure, mate guarding or keeping

A distinction made by many theories of motivation is whether an individual acts to obtain a positive outcome or to avoid a negative outcome. As some researchers such as Avert (2004), Impett and Tolman (2006), cited, a person is a sexual agent when she or he engages in sexual behavior to follow their own sexual needs and pleasures. Therefore, in sexual agency research, positive motives that imply agency are those referred to as meeting their own willingness and desires, while negative motives that are seen as obstacles of sexual agency, include the avoidance of unpleasant experience or to objectification of one's own sexuality to improve social or economic status. Accordingly, female respondents have been asked whether they engage in sex due to positive or negative motives. As it was defined above, positive motives would imply sexual agency in women.

2.5.1 Studies of Women's Sexual Agency

Most of the work on women's sexuality has been carried out by feminist scholars. In this field, gender has been mentioned as a central variable in acquiring a sexual attitude and in experiencing sexual behaviour. Male hegemony affects women's experience in sexual life. Having agency, freedom and pleasure in sexual life, have been the central interest of feminist researchers. The feminist approach argues that, female sexuality should be accepted and women should be free to have sex whenever they like, with whomever they like. The other discussion is that women should be empowered to refuse sex when they want to, or to have their sexuality respected in the society. Generally speaking, the feminist perspective addresses women's sexuality as a phenomenon that is misunderstood, somewhat misrepresented and strangely taboo in the society (Wyatt, 1994). Feminist theories focus on men and women working together for equality among the sexes; illustrate sexism in our culture, and finds out how this sexism leads to power inequities in the bedroom (Strongand & et.al 2008). They explain that women's sexual scripts influence them to be sexually passive, whereas men's sexual scripts encourage them to initiate and to be in control in sexual situations. Meanwhile, Crown and Roberts (2007) defined sexual agency as "the ability to act according to one's will in a sexual realm. These definitions imply that an individual who experiences herself as a sexual agent is able to make choices and shares control with her partner in her sexual decision-making and sexual experiences.

During the 1970s and 1980s, in the wake of the sexual revolution, numerous feminist writers started to address the question of female sexuality from their own female perspective, rather than allowing female sexuality to be defined in terms of largely male studies. The first such popular book was Nancy Friday's 'My Secret Garden' (1973). In this book, women's fantasies were collected through letters, tapes and personal

interviews. It is the first published compilation of women's sexual fantasies and it refuted many previously accepted notions of female sexuality.

Criticizing power imbalance between men and women, Hannah Frith and Celia Krtzinger (1997) focused on women's experiences of sexual coercion and suppression. They directed it to sexual miscommunication. Based on miscommunication theory, men forced women into unwanted sexual experiences because women simply do not communicate their desires effectively. The miscommunication model emphasizes the honest bewilderment of men who rape women without noticing that they are doing so and the responsibility of women to improve their communication skills. According to this theory, miscommunication is an obstacle in hearing women's sexual voices and the solution is to improve communication between both sexes through social learning and cultural development. Frith and Krtzinger conclude that miscommunication theory is useful for women in attempting to sustain heterosexual relationships and to improve their skills in having a sense of control in their own sexual relations.

One important source in the study of sexual agency is on 'Paternal communications and young women's struggle for sexual agency' a research project conducted by Paige Averett (2004) as a PhD dissertation. Her qualitative study examined how young women's sexual desire and agency was influenced by messages communicated from their parents. She has concluded that some patriarchal social controls such as the fear of being viewed as a slut, gender roles that demand female passivity and establishing sex as a scary phenomenon, were usual messages transmitted from the paternal context. Implications for parenting practices and the importance of developing sexual agency were mainly discussed throughout this study, besides a special focus on the necessity of female sexual agency in order to make women healthier, and in constructing more desirable intimate relationships.

Sharon Horne (2005) examined female sexual subjectivity and the state of their well-being among 449 adolescent girls. She compared females based on different patterns of sexual experiences (sexually inexperienced, sexually experienced non-coital, and sexually experienced coital in early, middle or normative age of first sexual intercourse). Through examination by various measures and variables, she found that females with more sexual experience were higher in sexual subjectivity and sexual agency. The researcher emphasizes the importance of sexuality education programs to improve young girls' awareness of their sexual rights. Another study by Crown and Roberts (2007) examined the characteristics and consequences of undergraduate women's 'non-agentic' sexual experiences. They say, "Any sexual interaction that occurs in the absence of partner's choice can be understood as potentially consequential" (Crown & Roberts, 2007, p. 6). The researchers found that negative sexual experiences could have psychological implications, even when only minimal coercion was present. They also claim that sexual agency, or being able to take control in sexual situations, is an important part of sexual health and psychological well-being.

Studies showed having a sense of agency leads women to be more sexually healthy. According to Moore and Davidson (1997), when women do not feel they are empowered, they are prone to feelings of guilt afterward and are unlikely to practice safe sexual habits in the moment. If women do not feel that they have power in sexual situations, they will be passive, allowing their partners to control the situations. If women are taught to be sexual agents, they will "perceive themselves as having a choice and empowered" (Moore & Davidson, 1997, p. 13). This type of therapy might is beneficial in helping women develop a sense of positive, active, and healthy sexual agency. The authors finally declare, by seeing themselves as agents, these women would be empowered to make healthy choices .

Emily Impett and Deborah Tolman (2006) examined sexual satisfaction among late adolescent girls aged 16-19. In their proposed model, sexual self-concept and sexual motives were tested as predictors of adolescent girls' sexual satisfaction with their most recent experience of sexual intercourse. As a result, they declared a positive relation between self-concept and sexual motives with quality of sexual satisfaction during their most recent intercourse. Two years later, Rachel Pittard and Rachel Rabertson (2008), focused on women's sexual agency and tried to identify sexual agency at different levels (fully agentic, partially agentic and fully non-agentic), during the first sexual experience of participants. Authors examined sexual agency based on three dimensions: connection/disconnection, activity/passivity, and interaction/isolation. They finally concluded that fully agentic women display connection with their experience, interaction with their partner and activity in their encounter, those women also describe their encounter as positive.

Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton (2009) published a study, which aimed to explore young women's reflexivity, narratives and embodied practices of agency in their sexual and intimate relationships. Through a focus group study and in- depth interviews, they concluded that the sensual experience of the body are crucial to understand an agentic practice in young women's sexual and intimate relationships. Moreover, their results declared physicality appears to be felt and experienced, often at quite an unconscious or instinctual level. Finally, this work suggests that sustained agentic practice might occur through a systematisation of insight (a more reflective process). However, sustained sexual agentic practice may also occur when young women become more confident and knowledgeable about sex and what is pleasurable to them.

Reviewing on obstacles of women's sexual agency, Melissa Burkett and Karine Hamilton (2012) examined the new models of sexual consent and agency that women, as free and autonomous agents, are in control of their sexuality and are able to 'just say

no' to unwanted sex. In-depth interviewing with eight young women, the authors found a contradiction between women's positive perception of their own sexual agency (influenced by contemporary compulsory agency) and their real experiences of failing in sexual consent negotiating. The researchers concluded that in spite of their claims of being a sexual agent, most of the young women interviewed in this study encountered difficulties in negotiating their sexual consent. They showed two conspicuous gaps: (1) the gap between participants' claims of sexual agency (i.e. 'I've never felt like there was nothing I couldn't get out of') and their descriptions of feeling pressured, unable to change their minds or to verbalise their sexual wishes, and (2) the gap in participants' awareness of these contradictions. Criticizing post-feminist sensibilities theory, Burkett and Hamilton (2012) said this is too optimistic and awkward idea that the blatant denigration of women is no longer acceptable; somehow, it is women themselves who are freely choosing to cooperate in practices that conform to traditional gender stereotypes. They finally underscore the necessity of reconnecting popular understandings of sex with issues of power, gender and sociocultural norms.

Maria Harvey and her colleagues (2002) explored how couples of Mexican origin define power in intimate relationships, what makes men and women feel powerful in relationships, and the role of each partner in control and decision making related to sexual and reproductive matters. Interviews were conducted with each partner of 39 sexually active couples and data were analysed using content analysis. Their results indicated that power is perceived as control over one's partner and the ability to make decisions. Women say they feel more powerful in relationships when they make unilateral decisions and have economic independence. Men feel powerful when they have control over their partner and bring home the money. Respondents agreed that women make decisions about household matters and children, while men make decisions related to money. Findings showed that whereas couples share decision

making about sexual activities and contraceptive use, men were seen as initiators of sexual activity and women were more likely to suggest condom use. Overall, the researchers declared that stereotypical gender roles have been seen as being partially dominant among participants.

Considering the quality of orgasm as a sign of women's sexual agency, some scholars focused on this issue in their academic studies. Farnaz Kaighobadi and her colleagues (2011) conducted a qualitative study among 453 heterosexual young women in a long-term relationship. Through the self-reported data, researchers found that some women fake orgasm as a strategy of mate retaining. Their results indicated that women, who perceive higher risk of partner's unfaithfulness, are more likely to use mate retention strategies. They also found that pretending to experience orgasm is one important male retaining strategy among these women. Researchers argued that this orgasm dishonesty is an indication of non-agentic behaviour in women. On the other hand, some researchers traced the female orgasm as a natural function that would be influenced by natural tendencies of human beings. For example, David Puts and colleagues (2012) argued female as well as male orgasm is a natural function of the body that aimed to facilitate recruitment of high-quality genes for offspring. Focussing on the evolutionary theory, they discussed that the frequency and the quality of women's orgasms are related to their male partner's status of masculinity. They concluded, "Women reported more frequent and earlier orgasms when mated to masculine and attractive men" (Put & colleagues, 2011, p.1). This natural selection would lead women to take genes that are more qualified. However, this study only focuses on the natural aspects and does not assume the social factors of the phenomenon.

As discussed above most literature focused on the state of female sexual agency and its indicators and obstacles. However, in spite of Giddens's discussion on female sexual agency and autonomy as an important part of transformation of intimacy and the pure

relationship, there is no empirical study to examine the interrelationships between these concepts. Accordingly, the current study aims to understand how and to what extent women's sexual agency is related to individual attitudes on relationship and gender roles and the actual intimacy among couples. Furthermore, none of the existing literature regarding sexuality in Iran has emphasized on the issue of women's sexual agency.

2.6 Definition and Concept of Attitudes towards Relationship and Gender Roles

One aspect of transformation of intimacy is transforming people's attitudes towards traditional gender roles and gendered stereotypes. A gendered stereotype consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as activities appropriate to, men or women. It is beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity (Begley, 2000). Concentrating on sexuality and heterosexual intimate relationship, stereotypes are related to relationship and sexual lives as well as the stereotypes about divided gender roles in intimate relationships are all emphasized in the current research. According to Avert (2004) there is a difference in the way men and women are allowed to be sexual. She states:

"Socially there are great differences in the ways women are supposed to be sexual versus the ways men are allowed to be sexual. Men because of being men want lots of sex with as many women as possible. Women only want it for love or security. Men are free of responsibility in sexual intercourse. Women are not. The gatekeeper role specifically disempowers women in their sexuality because not only does it give women less freedom and more responsibility (to be cautious) than men, it also teaches women to commodity their sex. Sex is rarely viewed as for their pleasure, alone or at all" (Avert, 2004, p. 59).

The following are some male privileged stereotypes that influence gender relationships:

i. Submissive females and powerful males are seen as ideal.

ii. Men are more interested in sex than women are.

iii. Unlike women, men are responsible for life expenses in heterosexual relationships.

iv. A man's main job is to earn the money; a woman's is to look after the home and family.

v. Women are supposed to make less money than men do.

vi. Women are seen as providers of sex and men as users.

vii. Women are supposed to be more sexually desirable than men are.

viii. Men are independent and dominant while women are seen as dependent and in need of security.

ix. Marriage is crucial for a girl and it is the only accepted way to have a sexual life.

(Glide 1996, Nobre 2003, Altermatt 2001as cited in Avert 2004, López-Sáez 2008).

Patriarchal and traditional gender stereotypes in Iran conform to all of the above-mentioned stereotypes, and the stereotypes regulates men and women's relationships. As it was discussed in the introduction, commodifying of female sexuality is a strong stereotype in Iran through which women are supposed to be involved in sex through marriage or by exchanging sex for any valuable resources owned by men.

As Giddens asserted (1992), in a situation of transformed intimacy, these stereotypical attitudes would be transformed towards being equal beyond gendered division.

2.6.1 Studies of Patriarchal Gendered Stereotypes in Gender Relationship and Sexuality

Sociologists, especially feminist scholars have done a lot of research on patriarchal gendered stereotypes related to sexuality and gender relationships. These studies covered both stereotypical forces against sexuality, especially female sexual life and the importance of individual's attitude regarding stereotypes.

Maureen Kambarami (2006) studied the interplay between femininity, sexuality and culture in the Shona society in Zimbabwe. Kambarami argues that patriarchal culture and practices shaped gender inequality and strip women of all forms of control over their sexuality. She defines patriarchy as a social system in which men appropriate all social roles and keep women in subordinate positions. According to her exploration, patriarchal attitudes have grown in several systems of power such as family, marriage, religion, education, economy and politics, so patriarchy is internalized through socialization processes that has a potent effect on women's sexuality and makes it a legal and acceptable tool.

Similar research by K.G. Santhya and et.al (2007) among married young women in India. They looked at the relationship between unwanted sex in married women and their gender role attitudes and their ideas toward gender-based violence. Evidence from qualitative studies, suggest that patriarchal norms, power imbalances and women's inability to negotiate sexual matters, lack of awareness of rights and opportunities for recourse and the lack of a supportive environment may increase the risks on young women of nonconsensual and unwanted sexual experiences. During a collaborative group work, Diana Sanchez, Amy Keifer and Oscar Ybarra (2006), argued that women internalize the social determination of the female submissive sexual role. Out of four related studies, they showed that women's implicit association of sex with submission leads them to greater adoption of the submissive sexual role, whereas men did perceive themselves as dominant sexual contributor. As a result, women are less likely to report arousal and sexual autonomy.

Following her first research, Keifer in company of Sanchez (2007), continued to study relations between sexual agency and people's attitudes. Through two studies, they found that, adhering to the gender roles may promote sexual passivity among women and reduce sexual passivity among men. Accordingly, although women might engage in

passive sexual behavior for a variety of reasons, such as having a dominant partner or from a lack of sexual desire, Keifer and Sanchez proposed that conformity to gender roles is a primary reason for this behavior. Moreover, their findings showed that passive behavior would predictably reduce sexual functioning and satisfaction for women. They also cited that the more women endorse attitudes toward traditional sexual roles and female passivity, the more they would engage in passive sexual behavior.

Among different stereotypes regarding gender and sexuality, concepts of female virginity and sainthood have always had a forceful impact on women's sexual life. Susan Stiritz and Britt Marie Schiller (2005), through a genealogical study, have articulated how the categories of virginity and sainthood have been historically constructed and can be differently imagined. Therefore, they can be reconstructed along new ways. As they argue, thinking in a deconstructive way can provide possibilities to produce gender theories and create female subjectivity in more free and creative terms.

In their quantitative study among young adults living in the United States, Melissa Guerrero and Wendy Wood (2010) revealed that there is an increase in self-esteem when people behave in conformity to gender standards. According to their findings, people became more positive when they acted in ways that confirmed rather than refute personal gender standards. The results of Guerrero and Wood's study affirmed that to what extent the dominant social norms might encompass the people's lives.

Despite the long standing imposed gendered stereotypes against women's autonomy, there has been some women especially in modern times, who give themselves the opportunity to break the stereotypical borders and determine their own lifestyle. These women usually are independent and successful in achieving personal goals. To find out how young women achievers perceive femininity and masculinity and how they enact their gender roles, Mary Louise Caldwell (2006), started a comparative study among

three young women who are social and educational achievers from different nations. She concludes that the participants reflected the perception of gender as a liberal space rather than a site of struggle where they choose to display typically feminine or masculine traits. "Deconstructing stereotypes of gender roles, these women employ analytical and pragmatic skills to negotiate and adapt to different role domain, alongside social and professional realm to personal and emotional life" (Caldwell, 2006, p. 13). Caldwell's results supported the idea that women achievers define themselves beyond stereotypical limitations.

Looking at the teenage years as a vital time to form an individual's personality, Deborah Chambers and her colleagues (2004), examined the teenage policing and attitudes of heterosexuality in the UK through debates about sexual moralities, heterosexual male agency and its related stereotypes. The researchers investigated secondary school boys' and girls' sex talk through focus group discussions. According to them, while teenage boys were more conservative about permanent marriage and showed homophobic bullying and misogynistic bullying, most girls, however, were more tolerant about homosexuality, and they were struggling against male normative agency toward gaining their own sexual agency. This study explains how girls struggle for their own agency, despite of the dominant gendered stereotypical attitudes in sexual education and in society.

Diana Sanchez, Janell Fetterolf, and Laurie Rudman (2012) reviewed the traditional gender-role adherence and sexuality for heterosexual men and women. Specifically, they tried to explain the consequences and predictors of following the traditional gender roles of female submissiveness and male dominance in sexual relationships. They explored the idea that sexual context is one in which both men and women feel particularly compelled to engage in gender stereotypic behavior. In addition, the article reported, men and women have automatic associations between sexuality and power

that reinforce their gender stereotypical behavior in sexual contexts. The authors finally conclude that, traditional sexual scripts are harmful for both women's and men's ability to engage in authentic and rewarding sexual expressions. This research is one of the rare academic studies in which the harmful consequences of patriarchal stereotypes on the quality of life for men have been partially emphasized.

2.6.1.1 Couples' Attitudes of Gender Stereotypes and Relationship's Intimacy

There are no noteworthy research regarding the relationship of stereotypical attitudes and the level of couples' intimacy, however, most of the research in this area has been done under the subject of the level of satisfaction in a relationship. For example, to explain how cultural scripts would influence people's attitude and behavior related to marital satisfaction, Huiping Zhang and colleagues (2012) examined the effects of socioeconomic–cultural congruence on the marital and sexual satisfaction of Chinese couples in Hong Kong. Using a representative, territory-wide sample of 1,083 first-time married heterosexual couples, this study found that wives were generally less satisfied than their husbands with their marital and sexual relationships. Accordingly, men reported more marital satisfaction when they are two to four years older than their wives. They were also less likely to be sexually satisfied, or satisfied with their marriages when their wives were five or more years older. Moreover, husbands showed lesser marital satisfaction when just their wives were employed than when both partners were employed. On the other hand, wives with an older husband were more likely to be sexually satisfied than wives with same-age husbands, but female partners were less likely to be satisfied with their marriages when they are better educated than their husbands. The results supported the idea that stereotypical norms and pressures are still significantly shaping relationship satisfaction among Chinese couples in Hong Kong.

Moreover, Ngaire Donaghue and Barry Fallon (2003) examined how relationship satisfaction in long-term heterosexual couples is related to their perceptions of stereotypical gender roles. Among a sample of 240 men and women involved in close relationships, for those who defined their gender role more stereotypically, the recognition of relationship satisfaction was predicted by the belief that one's own relationship compared favorably with others. However, for participants who showed

lower level of stereotypical gender role, the most important predictor of relationship satisfaction was equity.

In understanding the association between sexual transformation in attitude, intimate behaviours, and relationship quality among couples in romantic relationships, Tricia Burke and Valerie Young (2012) examined the frequency of sexual transformations, feelings about sexual transformations, and intimate behaviours as predictors of relationship satisfaction among 96 couples. Results indicated that relationship satisfaction was positively associated with partners' sexual transformations, positive feelings about sexual transformations, and intimate behaviour from the partner. In other words, more sexual transformation and intimate behaviour among partners, was positively associated with an increase in the level of relationship's satisfaction reported by them.

To examine how couples' attitudes and adherence to traditional gender roles could influence the couple's intimate relationship, Diana Sanchez and her colleagues (2012) carried out a comprehensive study on American couples. Their results demonstrated although it is assumed that egalitarian gender relations are dominant in contemporary intimate relationships, stereotypical attitudes of gender roles are still dominant. Their findings also confirmed that adhering to traditional gender roles especially in sexuality, has negative consequences on couples' sexual lives and their intimate relationships. Couples (both men and women) who were performing their sexual roles stereotypically as female being subordinate and male being dominant, reported lower levels of satisfaction in intimacy and close relationship, besides greater difficulties in sexual expression and sexual pleasure. Their results also suggested, men's adherence to stereotypical values is positively correlated with more sexual difficulties experienced by their partners.

2.6.2 Studies of Gender Stereotypes and Sexual Behavior in Iran

In her study about the relationship between gender stereotypes and sexual behaviour, Akram Khamsei (2005) conducted a qualitative survey among married university students in Tehran. Her findings confirmed that gendered stereotypes are strongly correlated with the ways people perform their sexual activities. According to her results, women who were more adherent to female gender stereotypes reported lower sexual satisfaction compared to women who did not follow feminine stereotypes. For men however, gendered stereotypes made no variation in their level of sexual satisfaction; Moreover, among women, orgasms are more mentally related, since they reported that they usually require mental involvement in expressing their sexual pleasure. It is, the researcher argues, due to the dominating female gendered stereotypes in the women's mind that prevents them from engaging and enjoying sex freely.

Khadijeh Safiri and Zahra Zareh (2007) investigated the relationship between gender stereotypes and marriage role conflict among young couples in Shiraz, Iran. Through a quantitative survey, they found a negative correlation between adhering to gender stereotypes and role conflicts in marriage; this means the more couples follow gender stereotypes, the less conflict there is in the marriage role. Nevertheless, women with more education, income and higher family status reported lesser role conflicts. However, emphasizing on only the role conflicts, the researchers did not focus on the level of satisfaction, happiness and intimacy in relation to following the stereotypes.

