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# How Second Generation Iranians Understand Their National and Ethnic Identity?

A comparative study of the impact of the host society- the case of Sweden and the  
United States.

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of the social characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their national and ethnic identities. In this regard I have *studied how the second generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves with Iranian society, with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden and/or with Swedish society* and then compared the second generation Iranians in Sweden and those in the Unites States to try to make clear the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their ethnic and national identities.

Educational attainment is regarded as a cornerstone in the identity construction of second generation Iranians (Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004). The literatures, which is based mainly on the studies conducted in the Unites States among second generation Iranians, indicates several factors being important for such an attainment. I have examined whether these factors also are important for the second generation Iranians in Sweden; this in order to more concretely show the impact of the social characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their identities.

For gathering the data in Sweden I used semi-structured e-mail interviews with fifteen young people of Iranian background (defined as individuals with both parents born in Iran).

When comparing my study with those in the United States, I could not find the identity tensions and identity crisis reported by the research on second generation Iranians in the United States among the same generation in Sweden. The comparison between the two groups concerning the educational attainment strengthens the hypothesis that the social characteristics of the society where the second generation Iranians live in, has an import impact on their understanding of their ethnic identity.

**Key words:** Second generation Iranians, identity crisis, ethnic identity, national identity, educational attainment

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## **1. Introduction**

In the framework of a book project (Hosseini-Kaladjahi 2012) funded by the Multicultural Center, Iranians and their children in Sweden, I have studied the second generation Iranians in Sweden. I was responsible for data collection and analysis in connection to the question of “ethnic and national identity”. In this essay I have discussed this question. The other questions, which were focused in this study, were individuality and discrimination. Another researcher was responsible for studying these questions (Ahmadi & Ahmadi 2012).

### **1.1. Aim of the study**

The aim of this paper is to examine the impact of the social characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians’ understanding of their national and ethnic identities. In order to achieve this aim, I have studied *whether the second generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves as Iranians, or/ and Swedes* and then compared the result with what I found in the literature concerning the ethnic and national identities of the second generation Iranians in the United States. By this I have tried to illustrate the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians’ understanding of their ethnic and national identities.

There are several studies which examine the second generation Iranians’ understanding of their ethnic and national identity. In these studies, the social, political and cultural characteristics of the societies in which these young people are living are not taken into consideration. I suppose that these characteristics have important effects on the understanding of this group of their ethnic and national identity. I have therefore attempted to compare, as far as is possible, the case of second generation Iranians in Sweden with another group, namely those living in the United States, where the majority of expatriate Iranians live. By means of this comparison, I have tried to highlight how the social characteristics of the societies in which the second generation Iranians are living are influence their understanding of their identities. In this regard, one important theme which has been focus in this study is the educational attainment. The reason for why I choose educational attainment is that this factor has historically and culturally been important for Iranian immigrants in the definition of their identities (Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004). Iranians belong to those immigrant groups who have higher levels of education than native born, for instance in Sweden, Iranians and Danish people have the higher levels of education than native-born people (SCB 2012b). By comparing the question of educational attainment among the second generation Iranians in Sweden and in the United States, I aim to more concretely highlight the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians’ understanding of their identities.

## **1.2 Research questions**

In order to reach the aim of the study I have tried to answer the following questions:

1. How do the second generation Iranians in Sweden define their ethnic and national identity and how do they relate themselves to Swedish society?
2. What are the differences between the second generation Iranians living in Sweden and in the United States concerning their understanding of national and ethnic identity?

## **1.3. Relevance for social work**

According to the most recent accessible data (SCB, 2012a), there are 95561 individuals in Sweden of Iranian origin. Of these, 65 649 are first-generation immigrants and the remaining 29 912 are second generation (individuals with at least one parent born in Iran). Several studies have been conducted on first-generation Iranian immigrants in Sweden, covering a broad range of areas, from participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of Sweden to the changes this group has undergone, either individually or collectively, as a result of living in a new society. However, few if any studies have been conducted on the second generation immigrants in Sweden. Problems like alienation, unemployment, drug abuse and depression are just some of the problems this group faces (Basic 2010, Pettersson 2007). These types of problems are strongly connected with social work. A healthy society without a corresponding healthy young generation is not imaginable. The effect of ethnicity (here I refer to the consequences of belonging to a minority group in a society, like poverty; and cultural and social characteristics of belonging to a certain ethnic group- for instance prohibition of drinking alcohol) on the self-image of the second generation immigrants, can be an important factor when trying to understand the reasons for the above mentioned problems. I hope this essay can contribute to a better understanding of the second generation immigrants.

## **1.4. Definition of important concepts**

**Second generation Immigrants:** I use the term “second generation immigrant” in this text to refer to people with at least one foreign-born parent..

**Second generation Iranians:** I used the term “second generation Iranians” to refer to young people with at least one Iranian parent. Admittedly, these terms are somewhat problematic in that they give the impression that “these groups” are homogenous, whereas they actually consist of individuals with different ethical, social, educational, cultural and religious backgrounds, as well as gender and other personal differences. Another problem with these terms is that many of those categorized as “second

generation” did not themselves immigrate to Sweden. They were either child when their parents immigrated or were born in Sweden. An additional problem with the term “second generation Iranians” is that some of these young people may not even recognize themselves as Iranians. Nonetheless, social sciences are not possible without categorizing individuals and their behaviors and attitudes in some way. Even though people are categorized in different groups and generalizations are made about certain characteristics, the intention is not to create or strengthen any kind of stereotyping of these individuals, but to better understand their life and problems.

**Hyphenated identity:** The term “hyphenated identity” is applied when addressing second generation immigrants especially in the United States. This term refers to various phenomena, including a double sense of patriotism, double ethnic identities, double cultural belongingness, etc. (for example, see Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar, 2007). The present text has sought to provide a more detailed picture of the second generation Iranians’ “hyphenated identity” by constructing divergent ideal types based on different combinations of their understanding of their ethnic identity/national identity and their adoption of the Swedish mentality. These ideal types will be presented when I discuss the result of the study.

### **1.5. Essay disposition**

The text is divided into seven sections. It begins with presenting the purpose and the aim of the essay, research questions and connection to social work. The definition of important concepts is presented in this section. The section concludes by outlining the different sections of the text. The second section describes previous research. The third section is devoted to theoretical framework with focus on national and ethnic identity and Swedish mentality. The fourth section describes the methodology. In this section, the primary understanding of the author, the research design, tools of analysis, the credibility of the study, and ethical considerations are discussed. The fifth section presents the result and analysis of the empirical study and the secondary data on the second generation Iranians. The sixth section is devoted to a concluding discussion of the paper and its findings and suggestions for further research in this area. In the last section the bibliography, the interview guide and the letter to the interview persons is put forward.

## **2. Previous research**

There are not many studies which focus on second generation Iranians in Sweden. Therefore, I put forwards two studies conducted in Sweden which concern second generation immigrants. These studies which touch the issue of identity can contribute to deepen our perspective on the situation of this group. Then, I present some important studies concerning second generation Iranians in the Unites States.

**1-Muslima: islamisk väckelse och unga muslimska. Kvinnors förhandlingar om genus i det samtida Sverige (Muslima: Islamic revival and young Muslim. Women's negotiation of gender in contemporary Sweden)**

An interesting study regarding young people who belong to a minority ethnic group has been conducted by Pia Karlsson Minganti (2007). Karlsson Minganti followed nine young women in the Sunni Muslim movement in Sweden. The data was gathered during an extensive field work during the five years 1998-2002, when the nine key informants were between 18 and 25 years old. They have different ethnic backgrounds. The focus of the study was, among other, on the tension between informants' individual life and collective life.

The results indicate the complexity and contradictions in these young people's life. One positive point with Karlsson Minganti's book is that she does not victimize these girls but sees their problems as symptoms of the structures and discourses that shape and guide people who against their own will and capacity for initiative are put in a shared box, i.e. "Muslim girls" or as Karlsson Minganti chose as the title of her book, "Muslima". This label has impacted the construction of identity among these girls and influenced their view of themselves.

**2- Andra generationens invandrare - den transnationella medborgaren (The second generation immigrant- the transnational Citizen)**

In her bachelor's thesis, proceeding from an immigrant heritage perspective, Rodrigues (2013) explains resources and problems associated with second generation immigrants. Her focus is second generation immigrants born in Malmö, with two Portuguese born parents recruited to Malmö as labor migrants during 1960-1970. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with six second generation immigrants of Portuguese heritage. In analyzing the result of the study Rodrigues applies the segmented assimilation theory and transnational migration theory. As she maintains "The results of the analysis proved upon extensive transnational ties, providing individual possibilities to various extents, as well as certain disadvantages associated with an immigrant background. How these individuals relate to their immigrant heritage is a matter of accessible resources and position in life" (Rodrigues 2013:1).

**3-Olika eller jämlika. En kritisk studie av kategoriseringen av invandrarflickor (Different or equal. A critical study of the categorization of immigrant girls)**

Self-image plays an important role in the personification process. Self-image is created, among others, on the basis of others' images of an individual or a group. An important source of the construction and maintenance of the society's image of immigrant groups is broadcast media. Media has the power to choose to acknowledge a cultural image, or question it. For many Swedes their only contact with immigrants and their children is through newspapers.



To be able to recognize what images the media gives the 'immigrant girls', Eva Karlsson (1999) studied how different newspapers present this group. She selected a number of articles in various newspapers (Swedish newspapers: Aftonbladet, Work News, Dagens Nyheter, Göteborgs-Posten, Helsingborgs Dagblad and Svenska Dagbladet), which she considered as representatives for a detailed analysis of the topic. The purpose of this paper was to examine how newspapers present images of 'immigrant girls', how some girls perceive this picture and relate to it, and how the girls see themselves and their lives. Karlsson (1999:14-20) recognizes at least three categories in the studied newspapers: Girls as victims, girls who choose and "super-hot girls".

The interviews showed that a different image is presented by newspapers than the one the immigrant girls have of themselves.

#### ***4-Ethnic Identity among Second generation Iranians in the United States***

The studies of Iranian migrants and their identity has been limited in the international scientific research, which has resulted in that most of the studies are suggestive rather than definitive on the subject. Different sociological studies have been conducted in the United States regarding the second generation Iranian migrants and how they interact and identify themselves in that specific context. These studies focus on the ethnic identity of the second generation of Iranians and how they relate to their cultural heritage and national identity (Mehdi 1998). The results of these studies show that the second generation Iranians in the U.S. tend to adopt the American lifestyle strongly and develop a unique identity which is different from their parents (ibid). According to Mahdi (1998) the popular approaches to Iranian's national, cultural or ethnic identity are essential, static, monolithic and idealistic. The notion of the Iranian national identity identifies the historical change in behavior and attitudinal traits of the Iranian population and ignores the multiplicity of values and behaviors. The concept of second generation does not imply any age limit, it is instead focusing on the ages between 11 to 35 years who have either been born in the U.S. or migrated to this country at an early age along with their parents. The identification of identity is, according to Mahdi, defined as a concept of how individuals define themselves in terms of their evaluation with their engagement, commitment to social groups, social culture, national entity and ethnic community. The notion about Iranian identity amongst the second generation Iranians is found to be more symbolic than behavioral. It is considered symbolic because the norms and values representing the Iranian culture are not as easily accessible to the users as they are to their parents. To enhance behavioral access to culture, contacts, practices and use of norms, values and symbols are required. The study of Mahdi (1998) has found that the second generation Iranians in the United States are very individualized and even segmented and hard to categorize. The sense of ethnic identity and community are very mixed in them.

#### ***5-Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at a Southern California University***

Neda Maghbouleh studies the national feeling of the second generation Iranians in the United States. In her article 'Inherited Nostalgia' Among Second generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at a Southern California University (2010), she discusses how the second generation Iranians in the USA

actively use pre-Revolution Iranian pop music and ‘inherited nostalgia’ in order to make sense of their identities in university where ethnicity, identity and claims to cultural authenticity are increasing. The study is based on interviews, focus groups and participant observation with an Iranian-American student group at a public university in Southern California.

