



## Perceived discrimination and acculturation among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Accepted 26 September 2008

#### Keywords:

Discrimination  
Iranian refugees  
Acculturation

### ABSTRACT

The relations between perceived discrimination, perceived acceptance of immigrants, acculturation orientations, and acculturation outcomes (psychological and sociocultural adjustment) were investigated in a sample of 232 Iranian refugees in the Netherlands. A good fit was found for a path model with perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance as correlated antecedent variables, acculturation orientations as intervening conditions, and measures of psychological and sociocultural adjustment as outcome variables. Perceived discrimination was the most salient variable in the model and showed significant associations with all outcome measures. Acculturation orientations (partially) mediated the relations between antecedent variables and outcomes. Gender differences were found. Women reported significantly less discrimination, more positive and fewer negative acculturation outcomes than did men. It is concluded that despite the high levels of sociocultural adjustment of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, perceived discrimination plays an essential role in their acculturation.

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Refugees in the Netherlands such as Somalis, Iranians, and former Yugoslavians are referred to as new immigrants. Since Dutch acculturation studies so far have dealt more with 'pull' than with 'push' immigration, there has been a focus on traditional immigrant groups, notably Turks, Moroccans, Surinamers, and Antilleans. Acculturation research among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands, studied here, is scarce and usually involved small groups. Ghorashi (2003) investigated 20 Iranian women refugees in the Netherlands. Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) investigated the relation between perceived discrimination, cultural conflict and life satisfaction among 76 Iranian refugees in the Netherlands). The traditional Dutch immigrant groups and Iranian refugees differ in several acculturation-related aspects. Iranian refugees, for example, cannot return to their country of origin because of physical threats, they are on average better educated and more are employed than members of the traditional immigrant groups (Van den Maagdenberg, 2004), and there is less coverage of Iranians by the Dutch media. Finally, fairly high levels of discrimination are reported in the group; Van den Maagdenberg and Van der Laan Bouma (2004) found that 32% of 672 Iranian refugees had experienced discrimination. In view of the specific characteristics

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of the Iranian refugee group in the Netherlands it is worthwhile from both a theoretical and a practical perspective to empirically investigate this group's acculturation experiences.

The history of Iranian immigration to the Netherlands started in 1981, when Ayatollah Khomeini ousted the Pahlavi dynasty and established an Islamic regime in Iran. The legal position of especially women deteriorated significantly (Ghorashi, 1997, 2003) and many people living in Iran whose ideas differed from Islamic values and ideologies were captured, tortured, and even executed. Many had to flee their home country without having much time to prepare their departure and to say goodbye to friends and relatives. These refugees fled via Pakistan, India or Turkey before they arrived in their countries of intended settlement, such as the Netherlands. An estimated 30,000 Iranians fled to the Netherlands. They are mostly first-generation and highly educated. The so-called Social Indicator, a study by the Dutch government, showed that Iranians are relatively well integrated in the Dutch society. Over 40% of the Iranian refugees are employed, compared to less than 25% of the Somalian refugees. For all non-Western ethnic groups, unemployment is twice that of Dutch mainstreamers (CBS, 2006a,b).

An important aspect of acculturation among Iranian-Dutch is gender differences. Gender egalitarianism is much stronger in the Netherlands than in the Arab world (Hofstede, 2001). Te Lindert and Korzilius (2008) found in their study that Iranian-Dutch women experienced more positive feelings, such as joy and self-esteem and felt more at home in the Netherlands than their male counterparts. Abu-Lughod (1988) mentioned the onset of changes causing feelings of exile in the homeland, called "internal exile". Women activists often see their stay in the Netherlands as a period in which they wait for a return to their home country when it is politically safe (Ghorashi, 2003). Their emotional bonds with the home and host country may change when after several years their stay in the Netherlands appears to be permanent.

In recent years a number of studies highlighted the importance of psychological acculturation for adapting to a new culture (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2004; Kopic, 2002; Lee, Sobal, & Frongillo, 2003; Lim, Heiby, Brislin, & Griffin, 2002; Neto, 2002; Schönplflug, 1997; Ward, 1997; Zagefka & Brown, 2002). "Acculturation includes those phenomena, that result when groups of individuals, having different cultures, come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Psychological acculturation (Graves, 1967) refers to how immigrants deal psychologically with the two cultures they experience.

Recent models in acculturation research distinguish three components in the acculturation process (e.g., Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; cf. also Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001): antecedent conditions (e.g., discrimination), intervening conditions (e.g., acculturation orientations), and outcome variables (e.g., sociocultural adaptation). Background (or antecedent) conditions refer to contextual variables that constitute the backdrop of the acculturation process, such as perceived discrimination. Acculturation orientations refer to the question of how immigrants want to deal with their ethnic culture and with the mainstream culture (e.g., focus on the ethnic culture and/or on the mainstream culture). Acculturation outcomes refer to the consequences of the acculturation process. We were interested in the question to what extent in this group of refugees, acculturation orientations can be seen as intervening conditions that link antecedent conditions (such as perceived discrimination) to acculturation outcomes. This mediation model of acculturation has been tested before (e.g., Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2006; Berry & Sam, 1997; Galchenko & Van de Vijver, 2007; Ward et al., 2001). The antecedent, intervening and outcome variables that were used in the present study are described in the next section.