2.7 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study

As mentioned earlier, Giddens proposed his theories on transformations of intimacy and pure relationship, as an aspect of modern developed countries. In his view, in a modern society, intimacy is supposed to be transformed. His explanations of this transformation on the individual level are at first, replacing the traditional values of a relationship with equality of gender roles, and second, female autonomy in sexual life. However, the challenge of the current research is to understand what has been happening in transitional countries, where the social contexts have undergone tremendous changes due to globalization and modernity. In urban Iran as a transitional context has modern characteristics such as growing expert systems, individualism, distance of time and space, a decline in fertility and developments in contraception use, more freedom in sexual relationships and finally a louder female sexual voice are all co-existing with the traditional features of the society.

This study aims to explore how the Giddens' discussion can be applicable in transitional context of Iran, and also to figure out how and to what extent individuals perceive and perform the transformed intimacy and to what extent the current relationships are actually as equal and reflexive as Giddens has argued.Towards this aim, 'women's sexual agency –sexual autonomy- and the individuals' attitudes about intimate relationship and gender roles are emphasized as two central predictors of transformation of intimacy. Moreover, the concept of intimacy that is defined in four dimensions -emotional, cognitive, sexual and experiential- is almost equivalent to what Giddens discussed about the concept of a 'pure relationship or transformed intimacy':

"A good relationship is a relationship of equals, where each party has equal

rights and obligations. In such a relationship, each person has respect, and wants

the best for the other. The pure relationship is based upon communication, so

that understanding the other person's point of view is essential. Talk, or

dialogue, is the basis of making the relationship work. Relationships function best if people don't hide too much from each other — there has to be mutual trust . . . Finally, a good relationship is one free from arbitrary power, coercion or violence" (Giddens, 1992, p. 94; 2000, p. 80).

According to Giddens (1992), the realized transformed intimacy of pure relationship among couples is an outcome of transformation of intimacy in its two aspects namely, transforming the individuals' attitudes and female sexuality.

Referring to the reviewed literature, it seems that despite the variety of studies regarding women's sexual agency, attitudes to relationship and stereotypes, and actual levels of couples' intimacy, there is an empirical shortage in examining the relations between these issues.

Therefore, this study explores the extent to which the transformation of intimacy is happening in terms of both individuals' attitudes and actual female experiences of sexuality. The study also aims at determining how these predictors of transformed intimacy (individuals' attitudes and female sexuality) are related, with each other and with the actual levels of couples' intimacy (In its transformed form). This study does not argue that Giddens's discussion of transformed intimacy has already been achieved, but rather it aims to examine whether his proposed subjects are related to each other in real life or not.

Besides examining the affected factors on the level of women's sexual agency and couples' intimacy, the study aims to determine the affected factors on the individuals' attitude about relationship and gender roles. This objective specially aims to find out how the egalitarian values of transformed intimacy might be carried out differently by men and women.

To clarify the gender differences in accepting the transformation of intimacy, two theoretical approaches of understanding the relationship are investigated; heterosexual relationship as an egalitarian intimacy and heterosexual relationship as an unequal and benefit-based construction. Furthermore, the feminist's critiques of Giddens's argument were also reviewed to determine the effect of patriarchal discourse on the individual domain of intimacy. Moreover, based on the literature review and gathered data of the current research, the theoretical analysis discusses how the transformation in the private domain has challenged the public and structural rules.

Finally, this research discusses whether or not the intimate relationships that are being performed in the context of this study are as equal and reflexive as Giddens has argued. According to the literature review, it seems, on the one hand, many researchers have focused on developed modern societies to explain and examine intimacy and its transformation, and there are very few studies that have been done in transitional societies. On the other hand, the growing numbers of studies in Iran are attempts to address the new crisis in intimacy and relationships among Iranian couples, however, almost none of them tried to theoretically explain the issue. Accordingly, the current study has taken this issue as a gap in research that needs to be addressed.

Therefore, the theoretical challenge of this research is to examine and develop Giddens's discussion on the transformation of intimacy and his rivals' arguments in a different context of study. Based on the above mentioned literature, the theoretical framework of this study draws a relationship between the main variables, as it is shown in (Fig. 2.3), individuals' attitude is supposed to have an effect on the level of women's sexual agency, and the level of women's sexual agency is assumed as a predictor of couples' intimacy.

Figure 2.1: A Summary of Theoretical Area
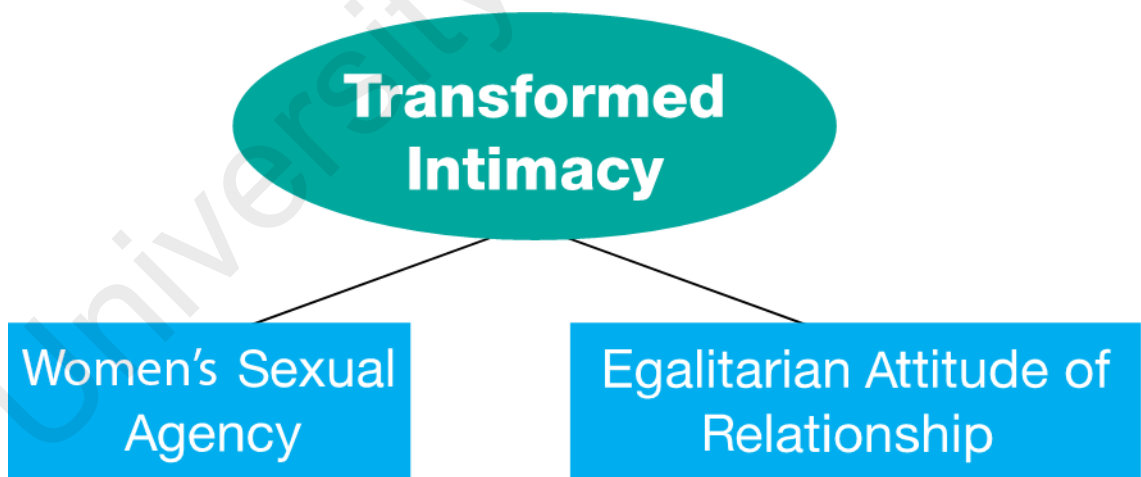
Figure 2.2: Two Main Aspects of Transformation of Intimacy in Giddens' Argument

Figure 2.3: Relationships between the Main Theoretical Concepts

(Theoretical Framework)

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Methodology

The goal of this study is to examine how the transformations to modern attitudes is perceived by individuals in the transitional context of Iran and how it has influenced women's sexuality and couples' intimacy in intimate relationships. 'Women's sexual agency', 'the individual's attitudes of relationship and gender roles', and 'couples' intimacy' are the main variables that are studied in correlation in the current research. These terms are also used to figure out how individuals as social actors deal with modern values which are in contrast with traditional values. To meet the research goal, the mixed method strategy is used to facilitate a better understanding of the issue. In the 'explanatory case study' approach, the quantitative phase was conducted and was followed up with the qualitative in-depth interviews. This enables a comprehensive view especially concerning the third research objective.

The current chapter provides information on the research methods used in this study. Firstly, the research design will be discussed, then the sampling approach in finding respondents in both the quantitative and qualitative phases will be provided and then data collection instruments will be discussed. Explaining the measures of the quantitative variables and the structure of the in-depth interview will follow, and finally an analysis of the approaches as well as the procedures will be elaborated on respectively.

Research Objectives

1. To determine the factors that are associated with the participants' attitude to relationship and gender roles.

2. To determine the factors that are associated with the level of women's sexual agency.

3. To determine the factors that are associated with the level of couples' intimacy in an intimate relationship.

As discussed in chapter two, women's sexual agency and individuals' transformed attitude about relationship and gender roles are two aspects of transformation of intimacy. As an outcome of these transformations, the heterosexual couples would reach the status of transformed intimacy or pure relationship (Giddens, 1992). According to the theoretical assumption of the current study, individuals' attitude would have an effect on the level of women's sexual agency, and the level of women's sexual agency would effect on the level of couples' intimacy (In its transformed form). Thus, couples' intimacy is focused as the main dependent variable of this study (Fig. 3.1).

Fig 3.1 Theoretical Framework of Study

3.2 Research Design

The first step in setting up a methodological design is determining the main research strategy. Yin (2003) offered three conditions for selecting a research strategy: "(a) the type of research questions posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events" (Yin, 2003, p. 4).

When looking at Yin's (2003) second condition, "the extent of control over behavioural events, the researcher must determine to what extent he or she can control the behavioural events associated with his or her study" (p. 8). If the researcher has control over or can manipulate behavioural events, Yin asserted that the best research method would be an experimental type of study. If the researcher has little or no control over

behavioural events, Yin argued the case study or historical study is preferred. In this study, the researcher has no control over how people manage their intimacy, their sexual attitudes and behaviour or how and to what extent they perceive modern transformations, thus it relied on applying a case study approach over other types of research strategies.

As the final condition of determining a research strategy, Yin (2003) identified the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. "If a study looks at current issues, then an experimental, survey, or case study format would be indicated. If the study looks at issues from the past, then a historical study would be recommended" (p. 8). This study examines current issues rather than historical records as a basis for research, which relied on applying a case study research approach. Yin (2003) defined the case study research method as, "An empirical inquiry that (a) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context; (b) When the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; (c) and where multiple sources of evidence are used. In other words, you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual condition, believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p. 13). As it has been explained, this study is going to examine a contextual and contemporary problem; relationship between people's sexual attitudes and behaviour in terms of facing modern transformation, couples' intimacy, and women's sexual agency, among people who are living in a transitional context with paradoxical forces and values. The theoretical challenge of the current study -as it was explained earlier- is mainly to examine and develop Giddens's theory of transformation of intimacy in a transitional social context. Therefore, based on the current study's purpose and problem statement and using Yin's (2003) three conditions for determining a research strategy in addition to his declaration

of using case study to test or develop a theory, it seems the most appropriate research design strategy for this study is explanatory case study as articulated by Yin (2003):

"(A) theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as circumstances within which the propositions are believed to be true. To confirm, challenge or extend the theory, a single case may meet all of the conditions for testing the theory. The single case study can then be used to determine whether a theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant. In this manner the single case study can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building" (Yin, 2003, p. 40).

The case study research however, has been subject to criticism on the grounds of non-representativeness and a lack of statistical generalizability. Moreover, the richness and complexity of the data collected means that the data is often open to different interpretations, and potential 'researcher bias' (Yin 2003). Addressing these critics, Yin (2003) argues that "case studies are used for analytical generalisations rather than statistical one, where the researcher's aim is to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theoretical propositions" (p. 36).

Similarly, Gail Greig (2008) referring to other scholars such as (Stake 2005 and Mason 1996) argues that "the validity of the case study approach derived from an interpretive epistemological stance is based on the "plausibility and cogency of logical reasoning applied in describing and presenting the results from the cases and in drawing conclusions from them" (Greig, 2088, p. 97).

3.2.1 Partially Mixed Method; Concurrent Dominant Status

Referring to a common methodological mistake, Yin (2003) declared, the case study strategy should not be confused with the qualitative research. In fact, qualitative and ethnographic researches are approaches used in a case study and it is not limited to these two approaches only. In addition, case studies need not always include direct and detail observations as a source of evidence. Instead, case studies can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidences (Yin, 2003, p.14).

Accordingly, and to enjoy the significance of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, this study applied the mix-method in terms of administering an online questionnaire and in-depth semi structured interview. As Creswell and Clark (2011), stated, mixed methods are utilized to promote the possibility of perceiving the issue more comprehensively:

"mixed methods research is a type of research in which a researcher or team of researches combines elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches (for example use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 28).

Among different types of mixed method's strategy that have been proposed by a variety of scholars, the most related approach was what Nancy Leech and Anthony Onwuegbuzie (2009) suggested. According to them, types of mixed methods can be categorized based on the time dimension and the emphasis dimension of the study. With respect to the time of data collecting and an emphasis on the approach of the study, the 'partially mixed concurrent dominant status design' has been taken as the methodological strategy for this study as stated by Leech & Onwuegbuzie:

"A partially mixed concurrent dominant status design involves conducting a study with two facets that occur concurrently, such that either facet has the greater emphasis. The quantitative and qualitative data are analysed separately before being compared and inferences made" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 5).

Accordingly, in the current research, while the quantitative phase was running, the qualitative interviews were initiated and both were conducted and analysed separately. However, the quantitative phase had a greater dominance in the study, since it's results was exclusively used to answer the research objectives two and three, while the first research objective of the study has been addressed by both quantitative and qualitative findings, in which the qualitative results were utilized to expand and confirm the findings of the quantitative data while the second and third objectives were discussed based on the quantitative results, two sets of quantitative and qualitative results were combined and compared toward gaining the interpretation of the first research objective.

3.3 Research Procedure

Stating the research problem was the first step of the procedure. After determining the main problem and defining the key research questions, the related literature and theoretical background was reviewed. Research participants and appropriate research design as well was selected in this step. Then, the questionnaire and interview's framework was developed based on standard existing scales and theoretical guidelines.

Data collection took 4 month from August to November 2013. After completing the questionnaire, participants were asked whether or not they agree to participate in a subsequent in-depth interview. The willing participants were contacted as potential interviewees. Quantitative and qualitative gathered data were analysed through

statistical and conceptual approaches, respectively. The final steps include writing up the thesis and strengthen it with the theoretical discussions and conclusion.

Keeping with research ethics, all potential participants were requested to provide an informed consent in advanced. In this informed consent form, the study's domain and its aim was clarified, furthermore, potential participants were informed that some questions will address their personal relationships and sexual life. Meanwhile, participants were assured that the research will maintain total anonymity. Individuals who accepted the conditions of the study and clicked the agree bottom, were guided to start the questionnaire. The questions in questionnaire have been devised in a way that no information of personal identity was required. In qualitative interviews in which more openness is needed, sessions of personal discussion was held between the researcher and the willing participants who had hesitations about the confidentiality of the information provided by them, during these friendly conversations, the researcher assured the potential participants about the importance of protecting their privacy and invited them to participate. Participants were promised that their real names would be kept safe with the researcher and pseudonym names have been used in the thesis.

3.4 Research Sampling

3.4.1 Selection of the Study Population

As stated earlier, the purpose of this study is to explain how transformation of intimacy has been perceived and performed in the transitional context of Iran, in terms of individuals' attitudes on gender roles and sexual agency, as well as to examine how this transformation affects actual intimacy between couples. Emphasizing on the transitions, this study leads to narrow the scope down to the factors contributing to the transitions. As some Iranian scholars declared, there are three main reasons that cause the society in Iran to undergo modern transitions; urbanism, new communication tools and higher levels of education:

"…in the conservative society of Iran, three main resources lead the contemporary individuals to face the modern attitudes and life style; Urbanism, improving the educational access, and raising the communicational technologies" (Shekarbeigi 2012, p. 12, Mahdavi 2007, p. 10).

Accordingly, Tehran is chosen as it is the capital city and the main urban area in the country. Moreover, male and female university students are selected as they are people with higher levels of education and are more likely to have access to new communication technologies. Therefore, educated adult men and women (aged between 20 to 49 years old) who are living in Tehran and studying in one of Tehran's universities have been selected as the potential respondents of the study. The other inclusion criterion is that they are involved in an intimate heterosexual relationship for at least the past one year.

Following the online procedure of the study, which will be explained later; ensures the anonymity and privacy of the respondents, therefore, the online communities of Tehran's universities, have been selected for this study. Among nine main universities in Tehran, five of them have a popular online community for their students. Therefore, the main online communities in which the sampling was sourced are as follows:

i. The Shahid Beheshti University students' online group - Tehran, with 3,249 members
ii. The University of Tehran students' online group, with 3,633 members.
iii. The Azad University students' online group in Tehran with about 2000 members.
iv. The Allame Tabatabaei University students' online group with about 1,835 members.
v. The Sharif University students' online group with about 2,500 members.

3.4.2 Sampling for the Quantitative Phase

Sampling is the process of selecting a portion of the population as a representation of the entire population in a study. It is divided into two main categories of sampling

which are probability and non-probability techniques (Ross 2005). As (Leeuw 2005) said, in a sensitive study, the first important factor is respondents' willingness to participate. Many people hesitate expressing any data about their private ideas and their sexual life. Therefore, giving more control to respondents would increase their willingness to disclose sensitive information. Therefore, the 'unrestricted self-select' approach has been chosen as a sampling method through which the members of selected online communities were introduced with the survey and they were free to choose whether they wanted to participate or not.

"Self-selected surveys are surveys that open to the public for anyone to participate in. They may simply be posted on a website so that anyone browsing through may choose to take the survey, or they may be promoted via website banners or other Internet-based advertisements, or they may be publicized in traditional print and broadcast media. Regardless of how they are promoted (or not), the key characteristics of these types of survey are that there are no restrictions on who can participate, and it is up to the individual to choose to participate" (Fricker, 2008, p. 11).

Although every one could participate in the survey, only participants who possessed the desired criteria were kept and the rest were dropped. Through the questions that addressed the educational level, city of residence and relationship status, the required respondents were selected among all who participated in the study. Thus, it could be argued that elements of judgmental sampling approach were involved as well. As Marshal stated it, by judgmental sampling the researcher can select participants based on his or her desired criteria:

"Judgmental sampling also known as purposeful sample, this is the most common sampling technique. The researcher actively selects the most

productive sample to answer the research question. This can involve developing a framework of the variables that might influence an individual's contribution and will be based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself" (Marshal, 1996, p. 2).

Therefore, encountering the sensitive topic as a limitation of this study, online method of data gathering was chosen, available online communities of universities' students in Tehran have been selected as target groups and participants participated in the survey randomly. At the first step of sampling, the online questionnaire was published in all target communities, besides an invitation message to encourage the members to participate. At the second step, with the assistance of the administrators of each community and through a random selection, the link to the online questionnaire was sent to the members by private messages. They were asked to participate in the study; however, it was up to them to decide whether to participate or not.

Utilizing the above mentioned process, a total of 1,030 individuals participated, from which 463 participants' who answered the questionnaire were removed because of their incompatibility with the required inclusion criteria; incompatibility in the current city of residence, educational level, desired age of participants, university of education or relationship status. In addition, incomplete answers were omitted. As it was mentioned as a limitation of the study, incomplete answers were anticipated, due to the sensitive nature of the topic some respondents were unwilling to continue and also because of the limitation of online self-selected survey in which the non-response bias is generally more than face-to-face methods. Finally, 567 participants' answered the questionnaire and were collected in the quantitative data collection phase, from which 306 participants were female and 261 were male.

In terms of relationship status, 35.8% of respondents were married and 64.2% were unmarried, of which 31% were involved in a sexual and emotionally intimate relationship, 9.5% were involved in just emotionally intimate relationship, 20.6% have been involved in an intimate relationship in the recent year but were single at the time of study, and just 3% were cohabitating.

In terms of level of education, most of the respondents had a bachelor degree, which is 44.3% of the sample group. 38.3% of the respondents had a master degree, 9.2% had an associate diploma and 8.3% categorized their education level as having PhD and higher.

Meanwhile, 24.7% of the respondents were educated in the field of human sciences, 10.8% in arts, 39.7% in engineering, 15.9% in sciences and 7.4% in the field of medicine. However, 1.6% of the respondents did not specify their field of study.

Moreover, based on the findings, young adults were the biggest group in the study, whereby 57.6% of the respondents were aged between 20-29 year old, people aged between 30-39 year old were categorized in the next group with 36.3% and finally 6.1% of the respondents were in the range of 40-49 years of age.

With respect to the duration of the relationships, 23.7% of the respondents categorized the duration of their current or their last relationship in the recent year as being less than 12 months, 23.2% between 12-35 months, 15.8% between 36-59 months, 11.1% between 60-83 months, 6.2% between 84-119 months and finally 11% specified their relationship's duration more than 120 months. Furthermore, 9% of respondents preferred to leave the question unanswered.

3.4.3 Sampling of Qualitative Phase

As mentioned above, for many people sensitive topics are not easy to talk about, and therefore the questionnaire was completely anonymous. However, to get more information, at the end of the questionnaire a section was devised to ask participants

whether they wanted to participate in an online in-depth interview or not. Willing participants were asked to leave their contact information. Amongst participants who left their contact information, those who met the inclusion criteria for the study were selected, at this stage, besides the basic criteria that was mentioned before, the gender of the participants was also crucial to keep the balance between male and female interviewees.

A total of 62 women and 105 men expressed their willingness to be a participant in the interview and left their contact information. Among them, a total of 22 women and 30 men were removed from the pool due to their incompatibility with research inclusion criteria. However, among 40 women who were contacted by email, only 17 replied and proceeded with the actual interview. Nevertheless, one of them changed her mind during the interview and did not finish the conversation. Finally, 16 completed interviews were recorded from female respondents.

Among 75 potential male respondents with contact information, only 50 of them were contacted by the researcher, because the maturation size was met and also because the balance between male and female interviewees was demanded. Finally, 21 men out of 50 males who were contacted proceeded with the actual interviews.

3.5 Research Instruments

3.5.1 Online Questionnaire

As stated, due to people's hesitation in disclosing personal information concerning sensitive topics, keeping the anonymity and priva

cy throughout the research process is an important commitment made by the researcher to the participants. Regarding this issue, the online data collection procedure was devised to ensure as much as possible, the anonymity of the respondents. As Leeuw (2005) argued:

"In comparing between anonymous computer-assistance forms of data collection and face-to-face forms, it found that the more private computer-assisted self-administered forms led to more accurate reporting of sensitive questions and socially undesirable attributes. The more control respondents have of the data collection and the more privacy they have, their willingness to disclose sensitive information increases and social desirability decreases. It is indeed somewhat harder to get people to answer questions in mail surveys. Both the overall non-response rates and the item non-response rates are higher in self-administered questionnaires than in face-to-face interviews. However, when questions are answered, the resulting data tend to be of better quality. Especially with more sensitive questions. Since the promise of privacy and confidentiality is more than classic forms" (Leeuw, 2005, p. 13).