***6-Hyphenated Identities: Second generation Iranian-Americans Speak (this text will be used as the secondary data)***

Hyphenated Identities: Second generation Iranian-Americans Speak (2007) is edited by Tara Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar is comprised of twelve first-person narratives encompassing the reflections and self-expressions of a twelve young second generation Iranian-Americans who from their own perspectives, explore the question of identity and in particular hyphenated identity.

The writers are second generation Iranians in the united Sates who after participating in a spring course in 2005 on the issue of Iranian identity are asked to write their own perspectives on their identities. These young people’s individual responses to the question reveals their understanding of their national and ethic identify and their view of Iran and the United States. The stories also reveal how the social and political situations they encounter in the United States impact their understanding of their identities. The book embraces the identities of all types, blends of cultures, religions and races, all with stories of their own.

***7-Success(ion): Second generation Iranian Americans***

Mehdi Bozorgmehr and Daniel Douglas in their article “Success(ion): Second generation Iranian Americans” (2011) present the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the second generation at the national level. They also compare this data with those concerning the first generation (Iran- or foreign-born population). In doing this they use the 2005–07 merged data set compiled by the United States Census in the American Community Survey(ACS). Their study shows a preliminary continuation of economic and educational success from the first- to the second generation Iranians. As the study shows among the second generation when it regards educational attainment and labor force participation, females have quickly closed the gap with their male counterparts.

Several of the above mentioned texts have been important in my study. I will come back to them in the analysis of my results.

### **3. Theoretical framework:**

#### **3.1. Ethnic identity/national identity and Swedish mentality**

Proceeding from the result of my primary data, certain patterns were constructed theoretically. These patterns can be regarded as *ideal types* (Weber 1904).According to Weber (1904:90):

“An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present, and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified thought-construct.”

Accordingly, an ideal type is used for understanding the chaos of the social reality. An ideal type neither corresponds to a reality as it is or is not, nor shows all characteristics and elements of a given phenomenon.

Two notions were used to construct the patterns: ethnic identity and Swedish mentality. In addition, the notion of national identity was used to analyze the results.

The notion of ethnic identity was used to understand the affiliation with the dominant features of the Iranian culture and the sense of belonging to the Iranian minority ethnic group. The term Swedish mentality was used to address the second generation Iranians' adoption of the dominant Swedish norms and values and ways of thinking and life. The term national identity was chosen to examine the sense of patriotism among this group.

The following subsections explain the author's understanding of these notions.

### ***Ethnic identity and National identity***

Developing a sense of self is an essential part of the process within which a child becomes a mature person. Each individual's understanding of himself or herself is a unique combination of identifying with and feeling part of various groups, such as a religious group, an ethnic community, a nation and/or even a small group such as a sports group. In terms of identifying with a large group, such as an entire nation or an ethnic community, the situation for second- and maybe even third-generation individuals with minority ethnic backgrounds is even more complicated. Members of such groups need to continually negotiate their identification with their ethnic group and with the mainstream culture of the society. They may also negotiate their identification with the nation of the country in which they live and with the nation to which their parents and ancestors belonged. One's ethnic identity cannot change during his or her life span, but their national identity can. Identity is an ongoing process driven by a continual contrast between tradition and ritual on the one hand, and individuality and adoption of new norms and values on the other.

Definitions of ethnic identity and national identity vary based on the theoretical understandings that different scholars have of identity and ethnicity and the concepts related to these notions.

An appropriate definition for this study is that of Trimble and Dickson (2005): "ethnic identity is an affiliative construct, where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group." Definitions of national identity, especially in political philosophy, focus on national self-determination. The present study has chosen not to consider the political discussion on national identity.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the study proceeds from the common definition of the notion as found on Wikipedia: "National identity is the person's identity and sense of belonging to one state or to one nation, a feeling one shares with a group of people, regardless of one's citizenship status."<sup>2</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup> For more discussion on the definition of national identity in political philosophy, see, for instance, Dahbour (2002) and Peter Mandler (2006).

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_identity)

consider both notions to be largely socially constructed, although certain attributes are not easily modified by social processes. As Gong (2007:506) notes:

“The relationship between ethnic identity and national identity can range from negative to no relationship to positive relationship. A negative relationship may be due to feeling of rejection by the society. Lack of a relationship might suggest the perception of the two as non-overlapping. A positive relationship might reflect an integrated bicultural identity. Attitude toward the majority group should be an important factor helping to tease these patterns apart.”

### *Swedish mentality*

Discussion about the Swedish mentality came to the forefront following the considerable increase in the number of immigrants to Sweden from 1980 onwards. Encounters between Swedes and non-Swedes have actualized the question of what it means to be a Swede, in terms of thinking and behaving. Besides, as Daun (nordicway.com,2012) explains:

“The hardening market for Sweden in international business also explains the renaissance in the 80s of thinking about national character in Sweden”.

Åke Daun is one of the most well-known researchers who studied the Swedish mentality. His article online which I have used for explaining the Swedish mentality is a compressive explanation in English of those characteristics which he presents as Swedish mentality thoroughly in various essays, including his well-known book entitled “Svensk mentalitet “ (Swedish Mentality) (1996). Below are the characteristics that Daun highlights as part of the Swedish mentality<sup>3</sup>. Several of these characteristics are pointed out by my interviewees when explaining their similarity or dissimilarity with ethnic Swedes.

*Independence:* “Personal independence is highly valued in Swedish culture, significantly more so than, for example, in Finland, Italy and the US. The need for independence among Swedes may explain their generally positive attitude towards being alone: to take walks alone, even to live alone.”

*Conflict Avoidance:* “Swedes typically avoid face-to-face conflicts. Like the Japanese, Swedes tend to be in strong favor of agreement and consensus”.

*Honesty:* “Swedes describe themselves as honest, although this notion has been considerably challenged in recent years: income tax evasion is frequently mentioned as one of several exceptions to the rule. It seems to be a tendency among Swedes to tell the truth in a very precise way, i.e., not to exaggerate, but rather to present all the details. But honesty is also praised in a more traditional way - lying is considered bad by a majority of Swedes (60%), compared with only 13% of Danes and 26% for Mediterranean Europe.”

*Emotions:* “Among Swedes there are relatively few kisses, hugs and verbal emotional expressions. In child rearing, even Swedish-Americans report that the importance of retaining control over feelings was often impressed upon them in early childhood”.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nordicway.com/search/Swedish%20Mentality.htm>

*Reason:* “In Sweden, rationalism has long dominated the climate of opinion. There is a strong preference for rational arguments, facts and concreteness, as opposed to emotional and speculative imagination. The effectiveness of planning and ability for willingness among Swedes to negotiate and to agree on compromises has also been attributed to this rational argumentation”.

*Gloom:* “In the eyes of many foreigners Swedes seem to be gloomy and joyless.”

The present study has not examined the extent to which the interviewees have shown the above-mentioned characteristics; such an examination would require a more comprehensive quantitative study. In constructing the theoretical patterns (ideal types) for this study, I have hence proceeded from my understanding of interviewees’ adoption of “Swedish mentality.” The aim of constructing these patterns was to make it possible to distinguish the different ways in which my interviewees see themselves as Iranian or Swedes or both. As noted above, these patterns as ideal types do not correspond to any reality as it is or is not (that is, the degree of Swedish mentality or “Iranianness”), and do not show all characteristics and elements of the interviewees’ identity. Consequently, the term used to address the various patterns should not be interpreted literally<sup>4</sup>.

Since the aim of my study has been to examine the impact of the social characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians’ understanding of their national and ethnic identities, the following theories have been crucial for my research.

### **3.2. Social construction of identity and culture**

According to the proponents of the social construction theory of identity, there is no objective and independent “self”, but it is shaped in the framework of different relations. Every individual is then created in relation to others and is constantly reconstructed on the basis of to the historical, cultural, and social milieu in which these relationships are embedded. Accordingly, the social constructivists see *the others* as the main determining factor in the individuals’ construction of “self” (Stevens 1998: 241-243). Social constructionist theory is based on the idea that our everyday experiences are the consequence of institutional practices or collective social action rather than objective reality. In this sense then, the issues we used to take for granted are not actually objective facts but are the products of human inter-subjectivity (Hacking 1999). Proceeding from the social constructionist theory, we can affirm that categories like nation, ethnicity, or identity do not exist outside of the context of human social behavior; they exist only by virtue of social interactions.

The process of identity construction is, as we see in Erikson (1980) stages of psychological development, a life-span process. Erikson’s discussion on constructing identity reflects an ongoing construction created as the basis for future meaningful adult life. Identity is developed through life stages (Dowling, 2011). The society we live in, the ethnic group we belong to, the culture within the

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<sup>4</sup> Here it should be mentioned that I have not presented in this text all those characteristics, such as individuality, which concern the Swedish mentality among the interviews; this since in another text (Ahmadi & Ahmadi 2012), these characteristics are discussed. These characteristics were used for creating the ideal types used for presenting of the results of the study.

framework of which we are brought up, are important factors which throughout our life continually construct and reconstruct our identity. When it concerns the ethnic and national identity, it is therefore crucial to take into consideration that these identities are always under construction and reconstruction.

The theory that I found important for my study is then the social construction theory of identity *with focus on the role of culture*.

Concerning the role of culture in identity construction Hall addresses two different approaches: In the first approach the identity is related to “a shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common.” Thus, culturally constructed identities “reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history” (Hall, 1993:224). The second approach “recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather - since history has intervened - 'what we have become” (Hall, 1993:225).

The second approach can be applied in studying the immigrant groups which face challenges of living in a cultural setting than the one they have socialized. The questions “what we really are” or what we have become” are crucial in their searching for understanding their identity.

Thus culture has a crucial role in the construction of identity. Ahmadi and Ahmadi (1998) mention, Belief system, value system and a person's lifestyle are culturally constructed. Every person's identity is directly dependent on the social structure within which her/his identity is constructed. There is no doubt that the construction of identity is an ongoing process, but here I address the primary and secondary socialization processes during which the individual internalized the basic norms and values of her/his orienteering system.

There is a risk that the well-being of those who have moved not only between countries but also between cultures, is threatened by the lack of a sense of coherence between the social structure of the society they are living in and the social structure within which their identities is constructed (Pinney et al. 2001, Haeri Darya 2007).

The tension between the dominant culture of surrounding society and the culture that they had internalized threatens people's perception of wholeness and inner integrity. Contact with a new society and its specific belief system and lifestyle needs - when cultural distance is great - a reconstruction of identity. Where there is a huge gap between a person's culture of origin and the new cultural environment, such a reconstruction of identity results in a cancellation of the basic value system, i.e. a state of anomaly which means, among others, a rupture between the past and the present reality (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 1998).

Many immigrants, among others Iranians, come from countries which culturally are very different from Sweden. For these peoples, migration has meant questioning of their social and personal identity. Such a confrontation has sometimes generated a strengthening of their group identity, especially ethnic identity. In the exile situation, such a strengthening is often a backward-looking caricature of the original culture. The tendency to preserve the group-based identity and group-based understanding of the fundamental values becomes even stronger than at home. The fear of losing the group-based identity has drastic consequences, such as honor killing. Situation is thus different between the first generations immigrants and their children or grandchildren. In this paper, the focus is the second generation and their understanding of their ethnic and national identity.

I have proceeded from the theory of social construction theory and the role of culture in such a construction as the prominent *framework* of my theoretical analysis. This means that this theory is applied as well in the construction of the meaning categorizations and as in the interpretation of the interviews.

### 3.3 Educational attainment

As mentioned before in order to high light more clearly the impact of the characteristics of the host society, I have also focused on the question of educational attainment. Educational attainment is considered as important in the identity construction of the first and second generation Iranians (Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004). The theoretical framework, on the basis of which the question of educational attainment of the second generation Iranians will be discussed, consists of, in addition to the theory of the social construction of identity which is the basis of our theoretical framework, on a number of articles on second generation Iranians in the United States and Sweden. The most important of these are:

1. Hartman's book (2009) *Problem eller tillgång? En studie om social och etnisk mångfald i högskolan*. (Problems or asset? A study of the social and ethnic diversity in higher education); Hartman discusses among other the reason for the achievement of the second generation Iranians in high education.
2. Bozorgmehr and Douglas's (2010) article, *Success(ion): Second generation Iranian Americans*, based on the United States census in the 2005–2007 American Survey (ASC). The article focuses on the educational attainment and occupational achievement of second generation Iranians.
3. Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar's (2007) book based on the stories of 13 University of Texas students' "hyphenated" worlds, Iranian-Americans and other Americans.