## 1. Antecedent conditions: Perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance

### 1.1. Perceived discrimination

The relation between (perceived) discrimination and acculturation has often been studied (Van den Berg & Evers, 2006; Verkuyten, 1998; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Ward et al., 2001). Van den Berg and Evers found that more than 50% of their Turkish and Moroccan Dutch participants experienced discrimination at least once last year (as contrasted to only 2% of the Dutch mainstreamers). Perceiving oneself as a victim of discrimination by members of a dominant group is a major acculturative stressor (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2003; Liebkind et al., 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Vedder, Van de Vijver, & Liebkind, 2006; Ying, 1996). The latter authors found in a 13-country study of ethnic youth that perceived discrimination was the most important predictor of both acculturation orientations and outcomes. Perceived discrimination negatively affected psychological adaptation and contributed to poorer sociocultural adaptation. Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) found significant relations between perceived discrimination, cultural conflict, and life satisfaction in a sample of Iranian Dutch. Perceived discrimination was a predictor of stronger ethnic identification, which, in turn, led to less well-being. Discrimination can lead to experienced institutional and interpersonal barriers in the host society by stigmatized groups. These negative attitudes adversely affect the quality of life of immigrants (Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, 1995).

Perceived discrimination can be treated as an antecedent variable; however, perceived discrimination can also be viewed as the result of acculturation over time (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998) or as an intervening variable (e.g., Berry & Sam, 1997). In line with most previous studies, perceived discrimination is considered as an antecedent variable in the present study.

## 1.2. Perceived acceptance

An important aspect of perceived acceptance is the treatment of refugees, who cannot return to their country of origin due to political problems, war, famine, or fear of prosecution in their home country. When most Iranian refugees entered the Netherlands, Dutch immigration policies were aimed at spreading asylum seekers all over the country; as a consequence, the newly arrived refugees could not set up an ethnic support network (Ghorashi, 1997). European regulations governing transnational immigration policies (such as the duty to prove that return to the country of origin is impossible because of physical threat) were established in the so-called Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Compared to other nations in the European Union, the position of immigrants in the Netherlands is relatively favorable in terms of housing, legal position (such as the right of self-organization by ethnic groups), and institutionalized religions (e.g., Muslim and Hinduism). On the other hand, the educational level of immigrants is relatively low, and the struggle against discrimination of immigrant groups is more difficult in the Netherlands than in other European countries (Penninx, 1998; Van den Berg & Evers, 2006). Following Van Praag (2003), Van den Maagdenberg and Van der Laan Bouma (2004) studied acceptance of immigrants in the Netherlands by asking questions such as how the immigrant groups experience the hospitality and the opportunities available in the Netherlands. Their study involved recent immigrant groups in the Netherlands (i.e., refugees from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia). Compared to the other groups, Iranian refugees perceived less acceptance in Dutch society. Gijssberts & Dagevos (2005) found that Iranian refugees and Turkish immigrants reported a lower degree of acceptance by Dutch mainstreamers than other participating immigrant groups. In short, it appears that the Iranian group experiences relatively little acceptance by Dutch mainstreamers.

## 2. Intervening conditions: Acculturation orientations

Acculturation orientations comprise of two dimensions: *ethnic orientation* (maintaining the characteristics of the culture of origin) and *mainstream orientation* (adopting the culture of the receiving society). According to Berry (1997), immigrants can assume four acculturation orientations: integration (co-national identification), assimilation (host-national identification), marginalization (non-national identification), and separation (origin-national identification).

Moghaddam, Taylor and Lalonde (1987) studied Iranian immigrants in Montreal. The researchers found two kinds of acculturation approaches: individualistic and collectivistic. The former were concerned primarily with personal social mobility in Canada rather than with maintenance of their Iranian culture. The latter were more supportive of Iranian cultural organizations and had a stronger belief in the justice and fairness of the Canadian system. Unlike many other immigrant groups, Iranian immigrants in Canada are, on average, well-educated, come from middle and upper-middle class backgrounds, and do not belong to the visible minorities in their countries of settlement.

In contrast, Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) found that people with high social and economic status staying voluntarily in Nepal, and originating from Canada, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark experienced a high level of psychological well-being while having strong co-national identification (integration). Strong host national identification (assimilation) predicted sociocultural adaptation to the host culture. However, a bicultural or integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are other identity categories (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). It should be taken into account that there is a major difference between voluntary immigrants with a high socioeconomic status in Nepal and refugees. Te Lindert (2007) found that highly educated Iranian refugees in the Netherlands experienced relatively low levels of well-being.

