

## “Man of Life”: A Cultural-Linguistic Investigation of the Concept of ‘Manhood’ in the Persian Language

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### Abstract

To shed further light on Iranian cultural cognition, an investigation was conducted into conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ among Iranian speakers of Persian. To this end, a total of 127 Persian male and female speakers from various ethnic and age groups in Iran were asked to complete a vignette question form that included five naturally occurring situations, for which the most probable concept(s) related to the action of the male character were provided by the participants. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the participants to triangulate the data and uncover the underlying worldviews. The data were then analyzed using MAXQDA, following a grounded-theory-driven approach and the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations. The findings revealed that despite the participants’ diverse ethnic backgrounds, homogeneous and interrelated cultural schemas (i.e., ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES, SUPPORTER, QEIRAT, and EMOTION CONTROL) and cultural metaphors (i.e., MAN AS A BACKREST, MAN AS A MOUNTAIN, MAN AS A SPINE OF A BODY, and MAN AS A WALLET) of manhood were referred to, all of which reflect a unified cultural category (i.e., MAN OF LIFE). It is argued that Cultural Linguistics can be utilized to unravel the unique cultural cognition of masculinity in the Iranian culture.

**Keywords:** manhood, cultural cognition, Cultural Linguistics, cultural conceptualizations, Persian language, Iran

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of ‘manhood’ has long attracted the attention of different scholars in sociology, psychology, and anthropology (e.g., Griffith & Emily, 2018; Kia, 2015; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Sumerau et al., 2017). What it means to be a man is culture-specific and is dependent on historical, social, and ideological conventions (c.f., Lease et al., 2013). Such culture-specificity in conceptualizations of manhood has led to the emergence of manhood acts perspective that unpacks the social processes whereby “males learn to believe they are men” (Sumerau et al., 2017, p. 215) in a particular cultural context through doing expected actions (c.f., Sumerau, 2012).

Although the Iranian society is a patriarchic speech community wherein manhood is considered significant (c.f., Kia, 2015; Koutlaki, 2010), the nature of the concept of a typical ‘Iranian man’ is still blurred as the previous related studies have been limited to the representation of Iranian men in poetry (Ghasemi & Khorasani, 2017), advertisement (Baaziar et al., 2019), Iranian television channels (Ghavidel Darsetani et al., 2019), and social media (Zokaei & Veisi, 2021). Such a dearth of studies on the criterion features of the concept of Iranian men necessitates scrutinizing the concept of ‘manhood’ as it is conceptualized by different layers of the Iranian speech community and is represented in their social interactions, which is the main aim of the present study.

Language can delineate characteristics of everyday cultural concepts, such as ‘manhood’, prevalent and distributed among members of a speech community (c.f., Palmer, 1996; Sharifian, 2017; Wierzbicka, 1997). As a discipline that probes the interrelation between culture and its representation in language, cultural linguistics probes the role of culture in forming the underlying mental images for everyday concepts (Palmer, 1996). Sharifian (2011b, 2017) expanded the theory and introduced Cultural Linguistics, with capital initials to distinguish it from Palmer’s ideas. According to Sharifian (2015, 2017), Cultural Linguistics explores the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations via cognitive structures such as schemas, metaphors, and categories. This field of inquiry has been employed to scrutinize various everyday concepts, culturally or cross-culturally, including nation (Musolff, 2020), magical practices (Wolf, 2021), family

(Kóczy, 2021), filial piety (Xu & Fang, 2021), time (Dabbagh, 2017), and woman (Dabbagh & Babaii, 2024). Particularly, the Persian language, i.e., the language under exploration in the current study, has been the focus of Cultural-Linguistic studies on concepts including love (Karshenas Najafabadi & Marín Arrese, 2015), truth and reality (Nosrati, 2020), compliment responses (Eslami-Rasekh & Derakhshan, 2021; Sharifian, 2008), eye (Sharifian, 2011a), shame and being ashamed (Ghazi, 2021; Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011), address terms (Keshavarz, 2025), and expressing gratitude (Dabbagh & Hashemi, 2023).

Despite the recent proliferation of studies on Iranian cultural conceptualizations, the exploration of cultural conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ in the Persian language has remained untouched. Therefore, in the present study, we seek to fill this lacuna in the literature of Cultural Linguistics by probing how Iranians conceptualize ‘manhood’, as a “hub of cultural meaning” (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 174) around which the whole related cultural domains are organized. More specifically, we explored the cultural values, attitudes, and expectations of behavior regarding the concept of ‘manhood’ that are imprinted in the minds of Iranians and manifested in their language through cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural categories.