Hartman (2009), proceeding from the data provided by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education), points out that investigation of students with foreign backgrounds showed that there are large differences within this heterogeneous group. According to Hartman, students with Iranian ethnic backgrounds are as well represented in higher education as students from Western European and Nordic countries.

According to Hartman (2009), one of the reasons why Iranian students are so well represented in higher education is the fact that it was members of the highly educated middle class who fled from Iran in connection with the 1979 revolution. Accordingly, one of the important reasons why young Iranians tend to seek higher education in Sweden is their parents' education background. Hartman's conclusion is verified by a study conducted in the United States (Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004).

In the United States, as Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2010:5) mention:

“Iranian parents tend to be very involved in their children's education because they emphasize education as the road to success and prestige. The second generation internalizes these values and becomes very motivated to excel in school and to choose professional occupations which will garner them respect in the Iranian community.”

According to Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2010:5), several factors have brought about differences between Iranians and other immigrant groups, such as Latin Americans:

“Both Iranian fathers and mothers are often college-educated, a further contributor to their children's academic attainment. Moreover, the fathers usually have high earnings, enabling the mothers the flexibility to stay at home to supervise their children's upbringing as a family strategy. The combination of parental educational and financial resources allows them to be more involved in their children's lives, as well as to afford quality education and oversight.”

Shavarini (2004) conducted a qualitative study among a religiously diverse sample of 30 undergraduate students with Iranian backgrounds in New England and New York. This study also shows that parental education, employment, and income were strong factors in children's academic achievement. Shirvani found the same family pattern as Bozorgmehr and Douglas had found.

According to both studies, the important factors in academic achievement of the second generation with Iranian background are highly educated parents, fathers with high-status jobs, parents' high level of involvement in their children's schooling, and pressure and expectation from parents that children will pursue higher education. Other factors also impact young people's view of education. Bozorgmehr and Douglas formulate these factors as follows: “Generally, many second generation youth view education as a way to repay parental sacrifices after immigration” (Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010:6) and, “In turn, the second generation perceived education as a way to advance socioeconomically, garner respect, and even dispel the ‘terrorist’ image associated with Iranians” (Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010:6–7).

Some authors have also pointed out the role of community pressure. Roundtree, one of the authors of the book *Hyphenated Identities*, explains the importance of educational attainment among Iranians in the United States by focusing on the collective identity. Roundtree (2007:108), says:

“The fact that Iranian-American are generally among the most educated population of America leads me to believe that their collective identity is consistently found in being highly educated and identifying with not only other Iranian-Americans, but other educated American as well.”



Vedadi (another author of *Hyphenated Identities*) points out that one of the most commonly discussed topics among Iranians in the United States is youth education. Vedadi (2007:24) says:

“Iranian parents always discuss education; I would feel ashamed of myself if I didn’t go to college. Education is central to the Iranian-American experience ...discussion of other families’ kids and how well they are doing is perhaps a not-too-subtle way of showing that academic success is not only desired, but expected.”

As the studies above show, several factors contribute to the educational attainment of second generation Iranians:

1. *The parents’ financial resources*
2. *The traditional family structure* (the ability of mothers to be flexible and stay at home to supervise their children due to the fathers’ high earnings)
3. *Community pressure*
4. *Education as a way of repaying parental sacrifices*
5. *Education as a means of dispelling the “terrorist” image*
6. *The traditional importance of education* (that is, education as a supreme value and a source of respect)
7. *Parents’ educational resources.*

These factors can be considered as cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1984), symbolic capital is not capital in itself without relation to other forms of capital, such as cultural, social, and economic capital. Capital becomes symbolic when its value is recognized by other agents within the same field. Symbolic capital is used to describe what the different groups stand for. Through clothing, style, interests, etc., individuals want to show their affiliation. It can also be described as the result of social experiences, collective memories, and ways of moving and thinking. Symbolic capital is a valuable resource in a specific social context. Cultural capital as a form of symbolic capital refers to non-financial social assets such as educational or intellectual, familiarity with high culture, and the use of polite language. Language skills or books in the home environment can be also regarded as cultural capital; parents provide their children with skills, education, and advantages that provide them with higher status in society. Cultural capital is considered one of the ways of promoting social mobility beyond economic means (Bourdieu, 1984).

My point is that the effect of these factors on the educational achievement of the second generation Iranians, as well as the impact of the educational attainment on the understanding of the second generation Iranians of their identities, varies depending on the society in which they live. As a step towards making this point more clear, I will later discuss the impact of these factors on the educational attainment of second generation Iranians in Sweden and the United States, with a focus on the differences between the social characteristics of these countries.

As mentioned above, in order to more clearly highlight the impact of the characteristics of the host society, the role of educational attainment is investigated in this study.

## **4. Methodology**

In this section, the author's pre-understanding of the research issue, the research design, the philosophical science perspective and the method used in the study will be presented. This will be followed by a description of the selection of participants and interviews in the study and the procedure of the data gathering. Under the title 'analysis technique' the procedure for interpretation processing will be described. Then the reliability, validity, generalization and ethical considerations of this study will be explained. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of literature overview.

### **4.1. Preliminary understanding**

The study, on the basis of which this text is written, has been a part of a book-project on the Iranian in Sweden, funded by the Multicultural Center. I was responsible for data-gathering and analyzing the area which concerns the second generation Iranians; i.e. the ethnic and national identity. In this text, this question is focused.

The application of the qualitative study brings into fore with itself the very role of the researcher in conducting, analyzing and interpreting the result of the study. My interest in the subject and pre-understanding of it arises first of all from the fact that I myself belong to the second generation Iranians. Since I live in Sweden I have close contact with the second generation Iranians in Sweden. Due to the fact that I have many relatives in the United States, I came into contact with the second generation Iranians in this country where I have travelled several times and resided in one year. Besides I have studied for several years in Canada where I have met young Iranians living in the United States and Canada. Furthermore I have discussed about the different aspects of migration and the construction and reconstruction of the identity among immigrants during several years with my parents who have done research on the Iranian immigrants.

### **4.2. Research design**

The research design used a "mixed methods" model in the form of triangulation of data sources, which is checking out the consistency of findings or different data sources within the same qualitative method – in this case using qualitative data from Sweden and qualitative narrative descriptions from twelve cases from USA described in the research literature. (Patton, 2002:555-566).

The study followed a sequence design divided into two stages. In stage 1, I have used my own interview study, a semi-structured interview design. It is used as an illustration of the how the second generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves. In stage 2, I have used the secondary data concerning studies on the second generation Iranians in the United States.

More precisely, I have proceeded from two data sources. Firstly my own study which is based on email interviews with fifteen second-generation Iranians in Sweden and secondly the literature on the second generation Iranians in the United States, among others, a book embracing twelve texts of the second-generation Iranians in the United States who explain their perspectives on the issue of national and ethnic identity.

#### ***4.2.1 My primary data collection***

The data was collected through semi-structured e-mail interviews with 15 young people of Iranian background (defined as individuals with both parents born in Iran).

The use of a qualitative data gathering method was thought best for the purpose of this study. This method allows obtaining deeper information from interviewees who relatively freely can talk about their experiences (Esaiasson et al. 2007: 237).

The reason for using e-mail interviews as a data-gathering method was that almost all of those who were selected for interviews worked or studied and had difficulty finding a suitable time. They suggested conducting the interviews via e-mail, as they felt that answering by e-mail would take less time for them. They also found it more comfortable than face-to-face interviews.

After one or two telephone conversations with each interviewee, they were sent open-ended questions by e-mail, along with information about the study. The interviewees' answers were received in the form of a Word document as an attachment. The names of interviewees were omitted from the texts and saved in a coded zip file.

It should be mentioned that interview guide was in Swedish and the interviewees have also answered in Swedish. The interviews are translated from Swedish to English.

#### **4.2.2. Secondary data**

The best data I found concerning the understanding of the second generation Iranians, living in the United States, of their ethnic and national identity, was a book named "hyphenated Identities". The book is based on the stories of twelve University of Texas students who tell us about their hyphenated world, Iranian-Americans (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar 2007).

By using these twelve narratives and comparing them with 15 interviews I conducted with second generation Iranians in Sweden I explored the question of ethnic and national identity and the impact of the social characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their national and ethnic identities.

### **4.3. Sampling**

#### **4.3.1. Sampling my study/ primary data collection**

Semi-structured e-mail interviews were conducted with 15 young people with Iranian backgrounds. To recruit the interviewees, the family members and friend circles were contacted; the used strategy in sampling was purposive sampling (Patton, 2002:21). Then the 'snowball' method was used. It attempted to recruit people from different ethnic, social and educational backgrounds. The interviewees were aged between 21 and 36 years at the time of the interviews and comprised of five men and 10 women. Both parents of all informants are Iranians. One interviewee was born in Sweden. Eight interviewees were less than six years old when their parents immigrated to Sweden, two were nine years old, one was 12 years old, and one was 15. The majority of interviewees have lived in Sweden for more than 20 years, and none have lived there for less than 15 years. The educational level

of informants ranges from secondary education to university education. The educational level of their parents ranged from a few years of primary school education to university education. The occupations of informants as well as those of their parents' vary from high-ranking jobs to low-ranking jobs.

I was conscious of the fact that the Iranian immigrants in Sweden belong to different ethnic groups in Iran, such as Persians, Turks, Kurds, Balochs and Arabs. Consequently, some questions were included about the ethnic identity of the interviewee's parents.

The information about the second generation Iranians immigrants in the United States comes mainly from a number of studies published in the United States of America.

#### **4.3.2. Sampling of secondary data**

For obtaining a general knowledge on the second generation Iranians in the United States I have used journals, research papers, reports, and interviews. The referee journal "Iranian Studies" was one of the most important sources for my study.

Several of the articles I have used are obtained online via Uppsala University and University of Gävle. By studying reference lists from other literature further literature has been chosen. The literature found was written mostly in English. The databases used when searching for literature were Libris, Ebrary, Sage journals online, Social services abstract, Sociological abstract, PsycInfo and Google. The words used when searching in the databases were *migration, young migration, the second generation migrants, Iranians, young Iranians, identity, identity crisis, national identity, ethnic identity, ethnicity, educational attainment, discrimination, Swedish mentality, Swedish way of life and Swedes*.

As explained above the most important data I found, concerning the understanding of the second generation Iranians in the United States of their ethnic and national identity, was the narratives of twelve students (all second generation Iranians in the United States) gathered in the book "Hyphenated Identities".

In the following I explain the data gathering process of these narratives.

The researcher, the author of the book, planned an undergraduate course entitled "Iranian Identity: Questions and Challenges" for the spring course 2005 at the University of Texas at Austin. The course consisted of seminars during which students, who had already studied several reading materials (supplemented with feature films and documentaries), discussed the issue of ethnic and national identity. The narratives gathered in the book are the papers that twelve students (those with Iranian background), in this course have authored (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar 2007:forward).

#### **4. 4. Tools of analysis**

This study was inspired by hermeneutic and phenomenological thought. The scientific approach of this study is phenomenological focusing on individuals' stories, experiences and interpretations (Larsson 2005:93). A phenomenological perspective means focusing on individual experiences of his world.

This is done by studying the structure and changes in the structure where events or personalities emerge (Kvale, 2007, p.54). Concerning the hermeneutic approach, the analysis is based on one hand on the interpretation of the interviewees' own written answers and interpretations and on the other hand on the studies which have been done concerning the second generation Iranians in Sweden and the United States.