## 3. Acculturation outcomes: Psychological and sociocultural outcomes

Acculturation outcome variables can be grouped under two major types: *psychological outcomes* and *sociocultural outcomes* (Ward et al., 2001). The latter outcome is theoretically rooted in the cultural-learning tradition and involves the successful participation in the ethnic mainstream group, whereas psychological outcomes have been studied mainly in the stress and coping tradition, and involves general satisfaction and mental health of ethnic minority groups. Ward and Kennedy (1994) found that psychological and sociocultural outcomes were positively correlated.

### 3.1. Sociocultural outcomes

In their study among Canadian-Chinese immigrants, Noels, Pon, and Clément (1996) pointed out that lower levels of knowledge of the Canadian culture and competence in the English language might be associated with a lower ability to meet daily needs in the new society (sociocultural adjustment), which might explain its relation with adjustment difficulties (psychological adjustment). Communication variables and language skills, such as host language communicative competence, were found to be important for psychological adaptation to interethnic contact (Kim, 1988, 2005). Low communicative competence might make people feel isolated.

Dutch knowledge (knowing how to arrange things in Dutch society, such as how to find a house and a job) and confidence in Dutch language skills (feeling secure about speaking the Dutch language) are aspects of sociocultural outcomes that are considered in the present study. Iranian refugees with a high competence in Dutch have a certain level of knowledge of the

host society and are more familiar with its cultural values and beliefs. Therefore, in general these individuals are expected to be more able to function in the new society.

### 3.2. Psychological outcomes

The main dimensions of well-being can be labeled as psychological well-being or happiness and (absence of) psychological distress (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). According to Reid (2004), emotional components of well-being include both the presence of positive outcomes (e.g., positive affect and happiness) and the absence of negative outcomes (e.g., negative affect and feelings of loss). Te Lindert and Korzilius (2008) found in their research among Iranian-Dutch refugees that women reported more positive feelings in the Netherlands, such as joy and self-esteem compared to their counterparts. Stress is an important psychological outcome among refugees. According to Ward et al., 2001, most refugees experience displacement and relocation. Tang and O'Brien (1990) found that refugees who had high-status professions in their homelands have more difficulties coping with their new, typically lower, status in the host country and therefore often experience more psychological stress after resettlement. Problems in meeting the high expectations of upward mobility can also induce psychological distress (Fraser & Pecora, 1985). Finally, not feeling at home or homesickness among refugees, though infrequently studied (Vingerhoets, 2005), may also add to their distress.

## 4. Hypotheses

As we noted in reviewing (Te Lindert, 2007; Te Lindert & Korzilius, 2008) which found in their research that Iranian women refugees in the Netherlands report more positive acculturation outcomes than Iranian men refugees. Moreover Tang and O'Brien (1990) found that refugees who had a high-status professions in their homelands, have more difficulties coping with their lower status in their new environment. In the present study we hypothesize that Iranian women refugees report more positive feelings than do their male counterparts, because Iranian women had already a low status in their homeland during the Islamic regime.

Discrimination and acceptance of immigrants are related to psychological and sociocultural outcomes. For example, Vedder et al. (2006) found in a 13-country study of ethnic youth that perceived discrimination was the most important predictor of both acculturation orientations and outcomes, perceived discrimination negatively affected psychological adaptation and contributed to poorer sociocultural adaptation. Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) found significant relations between perceived discrimination, cultural conflict, and life satisfaction in a sample of Iranian Dutch. Perceiving oneself as a victim of discrimination by members of a dominant group is a major acculturative stressor (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2003; Liebkind et al., 2004; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Ying, 1996), which can be expected to influence psychological outcomes. It appears that the Iranian group experiences relatively little acceptance by Dutch mainstreamers. Compared to the other groups, Iranian refugees perceived less acceptance in Dutch society (Van den Maagdenberg & Van der Laan Bouma, 2004), and Gijbbers & Dagevos (2005) found that Iranian refugees and Turkish immigrants reported a lower degree of acceptance by Dutch mainstreamers than other participating immigrant groups. Based on this evidence, we hypothesize that discrimination and acceptance show both a direct and indirect relation to acculturation outcomes and orientations.

As noted before, Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999) found in their study among people originating from Canada, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark with high social and economic status staying voluntarily in Nepal, that having strong co-national identification (integration) was associated with a high level of psychological well-being. According to Ward and Rana Deuba strong host national identification (assimilation) predicted sociocultural adaptation to the host culture. A bicultural or integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are other identity categories (Phinney et al., 2001). In line with various other studies (Ward et al., 2001), we expect significant relations between acculturation orientations and outcomes.

In summary, the following three hypotheses are tested in the present study:

1. Iranian women refugees in the Netherlands report more positive acculturation outcomes than Iranian men refugees.
2. Discrimination and acceptance, as perceived by Iranian refugees, show both a direct relation with psychological and sociocultural outcomes and an indirect relation through acculturation orientations.
3. Acculturation orientations are associated with acculturation outcomes.