The online questionnaire was chosen as a safe instrument to maintain the anonymity of the participants. It was mainly composed of closed and multiple-choice questions.

The questionnaire was administered through the 'Fluid survey's facilities'. It is especially rewarding due to the option of skipping questions. Participants were given a link to the questionnaire in which no personal information was asked and respondents

were ensured of their anonymity. The maximum time it took to complete the questionnaire was around 20-25 minutes.

3.5.2 Online Interview

Following the online procedure of data collection, willing participants who met the criteria were scheduled to go through online interviews.

A semi- structured in-depth interview was devised in the form of written chats which equipped the study with more detailed information especially in terms of the third research objective that needed an in-depth discussion. Online written chats were selected because of its advantages in maintaining the privacy of respondents as compared to voice and video chats. Moreover, a majority of respondents declared that they preferred doing interview in written mode rather than voice and video modes, because it provided them more convenience in expressing personal experiences and beliefs. The interview time varied from one to three hours.

3.6 Research Scales

In addition to reporting their demographic information such as sex, age, relationship status, duration of relationship, education level, field of study and university of education and the city of residency, respondents provided answers to the three main scales; scale of attitudes regarding intimate relationships and gender roles, scale of women's sexual agency, and scale of actual intimacy in intimate relationships.

3.6.1 Attitudes Regarding Relationships and Gender Roles

As mentioned earlier, transformation of intimacy is theoretically defined as a status in which the traditional, stereotypical and gendered duality in attitudes on relationships and gender roles has been transformed to the modern egalitarian mode (Giddens 1992).

Therefore, to test the participants' attitudes in terms of intimate relationships and gender roles, the standard scales of gender roles and gender stereotypes were used and modified based on the social reality of the context of study.

The following scales were used and modified to measure participants' attitudes on gender relationships and gender roles and to find out to what extent it was transformed. All the scales contained measures related to different aspects of gender stereotypes and gender attitudes, including stereotypes regarding masculinity and femininity in familial relationships, work place, sexuality, society, et cetera. However, regarding the current study's topic, only parts about the men's and women's mutual roles and expectations in intimate relationships were selected and the others were neglected. Some of the sentences were changed to suit local perceptions and concerns.

Adapting the related items of the following standard scales, the current study's measure featured 22 items. Respondents were asked to specify to what extent they would agree or disagree with each statement. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert-scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scoring of each measure gave one score to the most traditional attitude and five scores to the most transformed attitude.

(a) The ambivalent sexism inventory: ASI (Glide, 1996)

Two items of this scale were selected to measure to what extent the stereotypical male duties are upheld:

'Providing life expenses for the family is mainly men's duty '

'Women should be cherished and protected by men '

(b) Chivalry: The relation between a cultural script and stereotypes about women (Altermatt, 2001)

Three following items were used to examine the traditional stereotypes of women's sexuality:

'Women are not as interested in sex as men are '

'Sex is not as much of a priority for women as it is for men '

'Women who sleep around deserve just as much respect as women who do not '

(c) Development of a short version of the gender role beliefs scale: GBRS (Brown & Gladstone, 2012)

Five items of this scale was adapted to examine the attitudes on stereotypical gender roles:

'The initiative in courtship should usually come from the man '

'A man should not allow a woman to pay for the taxi, buy tickets, or pay the bill '

'Girls should not have the same sexual freedom as boys '

'Women earning as much as their dates should equally share the expense when they go out together '

'Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should do the same amount of household chores such as washing dishes, doing laundry and taking care of the children '

(d) Evolution of gender stereotypes in Spain: Traits and roles (López-Sáez, 2008)

One item to examine to what extent the issue of virginity is perceived as crucial:

'For a woman it should be important to be a virgin until she marries '

(e) Final subscale for attitudes about dating and sexual relationships measure (Ward, 2002)

To examine three statements that are stereotypically perceived as naturally different in men and women:

'Sex is something that is naturally evolved, as men are more interested in physical pleasure and women in affection '

'Women should be more concerned about their appearance than men '

'Husbands should be the one responsible in family decision-making '

(f) Sexual beliefs questionnaire (Nobre, 2003)

Three items were chosen to assess how respondents believe in stereotypical sexual life-style:

'Premarital sex is wrong '

'It is wrong to have a temporary sexual relationship, without the obligations of a long lasting relationship '

'Homosexual relationships should be accepted and respected '

(g) The attitude scale of assessing the future relationship (Emma Louise Daglish, 2011)

One item was adapted and modified to find out to what extent a new style of relationship would be acceptable:

'It is not acceptable for girls and boys to cohabitate without getting married '

(h) The sex-love-marriage association scale (Weis, Slosnerick, Cate, & Sollie, 1986)

One item of the measure was adapted from this scale to assess whether respondents see marriage as necessary:

'Sexual intercourse is better- more enjoyable, intense and satisfying- if the sex partners are married to each other '

Moreover, three items of the scale were developed by the researcher with respect to the current debates in the scope of this study. The current controversial debates about equality in the couples' family financing and the equality in family law for the wife and husband were asked:

'The husband and wife should be equal partners in the family finance '

'Women should have divorce rights in marriage '

'Bride price (Mahr) should be removed from the marriage law '

Table 3.1: Scale of Attitudes towards Relationship and Gender Roles

Scale of Attitude towards Relationship and Gender Roles	
Transformation of intimacy is theoretically defined as a status in which the traditional, stereotypical and gendered duality in attitudes on relationships and gender roles has been transformed to the modern egalitarian mode (Giddens 1992). This measure would evaluate the participants' attitudes towards relationship and gender roles.	
Questionnaire	**Source (s)**
22 Items. 5-point Likert scale. Point 1: the most traditional answer. Point 5: the most transformed answer.	The ambivalent sexism inventory: ASI (Glide 1996)
	Chivalry: The relationship between a cultural script and stereotypes about women (Altermatt, 2001)
	Development of a Short Version of the Gender Role Beliefs Scale: GBRS (Brown & Gladstone, 2012)
	Evolution of Gender Stereotypes in Spain: Traits and Roles (López-Sáez, 2008)
	Final subscale for attitudes about dating and sexual relationships measure (Ward, 2002)
	Sexual Beliefs Questionnaire (Nobre, 2003)
	The attitude scale of assessing the future relationship (Emma Louise Daglish, 2011)

3.6.2 Women's Sexual Agency (Women's Questions)

As stated in the previous chapter, to measure the women's sexual agency, four aspects of sexual life are addressed. According to the definition, by measuring the women's sexual activity, sexual power, sexual awareness and sexual motives, the level of female sexual agency were examined. While all questions were rated in 5 points, the most non-agentic answer received one score and five scores went to the most agentic answer.

To develop the appropriate measures of these scales, the existing standard questionnaires of each measure were utilized and modified.

(a) Sexual activity

The scale of sexual activity has been developed by six items based on the multidimensional sexual self-concept questionnaire (MSSCQ, Snell, 1997).

Snell (1997) constructed the original questionnaire to measure the 20 psychological aspects of human sexuality. However, based on Impett and Tolman's (2006) study on women's sexual agency, only parts of the questionnaire that were organized to measure sexual activity and assertiveness were used.

Through six items, the respondents were asked to answer to what extent the following items are related to their personality and personal experiences. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert-scale from options always to never. The aim of this scale was to measure to what extent female respondents are active and assertive in responding to their sexual needs:

'I have the ability to take care of any sexual needs and desires that I may have'

'I am very assertive to make sure that my sexual needs are fulfilled'

'I express my desire, when I feel sexual needs'

'I am not very direct about voicing my sexual needs and preferences'

'I would talk to my partner, if the sexual aspects of my life were not going very well '

'I am afraid of becoming sexually involved with another person '

(b) Sexual power

The Sexual Relationship Power Scale; SRPS (2000) was used in this section. The scale originally was designed to measure power in sexual relationships and to investigate the role of power relationships in sexual decision-making and HIV risks. The SRPS contains two subscales that address two conceptual dimensions of power in relationships: Relationship Control and Decision-making dominance. The scale includes questions about control over decision-making, commitment to the relationship, and control over the process of safer sex such as condom negotiation ability, control over sexual initiation, refusal, and freedom of action within the relationship (Pulerwitz, Gortmaker, & DeJong 2000). However, based on the current study's aim to measure 'sexual power', the items related to the control and decision making in sexual life was addressed and were adapted for this study. Therefore, three items have been devised in the 5-point Likert scale answer options from always to never. The aim of these questions was to assess to what extent women are able to exercise power to control their own sexual life and meet their desires:

'I usually do what my partner wants to do, even if I am not interested in it'

'My partner usually has more say about what types of sexual acts we do '

'I sometimes had sex with my partner when I did not want to '

Two questions have been provided to assess the quality of orgasm.

The first question was rated in a 5-point Likert scale with options from I do not know to Never:

'How often have you had difficulty in achieving orgasm in your relationship? '

And the second question is also organized in a 5-point multiple scale options of 'I try to neglect it' to 'I insist on becoming satisfied in any situation'

'If you have experienced difficulty in orgasm, what do you usually do about it? '

(c) Sexual awareness

The sexual awareness questionnaire SAQ (Snell 1991) has been adapted to measure female sexual awareness. According to the definition of the concept (Wood, Mansfield & Koch 2007), the sexual awareness's scale was constructed to measure the participants' awareness of their sexual needs, and desires as well as their awareness about sex and its importance in a relationship.

The Likert scale of SAQ contains 36 items in terms of measuring sexual consciousness, sexual monitoring, sexual assertiveness and sex-appeal consciousness. Based on the objectives of this study, three items of sexual awareness's were adapted towards assessing female sexual agency. The 5-point Likert scale was organized in the answer options from 'always' to 'never'. The aim of these questions was to evaluate the status of respondents' awareness about their sexual needs and their consciousness about the importance of sex in an intimate relationship:

'Having great sexual intercourse is very important for me in a relationship.'

'I know what my sexual preferences are during intercourse '

'I am always trying to express all my sexual desires with my partner '

Moreover, one question in 5-point Likert scale was added with answers options from 'it is very important' to 'it is very not important':

'In your opinion, to what extent does sex contribute to an intimate and loving relationship? '

(d) Sexual motives

Sexual motive's questionnaire (Meston & Buss 2007) consists of 142 items where the Likert scale was used. The original scale included four main factors on sexual motives: physical motives, goal attainment, emotional and insecurity as a motive to be involved in a sexual intercourse. Out of all factors, eight items have been adapted based on the social reality of the study's scope. The aim of these questions was to assess the women's original motives in engaging in a sexual relationship. Referring to the definition of sexual motive as a predictor of women's sexual agency (see chapter two of the current study), the motives, which addressed the participant's personal sexual needs, were assumed as her agency's indicator. Respondents were asked to specify how often they were evolved in a sexual behavior in any of the following situations. The answer options were rated from 'always' to 'never':

'When I feel sexual desire '

'When I wanted to marry him '

'I felt obliged to do it '

'When I feel a need for physical pleasure '

'I did not want to "lose" my partner '

'When I wanted him to do something for me '

'Because I wanted to enhance my partner's attention towards me '

'I was afraid my partner would have an affair if I didn't have sex with him '

As it was stated, measuring and computing these four aspects of sexual life, led to the evaluation of the level of women's sexual agency.

3.6.3 Women's Sexual Agency (Men's Questions)

To examine the women's sexual agency from their male partners' reports, a measure with seven items was developed and each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The answer options were rated from 'always' to 'never'.

This scale aimed to assess to what extent male respondents reported agency in their female partner's sexuality:

'My partner have had sex with me, despite of her own interest '

'I have more say about what types of sexual acts we do '

'Our sexual intercourse was initiated by me '

'I generally compensate sex with my partner, by providing a gift or doing anything, she likes '

'My partner easily talks about her sexual needs and desires '

'My partner expresses her sexual needs, when she feels them '

'I have to show more attention to my partner to convince her to have sex '

Besides the seven items scale, two questions on women's quality of orgasm has also been asked to the male respondents, both in multiple five-point scales. The first question asked men to declare how often their partners face difficulty in achieving orgasms. They were supposed to answer the question through five options rated from 'I do not know' to 'never':

'How many times has your partner experienced difficulty is achieving orgasms in your relationship? '

And the second question on orgasm was to evaluate the women's power in controlling their sexual activities, and male respondents were provided with five options for their answer from 'she talks about it directly' to 'I usually do not figure it out':

'If your partner faced difficulty in achieving orgasms, how do you usually know about it? '

Table 3.2: Scale of Women's Sexual Agency

Scale of Women's Sexual Agency			
Women's power to initiate, to enjoy sex, to experiment, to control their own sexual life and have a sense of self in sexual behavior (Hooks 1984).			
(Female respondents)		**(Male respondents)**	
Questionnaire	**Source (s)**	**Questionnaire**	**Source (s)**
24 items. 5-point Likert scale. Point 1: The most non-agent answer. Point 5: The most agent answer.	Multidimensional sexual self-concept questionnaire (MSSCQ, Snell, 1997).	9 items. 5-point Likert scale. Point 1: The most non-agent answer. Point 5: The most agent answer.	Multidimensional sexual self-concept questionnaire (MSSCQ, Snell, 1997).
	Multidimensional sexual self-concept questionnaire (MSSCQ, Snell, 1997).		Multidimensional sexual self-concept questionnaire (MSSCQ, Snell, 1997).
	Sexual awareness questionnaire SAQ (Snell, 1991) **&** Sexual motive's questionnaire (Meston & Buss, 2007).		Sexual motive's questionnaire (Meston & Buss, 2007).

3.6.4 Intimacy in Intimate Relationship

The last measure of the study is about examining the level of intimacy in intimate relationships. As stated in chapter two, intimacy has been defined and examined through its four subscales. Namely; sexual intimacy, emotional intimacy, cognitive intimacy and experiential intimacy. Measuring and computing all these scales have resulted in identifying the level of actual intimacy among couples. The standard questionnaire was used to construct the measures, all measures were organized in a 5 point Likert scale with answer options from 'always' to 'never'. Respondents were asked to specify to what extent each item conforms to their intimate relationship.

The scale's rate was scored from 1 (the most un-intimate answer) to 5 (the most intimate answer).

(a) Sexual intimacy

To develop the sexual intimacy measure, two standard scales were sourced. The first was sexual relationship scale (Olson, 1985, as cited in Tzeng, 1993) and the second was sexual satisfaction scale (Whitley & Poulsen, 1975). Although both of these scales were originally constructed with 13 and 23 items respectively, keeping the questionnaire short in length and based on the definition of sexual intimacy -provided in chapter two, three items of the mentioned scales have been adapted to examine the level of sexual intimacy reported by respondents:

'We try to find ways to keep our sexual relationship interesting and enjoyable '

'We use any opportunity to kiss and hug each other '

'Our sexual relationship is satisfying and fulfilling to me '

(b) Emotional intimacy

Holt relationship intimacy questionnaire; HRIQ (Holt & colleagues 2009), was reviewed to cover three aspects of couples' intimacy including emotional, cognitive and experiential. Out of 33 items in the original questionnaire, 10 items have been adapted based on the definitions of each measure and considering the length and time limitation of this study. Among 10 items, four questions addressed emotional intimacy aimed at evaluating the level of sharing between couples in terms of feelings, emotions, dreams, fears, faults and mutual trust:

'It is easy to talk about my life's dreams and secrets to my partner '

'I talk about all my experiences to my partner, even the sad ones '

'I am sure my partner does not prefer his or her priorities to mine, even in our serious disagreements '

'I tend to hide my faults from my partner '

(c) Cognitive intimacy

Similarly, four items from Holt et al (2009) relationship intimacy questionnaire have been adapted to measure the level of cognitive intimacy in terms of the partners' sharing of thoughts, ideas, decisions and life's goals has been assessed:

'My partner and I talk to each other about different issues and topics '

'If I face a problem in my family, my work or somewhere else, my partner is the first person whom I consult with '

'My partner and I totally know about each other's personal goals '

'I talk to my partner about my important life decisions '

(d) Experiential intimacy

Finally, the last subscale of intimacy is experiential intimacy that was developed through picking two items from Holt's et al (2009) relationship intimacy questionnaire. It is designed to figure out to what extent participants reported an intimate sharing of daily activities with their partners:

'My partner and I allocate a special time of the day to share our personal activities '

'My partner and I often engage in the same activities (watching movie, playing sports, reading, household chores...) '

Table 3.3: Scale of Couple's Intimacy

Scale of 'a Couple's Intimacy'	
Intimacy is a couples' level of closeness, sharing of ideas and values, shared activities, sexuality, knowledge about each other, and acts of affection (Heller & Wood, 1998; Moss & Schwebel, 1993; Waring, 1984).	
Questionnaire	**Source (s)**
13 items.	sexual relationship scale (Olson, 1985 in Tzeng, 1993)
5-point Liker scale.	sexual satisfaction scale (Whitley & Poulsen, 1975)
Point 1: The most un-intimate answer.	Holt relationship intimacy questionnaire; HRIQ (Holt & colleagues, 2009)
Point 5: The most intimate answer.	

3.6.5 Measures in Qualitative Interview

In the qualitative dimension of this research, the concept of measure and its reliability and validity is perceived differently. Qualitative research places an emphasis on the researcher's efficiency and human observation. However, there are some methodological recommendations through which a researcher could improve the credibility and validity of qualitative results.

As Rudestam (2007) stated, "Whereas survey researchers typically insist on preparing a specific set of questions that need to be asked precisely and in a particular order. Most qualitative interviewers start with a general plan of inquiry but not a formal set of questions. The qualitative interview's plan would include at least one opening question and then some detailed follow-up questions that the researcher may or may not use depending on the subsequent flow of the interview" (Rudestam, 2007, p. 110).

Accordingly and based on the first research objective that aims to find out the differences between men and women in their perceptions of transformation of intimacy, the qualitative interview's framework was devised. The main questions of the

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interview's protocol were devised based on the important aspects of relationship and gender roles that would be affected by transformation of intimacy. The issues like sexual relationship, women's sexual freedom, attitudes regarding sex and gender roles in a relationship, the participant's criteria in choosing an ideal partner, and men's and women's expectations from their partners made up the main questions. However, the sequence of questions as well as the follow-up questions was varied based on the situation of each interview and especially the respondents' answers. Some of the main questions were as follows:

'What do you think of pre-marital sex? '

'How important is sex in a relationship? '

'For you, what are the differences between choosing a boyfriend (girlfriend) and a husband (wife)? '

'What criteria does your ideal husband (wife) have? '

'When you wanted to marry (will marry), to what extent is the previous sexual life of your husband (wife) important to you? '

'To what extent do you think a girl's virginity is an important matter? '

'Some people believe, it should be a man's duty to take on the burden of the financial responsibility in a relationship and marital life. What is your opinion about this? '

'What are some of the characteristics in men (women) that have bothered you the most?'

3.7 Quantitative Data Analysis

The developed measures that have been built based on the previously mentioned standard questionnaires, was applied to the SPSS program (version 21) to be analyzed

statistically. As stated earlier, all measures were organized on the 5-point Likert scale in terms of one to the lowest score and five to the highest score.

At the first step, the multiple frequency responses demonstrated a descriptive results regarding to each dependent variable, as well as the demographic data of respondents.

Univariate analysis was run to answer the research questions in the quantitative phase. As the research objectives are aimed to determine the associated factors to each main variable, the univariate analysis in General Linear Model is a way to assess the associated factors on the one dependent variable. Furthermore, to determine the associated factors on the subscales of individuals' attitude, women's sexual agency, and couples' intimacy, the multivariate analysis was run. As the multivariate analysis, in contrast to univariate, is an appropriate method when examining the effects of independent variable(s) on two or more dependent variables is aimed to perform. Meanwhile, the multiple regression analysis was used to find out more about the relationship between several independent variables and a dependent variable. To determine how much the independent factors would predict the value of dependent variable of each research objective, and figuring out to what extent the independent variables would effect on the dependent variable, the multiple regression was run. Finally, Structural Equation Model (SEM) represented the relationship between variables. Similar in method procedure, the empirical evidences of related literatures supported the choice of statistical analysis (e.g. Rollero and Fedi, 2012; Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Keifer and Sanchez, 2007; Puts et al., 2011).

3.7.1 Validity of Quantitative Data

"Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are" (Joppe, 2000, p. 1). As Golafshani (2003) declared, "with regards to validity in quantitative research, the question is

whether the means of measurement are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they are intended to measure" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 4).

3.7.1.1 Standard Scales

To ensure the validity and accuracy of the measures, the existing standard scales were sourced to develop the research's scales. As standard scales have passed adequate pre-testing and revising, and have been the source of references for variety of previous researches, relying on them would be a good idea to ensure the accuracy of the measures.

3.7.1.2 Pilot Test

The next aspect of validity however, is about the content and argues whether the measures are actually measuring what they are intended to measure:

"Content validity pertains to the degree to which the instrument fully assesses and measures the construct of interest" (Miller, 2007, p. 3). For example, in evaluating the participant's attitude regarding the relationship and gender roles, evaluating the level of women's sexual agency and the level of couples' intimacy; the main point was to ensure that the questions fully represented the domain of mentioned concepts. Towards this aim, besides using the standard measures as a source, a pilot test of questions was carried out before the main data gathering began. At this stage, each scale has been measured by gathering data from 30-50 participants within the same population, in order to increase the clarity and accuracy of the questions. Moreover, the pilot-test's participants have been asked what they think the purpose of the test is, what concepts they believe is being measured and whether or not they feel the questions were adequately clear and related. Subsequently, most of participants believed the assessment accurately measured the core concepts in general; however, some vague and unrelated questions were removed from the scales.

Enhancing the validity of measures and accuracy of questions, the current research is more likely to evaluate what it was aimed to do.