In first stage of the study, I have used my study based on fifteen email interviews in purpose of illustrating the way the second generation Iranians in Sweden identify themselves concerning their ethnic and national identity. In this regard, I have used the Weber's ideal type model (Weber, 1904). To divide the empirical data in different themes (ideal types) can be described as a form of meaning categorization or meaning coding (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). As Kvale & Brinkman (2009) explain, using the theories of interpretation can be described as a form of meaningful interpretation (meaning interpretation) on the basis of selected theories and from a phenomenological-hermeneutic position (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

In the second stage, the secondary data consisting of literature written on the second generation Iranians in the United States is used for doing a theoretical comparison between the two Iranian groups. It should be mentioned that this comparison is not statistical but mainly theoretical, this in order to show the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their national and ethnic identity.

One important theme I have focused is educational attainment, which culturally has been important for Iranian immigrants in definition of their identities (Hartman 2009), in order to more concretely highlight the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their identities.

#### **4.5. Essay credibility**

Research validity depends on if you really examine what you had intended to examine. A conclusion is valid when it is explained correctly on the basis of the conditions. An argument should be sustainable, defensible, suitable and convincing in order to be valid. Different questions concerning what and why in relation to an interview text leads to different answers on how to validate an interpretation (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:263 ).

Validity takes place throughout the research process (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:267). At small scale interview studies like this one, it should look for the internal validity. This means that a few stories in as much detail as possible are described. To generate fruitful and thoughtful interviews in the study I used a well-planned interview guide with open questions. Interview guide enables us to receive rich information from interviewees' own answers (Larsson 2005:; 116). I have used direct quotes for reporting the results so the readers can take advantage of people's own descriptions. This strengthens the validity which means examining what is measured is truly measured (Elofsson 2005: 66). In this process, I have tried to have a critical attitude to what is studied and the results I come up with.

Interviews with the second generation Iranians with different social backgrounds have been strengthening the credibility of the study. To further enhance the credibility of my study, I put great emphasis on designing my interview questions in order to achieve the best results

Reliability in scientific studies aims for precision (Bergström & Boréus 2005: 33). High reliability means that what is studied is examined with sufficient accuracy, and measurements (Bergström & Boréus 2005: 33). Achieving high reliability requires that the measures remain stable and not become affected by changes in the timing, interviewer, location etc. (Elofsson, 2005: 66)

In order to achieve reliability in my study, I have tried to make clear, simple, open-ended questions so as not to affect my interviewees. The fact that interviewees themselves have written responses to the questions has also had a strengthening effect on reliability. Furthermore, I chose to capture as much as possible the interviewees' perception of the questions by the help of follow-up questions. And I've read several times the written answers in order not to miss anything.

Summing up, this study has accepted the notion of reliability as it relates to consistency and trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). As related to the validity of the study, I have accepted the notion of validity as quality (Golafshani, 2003:6). This makes the craftsmanship and credibility of the author, as researcher, essential.

Concerning the generalization, as Larsson (2005:118) points out, the ability to generalize is limited in qualitative study because the interview sample is small and not random. The sample in this study is small and therefore may not be representative. But Kvale (1997:210) believes that the naturalistic generalization may be possible. This means that the silent or implicit knowledge becomes more explicit. Citations from my own study and citations from the secondary data contribute to such explicitly.

#### **4.6. Ethical Considerations**

Within the framework of the project, data has been gathered pertaining to the question of understanding the ethnic identity by people belonging to a vulnerable section of the general public, namely young people with minority ethnic background. The consideration of ethical principles has thus been crucial.

The ethical guidelines that escorted the study are based on Science Research Council's Ethical Principles for humanities and social science research. The principles are i.e., the demand for information, consent, confidentiality and usage (Swedish Research Council 2002: 6). I have carefully applied the four main demands on ethical considerations in order to avoid facing ethical dilemmas and difficulties and to reach a high scientific quality of the study without risking violating the interviewees' privacy or harming them (Kvale & Brinkman 2009: 190). This means that, I made clear to potential respondents that: participation was voluntary; agreement to participate could at any time be revoked without any consequences for the respondent; data would be treated with confidentiality and would not

be made available to anyone outside the research team; results from the studies would be published in such a way that identification of individual respondents would be impossible.

## **5. Result and analysis**

I should mention that I have chosen to not separate the result and analysis sections, but to present these two in the same section.

The aim of this essay has been to examine the impact of the social characteristics of the society the second generation Iranians live in, on their understanding of their national and ethnic identities. This is achieved by a comparison between the cases of the second generation Iranians in Sweden with those in the United States. In doing this, I have preceded from two data sources. Firstly email interviews with 15 second-generation Iranians in Sweden and secondly the literature on the second generation Iranians in the United States, among others, a book (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar, 2007) embracing twelve texts of the second generation Iranians in the United State who explain their perspectives on the issue of national and ethnic identities.

This part is divided in three main sections. The first section is devoted to a brief presentation of the results of the empirical study in Sweden. It shows the interviewees understanding of their ethnic/national identity and how they have adopted the Swedish mentality. The second section is an analysis of the case of second generation Iranians by a comparison between the second generation Iranians in Sweden and the United States concerning their understanding of their ethnic and national identities.

For making my comparison more concrete, in the third section I have discussed the educational attainment of the second generation Iranians in Sweden and the United States; this since educational attainment is a cornerstone in the identity construction of the second generation Iranians (Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004).

As mentioned before, the presentation of the findings creates patterns that can be considered as ideal types (Weber 1904) and Kvaales & Brinkmans (2009) meaning categorization. The creation of these ideal types is based on the author's own judgment of the answers received from the interviewees.

As mentioned before, I have applied the theory of the social construction of identity and the role of culture in such construction as the prominent *framework* of my theoretical analysis. More concretely, this theory is applied as well in the construction of the meaning categorizations and as in the interpretation of the interviews.

It should be noted that the names which are used for addressing the interviewees are not their real names.

### 5.1. Ethnic/national identity and Swedish mentality<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of the answers received to the questions included in the first theme has led to the following patterns. The first pattern is labeled as a “**strong sense of ethnic identity, moderate adoption of Swedish mentality**”. This pattern represents those interviewees who exhibited an intense feeling of being Iranian and seemed to have only moderately adopted the Swedish mentality.

When asked, “how do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?” some interviewees viewed themselves as Iranian. They stressed that they would support Iran’s football team if it played against Sweden, that they like Iranian food and Iranian music, and that they have a reasonable knowledge of Persian language. They would prefer their partner to be an Iranian or at least know Persian language. They are interested in Iran’s culture and/or political situation and/or history. These interviewees also mentioned that they do not have many ethnic Swedish friends and do not socialize in private life with ethnic Swedes. Their answers to certain questions gave the impression that they do not regard themselves as Swedes.

One interviewee, a 31-year-old male, Ali, who moved to Sweden at five years of age, explained that “Sweden has never been my home country and will never be either.” In response to the question, “Do you see any difference between you and ethnic Swedes in everyday life? If yes, how?” this respondent answered: “Many are suspicious at first. You should prove that you are good enough sometimes. *In my country*, I had been one in the crowd”. As his answer indicates, he refers to Iran as “my country”.

A 33-year-old female interviewee, Bahar, who came to Sweden at nine years of age answered the question concerning ethnic identity as follows:

Emotionally, I am definitely more Persian than Swedish. But I am like a Swede in that I am more organized and like orderliness [ordning och reda]. Clearly, I would live a different life if we had lived on in Iran, so I’m much more Swedish than I realize or dare to admit.

On the other hand, she answered the question “Do you see in everyday life any difference between you and the ethnic Swedes? If yes, how?” as follows:

I’m neither afraid of conflict nor cautious, as Swedes are. I feel much more generous to people with whom I have direct contact (not in terms of charity in general). I always feel less inclined to be law-abiding. I do not like animals and nature, as much as Swedes do.

Another interviewee, a 29-year-old, Firozeh, who came to Sweden at two years of age, indicated that she sees her ethnic identity as Iranian and that she would support the Iranian football team against Sweden’s if they played each other. Concerning her national identity, she said: “I don’t know really; my feelings are mixed but I believe that I belong more to Sweden as a citizen.” This interviewee indicated that she can speak, understand and read Persian and that she is interested in Persian food,

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<sup>5</sup> This section appears in another text I authored together with another writer see (Ahmadi & Ahmadi 2012:162-168).



music and other issues related to Iran. She said that she has a strong interest in helping Iranians who face problems. She prefers men from Iran or the Middle East since she believes they would understand her better. At the same time, she said that she loves Sweden. She speaks fluent Swedish, has obtained a high education, and has a successful career.

This interviewee feels great affinity with the Iranian people and feels a great love toward Iran. She says:

“I get a pain in my heart when I follow the Iranian people’s fight for freedom. I have a deep sadness in me as I believe I was pulled away from my roots when I was a child ... You can compare it with a person who is adopted from another country and will always feel emptiness and longing for their roots.”

Despite her strong emotions towards Iranians and Iran, this interviewee showed no sign of idealizing the Iranian culture or history. As the above quotation shows, her emotions are similar to those of an adopted child who feels that she belongs to the society in which she has grown up and lives, but still seeks her origins. All of the interviewees in this group displayed a similar approach to their ethnic identity and the country in which they live. In general, despite having a strong sense of belonging to Iranian ethnic identity, the interviewees showed no signs of idealizing the Iranian national identity or Iranian history or culture.

The second pattern was categorized as “**Strong sense of ethnic identity, full adoption of the Swedish mentality.**” This pattern represents those interviewees who seem to have adopted the Swedish mentality but also feel a strong sense of belonging to the Iranian ethnicity. When asked “how do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?” these interviewees said that they have an Iranian identity but they do not count Iran as their home country. Interviewees in this group indicated that they would support the Iranian football team against the Swedish one, that they like Iranian food and Iranian music, and that they have a reasonable knowledge of the Persian language. They also showed an interest in the culture, politics or history of Iran. They do not consider ethnicity to be a crucial factor in the selection of a partner. On the other hand, despite their Iranian identity, they also feel Swedish in the sense that a number of their characteristics are more like ethnic Swedes than Iranians, that they socialize with ethnic Swedes and have several ethnic Swedish friends. Their answers to certain question give the impression that their view of Swedish society is positive and they share many points of view and social norms with mainstream society.

A 24-year-old female with an Armenian Iranian background, Carol, who was 11 years old when she came to Sweden, said that she considers herself both Iranian and Swedish. She responded to the question of national identity as follows:

“When it comes to culture, I feel like the Iranians and of course celebrate everything that we grew up with; but otherwise, I also follow the Swedish tradition. It is not so easy to be exact about this issue.”

She explained that she would support the Iranian football team against the Swedish one and that she has a very good knowledge of the Persian language. She also said, “Persian food? Love it. Persian music? It is my favorite kind of music.”

Another interviewee, a 33-year-old female, Shadi, who came to Sweden when she was 15 years old, responded to the question of “how do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?” by saying, “Both, perhaps more Swedish in certain point of views”. With regard to her national identity, she said: “I do not think much of it actually. To me it feels like I have the best of both.”

When asked, “how do you understand your national identity; i.e., membership of a society and a country?” the informants in this group answered that they felt as though they belonged to both nations. One interviewee replied, “I sometimes see myself as a part of society, and sometimes not, depending on where I am at a certain time.” Another wrote, “Very difficult question ... If I had to choose, my national identity is always Persian in my heart. From a social perspective, however, it would probably be more Swedish. I feel I can be proud of the Swedish society, but I do not feel proud of the country of Sweden”.

Pattern three refers to those respondents with “**moderate ethnic identity, full adoption of Swedish mentality.**” This pattern represents those who seem to have adopted the Swedish mentality and developed a moderate sense of belongingness to the Iranian ethnic group.

When asked “how do you understand your ethnic identity, Iranian or Swedish?” some interviewees said that they are Swedes with an Iranian background or minority/immigrant background, while others expressed that they are both Swedes and Iranians. No one in this group regards Iran as her/his home country. These interviewees said that they would have difficulty supporting either Iran or Sweden if the football teams of these countries were to play each other. Some said they would support the team that was better, while some said they used to choose the weaker side, which means those from poor countries.