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Participants

A total of 232 Iranian immigrants (126 women and 99 men, 7 unidentified) participated in the present study. The average length of stay in the Netherlands was 12 years (S.D. = 4.04; range: 3–34 years). All participants are naturalized Dutch citizens. Most are Christians, liberal Muslims, or non-believers. They had a medium to high level of education (2.14 on a three point low-medium-high scale). For 34.5% of the participants the highest educational level in Iran was four years of secondary education, and 42.5% mentioned higher vocational education or university as highest educational level in the Netherlands.

The participants were aged between 18 and 74 years, with a mean age of 37.6 years (S.D. = 11.1). Half of the participants (50.4%) were employed; the other half were still studying or seeking a job. The majority of the participants were recruited by means of snowballing. We approached some Iranian-Dutch who were given several questionnaires, requesting them to distribute the questionnaires among friends, colleagues, and relatives. Some participants were approached through university students (in Rotterdam, Utrecht, and Nijmegen) and self-help organizations (near Rotterdam).

## 5.2. Instruments

Responses of all scales in the instruments that were used in our study were given on a seven-point Likert scale, with answer options ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Using scree plots, we found evidence for the unidimensionality of all scales. This finding warranted the computation of mean scores per scale.

Two scales were used to assess *acculturation conditions*, namely perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance. The *Perceived Discrimination* scale is a composite of two measures, one developed by Phinney et al. (1998) and one developed by Verkuyten (1998). The scale, consisting of 18 items, assesses feelings of not being accepted because of one's ethnicity in the Dutch society in general and in job-related situations (Van Praag, 2003; e.g., "I am ignored or excluded because I am a foreigner", "My work experience in Iran is not recognized in the Netherlands", and "My colleagues treat me unfairly or negatively because I am a foreigner"). The internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) was 0.95; the eigenvalue of the first factor was 9.39, explaining 50% of the variance. It was decided to extract one factor. Four items measured the *Perceived Acceptance* of immigrants in the Dutch society (e.g., "The Netherlands is a hospitable country toward foreigners" and "The rights of foreigners are respected in the Netherlands";  $\alpha = 0.81$ ; eigenvalue 2.57; the first factor explained 54% of the variance).

Two scales were used to assess *Intervening Conditions (Acculturation Orientations)*. *Iranian orientation* (nine items) was measured using items about Iranian identity (e.g., "I feel attached to other Iranians") and items about attitudes toward Iranian behavior (e.g., "I think that it is important to live according to Iranian values and standards") ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ; the eigenvalues of the first two factors were: 4.00 and 1.13; the first factor explained 38% of the variance). *Dutch orientation* (nine items) was measured using items involving Dutch identity (e.g., "I am proud to be Dutch") and attitude toward Dutch and the Netherlands (e.g., "I have a lot of contact with Dutch people";  $\alpha = 0.82$ ; the eigenvalues of the first two factors were: 3.78, and 1.31; the first factor explained 35% of the variance).

*Acculturation Outcomes* were measured by *psychological adjustment* (positive and negative acculturation aspects) and *sociocultural adjustment* (confidence in Dutch language skills and knowledge of the Dutch culture). The positive and negative aspects of *psychological adjustment* were measured by a combination of items. Positive aspects were measured by 10 items about satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985) and positive affect (Bradburn, 1969). An example of an item is "I am satisfied with my life". The internal consistency was high,  $\alpha = 0.85$ ; the eigenvalues of the first two factors were: 4.78 and 1.25; the first factor explained 43% of the variance.

Negative aspects were measured by 13 items about not feeling at home (Aroian, Norris, Tran, & Schappler-Morris, 1998), negative affect (Bradburn, 1969), and topics that were found in a qualitative study with the target group (Te Lindert & Korzilius, 2008). Examples of items are "I feel like a lonely exile" and "I miss the persons I left behind in Iran". The internal consistency was high  $\alpha = 0.86$ ; the eigenvalues of the first two factors were 4.81 and 2.03; the first factor explained 32% of the variance.

The *sociocultural outcome* scale was adopted from the Novelty subscale of the Demands of Immigration Scale (DI; Aroian et al., 1998). The *Dutch Knowledge Scale* (three items) measures newness, unfamiliarity or information deficits about simple or more complex tasks of living and norms of social interaction (e.g., "I know how to arrange things in the Netherlands";  $\alpha = 0.81$ ; the eigenvalue of the first two factors was 2.19, and 0.58; this factor explained 63% of the variance). *Confidence in Dutch Language skills* (all four items were reversed) referred to how secure Iranian immigrants feel about their skills of the Dutch language (e.g., "I think it is terrible when I make mistakes in the Dutch language";  $\alpha = 0.71$ ; the eigenvalue first factor was 2.20, and 0.97; this factor explained 44% of the variance).