3.7.2 Reliability of Quantitative Data

Reliability addresses the consistency of results. Joppe (2000, p1) said that

"If the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable." Millner (2007, p1) looked at internal reliability and internal consistency as a measure of reliability which looks at "the extent to which items on the test or instrument are measuring the same thing. If the individual items of an instrument are highly correlated with each other, it can be concluded that the reliability of the entire scale is highly confident" (Miller, 2007, p. 1). He stated that "Internal reliability is estimated via coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and declared in the case of repeated testing with the same group of respondents, the same or similar scores will be obtained" (Miller, 2007, p. 2).

3.7.2.1 Coefficient Alpha Cronbach

Therefore, through two phases, the coefficient alpha Cronbach test was ran to assess the internal reliability of scales. The first test was run as a pre-test step to evaluate the homogeneity of scales, in advance to main data gathering. At the end of this phase, some vague and unrelated questions were removed from the scales. By refining the questions, the scales got more Alpha score and the scales became more homogenized. The second phase of running the alpha test was done before analysing the data. In this step, the reliability of scales was assessed and proved by scores of the Alpha test. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), Bolboaca and Jantschi (2006) and Miller (2007), the score value of 0.7 and more would be considered as a high degree of reliability of scales and the value between 0.5 and .07 is an acceptable degree of reliability.

The following will present the reliability values of all scales of the current study through which the internal consistency of scales was proven and it was argued that the same or similar results would be obtained in the case of repeating tests with the same group of respondents.

The reliability of the attitude scale with 22 items was proved by Cronbach's Alpha at α .857 (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Reliability Test, Attitude Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.857	22

Reliability of the women's sexual agency scale (women's questions) was proven by Cronbach's Alpha test: α .836 (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Reliability Test, Women's Sexual Agency Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.836	23

Reliability of the women's sexual agency scale (men's questions) was proven by Cronbach's Alpha test: α .738 (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Reliability Test, Women's Sexual Agency, Men's Questions

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.738	9

The reliability of the intimacy scale was tested by Cronbach' Alpha with the score of α .889 (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Reliability Test, Couples'Intimacy Scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.889	13

As it was mentioned, all values of the alpha test were 0.7 and more, these results confirm that the scales are adequately reliable through the high consistency among the questions proven. The internal consistency of questions in each scales assert that questions measure the same things. The adequate reliability values also anticipated the same or similar results would be reached if the scales were re-tested with the participants of the study.

Moreover, a factor analysis was run to ensure the consistency of scales. As results demonstrated, the KMO score is high enough to argue that the consistency of scales are

reliable. (KMO in all scales and subscales is near or more than 0/7. (See the appendix A).

3.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, as a popular analytical approach in qualitative research, was used to organize and to analyse the interview findings. As Braun and Clarke (2006) argued, qualitative analytical methods can be divided into two main groups:

 "Within the first, there are those tied to, or stemming from, a particular theoretical or epistemological position such as conversation analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis and grounded theory. Second, there are methods that are essentially independent of theory and epistemology, and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. Often framed as a realistic/experiential method. Thematic analysis is actually firmly in the second camp" (p. 4-5).

According to this discussion, being flexible, a thematic analysis provides detailed information, as well as ensuring the richness and complexity of the data. Braun and Clarke state that:

"Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6).

3.8.1 Validity of Qualitative Results

Although in the quantitative method, the validity of results comes from valid sources from which the measures and scales are inspired, in the qualitative approach, there are no such precise sources. Therefore, the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data depends on some adapted procedures through which a qualitative research is constructed as articulated by Rudestam:

"The credibility or truth value of findings might be ascertained by spending sufficient time with participants to check for distortions, exploring the participant's experience in sufficient detail. Videotaping interviews for comparison with the recorded data, clarifying tentative findings with the participants, revising working hypotheses as more data become available, and checking multiple sources of data such as other investigators, written records, diaries, field notes, and so on" (Rudestam, 2007, p. 113).

Therefore, in order to boost the validity of qualitative results the following procedures were carried out.

3.8.1.1 Spending Enough Time with Participants

After getting a participant's consent to participate in an interview, further contact was made to form a degree of closeness between the interviewer and interviewee; through these contacts, more detailed information on the study's aim was shared with the participants, besides providing them with some personal data of the researcher. Sharing private data, created trust and made the interviewees feel more comfortable in expressing their true opinions. Moreover, to avoid any misunderstanding, after each interview, a snapshot of the provided information was double-checked with participants. In some cases, the mutual trust resulted in friendly discussion regarding the issue in several sessions after the interview session.

3.8.1.2 Multiple Sources of Data

Checking multiple sources of data would be an effective way to improve the validity of qualitative results. With respect to the criterion, in the discussion section, the compatibility of gathered information with existing findings from other studies and archival observations was provided. As Rudestam (2007) stated:

"Soliciting data from multiple and different sources as a means of cross-checking and corroborating evidence and illuminating a theme or a theory is known as triangulation. The different sources may include additional participants, other methodologies, or previously conducted studies" (p. 114).

3.8.1.3 Peer Review or Debriefing

The last strategy to ensure the data was accurate enough was by asking two peers to check the research procedure of the qualitative phase and to express their ideas regarding the process, analysis and the results. "Many qualitative researchers make use of peers or colleagues to play the role of devil's advocate, asking tough questions about data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation to keep the researcher honest" (Rudestam, 2007, p. 115).

3.8.2 Reliability of Qualitative Results

To improve the reliability of results in qualitative research, as Rudestam (2007) mentioned the most important point is to follow a systematic procedure in coding and analysing the data:

"*Reliability* concerns the replication of the study under similar circumstances. It pertains to issues such as training interviewers and systematically recording and transcribing data. The naturalistic investigator derives consistency through coding the raw data in ways so that another person can understand the themes and arrive at similar conclusions" (p. 113).

Therefore, the reliability of qualitative results came by following the systematic procedure of recording, coding, refining and analysing the data as it is scripted in the thematic analysis process. Abiding to these procedures, would provide the clear set of data for other investigators to get familiar with the research process and would increase the chance of replication of results in a similar situation.

The following steps were taken in the qualitative phase of data analysing:

3.8.2.1 Familiarization with Data

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the first step of thematic analysis is transcription. However, as the current qualitative data were all in written mode through chats, the transcription step was skipped and the material was just overviewed to be organized. Next, to initiate the analysis, it is necessary for the researcher to make herself familiar with the raw data, even though she was the original interviewer as stated by Braun and Clarke:

"It is vital that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion usually involves repeated reading of the data, and reading the data in an active way - searching for meanings, patterns and so on. It is ideal to read through the entire data set at least once before you begin your coding, as your ideas, identification of possible patterns will be shaped as you read through" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 16).

3.8.2.2 Generate the Initial Codes

After familiarization with data, it was necessary to do the preliminary coding. Coding is in fact the first attempt to extract the related concepts from the raw data. As Braun and Clarke (2006) stated, coding would be driven from two perspectives; inductive of theoretical approaches. In the inductive approach of coding, the themes are strongly linked to the data. It means there is no pre-existing frame to emerging themes become fit with them, however, this kind of codes are originally data driven and provide by what respondents declared themselves. In contrast, using a theoretical approach, codes are original analyst-driven in which emerging codes tend to be adapted based on researcher's theoretical or analytic interest. In this approach, the coding process would be more focused on some aspects of the data that are more likely to provide the research questions' needs.

Accordingly, the coding step of the current research was more compatible with the theoretical approach. Through this approach, the written texts were scanned and those lines or phrases of each interview that refer to the participants' idea about specific aspects of intimacy and gender roles were highlighted. The aim of this step was to search for men's and women's specific opinions on each issue asked. This step is theoretically approached because participants were asked specific questions and their reports were analysed to find the related answers to the questions.

3.8.2.3 Searching for Themes

"A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 11). A comparison between the theme and the code states that themes are broader than codes. In fact, merging and justifying some related codes, could make a theme.

"Essentially, you are starting to analyse your codes, and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme. It may be helpful at this phase to use visual representations to help you sort the different codes into themes. You might use tables, mind-maps, or you might write the name of each code (and a brief description) on a separate piece of paper and play around with organising them into theme-piles" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 19).

Through this step, some initial codes made up new themes, while others went to the category of sub-themes and some codes were discarded due to overlapping or mismatching. At the end of this step, the themes were categorized through separate charts and were prepared as the first draft of themes to be revised and refined.

3.8.2.4 Review, Refine and Finalize Themes

At the final step, the themes were reviewed and refined for the sake of accuracy. At first, coded data were generally reviewed to make sure all the emerged themes appeared from accurate codes, then all individual themes were reviewed to insure the validity. At each phase, some refinement was done. After making a satisfactory refinement of the thematic map, the final step was to define each theme clearly and make the data set ready to be analyzed.

"By define and refine we mean identifying the essence of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 22).

At the end of this step, four divided themes and four sub-themes were identified and were ready to go through the analytical discussion. The main themes and sub-themes are as follows:

I. *A couple's responsibility in a relationship and the women's duty in life expenses*

II. *Women's sexual freedom and agency*

III. *Marriage law and sexual relationship's stereotypes, that had two sub-categories:*

i. *Pre-marital sex*

ii. *Girl's virginity*

During the analysis, the relationships between the themes' categories were discussed and hypotheses were answered and discussed based on the existing theories and literatures.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter aims to provide the quantitative and qualitative results of the three research objectives. According to the research objectives, the purpose of the current chapter is to determine the associated factors to participants' attitude about relationship and gender roles, the level of women's sexual agency, and the level of couples' intimacy. Accordingly, the first part of this chapter provides the quantitative and qualitative results to answers the research questions of the first research objectives. The second part provides the results of the second research objective, and the last part is aimed to show the results of the third research objective. Finally, the chapter will be concluded with a summary of all obtained results.

It is worth mentioning that 567 participants' answered the questionnaire for the quantitative data collection phase, from which 306 participants were female and 261 were male.

4.1 Research Objective One

The first research objective is to determine the factors that are associated with the participants' attitude to their relationship and gender roles. According to related literature, men and women might react differently in facing the values of relationship and gender roles (Rollero and Fedi, 2012; Thornton, 2001), some studies also discussed about the contribution of marriage (Gubernskaya, 2008) on the peoples' attitude. Furthermore respondents' age and relationship's duration have been examined as probable effective factors on peoples' attitude. Therefore, in meeting this objective, the following questions were answered:

1. Is there a relationship between the participants' gender and their attitude to relationship and gender roles?

2. Is there a relationship between the participants' marital status and their attitude to relationship and gender roles?

3. Is there a relationship between the participants' age and their attitude to relationship and gender roles?

4. Is there a relationship between the duration of participants' relationship and their attitude to relationship and gender roles?

As mentioned in previous chapters, the most critical aim of this section is to find out probable differences between men and women in terms of their attitudes toward the values of transformed intimacy. To provide more elaborated explanation to this question, the qualitative responses were used to support the quantitative findings.

4.1.1 Quantitative Results

After evaluating the main scale of attitude through the univariate analysis, four subscales of it were also measured to determine how participants might be varied in their attitudes and adherence to different aspects of relationship and gender roles. This part was answered by running the multivariate test. Moreover, multiple regression demonstrated the extent in which the respondents' attitude was predicted by independent factors. Frequency results indicated that about 52% of respondents showed traditional attitude about relationship and gender roles, 32% demonstrated transformed attitudes and 16% of respondents expressed attitudes that were in between; neither traditional nor transformed.

4.1.1.1 Univariate and Multivariate Results

Univariate results proved that gender has a significant effect on respondent's attitude. Table 4.1 showed, male respondents reported more transformed attitudes regarding relationship and gender roles compared to female respondents (Mean 71.08 for women and Mean: 75.32 for men).

Regarding the subscales of attitudes measure, the multivariate results showed significant differences between two genders in dealing with women's contribution in life's expenses (Mean 11.24 for women and Mean: 12.93 for men) (see Table 4. 2). As it was discussed in debates of transformed intimacy, in an egalitarian transformed relationship, both partners are supposed to take on the same responsibilities as well as have the same rights. The results of this study however, showed that male respondents are more likely to believe in women having the same responsibility in life expenses compared to women who do not contribute to life expenses.

On the other hand, female respondents expressed a more transformed attitude in support of women's sexual freedom (Mean 11.06 for women and Mean: 10.08 for men).

In terms of participants' attitude regarding the stereotype about sexual relationship in the society, male respondents showed a more transformed attitude compared to women. The results suggested that female respondents were more likely to adhere to the social stereotypes related to sexual life (Mean 26.07 for female and Mean: 29.04 for male) (see Table 4. 2).

Furthermore, the results on attitudes regarding 'women's right to apply for a divorce' and 'removing the bride's price' (amount of money the groom is obliged to pay to the bride), as two controversial marriage laws in Iran was compared between men and women. Results show that, female respondents who agree that women should have the right to apply for a divorce are significantly more compared to men (Mean 4.39 for women and Mean: 3.76 for men) (see Table 4.3).

On the other hand, participants' attitudes about 'bride price' (*Mahr*) showed different results. According to the result (see Table 4. 3), men significantly agreed more to removing the bride's price from marriage laws, compared to women (Mean 2.80 for women and Mean 3.80 for men).

While participants' age and relationship's duration had no effect on attitude, marriage had a contribution in some aspects. Generally, unmarried respondents showed more transformed attitudes regarding relationship and gender roles (Mean 70.69 for married and Mean: 76.84 for non-married) (see Table 4.1).

As Tables 4.2 and 4.3 demonstrated, non-married respondents showed more transformed attitude regarding to all aspects of the measure, except the women's divorce right in which there is no significant difference between married and non-married respondents.

It is suggested that unmarried men and women were more supportive of the idea of equal responsibilities for couples and they were more likely to resist sexual stereotypes.

Table 4.1: Associated factors to participants' attitude to relationship and gender roles

Dependent variable: Participant's Attitude			
Factors		**Mean**	**P. Value**
Gender	**Female**	71.08	.043
	Male	73.32	
Relationship's Status	**Married**	70.69	.030
	Non-married	76.84	
Age	**20-30**	72.04	.414
	31-40	74.43	
	41-50	76.83	
Relationship Duration	**1-11**	71.90	.361
	12-35	77.61	
	36-59	72.33	
	60-83	75.37	
	84-119	70.55	
	120-336	74.59	

Table 4. 2: Associated factors to participants' attitude of relationship and gender roles (subscales)

Dependent variables: Attitude's Subscales							
Factors		**Mean**			**P. Value**		
		Women's Duty in life Expenses	Women's Sexual Freedom	Sexual Relationship Stereotypes	Women's Duty in life Expenses	Women's Sexual Freedom	Sexual Relationship Stereotypes
Gender	**Female**	11.24	11.06	26.07	.000	.000	.015
	Male	12.93	10.08	27.08			
Relationship's Status	**Married**	11.65	10.23	25.21	.026	.023	.000
	Non-married	12.37	10.82	27.17			
Age	**20-30**	12.26	10.34	26.58	.762	.400	.753
	31-40	12.08	10.80	27.15			
	41-50	12.48	11.46	27.93			
Relationship Duration	**1-11**	12.49	10.38	25.26	.058	.132	.373
	12-35	12.26	11.37	28.57			
	36-59	10.98	10.59	27.42			
	60-83	13.12	11.58	27.27			
	84-119	11.42	9.62	26.11			
	120-336	12.94	10.59	27.53			

Table 4.3: Associated factors to participants' attitude of relationship and gender roles (subscales. Continued)

Dependent variable: Attitude's Subscales (Continued)					
Marriage Law					
Factors		Mean		P. Value	
		Women's Divorce Right	Bride Price (Mahr)	Women's Divorce Right	Bride Price (Mahr)
Gender	**Female**	4.39	2.80	.000	.000
	Male	3.76	3.80		
Relationship's Status	**Married**	4.14	3.05	.545	.009
	Non-married	4.08	3.36		
Age	**20-30**	4.06	3.26	.436	.672
	31-40	4.09	3.45		
	41-50	4.50	3.74		
Relationship Duration	**1-11**	4.03	3.79	.593	.306
	12-35	4.30	3.74		
	36-59	4.28	3.10		
	60-83	4.09	3.18		
	84-119	3.76	3.33		
	120-336	4.36	3.29		

4.1.1.2 Regression Results

To determine how and to what extent the dependent variable (Attitude) would be predicted by independent variables, the multiple regression was run. Through the stepwise mode of analyzing, independent factors that did not show a significant effect on the dependent variable has been removed from the model. As Table 4.4 demonstrates, gender and relationship's status of respondents had significant effect on their attitude. Results revealed that about 18% of changes in respondents' attitude are

predicted by their gender while the strength of relationship between the respondents' attitude and their gender is 42%. Significant Beta value indicated that by changing the one unit of respondents' gender, their attitude regarding to relationship and gender roles would change by .471(see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Regression analysis predicting respondents' attitude

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized coefficient	t	sig
	B	SE	Beta		
Gender	.361	.050	.471	7.227	.000
R= .421		**R square= .182**			
Relationship	3.585	1.296	.132	2.766	.006
R= .132		**R square= .017**			

Dependent: Attitude   p<.05

4.1.2 Qualitative Results

As mentioned before, the triangulated method of reporting was used to determine the differences between men and women's attitude regarding their relationship and gender roles. After providing the statistical results of attitude's measure, the related thematic findings came from in-depth interviews, which were combined to create a comprehensive view of the differences among male and female respondents in terms of their attitudes. Similar to the quantitative aspect, three main conceptual categories in which the participant's attitude were compared are 'women's duty in life expenses and couples' responsibilities', 'women's sexual freedom', and 'stereotypes about sexual relationship'.

4.1.2.1 Duty in Life's Expenses and Couples' Responsibilities

The qualitative results of the interviews confirmed the gender differences in reporting ideas about couples' responsibilities in a relationship and women's role in providing for expenses.

4.1.2.1 (a) Women's Answers Duty in Life's Expenses and Couples'
Responsibilities

Generally, women's answers about couples' responsibilities in providing the life's expenses were divided into two main categories. The first category is women who believed in traditional gendered divisions and the second are women who believed in equal responsibilities between couples.

Most of female respondents (10 out of 16), believed in traditional gendered division in couples' responsibilities and women's duty in life's expenses. Some of them claim that managing responsibilities in a relationship include providing for life's expenses should be mainly a male duty because, it is a normative behavior in Iranian society:

"I am living in Iran. I prefer my man to take this responsibility, because the equal work and equal rights are not internalized for us. In fact, when a woman works hard, her husband is lazy"(Elahe, Personal communication, October 23, 2013).

A young married woman said:

"I agree with this gendered division in family responsibilities, because providing the life expenses always has been a male duty, we are not supposed to change it, like the house chore that is a wife's responsibility" (Mahsa, Personal communication, November 12, 2013).

Some women who adhere to the gendered divisions in life's expenses claim that men should pay for life expenses in return for the sexual pleasure that women provide for them. These women believe in a kind of exchange in terms of money and sex:

"*When I give my body to my husband, he has to make up for it and prove to me that he cherished that*" (Kimia, Personal communication, October 20, 2013).

"*A man has to spend money to convince a woman to have sex*" (Aylar, Personal communication, September 29, 2013).

Following a gendered-based dichotomy, some women however, argue that being in charge of life's expenses is a part of the male pride and it is connected to their manhood:

"*I think it is necessary for a man to take more responsibility in life and money managing. It is important for them to have a strong personality*" (Saba, Personal communication, October 22, 2013).

"*I think it is necessary for a man to take more responsibility in life and money managing. It is important for them to have a strong personality*" (Saba, Personal communication, October 22, 2013).

Some women also state that the inequalities in job opportunities are a reason that men should provide for life expenses:

"*I used to believe women and men should take on the same responsibility in relationship' expenses, but now I do not believe it. Because there is no equality in job position for women and men*" (Masumeh, Personal communication, October 19, 2013).

6 out of 16 female respondents however, believed in taking on the same duty in handling the responsibilities in a relationship including the finances. These women gave

two reasons; take the same responsibility to avoid male domination, and that life expense provision should be the duty of both women and men. For example, a young female respondent argues that the male responsibility in providing the life expenses would make the men become a leader in a relationship:

"*No, I do not agree men to take all responsibilities of life' expenses. If they take all responsibilities, so they are in charge of making all important family decisions*" *(Parisa, Personal communication, October 15, 2013).*

Other female respondent says:

"*We live together, earn money and spend it together. It is fair, it is everyone's duty to take responsibility in life. I think women who try to choose a comfortable life without having the same responsibilities in it, lose the sense of being a mature and independent human being. They cannot live their life, because they do not accept their responsibilities in life*" *(Nilufar, Personal communication, September 21, 2013).*

4.1.2.1 (b) Men's Answers on Duty in Life's Expenses and Couples' Responsibilities

Similar to women, men's answers to the question of providing for life's expenses as a male duty was generally divided into two categories. The first, men who supported the traditional gendered divisions and the second, male respondents who believe in equality in terms of duties and responsibilities.

9 male respondents out of 21 ones preferred to keep the traditional rules in terms of dividing life's duties based on gender. Two men among this group claim that culturally speaking, being responsible for life's expenses is a male duty. However, this group expressed their unhappiness about the dominant culture:

"I am not sure about women taking on the responsibility, because this is our culture, we grew up with this attitude in which a woman is the desired beloved and a man is in need of a lover. Nevertheless, you know, I think it is not fair these days. Today, women are seeking their equal rights, they are socially active and even in sexual life they follow their own desire. But, I do not know why we should still follow the traditional values to pay for them?" (Hamid, Personal communication, November 16, 2013).

Some men, who believe that paying for expenditures is their duty, assert that it is fair because it is payment in return for women who are supposed to do household chores and fulfill the men's sexual desires:

"Yes, I think it is a male duty. A wife has her own duties as well. Like helping her husband, supporting him and responding to his sexual needs" (Adel, Personal communication, October 15, 2013).

Other male respondent states that:

"I perceived it as a male duty. Because when a couple gets married, the husband supports the woman entirely. In return, a wife can support him emotionally and meet his needs, fulfill his sexual desire, cooking, making things at home organized, and bring up the children..." (Ehsan, Personal communication, October 14, 2013).