## 2. Literature Review

Manhood refers to social roles, behaviors, and meanings defined for men in a particular society at a specific time and are produced through daily interactions within social institutions (Kimmel & Aronson, 2004). Being a man has been associated with social deference and privilege (Lease et al., 2013; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Sumerau et al., 2015), one which is assumed to be a “dominant social category” (Sumerau et al., 2017, p. 214). Although manhood has been considered diverse and plural (Jefferson, 2002; Roberts, 2014), the common feature of manhood is being “at the center of power” (Aboim, 2010, p. 43). This conceptualization is reflected in features such as the need for the achievement of social status, domination over women (Schwalbe, 2014), toughness and conjugal violence (Adjei, 2016), and considering women as men’s property (Finzel & Wolf, 2017). Such features legitimize hegemonic masculinity, which “embodie[s] the

currently most honored way of being a man, [...] require[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and [...] ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). In this regard, Connell (2005) highlights that hegemonic masculinity is a process in which individuals construct their masculinity according to the already-gendered cultural structure within the speech community they live in. These structures result from interacting with social and cultural forces such as social expectations and belief systems (Robbinson & Hockey, 2011).

Since the criterion features of the concept of ‘manhood’ are varied and culture-specific, different scholars scrutinized this concept from the vantage point of different cultural contexts. In the context of the United States, for example, Griffith and Emily (2018) interviewed 64 urban middle-aged and old African-American men about their conception of being a man. Their thematic analysis of the collected data revealed that for these African American people, the concept of ‘manhood’ encompasses gendered values, roles, goals, and, more importantly, cultural and religious beliefs, including integrity, spirituality, trustworthiness, self-reliance, and being a caring and helpful individual. More recently, Valved et al. (2021) compared the gender belief system between Poland and Norway. Their findings showed that young Polish people tend to hold stronger stereotypical ideas about men than did the Norwegians in that the Polish participants identified manhood with more agency, more hostile sexism, and stronger endorsement of precariousness than did the Norwegian participants. Likewise, DiMuccio et al. (2017) compared self-perception of manhood between American and Danish college-aged men. Their findings unveiled that the participants of both groups shared similar conceptualizations of manhood, such as other-protection and adult-like behavior. However, the American participants conceptualized manhood via athleticism and doing defeminized actions, whereas the Danish participants described manhood as physical embodiment, which is in contrast to boyhood.

The concept of ‘manhood’ has also been studied in the context of Iran. Iranian scholars mostly investigated hegemonic masculinity in different social contexts. For instance, Zokaei and Veisi (2021) scrutinized categorizations of ‘manhood’ as represented in Instagram, Twitter, Facebook (Meta), YouTube, and Telegram.

Their findings revealed different subcategories of Iranian masculinity, including standard and successful, heroic, religious masculinity (under hegemonic masculinity), hedonistic, foul-mouthed (under complicit masculinity), chivalrous (under subordinate masculinity), and queer and transsexuals (under marginal masculinity). In another study, Ghavidel Darsetani et al. (2019) probed the representation of male and female characters in children’s programs on channel two of IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting). Their findings revealed that male characters were portrayed as independent, active, intelligent, courageous, strong, competitive, aggressive, problem-solvers, leaders, and commanders. Similarly, Baaziar et al. (2019) analyzed the depiction of male characters in the images of four Iranian family magazines. Their results showcased that the contemporary advertisement reconceptualizes ‘manhood’ as associated with consumerism, hedonism, and eroticism, all implying the feminization of masculinity.

The studies conducted in the cultural context of Iran have been limited to investigating the representation of ‘manhood’ in different discursive modes. However, how Iranian people actually conceptualize ‘manhood’ in daily events has been left under-researched, which is our main focus in the present study. To address this research gap, the following research questions were formulated: What are the active cultural conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ among Iranians?

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1. The Participants***

Participants in this study were 127 Persian L1 speakers, who were selected following maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015) in order to reflect the heterogeneity of cultural cognition (see Sharifian, 2017). We attempted to include variation in the sample concerning gender, age, marital status, education level, and ethnic and cultural background, as much as convenient for us in terms of having access to them. Table 1 summarizes the variation among the participants. In order to follow the anonymity of the participants, we use ‘P’ in reference to them throughout the paper.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information of the Participants*

Factor	Sub-Factor					
	Male			Female		
Gender	60			67		
Age Range (Years)	18-25		26-35		35+	
	98		23		6	
Education	BA		MA		Ph.D.	
	86		34		7	
L1 Ethnic Background	Fars	Turk	Kurd	Mazani	Arab	Turkman
	71	18	12	8	5	13

### 3.2. The Data

To triangulate the data, we utilized two data sources, namely vignette questions and semi-structured interviews, which are explained in detail below.

#### 3.2.1. Vignette questions

In order to elicit the participants' conceptualizations of 'manhood', we developed vignette questions. According to Vargas (2008), a vignette question "describes an event, happening, circumstance, or other scenarios, the wording of which is often experimentally controlled by the researcher" (p. 947). As vignettes are "especially useful when trying to measure complex concepts that may be best described by way of example" (Vargas, 2008, p. 948), we utilized them to exemplify different sociocultural situations regarding the concept of 'manhood' for the participants so that they could describe their conceptualizations accordingly. Following the guidelines in Sampson and Johannessen (2020), we developed seven vignette questions, each including a situation in which a male character was the main protagonist. To develop the vignette questions, we asked five Persian L1 speakers to provide at least four naturally-occurred situations, which they have experienced in their lives and wherein the male character plays an important role. These Persian

individuals were both male and female Iranians of different age and social status and were considered active in the Iranian society in terms of their profession and/or social relations. Among the provided situation, we selected five that shared common situational features. We asked the participants to read the given situations and describe the most probable concept(s) about the protagonist's action in at least two sentences. In order to ensure the validity of the developed vignettes, we requested two individuals with Ph.D. in applied linguistics, who were experienced in cultural studies and speaks the Persian language as L1, to review the given scenarios. We then modified the vignette questions according to these experts' feedback. Results of Krippendorff's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) analysis estimated the agreement of 0.79 between the judgements of the two experts.