Members of this group indicated that they have sufficient knowledge of Persian language (that is, they can speak and understand it without any problem). They like Iranian food and do not feel that ethnicity plays any role in their selection of a partner. Their level of interest in Iranian music, culture, politics or history varied, although it seems that the level of interest was due to a general interest (or lack thereof) in politics, art, or social issues rather than a genuine interest in Iran specifically.

An interviewee, a 27-year-old female, Parvin, who was three when she came to Sweden, answered the question of ethnic identity as follows:

“I often feel like a Swede with a Persian [immigrant] background. I look like an Iranian physically, and have some Persian traits, behaviors, cultural heritage and upbringing, but I am usually more Swedish than Iranian, both here in Sweden and in Iran.”

With regard to her national identity, she said that she is “Swedish with an Iranian background.”

The answers to the questions concerning Swedish mentality showed that the interviewees in this group have internalized many Swedish norms and values; they socialize with ethnic Swedes and have ethnic Swedish friends. Interestingly, these interviewees seem to be quite multicultural and they socialize with people from a range of ethnic origins. They consider their nationality as multinational or globalized. Several interviewees have lived or studied in countries other than Sweden and see themselves as belonging to a larger entity than just a certain nation or ethnic group. They have experienced different cultures and have a sense of being cosmopolitan. They seem to consider the experience of dealing with different cultures to be an asset in their life.

A 28-year-old female interviewee, Manijeh, who was four when she came to Sweden, answered the question about her national identity by saying, "I am well integrated in the Swedish society but not the Iranian one." She also said, "I support the football team which is weaker." She explained, "I have lived an international life, with one foot in France, one in Sweden or one in Iran. I see this as an asset."

The fourth pattern, referred to as "**poor ethnic identity, full adoption of Swedish mentality**," represents those individuals who seem to have adopted the Swedish mentality and have a weak sense of belonging to the Iranian ethnic group.

The interviewees in this group answered questions concerning ethnic identity and national identity by saying they are Swedes and have Swedish national identity. They asserted that they would support the Swedish football team against Iran's but that they can speak and understand Persian. They said that ethnicity does not play a role in the selection of a partner, and that they enjoy Iranian food but have little or no interest in Iranian music, culture, politics or history.

A 36-year-old male, Mehran, interviewee who was 12 when he came to Sweden said that he understood his ethnic identity and his national identity as Swedish and that he would support the Swedish football team if Iran and Sweden had played against each other. However, he is able to speak and understand Persian. It should be noted that his parents belonged to a minority group (Armenian) in Iran. Interestingly, this interviewee enjoys Persian food and sometimes listens to Dariush (an Iranian singer), but he is not interested in Armenian food or music. It is notable that the Iranian community in Sweden consists of people with divergent Iranian minority backgrounds and that Iranians in Sweden socialize with each other regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. However, it is clear that belonging to an Iranian minority group may have impacted the above-mentioned interviewee's weak ethnic identity. However, having said that, belonging to a minority group does not necessarily cause a weak ethnic Persian identity or full adoption of the Swedish Mentality.

In sum, all of the interviewees can speak and understand the Persian language, and some can also read and write it. The role of ethnicity for the selection of a partner is only important for the first group. All interviewees showed an interest in Iranian food, but their interest in music, culture, politics and the like depends on the informants' general engagement and interest in these areas. All interviewees, with the exception of the one who does not have any friends, said that they socialize with young people from different ethnic groups and have "mixed" friends.

## 5.2 Comparison between the second generation Iranians in Sweden and in the United States

In order to analyze the results presented in the previous section I will use a comparative approach for better understanding the sense of the identity among the second generation Iranians in Sweden. In doing this I use the studies done in the United States among the second generation Iranians.

Ali Akbar Mehdi is one of the pioneers in studying the second generation Iranians. Mehdi (1998:77) puts forward some important questions concerning this group's ethnic identity. He points out that the parents of this group "claim they are genuine Iranians because they were born and raised in Iran, they relate to Iranian culture more than to American culture, they were active members of the Iranian society for decades, they might still have immediate family members in Iran, and they still hope to go back there someday". Such being the case, we can ask, as Mehdi (ibid.) does: "Are second generation Iranian youths able to make these claims? Do they think of themselves as Iranians? Apart from the fact that some were born in Iran, might still know the Persian language, and are familiar with some aspects of Iranian culture, what else about these young people makes them distinctly Iranian?" These questions are important for understanding the ethnic identity among the second generation Iranians in Sweden.

The majority of the Iranian immigrants in the United States belonged to the middle and high classes in their "home country" (Modarres 1998). Their main socialization process happened during the Pahlavi regime before the Islamic Revolution. Among this group, there are not so few who use their cultural heritage as a shield against the challenges of adaptation of the dominant norms and values of the new society (Mehdi 1998). The view of the second generation ethnic- and national belongingness differs, yet, from society to society. For instance, among Iranians in the United States such endeavor has been quite vivid and intensified and led to the creation of an idealized Iranian community. In this respect Mehdi (1998:79) notifies:

"The Persian magazines and journals, published by Iranian immigrants, exhibit a pervasive desire for future generations to retain the Persian language and culture. Iranian parents do not see their children's Persian proficiency as a marketable skill. Rather, they see it as the only effective medium through which their culture can be transmitted to their children. This paper contends that popular approaches to Iranian national, cultural, or ethnic identity have been essentialist, static, monolithic, and idealistic. These approaches draw selectively on isolated instances of national traditions, failing to contextualize these instances historically, spatially, or conceptually. They often ignore the vast array of patterns and instances that might contradict their claims to a homogeneous, cohesive, and expanded notion of identity."

The second generation has not been immune of such an idealization of certain Persian cultural characteristics, as Mehdi (1998: 93) considers:

"Based on what we know so far about Iranian youths, they are drawing some ideas from the stock of their parental culture. Their references to these cultural objects and symbols are selective, situational, interpretive, and often symbolic. They understand Iranian culture in their own terms, relating to it when suitable and appropriating from

it what is relevant to and desirable for them..... This selective and interpretive identification is not unique to these youths; their parents' representation of Iranian culture in the United States also conforms to this pattern. All the observable elements of Iranian culture in Southern California, where the most concentrated and largest Iranian population is located, are indicative of a "transplanted culture."<sup>17</sup> As a reconstituted reality, these cultural elements are selective, more appropriate to the lifestyle of the immigrants in the host society, and consistent with their outlook on Iranian culture.”

One factor which makes possible the idealization of the Persian culture and history among the second generation is perhaps their poor language. In this regard Mehdi (1998:93) says:

”Given that most Iranian youths' exposure to the Persian language is oral rather than written, and given the generally low level of proficiency of these youths in this language, it is difficult to imagine how these youths can maintain the elements of a culture that they cannot fully understand, and a culture whose semantic community they are not sufficiently in contact with. .. for second generation Iranians such actions are extremely difficult, if not impossible. Not only are their linguistic and cultural interactions with their parental culture very limited, but their access to a linguistically Iranian community in the United States is also limited by their geographical dispersion.”

In the United States the children should go to private course for learning Persian. In addition, there are not few families who use English as the dominant conversation language at home; this partly due to the fact that many parents could English already before immigrating to the United States and partly because of the “antipathy” towards Iranians in the United States. As it seems the "hostage story" causes a psychological hinder for the Iranian immigrants and especially the second generation, to in a public sphere carry their conversation among themselves in Persian.

Concerning the impact of the Americans' view of Iran and Iranians on the second generation, Bozorgmehr & Douglas (2011:8), proceeding from a study (Komaei 2009), on the self-identification among fifthly- one young people with Iranian background in Southern California, maintain:

“The findings suggested that tense US–Iran relations influenced the way the members of the second generation self-identify. As was the case for Iranian exiles who arrived after the Revolution, the second generation was also likely to assert a Persian identity which de-emphasized association with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the post-9/11 era, even if 9/11 had nothing to do Republic of Iran in the post-9/11 era, even if 9/11 had nothing to do with Iran”.

The continuation and reinforcement of the American's negative attitudes towards Iranians, especially after the September 11, has perhaps given rise to the development of a strong national identity based on an idealization of the Iranian pre-Islamic culture and history.

As it seems, one important reason for development of such an idealistic national identity among the second generation, is the political tension between the United States and Iran. Several voices of second generation Iranians in the United States bare witness to this point.

An important book on the second generation Iranians is “hyphenated Identities” based on the stories of thirteen University of Texas students who tell us about their hyphenated world, Iranian-Americans and the other Americans (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar 2007). In the following, I will use this source:

Tasuji (2007:6), one of the authors of the book “Hyphenated Identities”, explains the anti-Iranian attitude in the United States as follows:

"The anti-Iranian reaction was so widespread that it caused many Iranian-Americans to misinterpreted or misrepresent their ethnic identity. It also caused feelings of inferiority and insecurity and even feelings of self-hatred and shame among second generation Iranian-Americans and these types of sentiments continue to be reinforced by negative images from popular culture and the mass media”.

Concerning the idealization of Persian culture among Iranian in the United States, Tasuji (2007:5) maintains that:

“To reconstruct a new national identity for Iranians in America, they have become extremely interested in pre-Islamic Persian civilization. This revived sense of identification for Iranians is based on the hostage crisis and also on the assumption that all Americans have appreciation for pre-Islamic Persian heritage”

Anvari (2007:29), another author of the book “Hyphenated Identities”, answers to the question who am I?” as follows:

“I have answered this question by identifying myself as Iranian by nationality and American as citizenship. ....I have Iranian parents: hence I an Iranian by nationality. I have responsibilities to this society; hence I am American by citizenship.”

Another author of the above mentioned book, Bagheri (2007:80) discussing the attempt of the first generation Iranians in creating a “Persian myth” stresses that

“The Persian Myth is somewhat crippling to Iranian Identity....These are precisely the heavy layers of historical and cultural identity that many Iranians carry with them, what Fisk describes as the “malevolent influence of history,” and these heavy layers are often passed on the next generation.”

As the social construction theory of identity advocates, the second generation Iranians in the United States, by creating an ideal picture of their fatherland, construct a national identity for themselves. An identity that makes them feel proud of being an Iranian. Concerning the very poor knowledge of Persian language among the second generation Iranians in the United States and the lack of a first-hand contact with the Iranian culture and history, it is not surprising that this group’s familiarity with Iranian culture, society and history is through their parents, and others sources like the litterateur published aboard. To this we should add the attempt of Iranians developing an idealistic Iranian national identity as an answer to the humiliation they feel because of the political hostility between the United States and Iran. Besides, quite many in the Iranian community in the California and Texas where many of these young people live are monarchists and therefore quite often exaggerate the pre-

Islamic cultural heritage for justifying the Pahlavi's regime. Such being the case, the national identity which has developed among the second generation Iranians is hardly based on a real understanding of the Iranian culture and Iran's history and society either before or after the Islamic Revolution.

The above mentions considerations about the first and second generation in the United States can hardly be applied in full to the Iranians in Sweden. More clearly, the construction of an ideal view of the "fatherland" has not been a salient strategy for construction of their identity. The reasons are several.

One reason is that although in Sweden, just like in the United States and other European countries, there is a negative image of Muslim immigrants, applying the image of "terrorist" to young people from Muslim countries, especially to those with Iranian background, is not as prevalent as in the United States. Many ethnic Swedes have enough knowledge about this fact that Iranians in Sweden are not religious and have left their country because of problem with the Islamic regime in Iran. Besides, not only the political relation between Sweden and Iran is not hostile but also, as we can read in the homepage of the Government Offices of Sweden, Iran is one of the key overseas export markets for Sweden and many Swedish companies have a long tradition in the country (<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2688/a/52979>)

The other reason is that in Sweden, there is not any strong Iranian community; this maybe because in Sweden the tradition of minority-based community is not as strong as in the United States. Besides, Iranians in Sweden come from different social, cultural, ethnical and socioeconomic backgrounds; as well their ideology and ways of thinking as their view of the Islamic regime and the pre-Islamic regime differ significantly from each other.