Men who support paying for expenses as a male duty also claim that it is what women want and need:

"What I found in women is that they like to be dependent on a man, no matter how strong or smart they are. They need to have someone to depend on; a part of this support is financial. That is why I say it has to be a male responsibility" (Siamak, Personal communication, October 15, 2013).

"Women are more sensitive and weak. They can work outside if they like it, however, for the most part; financial dealing is up to men" (Amir, Personal communication, October 25, 2013).

Finally, a group of male respondents, pay for life expenses because they see it as a way to be a leader who controls the relationship:

"*Personally, I want to be the main person responsible in life; either in finance or in other aspects of a relationship. I always want to be the boss. That is why I want to hold everything in my hands*" (Eman, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

On the other hand, most of male respondents (11 out of 21), believe in equal responsibility in providing for life expenses. They state that in an equal relationship, everything should be shared:

"*It should be shared; like everything else. If a man takes on the burden of life solely, it makes him expect his wife to be under his authority.*" (Jafar, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

"*We called it a marriage; it is a shared life of two people, everything should be shared*" (Hamed, Personal communication, October 8, 2013).

Some men, who believe in a couple's equality in financial provision, however, argue that women do not want to be equal:

"*In my opinion, when a couple decides to live together, they are supposed to be giving to each other and share everything. Unfortunately, Iranian girls expect their men to take responsibility for all finance issues. It is neither fair nor leads us to gender-equality*" (Mehrzad, Personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Other young man claims that:

"It is obvious that both couples should have the same responsibility, if they want to reach equality. However, I have seldom seen this tendency in Iranian women to share all duties and responsibilities equally; they do not even believe in individual's freedom to make decisions and to act"(Aeen, Personal communication, October 18, 2013).

Above narratives indicated that generally, male respondents more support the value of equal responsibilities of couples' in providing the life expenses, most of female respondents still prefer to follow the traditional gendered division of couples' responsibilities.

4.1.2.2 Women's Sexual Agency

The qualitative results which came from in-depth interviews, led to the understanding of how women and men justified their attitudes and actual conduct regarding female sexual freedom and agency.

4.1.2.2 (a) Women's Answers

The remarkable point in women's reports of their own sexual freedom and agency was that many of them confirmed that it is their right to be free and autonomous in their sexual life (as shown in the quantitative results); however, they generally act conservatively. 13 among 16 female respondents do not exercise agency in their actual sexual life, although most of them argue it should be respected as a human right.

A common justification presented by female respondents is that sex is a valuable female commodity that is not supposed to be given out freely:

"I know we as women have sexual needs. However, we are not supposed to express it directly in front of men. It's better to suppress it. We have a valuable thing; men have to try to convince us to get it, not easily and freely" (Aylar, Personal communication, September 29, 2013).

"I feel sexual need, it is natural desire. However, I expect a man to insist on being with me...My body is very valuable and pricey. It should not be for anybody" *(Sepideh, Personal communication, October 3, 2013).*

Some women who do not expect to have sexual agency, believe that sex is a male priority:

"I am not sure in terms of sex to be treated equally. As most of the time, it seems to be more urgent for men rather than women. It is very hard for a man to control and manage his sexual needs. I think it is more desirable and enjoyable for men than us" *(Hanieh, Personal communication, November 11, 2013).*

Most of the women, who did not exercise agency in their sexual life, were afraid of being seen as a slut or feel guilty, sometimes, they are afraid of losing their chance at marriage:

"I have always acted very conservatively regarding sex and hid my desires, because I was afraid that he would think something bad about me. The society has identified me as men's sexual toy. I am afraid if I wanted him to do or to not do a special act, he would accuse me of being a slut forever" (*Elahe, Personal communication, October 23, 2013).*

"I want to be in a relationship. Nevertheless, I am afraid of having sex. I am afraid of losing everything I have. How can I prove to others that I did not do anything wrong? I would be seen as a slut. Men would never accept it I'm afraid I will not find a man who will accept me as a wife" (Afsaneh, Personal communication, September 26, 2013).

Out of the 16 female respondents, only 3 of them practiced agency and autonomy in their sexual life. These women talked about sex, as a personal human right that

everyone deserves. They also see themselves as being responsible for their own desires and rights.

"It is ridiculous to suppress our own desires. I believe all humans are free to decide about his or her sexual life. Freedom and authority in sex is not just for men, both men and women should have this right" (Leili, Personal communication, October 11, 2013).

"I have respected my feeling and desires. It was my right to follow what I wanted. I think, a woman who never experienced orgasm, does not understand how important and vital it is. She does not know what she is deprived of" (Saeideh, Personal communication, October 1, 2013).

"Every time I meet a man, I talk about my previous relationships. I cannot censor myself. I live my life no matter what others might say. I have always been responsible for what I have done in my life" (Leili, Personal communication, October 11, 2013).

The other common issue among this group of women was their resistance against the social stereotypes; either in the society or in the family:

"I do not accept discriminations in our cultural values. I cannot make myself a prisoner in some irrational norms. The most important thing for me is myself; I do not care what others say. I have a religious and traditional family, but, when I was 19, I decided to change. Thus, I resisted and changed my life" (Leili, Personal communication, October 11, 2013).

"My family used to disagree with my independence and freedom in relationship and sex. However, after I entered university, studying different books and being involved in social activities, I chose my way of life. I insisted on my beliefs and

talked with my family for hours and hours, finally, they accepted my new life style. Now, they know I am leaving with my boyfriend and they have no problem with that" (Nilufar, Personal communication, September 21, 2013).

"I have a traditional family and most of my relatives and friends follow the traditional lifestyle. However, it did not make me happy. I started to think about life and relationship until I have found my answer. I decided and chose my way by myself, no matter what is dominant in the society" (Saeideh, Personal communication, October 1, 2013).

4.1.2.2 (b) Men's Answers on Women's Sexual Agency

Male respondents expressed their ideas about female sexual agency in a series of different opinions; from supporting it to rejecting it. However, a considerable number of them stand in the middle, as they were not certain about how to deal with female sexuality:

Out of 21 male respondents, 3 of them expressed their opposition towards women's sexual agency. Following the traditional gendered-regulations, they prefer a woman to be identified as modest and decent:

"I believe in religion and social morality. I do not agree with unrestricted relationships; neither for men nor women. Nevertheless, women should be more careful regarding this matter. It is important to me" (Adel, Personal communication, October 15, 2013).

"Women are naturally and inherently modest. I like this character in them. You know, men generally do not trust and respect a woman who acts sexually and expresses her sexual desires" (Siamak, Personal communication, October 2, 2013).

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On the other hand, 6 men out of 21 male respondents strongly support the sexual agency and freedom in women, they argue that women suppress their own sexuality; these male respondents express no suspicions or doubts regarding women who are sexually free. They claim that they have no problem with these women and prefer sex to be dealt with directly and clearly:

"I am already in a relationship with a foreign woman. I know about all her previous relationships. I think her experiences even have a positive influence on our relationship. She always expresses her sexual desire every time she wants. It is my pride, I think any man like it when his partner shows how happy and excited she is to have sex with him. I have never had a problem with this issue, however, most of the Iranian girls I knew, were not direct and honest in their sexual needs. I see how much my male friends have a problem with their Iranian girlfriends and even wives. Women never express their real feelings and pretend that they have no interest in sex" (Aeen, Personal communication, October 18, 2013).

"In my opinion this is mainly women's responsibility to change the situation. They cannot get equality in sexual life, until they do not adhere to the rules in which a woman is a man's territory. I see sometimes, women act in a certain way to make these rules stronger" (Hamed, Personal communication, October 8, 2013).

These men generally do not see a difference between men and women, but they claim   women use sex as leverage:

"When I got to believe that sex is a natural right of human beings, I wanted it for myself as well as my sisters, my girlfriend and my future wife. Being sexually free is necessary for any man and woman. However, even these days more girls seem to be open and free in sex, I think, most of them still perceive sex as a male need. They do not involve in sex towards their own pleasure or desire, they are not aware of

resistance against the traditional social norms; I think most of them are looking for some benefits. Through providing sex, they are going to gain other aims, beyond sex" (Kusha, Personal communication, October 20, 2013).

"Sex should be dealt freely by both men and women. Unfortunately, I know many educated women who trade their sex. They argued: he has to spend money for me, because he has sex with me. Girls are not honest and fair regarding sex. They suppress it in order to gain other benefits" (Shahin, Personal communication, October 25, 2013).

12out of 21 male respondents, however are men who wonder whether or not to accept sexual agency in women. They are not happy with women who do not act clearly in sexual matters or deal with sex; however, these men are not completely comfortable with women who are sexually autonomous and free. It seems that the notion of 'the corrupted woman' is applied on women who are direct when it comes to sex, and it is still prevalent in the mind of these men:

"The worst manner in a girl is when she tries to trade her sexual attraction. This girl would not be honest in her talk and behaviour. I can never stand this kind of women…you know, I try to not be judgmental about the sexual life of my wife or my girlfriend, but, it is not easy..." (Eman, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

"I like a girl who is open minded in sexual matters. Someone who does not make me feel obliged due to have sex with her; I cannot understand why women think they do a favour to men by having sex. Why aren't they free and open regarding sex? However, if I get sex during the first date with a girl, I cannot trust her anymore. You know, I feel she does not deserve my love. This is paradoxical, I now…" (Soheil, Personal communication, September 18, 2013).

"I broke up with my girlfriend. Because, she easily agreed to have sex with me. I could not trust her anymore. I suspected that she is like this with other men as well. I know, this is not fair. Because I cannot trust girls who pretend to be modest and then cheat me, I think they are selling themselves. I do not want to choose my girlfriend or wife among them. I think it is an ironic situation. Because of this paradox, I am not in a serious relationship now. In the future, I try to not care about the sexual life of my wife or my girlfriend, but it is not easy" (Bakhtiar, *Personal communication, October 10, 2013).*

Above mentioned narratives suggested that most of men who participated in this study are hesitant regarding to women's sexual autonomy, while most of female respondents do not adhere to sexual agency in their personal lives, although they believe in it.

4.1.2.3 Sexual Relationship's Stereotypes; Premarital Relationships

To have a more comprehensive view on how men and women react differently regarding stereotypes about sex and relationships, they were asked to discuss some controversial issues most importantly, their attitudes towards premarital sex as well as debates on girls' virginity.

4.1.2.3 (a) Women's Answers on Sexual Relationship's Stereotypes; Premarital Relationships

Forbidding premarital sex is one of the traditional social stereotypes in Iran. This stereotype especially focuses on women's sexual life and limits it to only the family and marriage framework. Consequently, retaining virginity until the marriage, assumed as an important factor for girls. However, in a transitional context (new age), this stereotype has been challenged through the modern style of relationships. Women's answers were divided into three categories based on their responses on whether they agree or disagree with premarital sex.

7 Women who strongly disagree with having sex outside of marriage were those who asserted strong defense of retaining the virginity until the marriage time. They gave reasons such as cultural limitations for women, identifying sex as a male priority and considering sex and virginity as a guarantee of marriage for a girl:

"We have many limitations. Those (boys) are free. People would call me a slut if I do it before marriage. How can I change people's minds? How can I prove to my future husband that I am a modest woman...?" (Afsaneh, Personal communication, September 26, 2013).

"I cannot stand sex with anyone except my husband. Because it is not accepted in our culture. Iranian boys are not trustworthy; they want you just for sex, without commitment. They are not loyal. Girls' virginity is important for Iranian men and

that is why we have to keep our virginity. Because we want to marry with one of them. This is men's character; they would always humiliate their wife if she was not virgin" (Kimia, Personal communication, October 20, 2013).

"In my opinion there is no problem. However, in our society it is better avoided. In our people's values, it is not acceptable to be with someone and to have sex with him in an unmarried relationship" (Sepideh, Personal communication, October 3, 2013).

However, women's worries about losing a chance at marriage were an important reasoning for them to follow the traditional rules in their sexual life:

"If you have sex without marriage, it would be exciting for a temporary period. What do you want to do after that? How can you be sure that your partner wants to marry you? Marriage is very important for me; I do not want to lose my chance" (Afsaneh, Personal communication, September 26, 2013).

"If I were in another country, I might have no problem with premarital sex. Because they are not worried about losing their virginity, but we are. I already had sex in my relationships, but we do it in a way that my virginity is not lost. Because I do not want to lose it. I need it for getting married." (Aylar, Personal communication, September 29, 2013).

"I had soft sex with my ex-boyfriend, but I will keep the real sex for my husband. How can I trust men? What should I do if he will not marry me? I cannot do it when I am not sure about marriage. I want to have sex with someone who is my husband and I can be sure he is mine. I do not want make risk on my marriage's chance and be alone forever" (Kimia, Personal communication, October 20, 2013).

"It is meaningless to have sex with someone and your relationship will not lead to marriage. Women, who have premarital sex and lose their virginity in an unmarried relationship, make a gamble on their chance at marriage. I cannot do it with someone who is not totally committed to me and makes me feel safe" (Sepideh, Personal communication, October 3, 2013).

"I never do it except for my husband. Because I need to make sure that, he is mine forever. If I have sex before marriage, he might leave me. I do not want to lose my chance at getting married" (Zahra, Personal communication, September 23, 2013).

The other point is the women's adherence to the idea that sex is a male priority. They argue that it is not fair to provide for men's desires while they do nothing important and valuable in return:

"The only aim of men in a relationship is sex, but women involve their emotion in it. If a man really loves a girl, he will never have sex with her, he neglects his desire to prove his love. We are not supposed to provide sex for them easily. It should be happen in marital life" (Zahra, Personal communication, September 23, 2013).

"My body is a valuable thing that I have. I am not supposed to give it to anyone to do what he wants and then leave me. Sexual relationship in a marriage is fair, he would make my life secure and comfortable and I would be always sexy and attractive for him" (Sepideh, Personal communication, October 3, 2013).

Only 3 female respondents were totally agree with premarital sex, these women saw sex as a human right that should not be suppressed:

"There is no problem, if both partners agree. I think sex is a way to know more about your partner's personality. It is important and necessary, these days even boys' opinion have changed about girls' virginity and sex. My life is the most

important thing for me, no matter what other people say" (Leili, Personal communication, October 11, 2013).

"I strongly agree with having sex before marriage. I think it is necessary. It is important to know yourself and your partner's personality, sex is a basic need in us. We are supposed to resist against the social limits that have been imposed on our lives" (Nilufar, Personal communication, September 21, 2013).

"Being totally free in sex would cause more emotional damage for both men and women; however, being involved in a safe sexual relationship is vital for both… I have enough maturity to take care of myself. Nobody has this right to control my body. When I decided to not be a virgin anymore, I was sure I would never choose a man as a husband who could not respect my attitude about this" (Saeideh, Personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Furthermore, 3 women agree with premarital sexual experience because of problems they have faced in their traditional marriages.They argue that their conservative sexual life and traditional marriages caused them inconveniences in their marital and sexual lives:

"I used to disagree. I thought sex is a male need and it was not fair to me to provide it for free or without a marriage commitment. Even in my marriages, I used to be very silent in sex. Now I feel I have lost my life with these traditional beliefs. I have always suppressed myself for nothing and I always had sexual misunderstandings with my husbands. My both marriages ended because of that. I am changed now and I support premarital sex" (Elahe, Personal communication, October 23, 2013).

"I now strongly agree, because I was hurt a lot in my marriage. The main cause of my problems was sex. My husband and I had no agreement in sex. He never

satisfied me. If we had experience before marriage, we would not have faced these

problems" (Forough, Personal communication, October 12, 2013).

"I didn't have sex before the marriage, I wish I had. I used to think I am supposed

to save my body and my virginity to my husband. I had a traditional marriage

without any intimate experience. If I had a sexual experience, I would be able to

figure out how my husband should do it; I seldom get an orgasm and I am not sure

if it is even real. My husband cannot fulfil what I need in sex and it makes our

marriage boring and inconvenient" (Parisa, Personal communication, October 15,

2013).

3 women are not sure whether to support premarital sex or not. They agree but with some reservations:

"I used to strongly disagree. However, I know this is a very important human need

and it would cause serious harm if it is suppressed. Therefore, I can support it in

special conditions; I mean a girl and boy should be committed to each other, really

like each other and do not do it just as a passion. I do not accept sex in a non-

committed and temporary relationship. But, because Iranian boys might misuse it,

it is better to avoid it" (Hanieh, Personal communication, November 11, 2013).

"I have no problem with sex. Nevertheless, for a girl the important thing is to feel

secure in her relationship. I want sex in a committed and loving relationship.

Because sex makes a very intimate closeness and should not be acted without love.

Personally, retaining the virginity is not an important for me; it is kind of social

control. Nevertheless, the attitude of most people in the society is different from

mine" (Masumeh, Personal communication, October 19, 2013).

"I do not disagree with sex in a committed relationship. However, I do not support it just for passion or as an experience. Because I think it is not a simple matter to be experienced" (Saba, Personal communication, October 22, 2013).

4.1.2.3. (b) Men's Answers on Sexual Relationship's Stereotypes; Premarital Relationships

In general, except for two respondents, all male participants agree with premarital sex, either clearly or conditionally. However, a number of agreed men were still hesitant about whether or not to take the girls' virginity as an important factor in time of marriage.

The men, who totally agree to have sex without marriage, generally argue that sex is a basic human need:

"It obviously should be agreed. Sex is an important part of life. Even the people's attitude is going to change about this. I do not even think about the virginity. It is a very cheap issue to be involved in" (Aeen, Personal communication, October 18, 2013).

"It is easy. Today it is not necessary to get married to have sex' .Time has changed. Its vital for both sexes and I think virginity is not important for neither boys nor girls" (Hamed, Personal communication, October 8, 2013).

"In my opinion, having a sexual relationship is vital for a healthy and mature human being, no matter in or out of marriage. I know love is important for a relationship. Nevertheless, what should we do if we are not falling in love? We are not supposed to ignore our basic desires. When I met my wife, she was a virgin and it made me feel disappointed. Because it is a sign of adherence to suppressive social norms. I preferred her to not be a virgin. I was not happy because of her conservative sexual life. However, we talked to each other and I tried to understand

her. Generally, I do not believe in virginity at all"" (Kusha, Personal communication, October 20, 2013).

"So, it is obvious. We need to have sex. We do not have to get married to have sex. It is our right anywhere and anytime; for all human beings, no matter the gender" (Mehrzad, Personal communication, October 1, 2013).

"Sex has no connection with marriage. Marriage is different issue and needs various necessities to happen. I see sex as a food for the body; something like what we eat or drink; I mean it is vital for our life. Virginity is ridiculous. A person whose life is dependent on such a worthless thing, will have a terrible life" (Pouya, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

"Without sex I cannot call a man and woman's friendship as an intimate relationship. Without sex, it is just an ordinary friendship. It is necessary I think. And I really do not think of being a virgin" (Ramin, Personal communication, September 22, 2013).

"I think sexual freedom should be the main freedom in a human being's life. Everyone should be free in his or her sexual life. It is even helpful for the future marriage. People, who had more sexual experiences before marriage, usually have more abilities in handling the marital relationship. I do not believe in virginity at all; neither for girls nor boys" (Sami, Personal communication, October 22, 2013).

"I agree with any kind of sexual experience. Commitment is the next priority. Sexual need is a biological necessity of humans. It should be responded to naturally for both men and women" (Shahin, Personal communication, October 25, 2013).

Some men who agreed with premarital sex were not sure how to take their girls' virginity at the time of marriage:

"A relationship has various dimensions. An important aspect is the sexual relationship that should be met to say it is a real relationship. However, I am not sure about the virginity of my wife. I would be more comfortable if she was a virgin. But it is not a big deal, because I know this is her right as well"" (Eman, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

"I think a person who did not have a sexual experience before marriage, does not know many things in a marital relationship. This person is immature. However, in my opinion, desirable sex is required to an emotional connection… I believe, it is important for a girl to be a virgin at the time of marriage. I never violate a girl's virginity myself, and I expect my wife to be a virgin. I think when a girl lets a man take her virginity and experiences a real sexual pleasure; she is involved in a strong emotional connection to that man. I could not trust her, if my wife used to be very intimate with another man" (Soheil, Personal communication, September 18, 2013).

A part of agreed men however, support the idea that premarital sex should be accompanied with commitment, love and awareness:

"I make a difference between the sexual debauchery and physical relationship. I think it should be acceptable in a committed relationship. It is better under the family's control. I do not believe in an open relationship. Personally, I took care on my wife's virginity at the time of marriage" (Adel, Personal communication, October 15, 2013).

"It is very good, even better than marriage, if both partners are committed to the morality and understand each other. However, retaining the virginity is not important for me. I respect all people's right to decide about her or his sexual life" (Jafar, Personal communication, September 28, 2013).

"I agree, but in a situation in which no one would get hurt. The most important thing for me is finding a trustworthy woman. I cannot do it with anyone, I need to be sure I am special to her and she will not do it with anyone else. What I have seen in men, they usually do not care about their girlfriend's virginity, but they consider it for their wives. I personally, try to not care when I want to get married. Because I know, it is not fair and rational. It is the right of everyone to control his or her sexual life. However, we were raised by these values and it is hard to change them. But I am challenging them now and I want to change this value in myself" (Bakhtiar, Personal communication, October 10, 2013).

"It could be a good and beneficial experience for both partners. However, in a real relationship. I think sex without love has no pleasure and cannot meet neither the man's needs nor woman's" (Ehsan, Personal communication, October 14, 2013).

"I agree with sex in a safe relationship. However, I do not agree with debauchery. You will always be in need for sex if you would not be satisfied mentally and emotionally. However, I am not sure how men would go along with this in women. Personally, when I wanted to get married, her virginity was a positive factor for me" (Hamid, Personal communication, November 16, 2013).