### *3.2.2. Semi-structured interview*

In order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the participants' worldviews underlying the conceptualizations of 'manhood' they mentioned in their responses to vignette questions, we conducted a semi-structured interview. We contacted the participants, 37 of whom agreed to take the interview. Since these participants were not located in one city, we scheduled the interviews through Skype®. Given the complexity of cultural issues and the potential challenges that the participants might face when discussing such issues in a second language, we opted to conduct the interviews in the standard language of the context of the study, that is Persian. Each interview lasted for about 15 minutes on average.

The interview protocol contains three questions, including (1) what motivates you to associate a 'man' with the concept you mentioned in your responses? (2) what is the significance of this association in Iranian society? and (3) how do you think other Iranians conceptualize a 'man' in the given situation?

### *3.3. Analytical Framework*

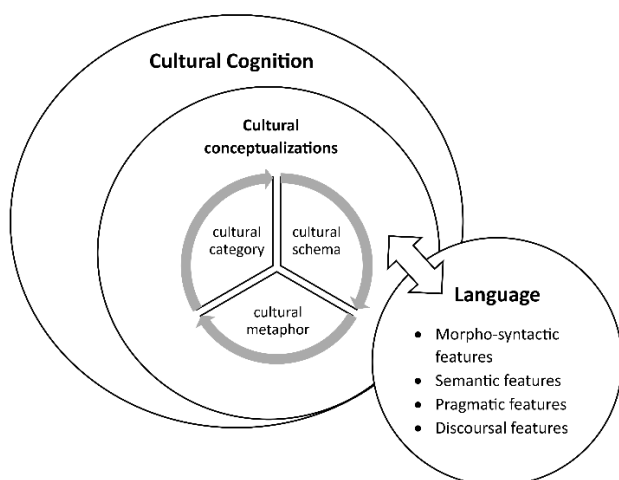
To scrutinize conceptualizations of manhood within the collected data, we utilized the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations, as an analytical framework particular to the multidisciplinary field of Cultural Linguistics. Breaking down the

notion of culture and analyzing its components, this framework avoids the general notion of ‘culture’, which is “too abstract to be useful in explicating the relationships that link beliefs and behavior to language use” (Sharifian, 2015, p. 477). Rather, the framework benefits from the notion of *conceptualizations* that signifies the dynamicity of culture developed “through interactions between the members of a cultural group and enable to think as if in one mind, somehow more or less in a similar fashion” (Sharifian, 2017, p. 5).

Building upon the notions of cultural cognition, distributed cognition, and cognitive adaptive systems to form its multidisciplinary nature (c.f., Sharifian, 2015, 2017), the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations provides three interrelated tools, namely cultural schema, cultural metaphor, and cultural category, that enable us to examine the entrenchment of conceptualizations within linguistic expressions. Cultural schemas are “beliefs, norms, rules, and expectations of behavior as well as values relating to various aspects and components of experience” (Sharifian, 2017, p. 7). The second tool is cultural metaphors, which are “cognitive structures that allow us to understand one conceptual domain in terms of another” (Sharifian, 2013, p. 1591) within a particular cultural group. The final analytical tool is cultural category, which refers to culture-specific classifications that have their roots in the cultural experiences of members of a particular speech community that form their thoughts and worldview (Polzenhagen & Xia, 2015).

### Figure 1

*The Analytical Framework of Cultural Conceptualizations*



Recent investigations (e.g., Dabbagh & Babaii, 2024; Derakhshan et al., 2024) indicate that the tools comprising the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations are not discrete entities; rather, they are cyclically interrelated, such that the interpretation of one element—such as a cultural metaphor—necessitates an understanding of other elements, including cultural schemas. That is, identifying each element might be rooted in understanding another element. Figure 1 depicts the three tools of the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations and their interrelation.

#### **3.4. Data Analysis Procedure**

At first, we administered the developed vignette questions to the participants. Following Sharifian (2005), we utilized the association-interpretation method to analyze the collected data. In the association phase, we located conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ within the participants’ responses to the prompts of vignette questions. We scrutinized the associative responses provided by the participants in order to find associative links in the form of schematization, metaphorization, and categorization, following the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations explained in section 3.3. According to Sharifian (2017, p. 43), the similarities among the elicited associative responses are “very likely to reveal *cultural* conceptualizations” (original emphasis).

