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## The Question About Marriage In Iran

Ah yes, marriage. What sweeter way to say that you are willing to spend the rest of your life with someone, than through spending thousands of dollars on an ostentatious white ballroom gown, a venue fit for royalty, and a glistening diamond ring. Back in the day everyone seemed to dream and look forward to their fairytale wedding. Unfortunately, in today's society, things have changed. Marriage to a majority of us in college can sometimes feel like the least of our issues. We live in such a fast paced society that sometimes we barely have enough time to even think about what we are going to have for dinner let alone ponder upon who we are going to spend the rest of our lives with for the years to come. I was able to first hand see this transition of prioritizing the need to devote your life to one specific person versus putting yourself before anyone else, all through the lens of my Iranian American culture.

Back in the day in Iran, marriage was considered a sign of accomplishment, success, and uppermost importance to most parents in Iran who had conceived a daughter. My own mother was pressured into her first marriage when she was only 20 years of age and was not able to fully pursue an education because of this. So ever since I was a child, my mother always told me to focus on my education and not let what societies expectations in regards to personal relationships steer me away from my schooling.

This all changed when I got accepted into college. You see like most Iranian parents who come to America, school always comes first and my parents were no different. It was not until sophomore year that I noticed my mother started expressing more of an interest in wanting to find me a potential husband. Whenever I would come home to attend a mehmooni, she ensured that my hair and makeup looked impeccable and that I was adorned in the trendiest, most presentable clothing money could find. After confronting her about the numerous amounts of times she would push me to go dance with one of her friend's sons, she finally confessed: "I think it's time for you to open your eyes and look at potential people you could see yourself marrying in the future." (Khosravi, 2018). I was shocked. My mother had always been the type of mom to scare me into not wanting to talk to boys because they could essential "ruin my life".

So what changed? Although a majority of my mother's traditional mindset had changed drastically throughout her stay in the United States, I found that a majority of her opinions regarding when it was the right time for a young woman to get married had still remained. Her belief was that a young girl, should eventually have kids and be "happily" married by the age of twenty-eight. This word "happily" always threw me off. Happiness to me is based on your own perspective. Your personal happiness could differ entirely from that of someone else's. So how is my mom so sure that me marrying between the age of twenty-one through twenty seven and

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eventually having kids would make me happy? I wanted to better understand the mentality that she grew up with that had set these standards and expectations of marriage in a young woman's life from a first hand perspective and how it has diverged from its traditional path throughout the years.

In the United States, marriage is an entirely different ball game. People in America tend to marry not to fit into the stigma of society and the beliefs of their families, but because they individually want to share a stronger bond with someone they are passionate about. Even with this freedom in regards to love and relationships, there seems to be an increase in more single Americans than ever before, specifically in younger women. According to the United States Census of 2016, more women than men were found to be unmarried at eighteen years of age and older (United States Census, 2017). As years have gone by, more and more women are becoming less inclined to marry as young adults and even in general.

This uprising trend is taking place in not only America but currently in Iran as well. Dr. Raz Zimmt, a post doctoral degree holder in Middle Eastern History from a renowned University in Iran, claims that many of Iran's youth are more likely to get divorced and become married at an older age than ever before (Zimmt, 2016). A lot of this has to do with Iranians adapting more of a non traditional outlook on marriage as a whole. What many people do not know about Iran, is that it is a solely Islamic republic, meaning that a majority of what is aired on television and the internet is highly monitored and censored through the government. Censorship in Iran does not just stop there. It is highly forbidden for women to step outside in public with a man that is not either married or related to them. Likewise, it is expected for all women to cover their hair as well as their arms and legs in fabric, ensuring a vast majority of their skin is not exposed. At this point you may be wondering how on earth a girl living in a society like that can even physically manage to date or even be with a guy that they like with all of these restrictions in place.

Luckily, I had the opportunity to view this strict dating regime first hand. I visited one of Iran's biggest capitals, Tehran in the midst of its dry summer heat to not only catch up with my close relatives but to also immerse myself into the culture. Throughout my stay, I was able to thoroughly observe all the ups and downs that many of my younger female relatives went through growing in such an Iranian society. One of which was my twenty-five-year-old cousin Sara, who knew more about the modern marriage culture of Iran more than anyone else in my family. Sara's thick hair, warm smile, and degree in accounting made her a suitable bachelorette for many of the potential suitors in the market. So why was she not married yet? Sara claimed that, "Unlike in America, there are no dating apps here to help you find the man of your dreams." (Ahmadi, 2016). She had no intent of getting married anytime soon regardless of her mother's constant "nagging". This traditional expectation that a lot of Iranian families place upon their younger daughters has caused many of the female generation to resent marriage as a whole.

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With marriage in Iranian families at a young age, there are a lot of factors that come into play. Money plays a major role and although it could seem rather unfair to judge whether or not you are going to spend the rest of your life with someone based on the amount of income they obtain, it is a stable way of reassuring many of the parents in the society of Iran on whether or not their daughters will live “happy” and stress free lives on top of their own income. Many parents in Iran will actually take part in a traditional gathering known as a “Khasteghari” which translates to “The Suitor” in Farsi and is essentially a way for the bride’s parents to get to know the potential groom’s parents. There is no limit in the discussions and questions that take place in these gatherings as they are similar in concept to a meeting for a lifelong business agreement. Both the daughter and the potential groom wear their best attire and essentially showcase their educational and financial status in hopes of becoming each others suitors. Families discuss everything from whether or not the groom can provide a certain style of wedding to requesting a certain life style for their daughters and future grandchildren.

In America, rather than having your parents seek out your future husband, most girls are often given the liberty to spend time and go on dates with boys through their own discretion. Even many of the girls I grew up with from my own hometown had boyfriends by the time they were in fifteen. It is this freedom given to young women at an early age of being able to experiment with relationships and young love that builds the basis of confident to decide later on in life whether or not they would be happy in a long term marriage.

Marriage is something that should not be forced, but unfortunately social standards have caused a lot of the issues younger women face in the Iranian society. As an Iranian American woman, I completely understand the feeling of wanting to make your parents proud. As seen in a variety of other cultures around the world, a lot of us push ourselves to attend certain schools and even pursue higher educations to make our parents proud, but I think there is a fine line between your own personal wants and their traditional beliefs especially when it comes to saying “I Do”.

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