"I agree with sex if it was in a real and safe relationship. I cannot stand sexual relationship without emotional involvement and in a short-term relationship. I have the same idea about the virginity of my future wife. If she lost her virginity in a loving relationship, I will not care it. In my opinion, it is not wrong to have real sex in a real relationship. However, it is important for me to know what kind of relationship it was she was involved in" (Soleiman, Personal communication, October 6, 2013).

"It makes a paradoxical condition. On the one hand, I do not want it without a real commitment and on other hand we are really under pressure, we need to have sex. I want it if both partners really like each other" (Pedram, Personal communication, October 9, 2013).

"In my opinion, it is acceptable if it happens in a committed and conscious relationship, because it is our natural need" (Siamak, Personal communication, October 2, 2013).

Just two participants among men disagreed with premarital sex and strongly defended retaining virginity until marriage for both men and women:

"It is wrong. Sex is a natural need, no doubt. However, we have some cultural and religious regulations that should be respected. We have family norms. We cannot transgress all of them. It is better to make the possibility of marriage easier, so that, people could respond to their sexual needs in the right way and normally. Having premarital sex might cause people to be corrupted and non-committed" (Amirhossein, Personal communication, September 26, 2013).

"I do not believe in sex without commitment. Because of a culture I grew up in, the premarital sexual relationship should be limited to just soft sex; I mean, just hugging and kissing, without intercourse. The real sex is better to postpone until marital life, being involved in sex before marriage, might take my motivation away from marriage" (Ahmad, Personal communication, October 14, 2013).

The mentioned narratives declared that male respondents generally more support the idea of freedom of having a pre-marital sexual relationship than female.

Totally speaking, the qualitative data showed that in terms of duty in life's' expense and couples' responsibilities, and stereotypes regards to relationship, male respondents

generally expressed more transformed attitude than female, meanwhile, women demonstrated more clear perception regarding to their own right to have sexual agency and freedom rather men who mostly were hesitant, however, they rarely adhered to their attitude and controlled their sexual life conservatively.

4.2 Research Objective Two

The second research objective is to determine the factors that are associated to the level of women's sexual agency (on its four aspects; sexual activity, sexual awareness, sexual power, and sexual motives). Based on the theoretical framework of the current research that hypothesized a relationship between the individuals' attitude and women's sexual agency, the participants' attitude has been assumed as the first independent variable. Considering other probable factors, and related literature, the effect of marital status (Wait and Gallager, 2010; National health and social life survey in USA, 2004), and the participants' age and relationship's duration (Lewandowski and Schrage, 2010) have been also examined on the level of women's sexual agency. Therefore, the questions that needed to be answered are as follows:

1. Is there a relationship between the participants' attitude of relationship and gender roles and the level of women's sexual agency?

2. Is there a relationship between the participants' marital status and their reported level of women's sexual agency?

3. Is there a relationship between the participants' age and their reported level of women's sexual agency?

4. Is there a relationship between the participants' relationship duration and their reported level of women's sexual agency?

Univariate and multivariate analysis was run to answer the four above questions. Furthermore, multiple regression demonstrated to what extent the independent factors would predict the level of women sexual agency. Frequency responses however showed, most of the female respondents experienced their sexual life as non-agentic (55.4%), while 22.6% of them ranked their own state of sexual agency as moderate, only 22% expressed agency in their sexual life. Amongst the male respondents who

were asked about their partners' sexual agency, 46.2% assessed their partner as non-agentic, 29.6% ranked it as moderate, and 24.2% argued their women as an agent and autonomous partner in their sexual life.

4.2.1 Univariate and Multivariate Results

As the results of the univariate statistical test showed, among all factors that were examined, the factor of 'women's attitude about relationship and gender roles, was the only variable that had an effect on the level of women's sexual agency, as reported by the female respondents (Mean .398, P: .000) (see Table 4.5). The results showed that women's sexual agency is about 40% affected by their attitude, while there could be various other effecting variables that are out of this study's domain.

Four subscales of women's sexual agency as well were examined to find out their relationship with the independent variable. Results demonstrated, while women's age and their relationships' duration had an effect on the level of sexual power through which the younger women in relationships of 36-59 months length showed more agency, the relationship's status had a significant association on the level of sexual power and sexual motives. Accordingly, in both scales un-married women expressed more agency compared to married women. In terms of women's attitude, the results showed a significant association with all aspects of sexual agency. The strongest association of transformed attitude in women was found with their sexual motives. Based on the findings, more transformed attitude in women would lead them to be more agentic and autonomous in their motives in a sexual relationship (see Table 4.6).

Moreover, results examining the related factors to the level of women's sexual agency reported by male respondents showed the only factor that had an effect on men's reports about their partner's sexual agency was male attitude about relationship and gender roles. According to Table 4.7, the status of men's attitude has a significant moderate

effect on the level of their report on female partners' sexual agency (Mean .134, p: .000).

Table 4.5: Associated Factors to the Level of Women's Sexual Agency. Female Respondent

Dependent variable: Women's Sexual Agency			
Factors		**Mean**	**P. Value**
Women's Relationship Status	**Married**	80.68	.975
	Non-married	80.75	
Women's Age	**20-30**	83.18	.248
	31-40	79.73	
	41-50	79.23	
Women's Relationship's Duration	**1-11**	79.34	.533
	12-35	80.46	
	36-59	83.42	
	60-83	80.04	
	84-119	78.23	
	120-336	82.78	
Women's Attitude of relationship and gender roles		.398	.001

Table 4.6: Associated Factors to the Level of Women's Sexual Agency (Subscales). Female respondents

Dependent variable: Women Sexual Agency's Subscales									
Factors		**Mean**				**P. Value**			
		Activity	**Awareness**	**Motives**	**Power**	**Activity**	**Awareness**	**Motives**	**Power**
Women's Relationship Status	**Married**	21.01	18.25	28.55	12.27	.624	.157	.011	.026
	Non-married	20.70	18.83	30.31	13.11				
Women's Age	**20-30**	21.00	18.74	29.69	13.11	.367	.334	. 942	.015
	31-40	20.42	18.00	29.40	12.14				
	41-50	19.00	18.11	29.44	10.88				
Women's Relationship's Duration	**1-11**	19.92	18.16	29.53	12.76	.271	.218	.450	.019
	12-35	21.45	18.76	30.09	13.09				
	36-59	22.04	18.58	30.56	13.36				
	60-83	21.36	18.80	28.80	12.80				
	84-119	20.25	17.60	28.20	13.10				
	120-336	20.39	18.56	30.60	10.86				
Women's Attitude of relationship and gender roles		.102	.049	.186	.068	.000	.003	.000	.000

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Table 4.7: Associated factors to men's report of women sexual agency

Factors		Mean	P. Value
Men's Relationship Status	**Married**	31.20	.887
	Non-married	31.04	
Men's Age	**20-30**	30.81	.574
	31-40	30.95	
	41-50	32.97	
Men's Relationship's Duration	**1-11**	28.46	.368
	12-35	31.00	
	36-59	31.85	
	60-83	31.19	
	84-119	31.16	
	120-336	31.87	
Men's Attitude of relationship and gender roles		.134	.000

The dependent variable spanning header: **Dependent variable: Men's Report of Women's Sexual Agency**

4.2.2 Regression Results

To determine how and to what extent the dependent variable (Women sexual agency) would be predicted by independent variables, the multiple regression was run. Through the stepwise mode of analyzing, independent factors that did not show a significant effect on the dependent variable has been removed from the model. Compatible with univariate results, findings of regression analysis also showed, the only variable that had a significant effect on women's sexual agency in both male and female reports was their attitude about relationship and gender roles. Accordingly, the strength of relationship between the women's attitude and their reports of sexual agency is 43%, and women's attitude could predict 24% changes in women's level of sexual agency. Beta value.429 stated that by changing the one unit of women's attitude, their level of sexual agency

would change by .429. (see Table 4.8). Moreover, as the univariate results also indicated, the male attitude had a significant but lower effect on their report of female partner's sexual agency. Male attitude predicted about 11% of their partners' level of sexual agency (as reported by male participants) (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.8: Regression analysis predicting women sexual agency (female respondents)

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized coefficient	t	sig
	B	SE	Beta		
Attitude	.403	.063	.429	6.420	.000
R= .429		**R square= .234**			

Dependent: Women Sexual agency (female respondents)   P<0.05

Table 4.9: Regression analysis predicting women sexual agency (male respondents)

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized coefficient	t	sig
	B	SE	Beta		
Attitude	.138	.030	.335	4.588	.000
R= .335		**R square= .113**			

Dependent: Women Sexual agency (Male respondents)   P<0.05

4.3 Research Objective Three

The third research objective is to determine the associated factors to the level of a relationship's intimacy among couples. Besides the main scale of intimacy, independent factors have been evaluated in terms of association to the four aspects of couples' intimacy; emotional intimacy, cognitive intimacy, sexual intimacy, and experiential intimacy. Based on the theoretical framework that hypothesized a relationship between the women's sexual agency and couples' intimacy, the reported level of women's sexual agency has been assigned as the first independent variable. According to the literature, the other probable factors have been assumed as marital status of respondents (Wait and Galleger, 2010; Messing, 1979), and respondents' age and relationship duration (Goodman, 2013). Accordingly, the questions that needed to be answered are as follows:

1. Is there a relationship between the level of women's sexual agency and the level of couple's intimacy reported by the male and female respondents/participants?

2. Is there a relationship between the participants' marital status and their reported level of couples' intimacy?

3. Is there a relationship between the participants' age and their reported level of couples' intimacy?

4. Is there a relationship between the duration of participants' relationship and their reported level of couples' intimacy?

Frequency findings stated that most of respondents assessed their relationships suffering from lacking of intimacy (64.5%), while 22.2% of respondents expressed their assessment on being in the in-between range, only 13.3% of them claimed of having an intimate and pure relationship.

4.3.1 Univariate and Multivariate Results

To answer the above questions, the univariate analysis was separately run for male and female responses. According to Table 4.10, the level of women's sexual agency (.329%, P: .000) and women's age, had a significant effect on the level of couples' intimacy as reported by female respondents. It indicated that women's report of couples' intimacy is 33% affected by their level of sexual agency. In terms of different aspects of intimacy, findings of multivariate analysis showed, the younger women expressed more experiential and sexual intimacy. According to Table 4.11, more sexual agency in women would increase the level of intimacy in all aspects. Meanwhile, the aspects of sexual and cognitive intimacy had a higher level of association with the level of women's sexual agency (Mean .119 and .108 respectively). Married women showed more intimacy in cognitive and experiential intimacy, while sexual intimacy was more reported by non-married women.

Examining the related factors to the men's report of couples' intimacy, the level of their report of female partners' sexual agency had a significant effect on male sense of couples 'intimacy (Mean .640, P: .000) (see Table 4.12). It means, 64% of men's sense of couples' intimacy is affected by their assumption of partners' sexual agency.

Male participants whose female partners have sexual agency, expressed higher levels of intimacy, it was especially remarkable in the aspects of sexual intimacy (Mean .218, P: .000), the next scores were recorded for cognitive intimacy (Mean .190, P: .000). Findings suggested that more sexual agency in women increases the sense of intellectual trust and closeness besides more sense of sexual intimacy in their male partners. Emotional intimacy (Mean .156, P: .000) and experiential intimacy (.080, P: .002) of male participants also showed a significant association with their reports of female partners' sexual agency (Table 4.13).

Table 4.10: Associated factors to women's report of intimacy

Dependent variable: Level of Intimacy (Reported by Women)			
Factors		**Mean**	**P. Value**
Women's Relationship Status	**Married**	50.15	.068
	Non-married	45.89	
Women's Age	**20-30**	49.74	.010
	31-40	48.11	
	41-50	40.82	
Women's Relationship's Duration	**1-11**	46.89	.976
	12-35	49.78	
	36-59	47.82	
	60-83	47.57	
	84-119	48.82	
	120-336	47.59	
Women's Sexual Agency		.329	.000

Table 4.11: Associated factors to women's report of intimacy's subscales

Factors		Mean				P. Value			
Dependent variable: Level of Intimacy's Subscales (Women)									
		Emotional	Cognitive	Sexual	Experiential	Emotional	Cognitive	Sexual	Experiential
Women's Relationship status	**Married**	14.64	16.91	10.91	7.55	.244	.003	.041	.009
	Non-married	14.54	15.69	12.57	6.88				
Women's Age	**20-30**	14.85	16.31	11.63	7.36	.164	.231	.013	.060
	31-40	14.08	15.93	10.83	6.75				
	41-50	13.09	14.63	9.63	6.36				
Women's Relationship Duration	**1-11**	14.15	15.55	10.59	6.50	.171	.184	.180	.213
	12-35	14.63	16.13	11.39	7.64				
	36-59	14.47	15.65	11.12	6.60				
	60-83	14.32	15.85	11.52	6.00				
	84-119	14.92	16.05	11.26	6.63				
	120-336	14.05	16.06	10.78	6.58				
Women's Agency	**Sexual**	.097	.108	.119	.064	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 4.12: Associated factors to men's report of intimacy

Dependent variable: Level of Intimacy (Reported by Men)			
Factors		**Mean**	**P. Value**
Men's Relationship Status	**Married**	49.31	.698
	Non-married	50.14	
Men's Age	**20-30**	50.59	.857
	31-40	49.49	
	41-50	47.35	
Men's Relationship Duration	**1-11**	49.30	.852
	12-35	50.94	
	36-59	48.95	
	60-83	49.69	
	84-119	47.88	
	120-336	50.53	
Men's Report of Partner's Sexual Agency		.640	.000

Table 4.13: Associated factors to men's report of intimacy's subscales

Dependent variable: Level of Intimacy's Subscales (Men)									
Factors		**Mean**				**P. Value**			
		Emotional	Cognitive	Sexual	Experiential	Emotional	Cognitive	Sexual	Experiential
Men's Relationship status	**Married**	14.91	16.02	11.38	7.53	.172	.124	.842	.195
	Non-married	15.37	15.33	11.45	7.22				
Men's Age	**20-30**	14.69	15.73	11.63	7.38	.853	.763	.828	.820
	31-40	14.48	15.42	11.52	7.25				
	41-50	14.38	15.30	11.84	7.15				
Men's Relationship Duration	**1-11**	14.31	15.50	12.19	7.34	.702	.597	.338	.701
	12-35	15.22	16.20	12.20	7.37				
	36-59	14.62	15.56	11.21	7.57				
	60-83	15.14	16.16	11.01	7.38				
	84-119	14.46	13.77	11.04	6.42				
	120-336	15.36	15.58	11.90	7.68				
Men's Report of Partner's Sexual Agency		.156	.190	.218	.080	.000	.000	.000	.005

4.3.2 Regression Results

The regression results demonstrated that women's level of sexual agency and women's age had an effective correlation with women's sense of couples' intimacy. Table 4.14 showed the strength of relationship between the women's level of sexual agency and women's sense of intimacy in their relationships is about 48%, and about 23% of females report of intimacy is predicted by their level of sexual agency. Women's age as well had negative significant but low effect on the female report of intimacy through which rising the women's age negatively affect their sense of couples' intimacy. Table

4.15 also indicated that male report of couples' intimacy is related to their reports of partners' sexual agency, in this term, partner's sexual agency had about 42% effect on the men's sense of intimacy.

Table 4.14: Regression analysis predicting couples' intimacy (female respondents)

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized coefficient	t	sig
	B	SE	Beta		
Sexual agency	.375	.049	.489	7.603	.000
R= .476			**R square= .228**		
Age	-.338	.116	-.201	-2.909	.004
R= .052			**R square= .034**		

Dependent: Couples' intimacy (female respondents)   P< 0.05

Table 4.15: Regression analysis predicting couples' intimacy (male respondents)

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Unstandardized coefficient	t	sig
	B	SE	Beta		
Partners' sexual agency	.676	.116	.419	5.820	.000
R= .419			**R square= .176**		

Dependent: Couples' intimacy (male respondents)   P< 0.05

Totally speaking, the regression results verified the proposed theoretical model in which the effect of attitude on the women's sexual agency and the effect of women's sexual agency on the couples' intimacy were assumed.

4.4 Structural Equation Modelling

Finally, the structural Equation Model (SEM), conducted through the Amos software (version 23), demonstrated how the main variables of the study are related to each other. According to Fig 4.1, women's attitude significantly affected their level of sexual agency, and level of sexual agency predicts the reported level of couples' intimacy; Chi square (4375.306) df (1593), (see Table. 4.16). Amongst male respondents as well a significant prediction of attitude on their report of partner's sexual agency, and the prediction of partner's sexual agency on their level of couples' intimacy has been found; Chi square (28576.3) df (2139), (see Table 4.17). The statistics show how close the model corresponds with the data.
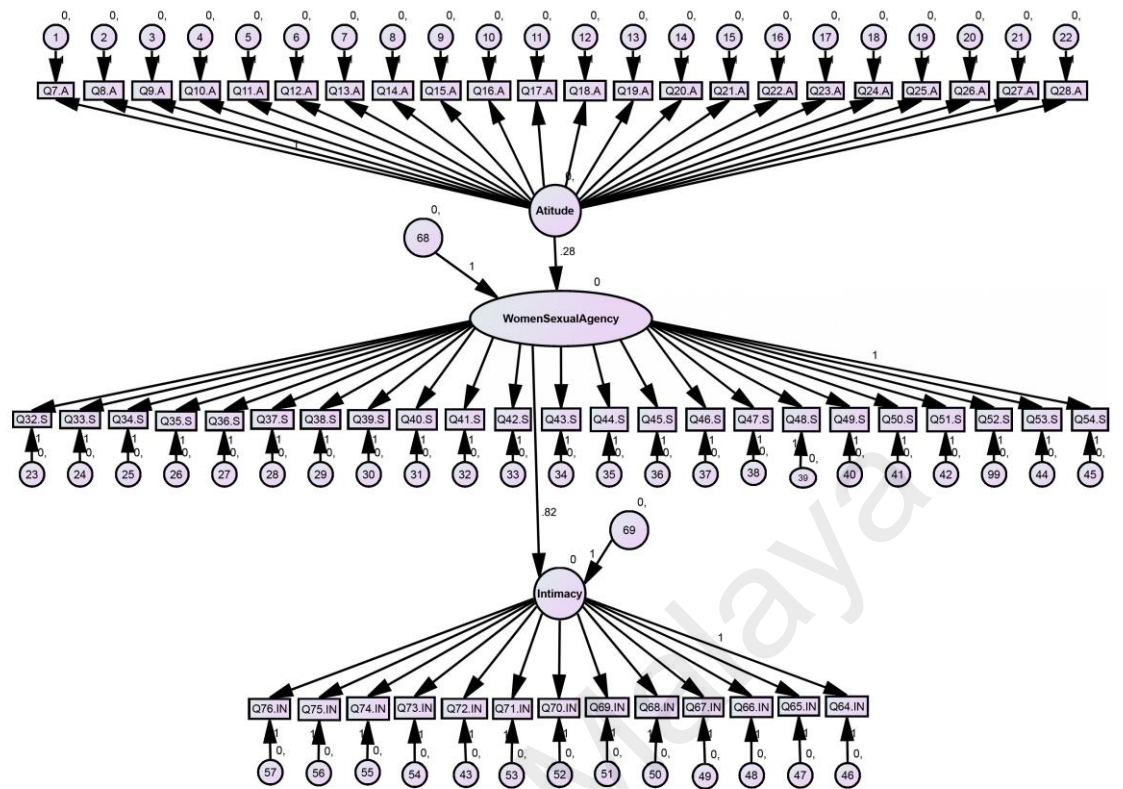
Fig. 4.1. SEM model, representing among female respondents.

Table 4.16. SEM statistics (Conceptual model among female respondents)

CFI	TLI	NFI	RMSEA
0.858	0.950	0.960	0.056

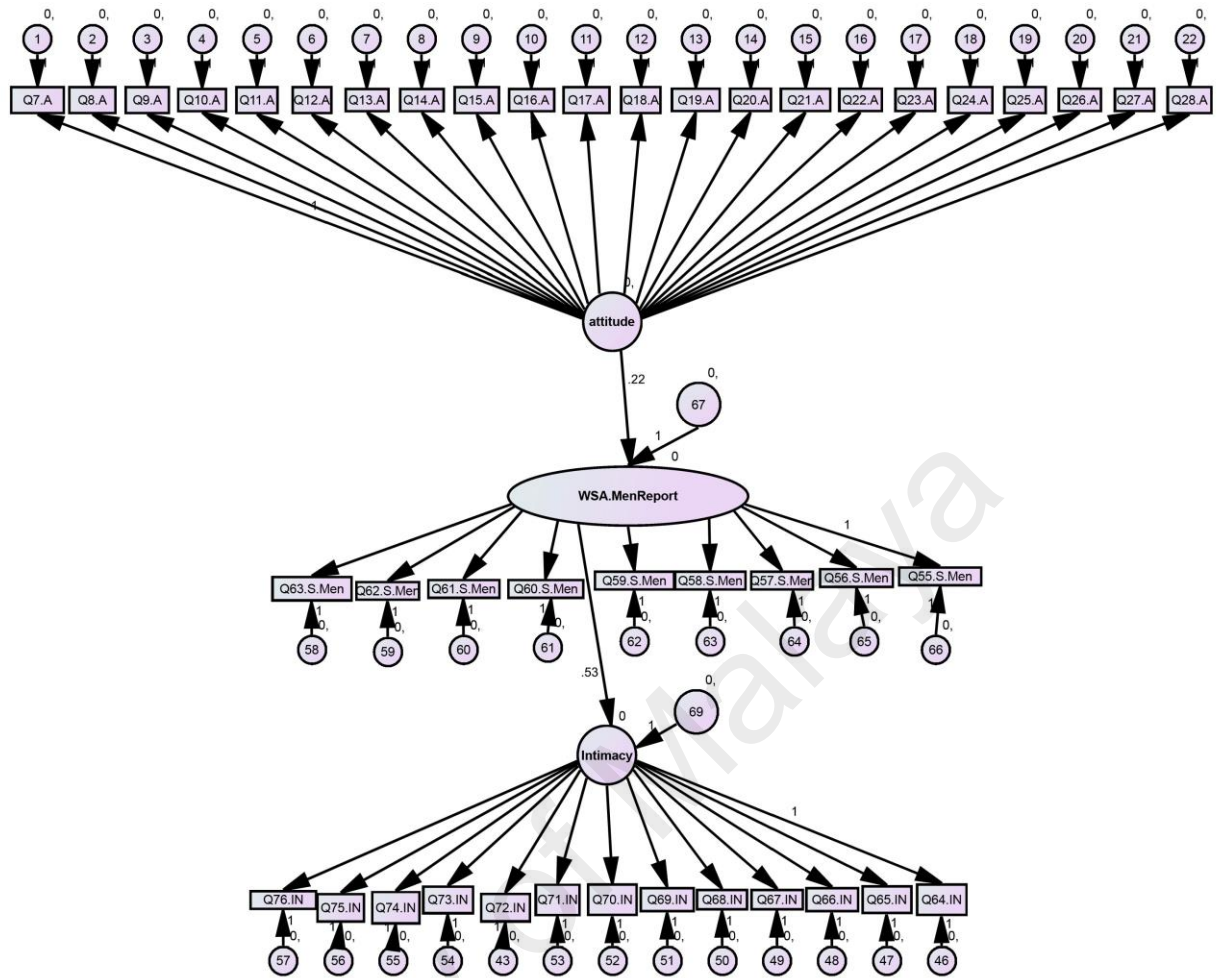CFI: (0-1); TLI≥ 0.95; NFI≥ 0.9; RMSEA< 0.08 (Byrne, 2010)

Fig. 4.2. SEM model, representing among male respondents.