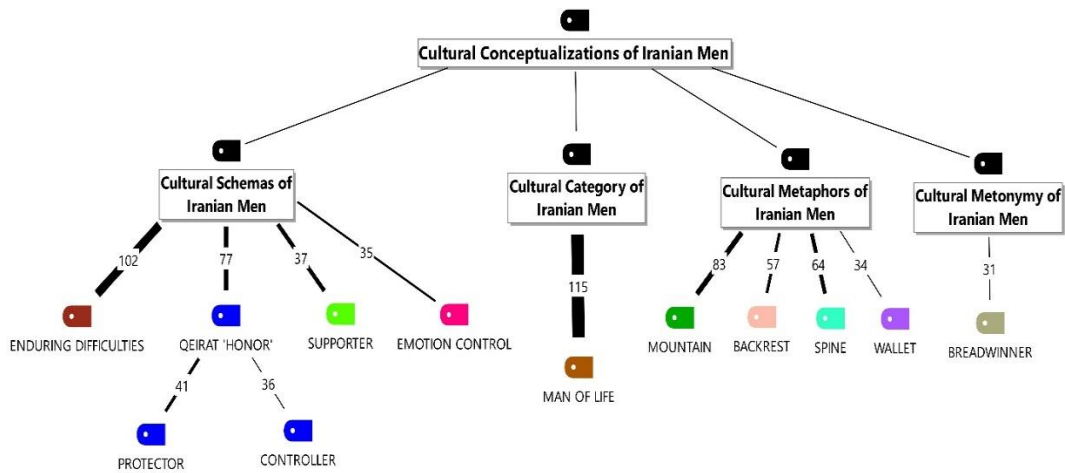
In exploring the interpretation phase, we conducted a semi-structured interview with 37 (about 30 percent) of our participants who agreed to participate in interview sessions. This interview aimed to access the underlying worldviews of the extracted cultural conceptualizations in the association phase. We recorded the interviews with the consent of the participants for later transcription. In analyzing the collected vignette and interview data, we followed a grounded-theory driven approach. Since the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations lacks sufficient details with regard to border lines among the three elements of cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural categories (Dabbagh et al., 2022; Shahi, 2023), chances are that some identified conceptualizations are co-instantiated (Sharifian, 2010). To

address this issue, we applied inductive content analysis through open coding, axial coding, and labeling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The complexity of the concept of ‘manhood’ in the Persian language makes the occurrence of unique conceptualizations during the process of analyzing each vignette response inevitable. Therefore, we conducted the processes of data collection and data analysis until no new conceptualization emerged and the data were saturated. More specifically, the analysis revealed saturation of data at the vignette data collected from P125 and no new conceptualizations were found while analyzing vignette data related to P126 and P127. The extracted cultural conceptualizations from the vignette responses and their underlying worldviews from the interview transcripts underwent constant comparative procedure (Glaser & Anslem, 2009) so that we can identify their distinctive cultural cognition and group the ones with similar characteristics under cultural schema, cultural metaphor, or cultural category. The dependability of the findings was checked by two Ph.D. holders of Cultural Studies and Applied Linguistics, who were also Persian L1 speakers, after being briefed about the utilized framework in separate sessions. Results of *Krippendorff’s alpha* ( $\alpha$ ) inter-coder agreement analysis revealed an estimation of 0.83.

#### **4. Findings**

Analysis of the participants’ responses to the given situations in the vignettes concerning the concept of ‘manhood’ revealed different cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and a cultural category (see Figure 2). The following provides a detailed account of the findings.

Figure 2  
Cultural Conceptualizations of Iranian Men



4.1. Cultural Schemas of ‘Manhood’

As illustrated in Figure 2, the most frequent Iranian cultural schema of ‘manhood’ in the vignette data was ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES ( $n = 102$ ) (The thicker lines shows higher frequency). According to this cultural schema, Iranian men, particularly married ones, are conceptualized as family members who are expected to endure the hardships of life, no matter how difficult these problems might be (see 1-3 below).

(1)

*Mard-e mas'ouliat pazir barāye āsāmeš-e xānevāde-aš hāzer ast*  
 Man-of responsibility accept for comfort-of family-3SG.POSS ready is  
*badtarin šarāyet rā tahammol konad.*  
 the worst conditions OM endure do.3SG.PRS

‘A responsible man endures the worst conditions for the comfort of his family.’

(Vignette Question 4, P11)

(2)

*Dar farhang-e Irāni, ešq o alāqe miān-e zan o mard*  
 in culture-of Iranian, love and affection between-of woman and man  
*ba'es mišavad mard māne'e haml-e*  
 cause become.3SG.PRS.PROG. man prevent carry-of  
*bār-e sangin-e hamsar-aš šavad.*  
 load-of heavy-of wife-3SG.POSS become.3SG. PRS

'In the Iranian culture, the love and affection between husband and wife causes the man to prevent his wife from carrying a heavy load.' (Vignette Question 2, P61)

(3)

*Yek mard ehsās-e mas'ouliat dar mogābel-e xānevādeh dārad*  
 A man feeling-of responsibility in front-of family have.3SG.PRS  
*va hall-e moškelāt-e xānevādeh rā*  
 and solution-of problems-of family OM  
*bar duš-e xod mibinad.*  
 on shoulder-of his see.3SG.PRS.PROG

‘A man feels responsible to his family and believes that he should solve the problems of his family.’ (Vignette Question 4, P87)

As evidenced by the aforementioned vignette excerpts, the primary motivations underlying Iranian men’s endurance of life’s hardships are threefold; that is, the bond of love between a man and a woman in a married life, bringing comfort to his family members, and the feeling of responsibility towards his family. Our participants further elaborated on this cultural schema in the follow-up interviews and emphasized that in the Iranian culture, “a man should support his family, particularly the female members, and does not let them do difficult tasks or even think of the life problems; after all, the difficulties of life are on the shoulders of men” (P35, Interview data, our translation). This conceptualization of ‘manhood’ brings forth the cultural schema of SUPPORTER for Iranian men ( $n = 37$ ) (see 4 and 5).