Another reason, that I find, is the relative lack of national sentiments in Sweden. I am of opinion that the national sentiments in Sweden are not as strong as in Iran or the United States. Sweden has of course, just like any other part of the world, people who have national sentiments, and nationalism is extremely strong in certain groups. However, Sweden has a long history of national independence and has not been threatened during the last centuries. Besides in Sweden there has traditionally been a tendency towards modernization, and in post-modern times, towards globalization which is contrary to nationalism. Johansson (2010) explains this point as follows:

"The tendency to adopt outside trends readily may be, particularly if you ask a Swede, a result of the malleability of Swedish culture. Modernity is valued over tradition, and, from a comparative perspective, a relatively weak national sentiment is characteristic of contemporary Sweden. In other words, a cosmopolitan outlook shapes social life in Sweden. For Swedish youth (especially among the middle class) to study abroad, spend time as an au pair (if you're female), or simply bum around the globe for a while is a socially endorsed and encouraged experience that is expected to form a cosmopolitan-minded citizen."

I regard such tendency towards adoption of outside trends and cultures, and positivism towards modernity and globalization resulting in a weak nationalism, as a possible reason which hinders the development of a strong national identity amongst Swedes, including the second generation Iranians in Sweden.

In addition to the above mentioned reason, there are far less differences between social classes and there exists a very strong tradition of democracy and social welfare in Sweden. These significant differences between Sweden and Iran have perhaps caused important changes in the ways of thinking of Iranians in Sweden who have been in this country for some decades and become integrated into the Swedish society. Such being the case, they have often, not only criticized the political system, but also the culture and the social structure which have been dominated in Iran before and after the Islamic revolution. Iranians in Sweden may then easier question certain cultural and social heritages than those Iranians in the United States where certain social and cultural characteristics are similar to those of Iran; here I refer to the existence of a strong class society, the traditional family structure and the importance of religion. Accordingly, the second generation Iranians in Sweden have, unlike the second generation Iranians in the United States, not chosen to construct an Iranian national identity.

An issue which together with the above mentioned reasons hinders the construction of an idealized Iranian community and a strong Iranian national identity among the second generation Iranians in Sweden is the fact that quite many of them travel continually to Iran and therefore have a more realistic view of Iran than many youths with Iranian background in the United States who have never traveled/travelled back to Iran.

That we may hardly find a strong Iranian national identity among second generation Iranians in Sweden does not yet mean a lack of awareness and sense of belonging to an Iranian ethnic group. There is actually a factor which strengthen such a belonging for these young people; a factor which makes it possible for them to be able to come in direct contact with their cultural heritage and with all Iranians around the world. This factor is their knowledge in Persian language due to the First Language Instruction (Hemspråksundervisning). According to the Swedish law, from 1977, every child has right to learn his/her mother language. Students who do not have Swedish as a first language have a possibility to receive first language instruction. The courses in mother language are free of charge and until recently was integrated into the main school curriculum.

Another factor which contributes to the improvement of their knowledge in Persian language is that in many Iranian families, the spoken language at home is Persian; this due to the fact that the parents do not have any knowledge in Swedish language before immigration. They learned Swedish as adults. Their ability to talk Swedish fluently, especially during the first years of their arrival to Sweden, was then limited<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> This cannot be applied yet to those who come to Sweden at a very young age.



One of the most important factors which contributes to the construction, maintenance and strengthening of a sense of belonging to an ethnic group is without any doubt language. The knowledge in mother language allows the second generation Iranians in Sweden to understand the cultural and social codes. Those who travel to Iran do not have any problem to establish contact with people and learn about the Iranian society. The ability to understand, talk and sometimes read and write Persian has thus contributed to development of a sense of belongingness to a people, i.e. Iranians, among the second generation.

Summing up the discussion above with awareness for a risk of generalizing, I maintain that the interviews show that unlike the second generation Iranians in the United State that according to several studies has reconstructed an *idealistic* Iranian national identity, the second generation Iranians in Sweden has developed a *multiethnic* identity with an awareness of belonging to an ethnic group, i.e. Iranian. This difference between the informants in the United States and in Sweden is, as I will discuss further, due primarily to the societies they live.

Until now I have tried to highlight the way the second generation Iranians in Sweden regard their identities concerning their ethnicity and belongingness to the Swedish society, and by comparing the case of the second generation Iranians in Sweden and those in the United States concerning their understanding of their ethnic and national identity to examine my idea of the impact of the host society on such an understanding.

### **5.3. Educational Attainment**

In this section, I will try to show more clearly the impact of the host society on the understanding of the second generation Iranians of their identities, by comparing the above mentioned two groups concerning their educational attainment. I have chosen educational attainment since it is an important factor for identity construction of young Iranian people. Below I will explain this point more clearly.

The strong belief in the importance of education among Iranians, regardless their socio-economic backgrounds, is considered to be a factor for the educational achievement of second generation Iranians (Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004). The educational attainment has played the role of a cornerstone in the reconstruction of the first-generation identity, it has also, as it seems, played an important role in the construction of the identity of the second generation Iranians (Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004). However, the effectiveness of such a belief on second generation Iranians depends on the social and cultural structure of the societies in which these young people live.

The social structures of the countries to which Iranians have migrated, vary considerably. The differences between these countries undoubtedly impact the extent to which members of the second generation internalize the values that their parents held in Iran, such as those regarding educational attainment. It is important therefore, to pay close attention to these differences.

The following section discusses the impact do the social characteristics of the society have on educational attainment of the second generation Iranians as an important factor in their understanding of their identities.

In order to highlight the impact of these characteristics on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their identities I have used a literature study of the issue of the educational attainment of the second generation Iranians in Sweden and their counterparts in the United States, which explained in the section theoretical framework. I have focused on several empirical studies which are presented in three texts; Hartman, 2009; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004. As pointed out before the review of these texts shows that several factors contribute to the educational attainment of second generation Iranians:

1. *The parents' financial resources*
2. *The traditional family structure* (the ability of mothers to be flexible and stay at home to supervise their children due to the fathers' high earnings)
3. *Community pressure*
4. *Education as a way of repaying parental sacrifices*
5. *Education as a means of dispelling the "terrorist" image*
6. *The traditional importance of education* (that is, education as a supreme value and a source of respect)
7. *Parents' educational resources.*

In the following, I will examine if these factors which seem important for the educational attainment of the second generation Iranians in the United States play the same role for the second generation Iranians in Sweden.

- ***The parents' financial resources***

Education in Sweden is free at all levels. In addition, any student who does not have a full-time job can receive financial aid (*studiemedel*) for living expenses during his or her study. Student aid is available for *studies* at folk high school<sup>7</sup>, colleges, and universities. There is also a special financial aid program for *studies* in foreign countries. Although this aid is hardly enough for all living expenses, it does play a significant role in students' independence from their family. There are other forms of public supports for all residents, such as unemployment insurance.<sup>8</sup> Free tuition, state grants, and loans for living expenses make higher education available for every resident in Sweden, regardless of their social class.

In the United States, higher education is not free, and students must usually pay considerable tuition fees. Funding of their children's university tuition fees is often a major issue for parents.

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<sup>7</sup> Folk high schools (Danish: *Folkehøjskole*; Finnish: *kansanopisto* and *työväenopisto* or *kansalaisopisto*; German: *Volkshochschule* and *Heimvolkshochschule*; Norwegian: *Folkehøgskole*; Swedish: *Folkhögskola*) are institutions for adult education that generally do not grant academic degrees, though certain courses might exist leading to that goal. They are most commonly found in Nordic countries and in Germany and Austria ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk\\_high\\_school](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_high_school))

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see: <http://service.csn.se/CSNOrder/GemensammaFiler/Blanketter/4146C.pdf>.

Students are usually dependent on their parents (or other family members) for university tuition fees and their living expenses during their education, and often afterwards as well, until they find a job.

Rumbau (2008) maintains that there is a tendency in the United States to recognize the importance of education among many immigrant parents; those with high human capital (education, occupation, and skills) can more easily transfer the advantages of being highly educated on to their children. Bozorgmehr and Douglas's census analysis in the 2005–2007 American Survey (ASC), as well as Shirvani's the interviews with the target group, are in accordance with the consideration of Rumbau (2008).

In the United States, public financial support to families is very limited, which is completely different to the situation in Sweden. As Björnberg and Latta (2007:415) note, "Swedish family policies are integrated within a general welfare policy where the state has acquired a significant responsibility for the welfare of individuals, independent of family membership."

While public financial support in the United States targets the poor, support is available in Sweden for all residents.

As a result of Sweden's general welfare policy, parents are not primarily responsible for the expenses of education and the living expenses of their young adult children. Clearly, some families, both among ethnic Swedes and migrant families, do support their children financially during their education if needed. Therefore, in Sweden, unlike the United States, the parents' financial resources do not directly affect the children's educational attainment.

- ***The traditional family structure***

Another factor that is believed to impact the educational attainment of second generation Iranians in the United States is *the traditional family structure*, with the father as the breadwinner and the mother as a housewife.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2010, the Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden) have the highest levels of gender equality in the world.<sup>9</sup> The idea of equality between men and women is a cornerstone of Swedish society. In all social domains in Sweden, men and women have the same opportunities, rights, and obligations. The most important point regarding gender equality in Sweden is the opportunity for both parents to combine work and care for the children.

"Each parent has 60 days of leave reserved specifically for him or her, which means these days cannot be transferred to the other parent. The father of a newborn baby gets 10 extra days' leave in connection with the birth of their child. With the birth of twins, a father is entitled to 20 days' leave. A parent adopting a child is entitled to take leave from work for 1.5 years from the time the child comes under his or her care."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sweden.se/eng/Home/Society/Equality/Facts/Gender-equality-in-Sweden/>.

The high level of gender equality in Sweden is the result of an intensive struggle over the last few decades, in a range of social domains, for women's rights and gender equality. This, among other factors, has led to a high level of gender awareness among the majority of women who live in Sweden. This awareness has changed the traditional gender roles.

Other factors have contributed to the development of a modern view of gender roles that challenges the traditional view in Sweden. One such factor is the high level of secularism in Sweden, where religion is not an integrated part of individual life.

Numerous studies (Ahmadi, 2006; Stark, Hamberg and Miller, 2005; Riis, 1994; McAuley, Pecchioni and Grant, 2000; Halman, 1994) have shown that Swedish society is not as religious as American society. The high level of religiosity in the United States contributes to the establishment and continuity of the traditional pattern of family structure in that country. In Sweden, however, the high level of secularism has contributed to a change in the traditional family structure and in the religious and traditional views of women and gender roles. As Scott (2006:12) argues, secularism is the strongest challenge to family values.

In terms of the traditional understanding of the female role, the mainstream understanding in the United States is not drastically different from the dominant view in Iran before the Islamic revolution, during which time the majority of first-generation Iranian immigrants were socialized. The lack of such a difference has hindered a radical change in Iranians' views of gender roles after migrating to the United States. In fact, Iranians who immigrated to the United States found a gender ideology and gender patterns that was not so different from what they were used to. The situation was different, however, for Iranians who immigrated to Sweden; these immigrants encountered a new family ideology and family culture.

In addition to a high level of equality and gender awareness, the social structure of Swedish society hardly allows the traditional patterns of the gender role function. In Swedish society, one-and-a-half-income or dual-income households are far more prevalent than breadwinner families. As Björnberg and Latta (2007:216) point out, replacing breadwinner families with one-and-a-half-income or dual-income households "has strong implications on the balance of power between men and women, as well as on how the partners negotiate their financial and other responsibilities within the household".

Although the family ideology among many ethnic groups is different from the Swedish one, the economic circumstances in Sweden also impose one-and-a-half-income or dual-income households on immigrant families.<sup>11</sup> Björnberg and Latta (2007:417) explain these circumstances as follows: "The

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<sup>11</sup> Although the rate of unemployment among immigrants is high, and in some immigrant families one of the parents is at home, there is significant difference between a family that has enough high financial capital to enable the mother to stay at home and help school the children, and a family that has economic problems due to unemployment and has one or both parents staying at home. In the latter, the family is often in crisis; parents are depressed and children suffer as a result. In such situations, the parent at home can hardly contribute to the schooling of the children.

moral economy of the Swedish welfare state presumes a substantial degree of collective solidarity since most of the redistribution within its social security system is financed through income taxes and regarded as an insurance system. The social security system is mainly built on the principle of (full-time) employment and income replacement, as acquiring full sickness, unemployment and retirement benefits are all based on the existence of an (relatively uninterrupted) employment history.”