Table 4.17. SEM statistics (Conceptual model among male respondents)

CFI	TLI	NFI	RMSEA
0.771	0.951	0.947	0.012

CFI: (0-1); TLI≥ 0.95; NFI≥ 0.9; RMSEA< 0.08 (Byrne, 2010)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Research Objective One

The first objective was aimed to determine the associated factors with the participants' attitude of relationship and gender roles. However, the most critical factor that was hypothesized theoretically and has been examined through both quantitative and qualitative phases was gender. This objective discussed to what extent women and men actually perceive the values of transformed or traditional relationship in their lives and this led to the examination of Giddens's rival theories that argue that Giddens's idea of transformation of intimacy is too optimistic and is far from the reality.

Results suggested that men and women perceived the values of transformed relationship differently. Besides gender, the relationship's status of respondents also had a significant impact on their attitudes regarding relationship and gender roles.

5.1.1 Gender and Transformation of Attitude

As it was hypothesized, there is a difference between men and women in their perceptions of transformation of intimacy. To examine this issue, questions on different aspects of a relationship that would alter through the modern transformation, were asked and theoretically discussed. Women's duty in life's expenses and couples' responsibilities, women's sexual freedom, and stereotypes regarding sex and marriage laws were discussed with the respondents, to determine to what extent men and women perceive transformed or traditional attitudes regarding each subject.

Findings suggested that the effect of gender was seen when the differences between men and women was apparent in terms of their attitudes regarding the transformation of relationship and gender roles. Comparing male and female attitudes on the different aspects of transformation of intimacy made the results compatible with Giddens's rival theories. As it was mentioned in the second chapter, feminists scholars proposed some

challenges against Giddens's account of transformed intimacy and argued that the meaning and function of relationships and intimacy have not yet transformed in the egalitarian and fair way as Giddens has discussed. Feminist critics mainly emphasize the gendered discriminations against women and argue that, transformed intimacy has not brought equality for women as it was promised. However, the current study suggests that the continuous inequality is not just against women, but on the men as well. In other words, men and women have not yet perceived and accepted the notion of transformed intimacy equally. The current results suggests that, unlike what Giddens suggested, in the transitional context of the study, modern transformations do not lead individuals to perceive intimate relationships as a source of equality and egalitarian intimacy, rather, the participants were mostly likely to follow their own needs.

Therefore, it seems that the discussion of social exchange theory (Baumeister & Vohs 2004) is more appropriate when theorizing the respondents' approaches to their relationships, where each individual seeks to gain more benefits and put in fewer investments. In fact, unlike Giddens (1992) argument that suggested, "(a) (pure) relationship continues only until both parties were equally satisfied" (p. 96), the current outcomes were more in line with the social exchange theory that stated, "Interactions are only likely to continue if each party gains more than loses" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004, p. 13).

On the one hand, female respondents mostly argued that they believed in women's right to have sexual freedom, however, they rarely actually adhered to their opinions and showed more adherence to the traditional gendered stereotypes in their sexual lives. Women generally wanted the same sexual freedom as men, but they did not negotiate sex freely and equally. Female participants argued for having equal rights and agency in the relationship; however, they rarely accepted taking on equal responsibilities in the relationship.

On the other hand, male respondents generally argued that sex should be free from stereotypical limitations; they complained that women suppressed sexuality and exchanged sex for other favors, while some of these men do not clearly agree and are not comfortable with women's sexual agency. Males generally want their female partners to be sexually easygoing and active and to be financially responsible in the relationship, while they are not comfortable with the status of female agency and independence in sexuality. They continue to exert control in the relationship.

As Swilder (2001) and Smart & Shipman (2004) argues, people are in a state of fluctuation between what Giddens called a pure relationship and the traditional perception of marital relationships. They declare that the cultural diversity and contextual characteristics should be considered in any examination of transformation of intimacy. Accordingly, in the context of this study, the results suggest that the transformation of intimacy is not yet perceived and performed completely by the majority of individuals, rather it is perceived by men and women selectively, and they fulfill their own desires rather than emphasize egalitarian and empathic values. Based on this model of transformation, respondents state that the notion of a semi-modern status as their desired condition. In what is called semi-modern, people generally want some aspects of the relationship to be transformed and some aspects to remain traditional.

As Langan and Davidson (2010) states, new changes in the societal context, and transforming the gender roles and couples' expectations, creates some challenges for couples to reach a balance between what they have learned as individual benefits and the mutual task to keep intimacy and equality.

Categorizing the male and female respondents based on their reactions to values of transformed intimacy and relationship, suggests that traditional men, who accepted their

stereotypical male gender roles, are more likely to argue that control in the relationship should be a man's domain, both in terms of finances and overall management. These men expect women to perform their stereotypical roles and are less likely to accept female sexual freedom, women's agency, and equality in the relationship. On the other hand, male respondents who resisted traditional stereotypes are more likely to accept agency and freedom of women and act more equally in the relationship. However, they are reluctant to accept the stereotypical male gender roles.

Among the female respondents however, women who are sexually autonomous and independent are more likely to avoid the traditional gender roles. These women accept their transformed responsibilities in managing and handling their relationships. They are more likely to be financially responsible and do not expect men to support them. These women are less likely to follow norms of exchanging female sexuality for material gain and perform sex as a part of a relationship that ought to be negotiated equally between both partners. On the other hand, traditional women who are conservative in terms of their sexual life are more likely to assume sex to be an exchangeable property that should not be negotiated equally with men. These women generally expect men to be in charge of the relationship, they are more likely to neglect the egalitarian responsibilities in relationships and tend to be dependent on men financially, mentally and emotionally. They however, expect men to be a fair, responsible, and treat women with justice.

5.1.2 Marriage and Transformation of Attitude

According to the results, unmarried respondents were generally more transformed in their attitudes on intimate relationships and gender roles. Regarding the sub-scales of attitude, except the measures of women's divorce' right, in all aspects the marital status had a specific effect. In which, unmarried respondents showed more transformed attitudes rather than married ones. It shows how the personal lives of people could challenge governmental narratives of intimate relationships; individuals, who were

engaged in unaccepted relationships (unmarried), were those who were more likely to disobey the formal norms and patriarchal beliefs of gender roles.

5.2 Research Objective Two

Based on the second objective, this part aims to explore factors related to the level of women's sexual agency. Referring to Giddens's theory on transformation of intimacy, an individual's attitude of intimate relationship and gender roles, as well as the status of female sexual agency and autonomy, are two aspects included in transformed intimacy. Accordingly, aside from age, a relationship's status and a relationship's duration are primary factors that were emphasized as the effect of a participant's attitude on the level of female sexual agency.

According to the results, the level of women's sexual agency positively correlates with their and their male partners' attitudes about relationship and gender roles. The current study's results demonstrates that, the more transformed the attitudes towards relationship and gender roles among participants, higher the level of women's sexual agency were reported by both men and women. In terms of examining other contributions in the level of women's sexual agency, the results showed that while marriage had a moderate correlation with the level of sexual agency in women, younger women in a 3-5 year relationship showed more sexual power.

5.2.1 Individual's Attitude and Women's Sexual Agency

According to the results, generally there is a positive significant relationship between an individual's attitude about relationship and gender roles and their reports of female sexual agency.

Findings show that the more transformed the attitude among women, the higher the level of their sexual agency, and the less transformed the attitude among women, the lesser level of their sexual agency.

The results conform to parts of existing research whereby the positive correlation between women's attitudes and the quality of their sexual lives have been discussed. For instance, Keifer and Sanchez's (2007) findings are compatible with the current research's results, when they concluded that adherence to gender roles might promote sexual passivity among women. Similar to the current study's assumption regarding the possibility of multiple reasons for female sexual passivity, Keifer and Sanchez (2007) proposed that conformity to traditional gender roles is a primary reason for women's non-agentic sexual behaviour.

Besides the general score of sexual agency, all four sub-scales of women's sexual agency showed a significant relationship with their attitudes on relationship and gender roles. These results suggested that women, who believed more in transformed perceptions about gender roles and intimate relationships, would be more likely to experience their sexual life as autonomous. In other words, women who regard intimate relationships as a situation in which both partners have equal rights and responsibilities, would be those who are more aware, active and powerful in their sexual relationships and would have more independent motives when involved in sexual intercourse. This discussion is related to Diana Sanchez and her colleagues' arguments (2006), when they stated that women, who associate sex with submission and passivity, are more likely to adapt the submissive sexual role and would be less likely to report arousal and sexual autonomy. Conversely, women who perceive their sexual role as active and assertive were more likely to show sexual agency.

The findings in this study also support the primary study of Moore and Davidson (1997). In series of therapeutic studies, they argued:

"If women do not believe that they have power in sexual situations, they will be passive, allowing their partners to control the situation. If women are taught to

be sexual agents, they will perceive themselves as having a choice and be empowered" (Davidson & Moore, 1997, p. 14).

Among the four sub-scales of women's sexual agency, the scale of 'sexual motive' recorded a greater relationship with women's attitudes. This result suggests that women whose perceptions of intimate relationship and gender roles are more transformed and equal, are more likely to participate in sex for their own sexual needs, in other words, these women are more likely to perceive their own sexual desire to be as strong as men's and would not assume it as something valuable that can be exchanged. This finding actually contradicts Catherin Hakim's (2011) criticism on Giddens's theory. As it was mentioned earlier, Hakim argued that women naturally have lesser sexual needs than men do and it is their opportunity to exchange sex for men's possessions. She stated that Giddens's idea of pure and equal relationship would only meet the men's desire to have free sex and would not meet the women's needs. While the current results demonstrate women who do not follow the traditional values of gender roles and relationship, do not perceive sex as a male priority. Contrary to Hakim's theory, the results in this study support the idea that sexual needs are not naturally less among women. Nevertheless, these are perceived as social constructs made by stereotypical gender roles.

Meanwhile, a significant association of men's attitudes and their reports of partner's sexual agency suggested that female sexual agency would be greater in relationships in which the male partner possesses transformed ideas about intimate relationship and gender roles. In their study on the relationship between traditional gender roles adherence and sexuality, Diana Sanchez and her colleagues (2012) stated that the sexual context is one in which both men and women feel particularly compelled to engage in stereotypical gender behaviour. They concluded that this is not just women who have attitudes which are related to their sexual satisfaction, but rather, men's attitudes on

relationship and gender roles also have a positive correlation with their own sexual experiences as well with the level of sexual autonomy experienced by their female partners. According to the existing literatures and the results of this study, it could be argued that more transformed and modern perceptions of a relationship among male partners could be positively related to the greater level of sexual agency among their female partners.

Finally, the regression results also supported the general linear results, when it proved a significant effect of both male and female respondents on the level of women's sexual agency. Therefore, the current study's theoretical assumption about the exciting relationship between two aspects of transformation of intimacy was proven; that more transformed attitudes would lead to a higher level of sexual agency among women.

5.2.2 Marriage and Level of Women's Sexual Agency

Examining the multivariate analysis, provided findings through which marriage was seen as a significant associated factor to aspects of sexual agency reported by women. While in terms of general score of sexual agency's report, there was no significant difference between married and non-married men and women, amongst the sub-scales of sexual agency, the statistical results showed a significant difference between married and non-married women in terms of sexual motive and sexual power.

Accordingly, non-married women have shown greater agency in their reports of sexual motives compared to married female respondents. It can be concluded that non-married women were more likely to initiate a sexual intercourse with their partners due to their own sexual needs and desire. Moreover, non-married female respondents reported more power in their sexual lives compared to married women.

Overall, it is reasonable to argue that women who are engaged in non-married relationships were more likely to experience agency in their sexual life especially in

terms of motives for engaging in sex, as well as in the level of power and control they exercise in their sexual lives.

In primary studies comparing married and non-married women's sexual lives, there are contradictory approaches. While some parts of literature support these research findings by declaring more sexual agency among non-married women, there is also evidence against these findings. Based on the national health and social life survey held in the United States of America (2004), married women had sex less frequently and were less likely to experience orgasm compared to non-married women engaged in dating relationships. Moreover, the national survey in Britain (2000) stated that married women were more likely to report a problem and dysfunction as well as miscommunication in their sex lives. Besides research that supports the current findings, there are some arguments on the opposing side. For example, Waite and Gallagher (2010) argue that married women had better and more satisfying sexual lives compared to non-married women. They stated that 40% of married women recognized their sexual lives as being emotionally and physically satisfying and self-controlled, compared to only 30% of single women who were involved in cohabiting and dating relationships.

Although both sides of the arguments have their evidences, the results of this study support the first group of arguments in which there is greater sexual agency among non-married women compared to married women.

It can be concluded that, participation in traditional rules of familial relationships by which the traditional roles of wives and husbands have been reinforced, causes married women to accept and perform passive sexual roles in marriage. On the other hand, non-married women are already involved in a kind of non-traditional intimate relationship that is more likely to weaken the stereotypical gender roles in their relationships and sexual lives. However, there is no strong evidence to argue that non-married

relationships are free from traditional gender roles or married relationships are totally shaped by traditional rules. It is obvious that a continuum of both traditional and transformed rules are present in both types of relationships, however, marriage being an institution based on stereotypical definitions of gender roles and sexuality, it is therefore more likely to reinforce these norms.

5.3 Research Objective Three

The third research objective concerning the related factors to the actual level of intimacy among couples was devised based on two theoretical arguments. The first inspiration of this objective was Giddens's discussion on the transformation of intimacy and pure relationship where he argued in the modern context, women's sexuality has been revived and due to the egalitarian transformations in a couple's sexuality and relationship's expectations, the pure and equal intimacy is achieved. Based on this argument, the third objective of the current research, hypothesized that besides other factors, there should be a relationship between the level of women's sexual agency and the level of couple's intimacy reported by respondents.

The second theoretical source of this objective was the approach through which intimacy was discussed as a socio-cultural discourse rather than a necessary natural phenomenon. In this approach, the discourse of intimacy is related with other discourses such as sexuality and power. As it was mentioned, in the traditional discourse of intimate relationships, the issue of sexuality was always defined by male sexual dominance, while the women's autonomy in the area of sexuality is a new discussion. Assuming the relationship between the discourses of intimacy and sexuality, the current study aims to investigate how the status of women's sexual agency as a new phenomenon of human sexuality, is related to the level of intimacy among partners.

According to the results, a positive significant relationship has been found between the women's level of sexual agency and their reports of intimacy in their intimate relationships. Male respondents also reported a strong positive association between the actual level of intimacy and their partners' level of sexual agency.

In addition, in order to understand the contribution of other variables in the level of intimacy among couples, the probable effects of a participant's age, a relationship's duration and the participants' marital status were examined with the level of reported intimacy. Results showed, while a relationship's duration had no significant relations with intimacy, female participant's age made significant differences in the level of intimacy. Similarly, marriage made a moderate variation in the female respondents' reports and had no effect on male reports of intimacy.

5.3.1 Women's Sexual Agency and Couples' Intimacy

According to the results, the higher the level of sexual agency in female participants, the higher the level of expressed intimacy by them. Similar results were also obtained from the male participants.

Scholars who worked on intimacy as a discourse recognized the positive relationship between sexual life and intimacy. In this approach, intimacy is an interactional phenomenon that has been defined historically in relations with other discourses like power, gender and sexuality. Weingarten (1991) described intimacy as a vital and interactive discourse; "As a discourse, intimacy is framed as a cultural and historical construction that is mediated by social processes... [and]... inextricably linked to the other discourses – discourses of gender, power, domination, and sexuality" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 287, as cited in Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 21).

Meanwhile, the link between intimacy and sexuality especially female sexuality has been emphasized in the works of modern sociologists. According to the modern theorists, like Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) and Anthony Giddens (1992) modern changes have fundamentally altered the experience of love, family life and sexuality. According to them, while intimate relationships among couples are necessary in the isolated individualised world, it would survive as long as each individual in the relationship could continue to derive sufficient personal satisfaction.

For female participants, while the level of sexual agency was related to all aspects of their sense of couples' intimacy, the strongest effect of sexual agency was found in their reports of sexual intimacy. It would provide an argument that for women, the feeling of sexual intimacy and satisfaction would be considerably related to their level of sexual agency and their sense of autonomy in their sexual life. This discussion is supported by the findings of Diana Sanchez and colleagues (2006) in which they argued that women

who performed the submissive sexual role reported lower levels of arousal and sexual satisfaction, and greater difficulty in becoming sexually aroused.

The results also suggest that men's report of intimacy is related to their female partners' level of sexual agency. Besides the sexual, emotional and experiential intimacy, a strong relationship was also found between the men's sense of cognitive intimacy with their partners' level of sexual agency. This result is against arguments in which men are shown to prefer their female partners to be sexually silent and passive. The results underlines that male respondents would be more likely to become cognitively and intellectually close to their partners, when they assume that female partners have an equal and autonomous sexual relationship.

This argument is compatible with the results of Elaine Hatfield and colleagues research (1988) through which they found out that male respondents wanted their partners to be more active, assertive, experimental and unexpected during sexual intercourse. Moreover, the findings of Faulkner (2002) advocated the results by showing evidence that wives' marital, sexual and interpersonal functioning would be a greater predictor of husbands' marital satisfaction.

Findings are also supported by the findings of Iranian scholars who worked on the issues of relationship happiness and women's sexuality among Iranian couples. Movahed's and Azizi's (2011) results show women's low awareness of sexual relationships, and their passivity in expressing their sexual desire besides the couples' misunderstanding about their partners' sexual needs as the main cause of sexual dissatisfaction among couples. Their results also stress on the positive relationship between the women's sexual agency and couples' relationship satisfaction.

In contrast, some scholars argue that there is a contradiction between intimacy and sexual agency among modern individuals. They emphasise individual freedom,

individual pleasure and agency and individual choice are in contradiction with the demands of intimacy in contemporary societies:

"We can begin to see the lack of fit between discourses of individualism and intimacy within contemporary society. These are competing discourses; individualism discourse demands independence, while intimacy discourse demands dependence" (Langan & Davidson, 2010, p. 29).

The current results however, provide evidence against the argument, as a positive relationship was found between individual sexual agency among women and couples' intimacy. Regression results in particular demonstrated that the level of women's sexual agency has a significant effect of the report of intimacy by both male and female participants. The finding supported the assumption of the theoretical model through which the effect of women's sexual agency was assumed on the level of coupes' intimacy. It is more compatible with the Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (1995) argument that the need for intimacy does not disappear in modern times; rather it is more necessary among modern and independent individuals who are isolated. However, the form and construction of intimacy has changed from traditional obligations to individuals' choice. From large family ties to smaller ties between two individuals.

5.3.2 Marriage, Age and Couples' Intimacy

Statistical findings show that marriage has an effect on women's sense of intimacy. While married women expressed higher levels of cognitive and experiential intimacy, their reports of sexual intimacy were lower than un-married women.

It can be argued that the higher level of experiential intimacy reported by married female respondents can be justified by the fact that non-married participants do not have the shared time and space that married couples do. Especially in the context of Iran in which cohabitating is rarely practiced, social and economic pressures impose some limitations on dating couples in terms of having enough shared time and activities. However, the findings of this study suggest that these limitations are more perceived by female participants than male participants.

Similar to this outcome, Waite and Gallagher (2010) states that mutual trust and intellectual communication is higher among married couples compared to unmarried couples.

The remarkable point is that marriage has different effects on men's and women's sense of sexual intimacy. While male respondents reported the same level of sexual intimacy within both kinds of relationship, however, non-married women expressed higher levels of sexual intimacy compared to married women. It provides evidence to support the idea that marriage would impose negative effects on female sexuality. It suggests that women are more likely to lose their agency and feeling of intimacy and satisfaction in their sexual lives following marriage.

While existing research on relationship and intimacy rarely focused on comparing the level of intimacy among married and non-married couples, however, the results of the current study was supported by Debora Messing's (1979) study in which she argued that non-married female respondents were more likely to assume their sexual life as an

intimate relationship. Messing declared that in comparison with 56 percent of married women, 88 percent of non-married women reported a sense of satisfaction and intimacy about their sexual life.