(4)

<i>Mard-i</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>tekiegāh-e</i>	<i>mohkam-i</i>	<i>bāše</i>	
Man-DEF	who.REL	support-of	firm-DEF	be.3SG	
<i>mard-e</i>	<i>ideāl-e</i>	<i>besiār-i</i>	<i>az</i>	<i>dokhtarān</i>	<i>hast.</i>
man-DEF	ideal-of	many-DEF	of	girls	is

‘A man who is a firm supporter is an ideal man for many girls.’ (Vignette Question 4, P7)

(5)

<i>In</i>	<i>mard</i>	<i>mixāh.ad</i>	<i>nešān</i>	<i>beda.had</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>dar</i>	<i>har</i>	<i>šarāyeti</i>
This	man	want.3SG.PRS	show	give.3SG.PRS	that	in	any	conditions
<i>mišavad</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>ou</i>	<i>tekkie</i>	<i>kard.</i>				
can	to	him	lean	do.3SG.PRS				

‘This man wants to show that he can be relied on in any conditions.’ (Vignette Question 2, P23)

According to the interview analysis results, Iranian men are conceptualized as the ones in the family who are expected to *support* family members, particularly female ones, including their wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers. As P29 stated, “men should be strong both physically and emotionally in life. We ladies learn to be dependent on men’s support and protection without which we find a big gap in our lives” (our translation). As can be seen, this conceptualization highlights the significant role of men in Iranian families (see also section 4.2 for the related cultural metaphors).

Another cultural schema that our participants mentioned in their vignette responses is *QEIRAT* ( $n = 77$ ). According to Bakhtiar (2015), the word *qeirat* is derived from *qeir*, meaning ‘the other’, who might threaten, insult, or even injure whatever is valuable to Iranian men, including family members, particularly the female ones, referred to as *nāmus* (or sexual honor (Meeker, 1976) in the Persian linguaculture (c.f., King, 2008 for more details). This schema of Iranian men is represented in the data mostly through two sub-cultural role schemas of *PROTECTOR* and *CONTROLLER*. The former sub-cultural schema ( $n = 41$ ) portrays protecting *nāmus* from any harm or insult, which is clearly pointed out in the following vignette excerpts, in which men do not want their wives to carry any heavy load (see 6), experience any pressure (see 7), or be insulted by others (see 8 and 9):

(6)

<i>Mard-e</i>	<i>qeirati</i>	<i>ke</i>		<i>nemixāhad</i>	
Man-of	honor	who.REL		want.NEG.3SG.PRS	
<i>xānumeš</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>zahmat</i>	<i>bioftad</i>		
wife.3SG.POSS.	with	difficulty	fall.3SG.PRS		
<i>xodaš</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>tanhāhi</i>			
he.REFL	with	alone			
<i>bār-e</i>	<i>sangin</i>	<i>rā</i>	<i>be</i>	<i>duš</i>	<i>mikešad</i>
load-EZ	heavy	OM	with	shoulder	pull.3SG.PRS

‘A man who has *qeirat* and who does not want his wife to fall into difficulty carries the load alone himself.’ (Vignette Question 2, P37)

(7)

*Qeirat-e hiç mardi fešāre-e jesmi-e šadid*  
 Honor- POSS. no man.ART pressure-EZ physical- EZ severe  
*be zan rā nemipazirad*  
 to woman OM accept.NEG.3SG.PRS

‘No man’s *qeirat* accepts severe pressure on women.’ (Vignette Question 2, P61)

(8)

*Defā az nāmus hatā be qeimat-e jān*  
 Defending from *nāmus* even to price-EZ life  
*vižegi-e har mard-e vāqe’i ast*  
 feature-of every man- EZ real is

‘Defending *nāmus*, even at the cost of one’s life, is the hallmark of every real man.’ (Vignette Question 6, P. 52)

(9)

*Mard bāyad az nāmus.aš dar barābar-e negāh-e*  
 Man must from *nāmus.3SG.POSS* in front-of look-of  
*havas amiz afrād-e mozāhem mohāfezat kon.ad*  
 lustful people- EZ annoying protect do.3SG.PRS

‘A man must protect his *nāmus* from the lustful glances of annoying people.’ (Vignette Question 6, P28)

The other sub-cultural role schema of QEIRAT, that is CONTROLLER ( $n = 36$ ), was mostly observed in responses to vignette question 7 in which the son of the family warns her sister not get so close to her fiancé physically. This cultural role schema refers to the controlling role of men in Iranian families, particularly with regards to their *nāmus*' relationship with stranger men, even with a purpose of marriage (see 10).