## 5.3. Procedure

The English Demands of Immigration questionnaire, the Satisfaction With Life Scale, and the positive and negative affect scales were translated into Dutch by one of the authors; the translation was discussed with the other authors and a few changes in the Dutch version were made so that all members of the team agreed on the equivalence of the two language versions. The Dutch questionnaire was translated into Farsi and English by an official translation office. There was no difference in back translation of the 15 items about well-being translated from English in Dutch and vice versa. Iranian-Dutch filled in the questionnaire at home. Respondents could choose in the questionnaire language (Farsi or Dutch); 92% of the Iranian-Dutch participants used the Dutch version and 8% the Farsi version.

## 5.4. Statistical analysis

Three types of analyses were conducted. Firstly, we computed descriptives of all instruments to establish the participants' standing on acculturation variables so as to provide a global picture of their acculturation; for example, we were interested in the question of whether their average score on perceived acceptance would be above or below the scale midpoint. Secondly,

gender differences were examined in a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the scale scores as dependent variables; values of Cohens' *d* were used to measure effect size. Finally, relations between antecedent, intervening and outcome variables were tested using structural equation modeling. We tested a partial mediation model in which the antecedent variables (perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance) influenced intervening variables (acculturation orientations), which in turn influenced outcomes (psychological and sociocultural adjustment measures). In addition we postulated direct effects of the antecedent variables on the outcome measures. The three types of analysis are reported in separate sections below.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. Descriptives

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the above mentioned concepts were measured per condition: acculturation conditions, orientations, and outcomes. The possible range of all scales was 1–7, ranging from negative to positive. As can be seen in Table 1 the mean score of *perceived discrimination* was at the midpoint of the scale ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $S.D. = 1.35$ ). This score indicates that discrimination is not absent and fairly commonly experienced; yet, the experienced level of discrimination is not very high. Iranian participants slightly disagreed with perceived acceptance ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $S.D. = 1.38$ ). Scores on Iranian orientation were high ( $M = 5.25$ ,  $S.D. = 0.98$ ). Compared to Iranian orientation, participants gave lower scores ( $t(231) = 9.93$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) to items that refer to Dutch orientation ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $S.D. = 0.90$ ). Both positive and negative outcome scores were close to the scale midpoint. However, positive outcome gave somewhat higher scores ( $M = 4.41$ ;  $S.D. = 1.09$ ) than negative outcomes ( $M = 3.96$ ;  $S.D. = 1.08$ ). Finally, Iranian participants agreed slightly with the sociocultural adjustment items. The mean score of the Dutch knowledge scale was relatively high ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $S.D. = 1.24$ ) and the average self-rated Confidence in Dutch language skills was close to the scale midpoint ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $S.D. = 1.53$ ). In summary, the participants experienced a moderate level of discrimination and they did not find the Netherlands a very hospitable country. Furthermore, Iranian refugees endorsed cultural maintenance and they were neutral with regard to Dutch orientation. The sociocultural adjustment scores of Iranian refugees were above the midpoint of the scale, especially their knowledge about how to organize their lives in the Netherlands.

### 6.2. Gender differences

We tested the *first hypothesis* that Iranian women report more positive acculturation outcomes than men. Mean scores and standard deviations per subscale of Iranian women and men are presented in Table 2. Results of MANOVA indicated significant main effects for gender (Wilks' Lambda = 0.90,  $F(8, 216) = 2.88$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The two acculturation condition subscales showed statistically significant differences between women and men in *perceived discrimination*. Iranian women scored significantly lower on the perceived discrimination subscale than men ( $F(1, 225) = 6.90$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); the effect size was small (Cohen's  $d_{\text{female-male}} = -0.35$ ). Further, no gender differences were found for the subscales that measured intervening variables. The acculturation outcome subscales showed significant differences. More specifically, the differences for positive outcomes were significant ( $F(1, 225) = 8.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and of small size ( $d_{\text{female-male}} = 0.39$ ). Iranian women scored higher on positive outcomes and lower on negative outcomes than did men. These differences between Iranian women and men were significant ( $F(1, 225) = 6.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and small ( $d_{\text{female-male}} = -0.33$ ). Finally, the pattern of gender differences is consistent: compared to men, women reported less discrimination, less negative affect (e.g., fewer feelings of loss), more positive affect (e.g., more happiness), and they felt more at home in the Netherlands. These results supported our first hypothesis.