Furthermore, age showed an effective contribution to the sense of experiential and sexual intimacy for female participants. Younger women expressed a higher level of intimacy in both experiential and sexual aspects.

5.4 Why the Transformed Intimacy has not been actualized?

The concept of transformed intimacy, proposed by Giddens (1992), refers to the status in which each party has equal rights and obligations. In this relationship, each person has respect, and wants the best for the other. Mutual trust is necessary in such a relationship. In such a status he called as a pure relationship, the transformed intimacy between partners is assumed to be achieved when couples are involved in a close, trusting and equal relationship by which both partners are satisfied sufficiently and equally. As Giddens argues, there are two conditions in achieving pure relationship (transformed intimacy); transformation in the stereotypical attitudes of gender roles and relationship, and sexual autonomy and agency for women to be equal as men. Accordingly, the theoretical model of the current research assumed the individuals' attitude about relationship and gender roles have an effect on women's sexual agency, and the level of women's sexual agency hypothesized to have an effect on couples' intimacy reported by men and women. The quantitative results and Structural Equation Model approved this hypothesized relationship. According to the SEM findings, the following figure represents and approves the theoretical framework of this study:
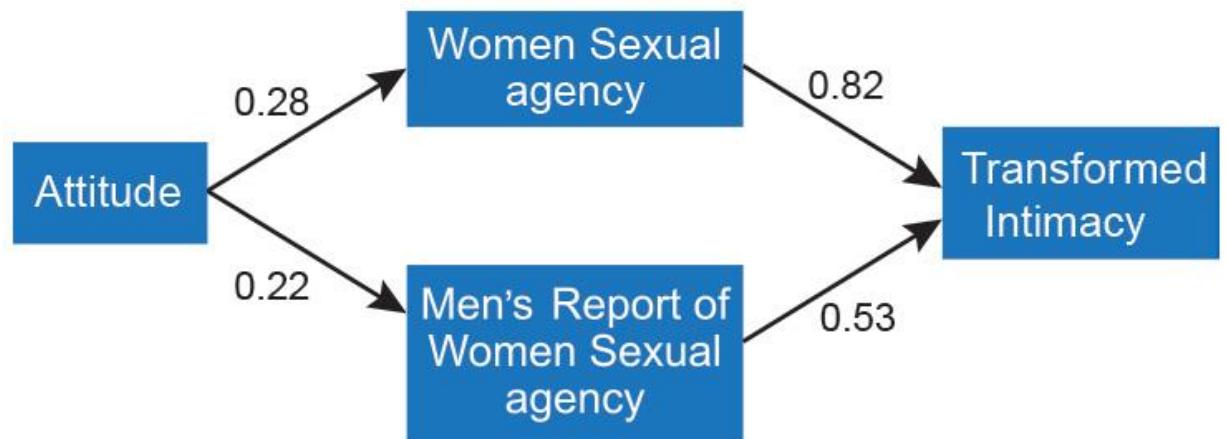
Fig. 5.1 Theoretical framework, based on SEM findings

However, while a positive relationship was shown between transformed attitudes of people, sexual agency of women, and higher levels of couples' intimacy, the status of pure and intimate relationship has not yet been actualized. For most of the respondents, transformation in the stereotypical attitudes and sexual life is not fulfilled and as a result, the pure and transformed intimacy is not achieved. Besides the qualitative findings, the quantitative multiple frequencies as well indicated that transformation of intimacy has not been realized. As mentioned in the statistical results of chapter 4, 52% of respondents still believe in traditional values of relationship and gender roles, 51% of respondents reported the level of women's sexual agency as non-agentic and just 23% reported as being agentic, and 64% of respondents identified their relationship as non-intimate.

There are some theoretical approaches that try to explain the unfulfilled process of transformed intimacy and pure relationship. Feminist' perspective on the interrelations between public and private spheres, the situation of transitional social contexts, and commercialization of the human relationships, are three theoretical approaches through which the uncompleted process of transformed intimacy in Iran can be explained.

5.4.1 Public and Private Sphere

The relationship between the private and public spheres was the main criticism of feminists against transformed intimacy and pure relationship. The feminist perspective has brought forward some criticism against the discussion and elaborated on why transformed intimacy is not accomplished. Feminist scholars particularly accused Giddens of neglecting the interrelations between public and private spheres. They argue that by focusing on the personal domain of gender relationships, Giddens underestimates the effects of public discourse and structural forces on the private sphere. Many political theorists, especially liberal theorists discuss public and private spheres as separate and independent domains. As Jeff Weintraub et al (1997) stated:

"the distinction between public and private has been a central and characteristic preoccupation of western thought since classic antiquity, and has long served as a point of entry into many key issues of social and political analysis, of moral and political debates and of the ordering of everyday life" (Weintraub & Kumar, 1997, p. 1).

In this separation, the domain of family and intimate relationships has been allocated to the private sphere in which politics has no entrance. Accordingly, the gendered features of relationships in a private sphere has been assumed as natural and private, and therefore not influenced by political and social concerns. However, feminist scholarship is critical of the public/private dichotomy and emphasises the interrelationship between the two spheres, providing a significant influence on political theories:

"…by demonstrating the legitimacy of gender as an important category of political and social analysis, and particularly by focusing on gender as itself a social construction needing to be explained, feminists scholars have pointed out

numerous flaws in the dichotomy and ways it continues to be used in mainstream political theory" (Phillips, 2009, p. 122).

Focusing on gender as a socially constructed phenomenon and arguing that both economic and political power and practices are closely interrelated with the structure and practice of the private sphere, feminist scholars elaborated on their argument that 'the personal is political'.

The slogan 'the personal is political', which feminists coined turned their attention to the politics of what has previously been regarded as non-political; namely, the personal sphere of sexuality, family life, gender roles and intimate relationships. "Contemporary feminism thus poses a significant challenge to the long-standing underlying assumption of political theories that the sphere of family and personal life is so separate and distinct from the rest of social life ……. For example, feminists analysed the multiple interconnections between women's domestic roles and their inequality and segregation in the workplace, and between their socialization in gendered families and the psychological aspects of their subordination" (Phillip, 2009, p. 124).

Therefore, the argument that 'the personal is political' means that, whatever happens in the personal life particularly in relations between the sexes, is in fact, not immune to the dynamic of power which typically has been seen as a feature of political life. Feminists also argue that domains of the personal and private life, as well as political, economic and social domains cannot be understood in isolation. The main questions include how the state defines the family and private life, and to what extent the state influences them.

As it was discussed in the section on the scope of study (chapter one), the family law, religious and social-cultural traditions in Iran, alongside the governmental politics are based on intensifying the gender segregation to preserve the patriarchal dichotomy of gender roles. According to the current research's findings, the scarcity of equal-paid job

opportunities for women is a reason why female respondents do not take on equal financial responsibilities. Moreover, both female and male respondents declared that in spite of dissatisfaction in following the gendered norms, disobeying these socially embedded values is not an easy task to do. Influenced by the public discourse and affected by gendered discrimination embedded in the legal, economic and social regulations in Iran, many of respondents avoid the values of transformed intimacy and pure relationship.

However, while the public and structural spheres in Iran have a significant effect on the private life, new transformations in personal domain, has also resulted in individuals challenging norms in the public domain. As the findings showed, some respondents were engaged in un-married relationships; also, besides the higher level of sexual intimacy and female sexual agency, un-married respondents demonstrated more transformations in their attitude to relationship and gender roles. These respondents challenged the official law, traditional norms and governmental rules, both in their beliefs and in their actual life experiences. Furthermore, all of the female respondents who exercise sexual agency in their personal life argued that they resist against legal forces and social stereotypes, in order to be an autonomous and independent person. As Pardis Mahdavi said:

"In spite of legal prohibitions against pre-marital sex, homosexuality, dancing parties and alcohol consumption, contemporary youths in Iran oppose these constrains and make their own definitions of life-style and relationships" (Mahdavi, 2007, p. 10).

The resistance of young people against official discourse in their personal lives was significant enough to facilitate a social tolerance in accepting new intimate relationships on some levels. However, the political and legal spheres reacted to the transformation of

the private domain by intensifying the restrictions through the control in educational programs, increasing state surveillance, encouraging gender discrimination and passing laws that limit any kind of transformation in intimate relationship and gender roles. Give priority to men in governmental recruitments, neglect the rights of employed mothers such as maternity leave, restrict public kindergartens and child care facilities, encourage childbearing and admire the housekeeper women, there is a strong resistance against any attempts to change the family laws and suppress the women's movements are some governmental proceedings to impede the modern transformation in gender relations. Although the modern understanding of gender relationships and sexual life has entered personal domains in Iran, individuals could not be fully free from the traditional limitations when the patriarchal structures still powerfully exist.

5.4.2 Transitional Social Context

According to Weber (1978), the gaps between new demands and dominant traditional values, caused a challenge between two sets of beliefs; "while there is a doubt regarding the accuracy of existing norms, the new values has not yet been embedded" (p. 254). The situation of social transition in Iran shows that on the one hand, the traditional rules and values of intimacy are not functional anymore, and on the other hand, the new values are not secure enough as stated by Ghazimoradi :

"Conflict is a feature of social transition that we are experiencing in Iran. In this situation, an individual has some opposite characteristics that come in part from traditional values and in part from modern values. For instance, while contemporary young generation tend to make a mate selection based on love and personal choice, the traditional values encourage them to give priority to the familial values. We often see the overlapping of these contradicting tendencies" (Ghazimoradi, 2012, p. 8).

That is why the transformed values of relationship and modern values of sexual life are not completely accepted nor rejected. As Tinder (2003) stated, "in a transitional situation, the old values are not effective anymore and the new ones are not applied yet; therefore, the society suffers from the lack of meaning. This crisis would be dominant in various aspects of people's lives" (Tinder, 2003, as cited in Nabavi, 2011, p. 21). In this situation, people are hesitant and ambivalent in choosing their ways and making their decisions, and as Langan and Davidson (2010) said, the problem of equal intimacy are raised when individuals have not learned ways of successfully dealing with new situations. Therefore, the situation of social transition could be assumed as a reason behind the incomplete process of transformed and equal intimacy in Iran.

5.4.3 Commercialization of the Intimate Relationships

Anthony Giddens (1992) in his discussion of transformation of intimacy argues this transformation as a source of democratization and emancipation of the human intimate relationship. According to Giddens (1992), emancipation and democratization of intimacy among heterosexual partners seem to be manifested in two main ways. The first way is that intimacy becomes released from regulation of custom and no longer is a matter of tradition and reproduction of social order, but rather a matter of discussion and satisfaction. The second is that women are emancipated from the role of housekeepers and from the fear of pregnancy, men as well are emancipated from the traditional role of breadwinner and that the partners' position in intimate relationships is equal, which makes those relationships more democratic.

However, the advocates of colonization thesis approach claim that Giddens' analysis is too optimistic and neglect the reality of the world. Urlich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1995) consider transformation of intimacy in a much more ambiguous way compared to Giddens. They agree that intimacy has become emancipated from the regulations of custom, and that men and especially women are no longer prisoners of

social and gender roles. They also agree that the intimate life has become a matter of choice and negotiation of its participants and that it seems to bring more opportunities of enjoyment than ever before. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) even present a strong statement that after the collapse of religious beliefs, intimacy, love and family becomes the source of the meaning of life, fulfillment and happiness. However, they also discuss the other facets of the situation. They claim, "The sense of freedom, and the actual freedoms which are upsetting the old picture of family life and encouraging the search for a new one, is not an individual intention but a late child of the labor market" (p. 6).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) strongly emphasize the influence of the market on intimacy. Whereas Giddens sees pure relationship that is free of outside regulations, they see involvement of capitalism that strongly regulates the intimate life. Intimacy is emancipated from custom, but not from the market; individuals do not have to reproduce the social order based on tradition, but they are encouraged to reproduce social order based on capitalism. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue, the deep mechanism through which capitalism and market invade intimacy is 'thinking patterns' that are raised by them. Focusing on the notion of "benefit", the market's logic spread out to all aspects of human life. Accordingly, in the intimate realm as well, instrumental rationality as a value of capitalism and market's logic leads contemporary individuals to prioritize their own benefits rather the mutual satisfaction and pure emotions. Arlie Hochschild's (2012) study provides empirical exemplifications of the abovementioned process of commercialization of intimacy. In her book entitled "The Outsourcesed Self" Hochschild (2012), concentrates on the phenomenon of love coaching. Love coachers help their clients to improve chance of finding love via dating services on the internet. The first level of market involvement appears in the language used by the coaches who teach their clients that searching for a love is "like searching for a job" (p. 24), and that the "Internet is a love mall" (p. 25). Moreover, love coach claims that an internet profile

should be a brand of its user, and that the purpose of this brand is to attract as many potential customers as possible. Love coaches propose to calculate return of investment rate, which does not only concern how many individuals responded to one's profile, but also how attractive those individuals are; in other words return of investment depends on physical appearance, age, social and economic status and other features of attracted customers. Hochschild (2012) summarizes this part of the book by stating that clients of love coaches are "told to train their attention on finding — not making — connection. They were preparing to become consumers, not creators, of love" (p. 41).

Hochschild (2012) argues that capitalism is the new religion, and that commercialization of intimacy makes intimate life more and more like a prayer to money (p. 50). According to her, even if Giddens is right when he claims that transformations of intimacy are often connected with emancipation and democratization of intimate relationships, it seems he fails to recognize the influence of capitalistic market, which colonizes intimacy. It can be concluded that individuals who are more and more influenced by instrumental rationality tend to form their intimate relationships based on personal interests and benefits. As it was demonstrated in the current study's results, both male and female participants were more likely to focus on their own benefits while neglecting the other person's interest and rights. They sometimes were too pessimist and egocentric to believe in mutual trust, mutual understanding and equal relationship. It seems, in spite of emancipation from some aspects of traditional order, domination of market's sprit on intimate life causes some deviation in transformation of intimacy. As Hochschild (2012) states:

"Human intimate interactions are becoming more and more similar to economic transactions, and that they are no longer regulated by the understanding and communicative rationality, but by money and instrumental rationality. Family becomes more and more like company, individuals become more and more like

buyers and sellers, providers and consumers" (p. 48, as cited in Musial, 2013, p.

12).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study is to figure out the extent to which the transformation of intimacy has influenced intimacy among couples in the transitional unban context of Iran. As Langan and Davidson (2010) discussed, the notion of intimacy and intimate relationships in pre-modern times was perceived in relation to community and familial bonds. The roles and expectations of each member were defined through the traditional norms and the individuals' choices have rarely contributed in the gender roles. In modern times however, the notion of intimacy has been transformed. The modern concept of intimacy is based on a sense of satisfaction, fairness and fulfilment experienced by independent individuals in mutually benefitting relationships. The interaction between individualism and mutual intimacy is a challenge in modern relationships especially in transitional contexts in which traditional and modern values are co-existing and influencing relationships.

Transformation in heterosexual relationships, gender roles and expectations, was emphasized in Giddens's (1992) discussion of the transformation of intimacy. As Giddens states, due to modern social changes, traditional gender roles have been transformed to be more egalitarian, women's sexual life has been freed from the stereotypical subordination and partners' expectations and responsibilities have been equalized based on mutual trust. Giddens calls this new relationship situation as the transformation of intimacy, which leads modern relationships to become more equally intimate or as he called it, a pure relationship. Accordingly, the current study hypothesized that there should be a relationship between different aspects of a transformed intimacy. Therefore, the effect of individuals' attitude on the level of women's sexual agency, and the effect of women's sexual agency on couples' intimacy was assumed.

The results supported the argument by stating the significant relationship between the variables:

Figure 6.1: Theoretical Accomplishment

As Tricia Burke and Valerie Young (2012) state, relationship satisfaction and intimacy is positively associated with couples' frequent sexual transformations. Similarly, Diana Sanchez (2012) says that couples (both men and women) who are performing their sexual roles stereotypically as female subordination and male domination and those who adhered to traditional gender roles and behaviour, reported lower levels of satisfaction in intimacy and close relationships, as well as greater difficulties in sexual expression and sexual pleasure.

Although Giddens's discussion on the positive association of transformation of intimacy on the couples' intimacy and closeness is supported, the findings however, support Giddens's critics who challenged his argument of the possibility of a full realization of modern transformation in the modern times.

The results suggest that in the transitional urban context of Iran in which modern values and regulations are present in the people's lives which includes their intimate relationships, traditional values are also still adhered to by individuals. Thus, Giddens's argument of transformation has not been completely fulfilled, not in the individuals' perception of relationships and gender roles, and neither at the level of female sexual agency and autonomy.

According to the results, individuals do not perceive their relationships, or the intimacy as transformed, and also, the model of transformation for both men and women are not based on the values of equality and justice. The results suggest that both men and women have undergone the modern transformation selectively, based on what they assume as an advantage. While women are not likely to accept the responsibilities of equal relationships, men are not likely to give up their stereotypical role as a leader for the sake of equality. As feminist critics claim, the existing patriarchal discourse has a significant impact on the personal attitudes and experiences of intimate relationships.

The results moreover, provide evidence that show that the context of study is a transitional society based on what Max Weber has discussed. For him, a transitional condition is when a strong belief in the current and dominant values are doubted, because the dominant system becomes unable or too weak to respond to the realities of a modern life. In other words, in a transitional society, there is a gap between the real life needs and the values that dominate society (Weber 1978, 254). As the current results show, while both men and women find that the traditional values are weak and inadequate in responding to the new needs of modern life, they still however, deal with the inconsistencies with hesitation and ambivalence. Furthermore, as Bahry and Wilson (2004) state, "individuals in transitional societies need new stable sources of trust" (p. 27). The non-empathic and benefits-based approach reflected in the respondents' answers, suggests that due to the detraditionalization of relationships, people have partially lost the traditional sources of trust that was mainly based on familial bonds, traditional gender roles and the stability offered by marriage. In such a situation, it seems couples need a new source of trust to place their confidence on. Besides the transitional situation and the effects of public patriarchal structures, the discussion suggests commercialization of intimate life as well, as a significant contributor of the incomplete process of transformed intimacy in urban Iran.

In addition, the findings confirm Giddens's (1992) argument regarding women's avant-garde roles in realizing the transformation of intimacy, when he states, "due to the plastic sexuality and freedom of female sexual life, women would be the vanguard of the new intimacy" (p. 120). Accordingly, in the case where women applied their agency both in sexual and relational aspects of a relationship, their male respondents were more encouraged to give up their traditional leadership roles and practice equality in relationships.

The results also show that marriage generally has a more significant effect on female respondents compared to males. While no variation was found between married and non-married men's reports, non-married women reported greater levels of sexual agency and sexual intimacy compared to married women. In terms of the level of transformed attitudes, non-married men and women showed more transformed opinions compared to married respondents.

6.2 Key Findings

I. Transformed attitudes regarding relationships and gender roles in both male and female respondents is positively associated with women's sexual agency.

II. Higher levels of sexual agency in women are related to higher levels of intimacy in intimate relationships for both men and women.

III. Higher levels of transformation of intimacy in a relationship lead to more equal intimacy among couples.

IV. The couples' sexual intimacy is strongly associated with the level of women's sexual agency, the level of cognitive intimacy among couples showed a strong positive relationship with the level of women's sexual agency. This correlation was stronger in the male respondent's reports.

V. Generally, unmarried respondents are more transformed in their attitudes towards relationships and gender roles, and reported greater levels of female sexual agency and greater levels of sexual intimacy.

VI. The status of transformed and equal intimacy has not been understood and practiced completely by individuals in the context of this study.

VII. Both men and women tend to accept the advantages of transformed intimacy, while they retain the traditional advantages of stereotypical gender regulations as well.

VIII. Some women report equal rights and sexual freedom, while they rarely accept equal responsibilities in managing their relationships. The stereotype of women exchanging sex for material gain is still prevalent among female respondents.

IX. While male respondents tend to want women to treat sex as something equally shared, they are suspicious about the status of agency and freedom in women's sexuality.

X. Answering the theoretical purpose of the current study, which aims to examine and develop Giddens's theory of transformation of intimacy, the results suggested several points. While Giddens's arguments on the relation between transformations of intimacy and pure relationship is supported, his assumption of a realized transformed intimacy in the situation of modern relationships is not proven in the context of this study. The results show that in the transitional context, with co-existing contradictory values, individuals do not completely adhere to the transformed values; rather they combine them with the traditional norms. This inconsistency has caused the emergence of distrust and misunderstandings among couples.

XI. The incomplete process of transformed intimacy or pure relationship in the context of study could be explained by three sources: first, the feminist

perspective of the interrelatedness of the public and private domains in the society, and the prevalence of patriarchal discourse in personal relationships. Second: the condition of the transitional social context in which inconsistency between traditional values and new needs is dominant, and the new source of trust are not reliable enough to replace the traditional ones. Third: commercialization and existence of the market logic in the intimate life.

6.3 Recommendations for the future researches

The following recommendations are offered for future research in this field of inquiry:

I. The current study mainly focused on the implications and obstacles of the transformation of intimacy among individuals. Even though the attitudes and behaviours of social actors are investigated, the structural obstacles in the public sphere were not discussed fully. Therefore, it could be an advantage to conduct a study, which elaborates on the structural obstacles of realizing transformed intimacy.

II. Although sexual life has a vital importance in intimate relationships, and women's status of agency in their sexual life is associated with a couple's intimacy, however, an investigation on women's agency in other aspects of the relationship could also be worthwhile to investigate.

III. As the current research concludes, the idea of transformed intimacy is not understood by individuals as being based on equality and egalitarian intimacy. However, a specific academic research on the notion of equality among Iranian women and men could be valuable.

IV. As mentioned in the current study, the stereotypical practice of exchanging female sexuality with male material and financial provision is still dominant among Iranian women in the context of this study. A separate research is suggested to understand the mechanisms of exchanging female sexual capital for male financial and material

provision and its effects on women's agency, women's power and relationship satisfaction.

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