Few Iranian families in Sweden have the father as the breadwinner and the mother as a housewife. Dual-income is the dominant pattern. It would appear that Iranian women have been integrated into Swedish society to a greater extent than Iranian men (Ahmadi, 2001; Darvishpour, 2002) and have therefore had a better opportunity to enter the job market.

The above has hopefully shown that the “traditional family structure” can hardly be regarded as an important factor for the educational attainment of second generation Iranians in Sweden.

- ***Community pressure***

The third issue that is believed to impact the educational attainment of second generation Iranians is community pressure. However, two factors oppose such an impact. Firstly, the Iranian community in Sweden is not as strong as that in the United States. This could be because the tradition of minority-based community is not as strong in Sweden as it is in the United States, a country that has historically been a land of continual conquest, re-peopling, settlers, and migration.

Secondly, education does not hold the same position in Sweden as it does in the United States, which has probably influenced the Iranian community. Unlike its equivalent in the United States, the Iranian community in Sweden does not seem to regard educational attainment as its collective identity. One reason for this difference could be that, as a strong class society with a weak social welfare system, the American society usually allows families with high incomes to send their children to college. Given that this is the case, educational attainment becomes a crucial means of raising status, gaining respect, and moving up the social ladder. The situation can be quite difficult for poor people, and harder still for migrant groups that have limited social opportunities, such as Iranians, who are yet to carve out a niche in American society. Another factor is the problem of people from Muslim countries being labeled as potential “terrorists.” Accordingly, achieving a high education has become a vital “survival” mechanism for second generation Iranians in the United States, and a part of their collective identity, as Vedadi notes (2007:24).

As is the case in other societies, higher education is evaluated positively in Sweden; however, the education has been regarded as a way to achieve a highly qualified job rather than a value in itself. In Sweden, which until 100 years ago was one of the poorest countries in Europe, performing skilled and qualified work has historically represented a path towards development and success. It is important to

remember the impact of the protestant ethic,<sup>12</sup> which emphasized the need for good and hard work as a component of a person's calling, worldly success, and a sign of personal salvation (see Weber, 1959). Sweden's distribution of income is among the most equal in the industrialized world (although inequality has increased since the 1990s). In addition, the dominant social democratic ideology has valued working class backgrounds, sometimes higher than educational backgrounds. Possession of a university degree has rarely impacted the election of Sweden's political leaders. For instance, Stefan Löfven, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (the dominant party in Sweden for several decades) has no higher education. None of the ex-leaders of the Social Democratic Party during the last two decades, i.e. Håkan Juholt, Mona Sahlin, or Göran Persson, who was one of the most important political figures in Sweden for a decade, as the prime minister from 1996 to 2006 and leader of the Swedish Social Democratic Party from 1996 to 2007, have a university degree, but were appreciated for their political activities in the Social Democratic Party and their working-class upbringing.

Accordingly, it has traditionally been more important in Sweden to obtain a job and conduct qualified work than to obtain a title based on high education. Such being the case, young people in Sweden do not generally consider higher education as the only way of being successful in life. The "fever" about going to college that exists in the United States (as well as in Iran) is hardly noticeable in Sweden. Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the number of college students in Sweden over the last two decades, which is largely due to the increase in unemployment. For some people, attending college is a way of managing their living expenses, given the financial aid that students receive.

The above-mentioned factors have probably led to the situation whereby education is not as important in Sweden as it is in the United States for improving social mobility.<sup>13</sup>

The dominant view of education in Sweden may have impacted the attitude of the Iranian community towards educational attainment. Although educational attainment is still important for Iranians in Sweden, their broadcasts and social communication hardly contain the collective "hysteria" concerning educational attainment that is apparent among the Iranian community in the United States. Therefore, the group pressure on second generation Iranians in Sweden cannot be considered a crucial factor for the educational attainment of these youths.

- ***Education as a way to repay parental sacrifices***

As explained above, Iranian parents in Sweden do not pay for their children's education. Besides, like other immigrants, students receive financial aid until they are established in the new society. It is

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<sup>12</sup> In sociological theory, the "protestant ethic" is the value attached to hard work, thrift, and efficiency in one's worldly calling. These qualities, especially in the Calvinist view, were considered signs of an individual's election, or eternal salvation. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/479867/Protestant-ethic>.

<sup>13</sup> It should be mentioned here that one of the reasons why educational attainment does not guarantee an improvement in social mobility among second generation Iranians in Sweden and, more generally, in Europe, is the existence of a strong ethnocentrism in Europe compared to the United States.

difficult to imagine, therefore, that the second generation sees educational attainment as a means of “repaying parental sacrifices after immigration.” Of course, some children feel that their educational attainment would make their parents happy and satisfied, and this can encourage them in their education, but this is not the same as repaying parents for their sacrifices.

- ***To dispel the “terrorist” image***

There is no doubt that in Sweden, like in other Western countries, some people have a negative image of Islam. Applying the image of a “terrorist” to young people from Muslim countries, especially to those with Iranian background, is hardly prevalent in Sweden. Mainstream Swedish society views Iranians as being non-religious and generally opposed to the Islamic republic of Iran. In addition, the political relationship between Sweden and Iran is not hostile and Iran had historically been regarded as a key overseas export market for Sweden. Therefore, I do not consider dispelling the “terrorist” image to be a crucial reason for educational attainment among second generation Iranians.

- ***Parents’ educational resources***

As pointed out above, Hartman (2009) maintains that students with ethnic Iranian backgrounds are well represented in higher education in Sweden. Hartman (2009) regards parents’ educational background as one of the most important reason for educational attainment of-second generation Iranians.

Parents’ educational resources are a crucial factor, both in the United States and in Sweden, for the educational attainment of the second generation with Iranian background.

To this, I should add another factor, which I call *belief in the importance of education*.

*The tradition of belief in the importance of the education*

The Swedish view of education, as well as the social structure of Swedish society, has influenced the attitude of the Iranian community towards education. However, the tradition of belief in the importance of education is still strong among Iranian parents, even if such belief is not expressed as loudly (collectively) as it is in the United States.

Hartman (2009) mentions that Iranian immigrants, who came to Sweden and other countries as a result of Iran’s 1979 revolution, clearly brought with them a tradition of child-rearing that emphasized the importance of education.

Here we can apply the Bourdieu’s doctrine of cultural capital for better understanding the role of the parents and their strong belief in the importance of education in educational attainment of second generation Iranians.

Bourdieu (1984) explains that cultural capital consists of education and culture. By education, Bourdieu means study habits in the family, which can affect the degree to which one dedicates oneself to study and high education. I believe that this is one of the factors that may impact the educational attainment of second generation Iranians. The tradition of belief in the importance of education can be regarded as an embodied cultural capital, which is a form of cultural capital that consists of both consciously acquired and passively “inherited” properties of individuals’ self. Here, the term

“inherited” refers to the culture and traditions that are socialized by the individuals in the family. Embodied Cultural capital impresses itself on one’s habitus (character and way of thinking) over an extended period. As Bozorgmehr and Douglas (2010:7) note:

“Contrary to the predictions of assimilation theory, which argued that immigrants and their descendants must abandon their cultural heritage to move up the economic ladder, the consensus from current research on the second generation is that educational and occupational achievement need not come at the expense of ethnic identity and ethnic attachment. Successful integration often depends on ties to the family and ethnic community because they offer valuable support and resources, even in the absence of parental human capital.”

Although the belief in the importance of the education can play the role of a cultural capital for the achievement of the second generation Iranians both in Sweden and the United States, the effectiveness of such a belief on second generation Iranians depends, on the social and cultural structure of the societies in which these young people live.

In some Iranian families in Sweden, the educational attainment of the second generation is partially due to the strong influence of the parents on their children. However, there are other families in which the parents have little or no influence on their children’s education. These families have either adopted the Swedish view of education (and, therefore, do not try to impact their children) or have lost their authority over their children.

The possibility of losing authority over children is much higher in Sweden than it is in the United States. This is largely due to the social welfare services in Sweden for young people, which makes it possible for young people to realize their individuality and independence during their studies and before getting a job. Therefore, it is not unusual for a young person to leave his or her parents and live independently, even before going to college. In the United States, the “early” independence of young people from their family, before finishing their education or getting a job, is considered a family problem and often manifests itself as running away from home.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1. Discussion of result in relation to aim and research question**

My point in this text was that the social characteristics of the society the second generation Iranians live in have an import impact on their understanding of their ethnic identity. For highlighting my point I have compared the two groups of second generation Iranians, those in Sweden and the United States. In doing this, I have explored how the second generation Iranian in Sweden identify with Iranian society, with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden and/or with the Swedish society; then using a sociological comparative analysis of the social, political and cultural characteristics of the society the second generation Iranian in Sweden and those in the Untied Stated live in, I have tried to show the impact of these characteristics in the understanding of the identity of these people.



By comparing the question of educational attainment among the second generation Iranians in Sweden and in the United States, I tried to more concretely highlight the impact of the host society on the second generation Iranians' understanding of their identities.

The data used for the study in Sweden was collected by e-mail interviews with 15 young individuals of Iranian background. With the exception of one interviewee who was born in Sweden, all migrated to Sweden when they were children. The secondary data which concerns the second generation Iranians in the United States was based on the several literature on this group conducted mainly by some sociologists in the United States and twelve texts written by the second generation Iranians in the United States.

**The research questions were:**

1. How do second generation Iranians in Sweden define their ethnic and national identity and relate themselves to Swedish society?
2. What are the differences between second generation Iranians in Sweden with second generation Iranians in the United States concerning their understanding of their national and ethnic identity?

**Concerning the first question** which regards the empirical study in Sweden, the questions raised for the interviewees have covered a central theme: ethnic/national identity and the Swedish mentality.

The findings have been presented in different patterns. In the case of identification with the Iranian ethnic group in Sweden and/or with the Swedish society, four patterns were identified: (1) a strong sense of ethnic identity and moderate adoption of Swedish mentality, (2) a strong sense of ethnic identity and full adoption of Swedish mentality, (3) moderate ethnic identity and full adoption of Swedish mentality, and (4) low ethnic identity and full adoption of Swedish mentality.

As it seems, the second generation Iranians in Sweden have a more unambiguous understanding of their ethnic belongingness, but have not developed a national identity. This due to the fact that they live in a globalized world, within the European Union, and in a country where nationalist tendencies are not so strong<sup>14</sup>. This situation provides these young people with a better possibility to consider themselves as citizens of the world and as individuals with multicultural and multiethnic identity.

**Regarding the second question**, the findings of the present study were compared with those of studies on second generation Iranians in the United States, where the greatest Iranian community outside of Iran is located. This comparison has shown that the identity tensions and identity crisis reported by the research on second generation Iranians in the United States does not exist among the same generation in Sweden.

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<sup>14</sup> The following example can show this point clearly. A school principal in southern Sweden has banned pupils from posing for class photos wearing national team shirts containing Swedish flags. Since national flags may be perceived by some as xenophobic, eighth grade pupils in Karlshamn have been ordered to wear less inflammatory garb for a photo to be published in the school yearbook. (<http://www.thelocal.se/8401/20070905/>)

More precisely, the cases in Sweden do not show the same kind of a “reconstructive identity”, expressing itself in creating a “reactive identity” based on an “idealized form of Iranian pre-Islamic culture”, as it does in the cases in the United States. We can still consider another kind of “reconstructive identity” among the second generation Iranians in Sweden which expresses itself in the form of *creating a global and multicultural identity*.

Without being able to give a conclusive explanation for these differences between Sweden and the United States, I have presented some reflections that can be used as a starting point for future studies. The reflections cover the differences in the population structure of the Iranian communities in Sweden and the United States, the political, social and cultural differences between the two societies, and the possibilities available for second generation Iranians in these societies.