**Table 1**  
Means, standard deviations, and correlations of scales ( $N = 232$ ).

	M	S.D.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Acculturation conditions									
(1) Perceived Discrimination	3.99	1.35							
(2) Perceived Acceptance	3.67	1.38	-0.54**						
Acculturation orientations									
(3) Dutch Orientation	4.42	0.90	-0.10	0.15*					
(4) Iranian Orientation	5.25	0.98	0.18**	-0.10	0.10				
Acculturation outcomes									
(5) Positive Outcomes	4.41	1.08	-0.37**	0.30**	0.25**	0.12			
(6) Negative Outcomes	3.96	1.08	0.67**	-0.32**	-0.07	0.19**	-0.49**		
(7) Dutch Knowledge	5.08	1.24	-0.43**	0.30**	0.17*	-0.14*	0.26**	-0.38**	
(8) Confidence in Dutch Language Skills	4.02	1.53	-0.37**	0.14*	-0.08	-0.16*	0.22**	-0.37**	0.39**

Note. Scores range from 1 to 7.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 2**Mean scores, standard deviations, and effect sizes per scale of Iranian women ( $n = 126$ ) and men ( $n = 99$ ).

Scale	Females		Males		Effect size Cohen's $d$
	$M$	S.D.	$M$	S.D.	
Perceived Discrimination	3.74	1.33	4.36	1.28	-0.35**
Perceived Acceptance	3.75	1.33	3.57	1.43	0.13
Dutch Orientation	4.41	0.88	4.39	0.93	0.02
Iranian Orientation	5.26	0.91	5.25	1.10	0.01
Positive Outcomes	4.59	1.02	4.18	1.12	0.39**
Negative Outcomes	3.83	1.11	4.18	1.02	-0.33*
Dutch Knowledge	5.07	1.32	5.08	1.16	-0.01
Confidence in Dutch Language Skills	3.92	1.60	4.20	1.44	-0.19

Note. Scores range from 1 to 7.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

### 6.3. Model estimation

The *second hypothesis* according to which perceived discrimination and acceptance show both a direct relation with psychological and sociocultural outcomes and an indirect relation through acculturation orientations was tested in a structural equation analysis using AMOS 7 (Arbuckle, 2006; Byrne, 2001). Prior to the analysis, the few missing values were replaced by estimated values using a regression technique. The hypothesized model consists entirely of observed variables. We conducted some initial analyses in which all hypothesized arrows were drawn. However, various paths were not significant. In order to simplify the model we omitted non-significant coefficients. Regrettably, our sample size does not allow to split up the group and test the model in a cross-validation. There are 232 participants and 9 observed variables, which yields a ratio of cases to variables that is appropriate by common standards. The data showed a good fit to the final model:  $\chi^2(\text{d.f.} = 12, N = 232) = 14.66, p = 0.26, \chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 1.22, p = 0.26$ ; CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.99; AGFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.99, RSMEA = 0.03. All parameter values were statistically significant and (with a single exception, as outlined below) pointed in the expected direction, providing good support for the adequacy of the hypothesized model (see Fig. 1). The model has four levels of variables. The *first level* refers to acculturation conditions. These conditions include perceived discrimination (job and general) and perceived acceptance. The *second level* of the model includes intervening conditions. The variables at this level reflect cultural orientations and identity (Dutch and Iranian orientation). The *third level* refers to sociocultural adjustment. Finally, the *fourth level* refers to psychological adjustment. It may be noted that the split of outcomes in two levels in which sociocultural adjustment precedes psychological adjustment has been found before (e.g., Ait Ouarasse, 2003). In order to obtain a good fit, we needed to allow the error terms of the psychological outcome variables to be correlated ( $r = -0.29, p < 0.01$ ). The correlation may be due to commonality in item content of the scales that all measure emotional states.

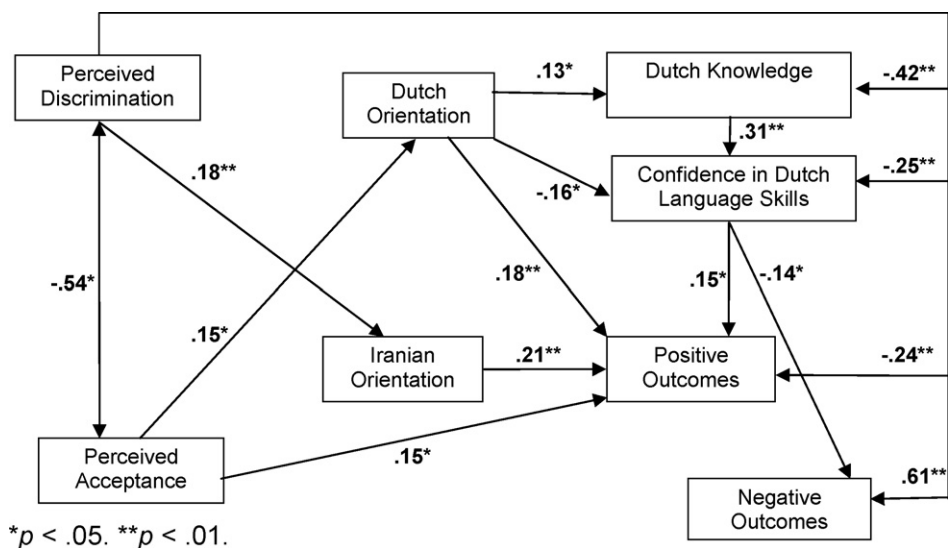


Fig. 1. Empirical model with standardized solutions.