(10)

<i>Mardān</i>	<i>ehsās</i>	<i>mikon.and</i>	<i>haq</i>	<i>dar.and</i>	<i>samt o</i>	<i>suy-e</i>
Men	feel	do.3PL.PRS	right	have. 3PL.PRS	side	and direction-of
<i>ravābet-e</i>	<i>nāmus.ešān</i>	<i>rā</i>	<i>kontrol</i>	<i>kon.and</i>		
relationship-of	<i>nāmus.3PL.POSS</i>	OM	control	do.3PL.PRS		

'Men feel entitled to control the direction of the relationship of their *nāmus*.' (Vignette Question 7, P.37)

Analysis of interviews regarding the cultural schema of QEIRAT revealed that Iranians consider this schema as a defining feature of a man: "We all know a man, particularly for his *qeirat*, without which a man is incomplete, and others do not accept him as a man" (P95, interview, our translation). Though the sub-cultural role schema of PROTECTOR was unanimously perceived by the participants as a positive role schema, the role schema of CONTROLLER were considered both negatively ( $n = 21$ ) (see 11) and positively ( $n = 15$ ) (see 12).

(11)

Dominant and controlling men are commonly seen in our society (Iran). It is a wrong concept and is simply influenced by the wrong patriarchal upbringing (P. 39, interview, our translation).

(12)

Male control on the relationships of female family members is necessary at all times to maintain adherence to cultural values, especially within the family. This is for the benefit

of the family and the elders, as well as for the benefit of the young (P. 39, interview, our translation).

The final cultural schema of manhood that our participants highlighted in their vignette responses is related to men’s emotions. The participants conceptualized men as human beings who can control their emotions in dangerous situations, and act based on logic, and decide accordingly. In the following excerpts, this conceptualization is vividly shown:

(13)

*Be bāvar-e jāme’e-ye mā*  
 in belief-of society-EZ us  
*mard na.bāyad jelo-ye hame gerye konad*  
 man.ART not.should In front-of everyone cry do.3SG.PRS.

‘In our society, we believe a man should not cry.’ (Vignette Question 5, P19)

(14)

*Mard.hā tavān-e kontrol-e ehsāsāt-e xod rā dārand*  
 Man.PL ability-of control-of feeling-of their OM have.3PL.PRS.

‘Men have the ability to control their emotions.’ (Vignette Question 1, P101)

The cultural schema of EMOTION CONTROL ( $n = 35$ ) is apparent in 8 and 9 above. More specifically, as is clear from excerpt 8 above, men are not expected even to show their emotions when they are sad, and hence, they are not allowed to cry in public. That is, as P39 asserted in the follow-up interviews, “crying in front of others is considered bad for men, and they should control their emotions and be strong when difficulties occur” (our translation).

#### 4.2. Cultural Metaphors and Cultural Metonymy of ‘Manhood’

The extracted cultural metaphors of ‘manhood’ from the participants’ responses to the vignettes were related to the cultural schemas of ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES and SUPPORTER. Some of the participants conceptualized ‘manhood’ in relation to life challenges and difficulties through the cultural metaphors of MAN AS A MOUNTAIN ( $n = 83$ ) (see 16 below), MAN AS A SPINE OF A BODY ( $n = 64$ ) (see 17 below), and MAN AS A BACKREST ( $n = 57$ ) (see 4 and 5 above). Analysis of the follow-up interview data revealed the underlying worldviews for these cultural metaphors. Concerning the cultural metaphor of MAN AS A BACKREST, P12 asserted that “when you lean against a backrest, you feel safe and comfortable, a true man should be like that when life is not kind with you” (our translation). The cultural metaphor of MAN AS A MOUNTAIN, according to our participants, is rooted in the firmness and stability of a mountain. One of our participants asserted that:

(15)

A mountain is a firm and solid topography that is not subject to change in a short period of time. Comparatively, a supportive man, in my view, is not precarious and is the one his family can fearlessly lean against, and be sure that he is with them no matter what the possible circumstances might be in difficult life situations. (P 42, interview, our translation)

(16)

*Mard mesle yek kouh bāyad pošte xānevādeh-aš bāšad.*

Man.ART like one mountain should back family-his.POSS be.3SG.PRS

‘A man should be at the back of his family [support] like a mountain.’ (Vignette Question 4, P56)

For the cultural metaphor of MAN AS A SPINE OF A BODY, as the interview data analysis revealed, our participants conceptualized a family as a body and a man as the spine of the body without which it cannot hold its position. Therefore, a man should be steadfast and should not be weak when a problem occurs, as the following vignette extract reveals:

(17)

<i>Mard</i>	<i>sotoun-e</i>	<i>faqarā-te</i>	<i>xānevādeh</i>	<i>ast</i>	<i>va</i>	<i>nabāyad</i>
Man.ART	pillar-of	spine-of	family	is	and	not.should
<i>az</i>	<i>xod</i>	<i>za’f</i>	<i>nešān</i>	<i>bedahad</i>		
from	himself. REFL	weakness	show	give.3SG.PRS		

‘A man is the spine of the family and should not be weak.’ (Vignette Question 4, P86)

In response to the fourth vignette, in which a man goes to a drugstore at 3 a.m. in order to buy milk powder for a crying newborn baby, the participants conceptualized the man as a BREADWINNER ( $n = 31$ ). These participants believed that supplying the fundamentals of life, including food and accommodation, is among the irrevocable supportive responsibilities of a married man to his wife and children (see 18 and 19 below).