In order to more clearly highlight the impact of the characteristics of the host society on the second generation Iranians understanding of their identity, I have also focused on the question of *educational attainment*.

**Concerning this issue**, we can summarize the answer as follows: Second generation Iranians, like other young people around the world, view educational attainment as a way of obtaining a more prosperous life situation. The differences between this group in the United States (where the majority of these young people live) and in Sweden (where the majority of this group in Europe live), with regard to their view of education, reflects the society in which they live. In my view, the most important reason for such diversity is the significant differences between the two countries concerning social structure and cultural values.

As discussed above, factors such as financial resources, the traditional family structure and the impact of the community are not as significant in Sweden as they are in the United States in terms of the educational attainment of second generation Iranians. The second generation Iranians in Sweden do not appear to be as motivated as their counterparts in the United States to dispel the “terrorist” image associated with Iranians, or to feel guilty about repaying their parents’ sacrifices.

Parental educational resources and the traditional importance of education appear to influence the educational attainment of second generation Iranians in both Sweden and the United States. Studies show (Wilcox-Ghanoonparvar, 2007; Bozorgmehr and Douglas, 2010; Shavarini, 2004) that it is an important cultural capital for the achievement of the second generation Iranians in the United States. The extent to which such influence functions for the achievement of the second generation Iranians in Sweden is a question that needs to be investigated.

In this section, I answered the main question and the research questions. In the following I put forward a discussion on the used theoretical framework and method.

## **6.2 The main theoretical interpretation of the findings**

I have tried to highlight the way the second generation Iranians in Sweden regard their identities concerning their ethnicity and belongingness to the Swedish society, and relating these findings for the

case of the second generation Iranians in Sweden to those in the United States concerning their understanding of their ethnic and national identity to examine my idea of the impact of the host society on such an understanding. At the background of a social constructivist theoretical approach the results seem to reveal that they have different social identity constructions in the following way:

As the social construction theory of identity advocates, the second generation Iranians in the United States, by creating an ideal picture of their fatherland, construct a national identity for themselves. Their poor knowledge of Persian language and the lack of a first-hand contact with the Iranian culture and history hinder them of obtaining a realistic picture of their fatherland and its history. Creating such an ideal picture is also an answer to the humiliation they feel because of the political hostility between the United States and Iran.

What is said above about the first and second generation in the United States can hardly be applied in full to the Iranians in Sweden. The construction of an ideal view of the “fatherland” has not been, as in this paper I tried to show, a salient strategy for construction of the second generation Iranians in Sweden.

As mentioned, instead of “reconstructive identity”, expressing itself in creating a “reactive identity” based on an “idealized form of Iranian pre-Islamic culture”, (the cases in the United States) we consider among the second generation Iranians in Sweden a “reconstructive identity” which expresses itself in the form of *creating a global and multicultural identity*.

### **6.3. Discussion of method**

In the following I will shortly point out some disadvantages and advantages of using email interview as data-gathering method. The disadvantage is that in the qualitative method, the information rarely can be generalized.

Concerning email interviewing method, as Opdenakker (2006) emphasizes “one of the advantages of email interviewing, due to asynchronous communication of place, is the extended *access to participants*”. A disadvantage of using e-mail is, according to him “the complete lack of social cues. Such being the case, email interviewing “provides a limited register for communication” (Bampton & Cowton, 2002, paragraph 25).

Without any doubt email interviewing has the extra advantage that the interviewee can answer the questions at his or her own convenience independent of place and time.

Email interviewing has also this advantage that it is much cheaper than face-to face interviewing because of no travelling costs (Opdenakker, 2006). On the other hand according to Opdenakker (2006):

“this technique can cost a lot of time. Due to the asynchronous communication of time, the interviewee might have to wait sometimes for days or weeks before he/she answers the questions. This does not only lead to the risk that the interviewee will lose interest in the research, but also to the risk that the interviewee may forget to reply to questions”.

The email interview functioned well for my study since as mentioned before almost all of the interviewees found it more convenient to send their answers by email.

#### **6.4. Suggestion for future research**

Hopefully, this essay will pave the way for more studies on the second generation Iranians, in particular those who live in Sweden. This study can also be used for studying the second generation immigrants with focus on those factors which are important for the identity construction of each ethnic group. The question of how the second generation immigrants with different ethnic backgrounds understand their ethnic and national identities and their belongingness to the Swedish society should be investigated by using different approaches such as individual interviews, group interviews and survey studies. One issue that is needed to be studied, is the impact of the culture within the framework of which the different second generation immigrants are brought up in. has on their understanding of their national and ethnic identity and how the Swedish society and its culture impacts such an understanding.

The second generation immigrants are regarded as a vulnerable group which needs to be paid more attention to by politicians, sociologists and social workers. To understand how this group understands their identities, and how the social characteristics of a society affects the groups understanding of their identities, can help social agencies and social workers to better understand this group and help them in solving the divergent problems they encounter. Conducting qualitative and quantitative studies among the second generation immigrants with different ethnic identities on their understanding of their national and ethnic can shed light on existential and other profound problems this group faces.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Intervjuguide

#### Unga iranier i Sverige: en studie om identitet och individualitet

Följande frågor är inte enkätfrågor utan intervjufrågor via email. Du kan därför välja att svara på dessa frågor utförligt eller kort. Självklart får vi mer material för att analysera dina svar om du svarar utförligt. Vissa frågor kräver att du väljer mellan ett eller flera svarsalternativ. I sådana fall var snäll och **stryk under** den/dem svar som du väljer.

Du kan välja att inte svara på någon fråga om du inte.

Du kommer att vara anonym i denna studie och ingen annan får reda på dina svar gällande frågorna. Deltagande är frivilligt och resultat av studien kommer bara att användas i vetenskapligt syfte.

#### **Tusen tack för att du ställer upp.**

#### **Allmänna frågor:**

Du är: Man    Kvinna

Din ålder är:.....

Du är född i Sverige:    ja       nej

Om nej: Du var ..... år gammal när dina föräldrar kom till Sverige.

Din mamma var ..... år gammal när hon kom till Sverige.

Din pappa var ..... år gammal när hon kom till Sverige.

#### ***Din utbildning:***

- Gymnasiet,
- lägre än gymnasiet
- högre än gymnasiet

om högre än gymnasiet:

Vilket ämne?

Hur många år har du studerat? Färdigt?

Var:

***Ditt jobb:*** vad, var,

Dina föräldrars utbildning:

Mor:

Far:

#### ***Dina föräldrars arbete:***

Mor:

Far:

Har du någon/några syskon? Hur många? Syster, bror, hur gammal är dem?

## **Specifika frågor:**

### ***Identitet:***

- Hur uppfattar du din etniska identitet? persiska, svenska eller ...?
- Skulle du stödja (heja på) iranska eller svenska fotbollslaget om Sverige och Iran spelar mot varandra?
- Hur uppfattar du din nationella identitet, dvs., tillhörighet som medlem i ett samhälle och ett land?
- Har du andra personer i släkten än dina föräldrar som bor i Sverige? Vilka?
  - Umgås du med dessa? Hur? Hur ofta?
- Umgås dina föräldrar med iranier? Hur? Hur ofta?
- Umgås du med iranier? Hur? Hur ofta?
- Är majoriteter av dina vänner:
  - Iranier?
  - Svenskar?
  - Från andra etniskbakgrund än svensk eller iransk?
  - Mix?
- Kan du prata persiska obehindrat?
- Förstår du persiska obehindrat?
- Läser du persiska obehindrat?
- Skriver du persiska obehindrat?
- Är du intresserad av.
  - Persisk mat?
  - Persisk Musik?
  - Andra saker som har att göra med Iran så som sport? vad?

### **Etnicitet: hinder eller tillgång**

- Förklara hur din etniska bakgrund har hindrat eller hjälpt dig i din utbildning eller arbete?
- Om du kan persiska, använder du den som en tillgång i din studie eller jobb? Hur?
- Har du någon gång har känt dig blivit diskriminerad på grund av din etniska bakgrund?  
Kan du kortfattat beskriva den?
- Ser du i vardagslivet någon skillnad mellan dig och de etniska svenskarna? Om ja, på vilket sätt?
- Spelar etnicitet någon roll i ditt val av partner? Om ja, på vilket sätt?
- Ser du någon skillnad mellan de unga med iransk bakgrund och de från andra etniska bakgrunder än svensk? Om ja, var snäll och ge exempel av vilka och förklara på vilket sätt?
- Bor du med dina föräldrar?
  - Om ja,*
    - Gör du dina vardagsärenden så som diska, tvätta kläder och damsuga rummet, tvätta badrummet, ...själv eller gör dina föräldrar eller gör någon annan dessa arbete?
  - Om du inte bor med dina föräldrar,*
    - Hur gammal var du när du flyttade hemifrån?

- Har du trots att du har flyttat hemifrån får fortfarande hjälp av dina föräldrar?

Vilken sort hjälp?

- Bor du med någon/några andra?

- Vem?

- Är du oberoende av denna person? Ekonomisk eller när det gäller olika vardagslivsärenden?

- Är du ekonomisk oberoende av dina föräldrar?
- Ska du hävda att du är oberoende av dina föräldrar? vänner, dylik när det gäller vardagslivet?
- Tror du att du kan klara dig **totalt** utan hjälp från föräldrar eller någon annan?
- Har dina föräldrar varit mycket hjälpsamma? Förklara!
- Tog dina föräldrar hand om dina vardagsärenden (göra i ordning ditt rum, tvätta dina kläder och annat) när du var barn?
- Tog dina föräldrar hand om dina vardagsärenden (göra i ordning ditt rum, tvätta dina kläder och annat) när du var ungdom?
- Brukade dina föräldrar hjälpa dig med skoluppgifter?
- Hur du uppfattat att skolan begärde mycket mer självständigt ansvar än det du är van vid hemma?
  - Tror du att det var någon skillnad mellan hem och skolan när det gäller ansvartagandet?  
Förväntades man i skolan mer/mindre att ta ansvar för sina handlingar?
- Om det är något annat du vill säga var snäll och skriv detta nedan:

Tack för din hjälp

## **Appendix 2**

### **Email till IP**

Hej,

Till detta email har vi bifogat några frågor. Vi är tacksamma om du svarar på dem.

#### **Vad det handlar om?**

Det handlar om en studie som vi gör bland unga med iransk estnisk bakgrund som är uppväxta i Sverige. Studien ska resultera i ett kapitel i en vetenskaplig bok. Boken handlar om iranier i Sverige och den är på engelska. Du kan få boken när den har publicerats.

#### **Vad är studien syfte?**

Vår studie vill granska hur etnisk identitet påverkar unga Iran-svenskar och om denna bakgrund har haft någon betydelse i deras liv, positivt eller negativt.

#### **Vilka ingår i studien?**

De som är mellan 18 år och 35 år; deras båda föräldrar är iranier och är födda i Sverige eller har tillbringat en stor del av sitt liv i Sverige.

#### **Vad är denna studie bra för?**

Livet är en konstig spiral. Vi går upp och ner i livets berg-och-dal bana; det händer många glädjande och sorgliga händelser i våra liv och ju mer känner vi denna bana desto bättre kan vi ”kontrolla” den. Det är vi forskares uppgift att studera denna bana och utrusta individer med den nödvändiga kunskap de behöver för att så mycket som möjligt kunna hindra skador och utöka glädjen i denna berg-och-dal bana.

Denna studie kan förhoppningsvis öka kunskapen om den etniska bakgrundens betydelse för de unga med annan etniskbakgrund än svenska.

Du kommer att med ditt bidrag till denna studie att hjälpa dig själv och andra att veta mer om denna generation.

Du kommer att var hundra procent anonym i denna studie vilket innebär att ingen information om intervjupersonen kommer att kunna identifieras. Vid citatanvändning kommer citat av icke-känslig karaktär användas och ingenting i texten som publiceras ska tyda på vem står bakom citaten. Jag som forskare har tystnadsplikt och följer etiska regler.

Vi bör påpeka att insamlad data endast kommer att användas för denna studie.

Tack för din hjälp