### 6.3.1. Acculturation conditions

The scales of the two antecedent conditions (i.e., perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance) showed a strong negative relationship ( $r(232) = -0.54, p < 0.05$ ). Perceived Acceptance was positively associated with Dutch orientation and positive outcomes. Five paths were significant in the model from perceived (job) discrimination to intervening and outcome variables. Two paths with negative coefficients led directly to the two sociocultural outcomes (lower feelings of Dutch knowledge and lower feelings of confidence in one's Dutch language skills); furthermore, negative outcomes showed a strong association while positive outcomes showed a weaker, positive association. Finally, perceived discrimination was positively associated with cultural maintenance. Perceived acceptance was not directly related to acculturation outcomes; yet, good support was found for our hypothesis of the direct and indirect predictive power of perceived discrimination. It can be concluded that perceived discrimination has a central position in the model.

### 6.3.2. Intervening conditions

We used the same structural equation model to test the *third hypothesis* according to which acculturation orientations should be associated with acculturation outcomes. Both Iranian and Dutch acculturation orientations showed a positive association with positive outcomes. Moreover, there was evidence for modest (partial) mediation effects of both orientations; for example, as can be seen in Fig. 1, both orientations mediated the relation of the acculturation conditions with positive outcomes. Dutch orientation showed relations with more outcome variables than did Iranian orientation. Unlike Iranian orientation, Dutch orientation was significantly related to both sociocultural outcome variables. Yet, the pattern of associations was more complex than assumed. We did not find the above mentioned expected positive relation between Dutch orientation and confidence in Dutch language skills; rather we found a direct path of  $-0.16$  that was significant and an indirect path through knowledge of the Dutch culture of  $0.04$  (*ns*). Finally, we found that the relations between antecedent variables and acculturation orientations were significant, though weak; 2% of the variance in Dutch orientations and 3% in Iranian orientation was explained by antecedent conditions. So, it can be concluded that our third hypothesis was partially supported because acculturation orientations were not strongly influenced by perceived discrimination and perceived acceptance in this group.

### 6.3.3. Acculturation outcomes

The third level consists of sociocultural outcomes. Dutch knowledge had a strong influence on feeling secure when speaking Dutch (i.e., confidence in Dutch language skills). Sociocultural outcomes significantly influenced psychological outcomes. Confidence in one's Dutch language skills was positively related to positive outcomes (e.g., positive affect) and negatively to negative outcomes (e.g., not feeling at home). The proportions of explained variance in sociocultural variables were large (20% in Dutch knowledge and 22% in confidence in Dutch language skills). The same was true for the psychological outcomes; 24% was explained in positive outcomes and even 46% was explained in negative outcomes (mainly by perceived discrimination).

## 7. Discussion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the relation between perceived discrimination, perceived acceptance, acculturation orientations and acculturation outcomes (psychological and sociocultural adjustment) among Iranian refugees in the Netherlands. Feeling discriminated against was a fairly common experience for our participants, despite their relatively high levels of Dutch orientation and their medium to high level of education. The current study showed that for Iranian refugees in the Netherlands cultural maintenance in the Netherlands could mitigate negative outcomes. We confirmed our expectation, as formulated in hypothesis 1, that Iranian women refugees in the Netherlands report more positive acculturation outcomes than men. Iranian women experienced less discrimination and less negative outcomes and more positive affect than men. For Iranian women, changes in Iran after the Revolution could have been more of a shock than being exposed to the Dutch culture with its strong gender egalitarianism. Iranian men did not experience such changes before and after the Revolution in terms of different gender roles.

With respect to the second hypothesis of the predicting role of perceived discrimination and acceptance towards psychological and sociocultural outcomes, directly as well as indirectly via acculturation orientations, we found that *perceived discrimination* played a stronger role in our model than we anticipated. It is not surprising to find that the more discrimination is experienced, the less hospitable the mainstream country is experienced by Iranian-Dutch. However, the crucial role of perceived discrimination is rather surprising because according to objective figures Iranian refugees are well adapted to the Dutch society. They speak the Dutch language very well (e.g., 92% of the Iranian-Dutch participants of our study used the Dutch version of the questionnaire), are on average highly educated and many of them are employed. In contrast to other immigrant groups in the Netherlands, Iranians hardly ever feature negatively in the media. Our analyses showed that perceived discrimination is a salient aspect of the psychological functioning of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands. All parameter values were statistically significant and (with a single exception, as outlined below) pointed in the expected direction, providing good support for the adequacy of the hypothesized model. Perceived discrimination showed strong, positive associations with negative outcomes, such as negative affect. Our findings are in line with Tang and O'Brien (1990) who found that refugees with high-status professions in their homelands have more difficulties coping with their lower, status in their new environment. Therefore, refugees often experience more psychological distress after



resettlement. Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) also found relations between perceived discrimination and cultural conflict and life satisfaction among Iranian-Dutch. Finally, it also supports the findings of racial discrimination toward immigrants, such as Iranian refugees in the Netherlands (Van den Berg & Evers, 2006; Van den Maagdenberg & Van der Laan Bouma, 2004).