(18)

<i>Mard</i>	<i>dar</i>	<i>har</i>	<i>šarāyeti</i>	<i>nān.āvar-e</i>	<i>xānevādeh-aš</i>	<i>ast.</i>
Man.ART	in	any	circumstances.ART	bread.supply.ART-of	family-3SG.POSS	is.

‘A man is the breadwinner for his family.’ (Vignette Question 4, P33)

(19)

<i>Barāye</i>	<i>mard.hā</i>	<i>nān.āvari-e</i>	<i>xāne</i>
For	men.PL	bread.supply.ART-of	house
<i>jozve</i>	<i>vazāyef-e</i>	<i>hamišegi-aš</i>	<i>ast.</i>
among	responsibilities-of	perpetual-3SG.POSS	is.

‘For men, supplying bread is among their perpetual responsibilities.’ (Vignette Question 4, P13)

As can be seen in the above vignette excerpts, financial support is metonymically compared to earning bread for the family. Although this conceptual metonymy is common among many cultures, the participants typically use it to refer to men rather than any other members of a family, particularly in their follow-up interview, as in the following: “Supplying the needs of a family is on the shoulder of men. This is our culture. Even if women work outside the house, only men are considered as breadwinners” (P14, interview, our translation).

Quite related to the cultural metonymy of MAN AS A BREADWINNER, some of the participants ( $n = 34$ ) conceptualized an Iranian man as the one who should pay for every cost in the family and hence these participants used the cultural metaphor of MAN AS A WALLET (see 20 below). These participants believed not only should Iranian men supply food and accommodation, as was the case for the cultural metonymy of MAN AS A BREADWINNER, but they should also provide all the family members with pocket money: “It is completely normal, in Iranian families, that men provide other family members, particularly their children until they get married, with pocket money. I cannot imagine a man without such characteristics” (P85, interview, our translation). In congruence with this conceptualization, P75 asserted in his interview that “it might not be fair, but in Iranian families, one man earns money and other family members consume it; the worst is that it is expected of you to act like a wallet that should be full of money every time” (our translation).

(20)

<i>Mard</i>	<i>bāyad</i>	<i>Hamiše</i>	<i>jibeš</i>	<i>por-e</i>	<i>poul</i>	<i>bāše</i>
Man.ART	should	Always	pocket.3SG.POSS	full-of	money	be.3SG.PRS
<i>çon</i>	<i>mard</i>	<i>kif-e</i>	<i>poul-e</i>	<i>xānevādeh</i>	<i>ast.</i>	
because	man.ART	bag-of	money-of	family	is	

‘A man’s pocket should always be full of money since he is the family’s wallet.’  
(Vignette Question 4, P19)

### **4.3. Cultural Category of ‘Manhood’**

The cultural schemas and cultural metaphors of ‘manhood’ explained in sections 4.1 and 4.2 above collectively make the cultural category of MAN OF LIFE. This relationship among cultural schemas, cultural metaphors, and cultural categories is shown using arrows in Figure 2. More specifically, a man who endures life difficulties, protects his family, controls his emotions, shows *qeirat*, and supplies his family members with essentials of life and pocket money is considered a suitable man to live with. Our participants noted in the follow-up interview that a man does not need to have all the aforementioned cultural schemas and cultural categories to be categorized as MAN OF LIFE: “of course, it might be quite natural that some men do not enjoy having all the characteristics of a man of life and one or two of these features might be absent in some men” (P92, interview, our translation).

## **5. Discussion**

This paper explored Iranian conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ that are reflected in the use of the Persian language within responses to vignette questions collected from Persian L1 speakers across various genders, ages, education levels, and ethnic backgrounds. The Cultural-Linguistic analysis of the data unveiled various cultural schemas (i.e., ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES, SUPPORTER, QEIRAT, and EMOTION CONTROL), cultural metaphors (i.e., MAN AS A BACKREST, MAN AS A MOUNTAIN, MAN AS A SPINE, and MAN AS A WALLET), a cultural metonymy (i.e., MAN AS A BREADWINNER), and a cultural category (i.e., MAN OF LIFE).