The tested model confirmed that Dutch knowledge and confidence in Dutch language skills were directly negatively predicted by perceived discrimination. This can indicate that Iranian refugees feel more insecure about their language skills and knowledge of the Dutch culture when they perceive more discrimination. Many participants indicated to experience at least some level of discrimination, even though their mastery of the Dutch language is often very good. It seems that it does not matter how much effort the refugees put into learning the Dutch language and learning how to arrange things according to the Dutch culture, they still experience prejudice from the mainstreamers. Moreover, the experienced poor acceptance of Iranian refugees by Dutch mainstreamers as found by Gijbbergs & Dagevos (2005) was also found in the present study. In this study, not unlike other studies, perceived discrimination has turned out to be strongly negatively related to various aspects of Iranian refugees' well-being (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti & Solheim, 2004; Shrake & Rhee, 2004; Vedder et al., 2006). Although the whole acculturation process can be seen as consisting of factors that influence each other in feedback loops, experiencing discrimination has been found one of the major stressors for the acculturation process, more specifically, leading to decreased well-being among immigrants (e.g. Berry, 1997; Noh & Kaspar, 2003). The present study found partial support for the third hypothesis (about associations between acculturation orientations and outcomes), because the mediating effects of acculturation orientations were present, though weak. A few other studies have addressed the mediating role of acculturation orientations when perceived discrimination was an antecedent variable. Verkuyten and Nekuee (1999) reported that more perceived discrimination led to higher ethnic identification among Iranian-Dutch, which, in turn, led to less well-being. In the present study it was found that perceived discrimination was such a strong predictor of acculturation outcomes, that the mediation effect of Iranian orientation was limited and much smaller than the direct effect of perceived discrimination on acculturation outcomes. A similar pattern of a strong direct and smaller indirect effect of perceived discrimination on acculturation outcomes was also found by Vedder et al. (2006) in a multicountry study on ethnic youth.

Confidence in Dutch language skills was positively associated with Dutch knowledge; these subscales seem to strengthen one another (see also Ait Ouarasse, 2003); knowing how to arrange things in the Netherlands goes together with more fluency in the Dutch language. This confirms the research among Chinese-Canadian immigrants of Noels et al. (1996), who pointed out that communication variables can be related to lower levels of contact with the mainstream society and immigrants' linguistic competence of the mainstream culture. Low communicative competence may lead to isolation, which is confirmed in the present study: Iranian refugees who felt confidence in Dutch language skills showed somewhat lower negative outcomes and higher positive outcomes. The tested model showed that knowing Dutch customs and knowing how to arrange things in the Netherlands (Dutch knowledge) was strongly associated with confidence in Iranian refugees' Dutch language skills.

The specific position of refugees should be taken into account. Some Iranian refugees would prefer to go back to Iran, if possible. Unfortunately for them, it is politically unsafe in Iran and therefore their return is out of the question. Others want to go to the U.S., Germany or Finland. For example, in Los Angeles there is a close-knit Iranian community with a good support network (e.g. Ghorashi, 1997, 2003). Due to Dutch government rules, Iranians in the Netherlands live spread out over the country. If Iranians would live closer to each other and would have a good support system, it would be easier for them to experience familiar warmth in their contacts with Iranian neighbors and friends anytime needed and to get closure on traumatic experiences from the past.

The climate of the acculturation context is important because it is characterized by attitudes of members of the larger society and the degree to which these members accept a multicultural ideology (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Berry, 2001). Less perceived discrimination and more perceived acceptance by mainstreamers could develop when realizing that feelings of being excluded or discriminated against can lead to traumatizing experiences in the present life of these refugees (Te Lindert, 2007). It is to be expected that Iranian refugees would be much happier if they were able to live among their co-nationals in the Netherlands, and were not merely tolerated but respected in their refugees' job situation and daily life.

Finally, we mention some limitations of the current study and some ideas on how further research on acculturation topics could proceed. We recruited participants through snowball sampling. Although this sampling frame limits generalization, 232 Iranian refugees can give a reasonable attribute to the acculturation experiences and outcomes of Iranian refugees in the Netherlands. Still, it is not likely that a larger, randomly chosen sample would change the major findings of our study. A major finding of our study involves the vital importance of the acculturation context, and more specifically of perceived discrimination as a predictor in the acculturation process (cf. Vedder et al., 2006). It was the variable that showed the most and strongest relations with other variables. It can be concluded that feelings of discrimination (or lack thereof) can be seen as an important driving force behind the acculturation process. Future studies, therefore, will need to incorporate feelings of discrimination as a predictor to study the process of acculturation.

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