The present study unclosed the cultural schema of QEIRAT, which echoes the previous similar studies (e.g., Shahabi & Etaf, 2013) in that caring for the female members of a man’s *nāmus* is among indispensable criterion conceptualizations of an Iranian man. Bakhtiar (2015, p. 261) also highlights the necessity of QEIRAT for an Iranian man in that its lack of existence is “highly disparaging and discrediting for the person”. The two identified cultural sub-schemas of QEIRAT in relation to one’s *nāmus*, namely PROTECTOR and CONTROLLER, reflect checking if the state of affairs follows the defined moral codes for female members of Iranian families,

and, if the that was not met, men should show suitable actions. Such actions, as Bakhtiar (2015, p. 267) asserted, are considered acts of maintaining *āberu* ‘face’ in that “any insult to a man’s *nāmus* jeopardizes his *āberu*”. These dynamics underline the urgent need for societal reflection on the pressures placed upon men to conform to these roles, which can have detrimental effects on both mental health and interpersonal relationships. The present findings revealed that these actions might be perceived both positively (the cultural sub-schema of PROTECTOR) and negatively (the cultural sub-schema of CONTROLLER), which echoes the heterogeneity of the distribution of cultural conceptualizations. Further research should provide empirical evidence to see which of the cultural sub-schema of OĒIRAT has been maintained among Iranian men and which one might have been faded. It is worth mentioning that, the present study did not reveal other possible conceptualizations of OĒIRAT, including women’s OĒIRAT, OĒIRAT and religion, OĒIRAT and nation among others (for more information see Bakhtiar, 2015).

The present findings support the literature in that Iranians share some of the conceptualizations of ‘manhood’ with non-Iranians, including the cultural schema of SUPPORTER in the American and Danish contexts (c.f., DiMuccio et al., 2017). This cultural schema has also been observed in other recent studies conducted in Iran, including Zokaei and Veisi (2021) in the context of social media. One possible reason for this similar finding might be the influence of social media on the conceptualization of men among Iranians. Future studies can clarify this probable influence. However, other unveiled conceptualizations of manhood in the present study (i.e., ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES and EMOTION CONTROL) have barely been noticed previously. That is, the present findings extend our understanding of Iranian schematization of manhood in that, according to the current investigation, Iranians conceptualize a man as an individual who is able to manage his emotions in difficult situations and endure the difficulties for others, perhaps as a way to protect them. Due to their high frequencies reported in this study, it seems that the cultural schemas of ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES and EMOTION CONTROL should be added to the criterion features of manhood in Iran, i.e., the cultural category of MAN OF LIFE.

The cultural metaphors of manhood extracted from the data can be categorized into two groups, namely the ones related to the cultural schema of ENDURING LIFE

DIFFICULTIES and the ones germane to the cultural schema of SUPPORTER. More specifically, our participants conceptualized the schema of ENDURING LIFE DIFFICULTIES through cultural metaphors of MAN AS A BACKREST, MAN AS A MOUNTAIN, and MAN AS A SPINE and portrayed the cultural schema of SUPPORTER using the cultural metonymy of MAN AS A BREADWINNER and cultural metaphor of MAN AS A WALLET. The first group of metaphors visualizes man as a fortified individual that other people can rely on, particularly in difficult situations where people tolerate pressures. This is manifested by comparing the concept of manhood to a mountain and a spine that are two well-known symbols of stability in the Iranian culture (see Zolfaghari, 2015). In the second category of metaphors, the vital needs of a family, which are usually food and accommodation, are compared to bread to be earned for the family. The significance of this comparison can also be discussed in relation to the position of the concept of bread among Iranians. According to Mohammadpour Karizaki (2017), *nān* ‘bread’ is conceptualized as God’s blessing in the Iranian culture. Such a religious conceptualization of *nān* ‘bread’ reflects the significance of the cultural metonymy of MAN AS A BREADWINNER (i.e., *nānāvāri*) in that a man is conceptualized as an individual who brings God’s blessing for his family. Such a conceptualization provides a clear example of how language can serve as a ‘memory bank’ (see Sharifian, 2017) for cultural conceptualizations in a speech community. That is, linguistic expressions carry conceptualizations that are rooted in the traditional and/or historical worldviews, specific to a speech community, that might even be actively practiced today.

On the other hand, along with this religious conceptualization, our data revealed a materialistic perspective towards men, which is represented in the cultural metaphor of MAN AS A WALLET. This cultural metaphor depicts men as sources of money for the family. The difference between this cultural metaphor and the cultural metonymy of MAN AS A BREADWINNER is that the latter related to supporting family in terms of providing the necessities of life, while the former connotes supplying money for issues other than life requirements.

It is noteworthy that the different cultural conceptualizations identified in our analysis with differing frequencies reflect the heterogeneity of these conceptualizations among members of the Iranian speech community. This accords

with the mainstream Cultural-Linguistic studies wherein such a heterogeneous distribution is also reported (c.f., Dabbagh & Hashemi, 2023; Sharifian, 2015, 2017). One reason behind this observation might be that the participants of the present study are from different sub-cultures (i.e., Fars, Turk, Kurd, Mazani, Arab, and Turkman) though they all belong to the Iranian culture. On the other hand, the differing frequencies might be the case that the distribution of cultural conceptualizations among members of a speech community is a matter of degree.

## **6. Conclusion**

The present study investigated Iranian conceptualizations of manhood reflected in the Persian language. Application of the analytical framework of cultural conceptualizations to the data collected from vignette questions, as a novel data source in Cultural Linguistics studies, and semi-structured interview revealed different cultural schemas, cultural metaphors that all related to a single cultural category.

The findings shed light on and expanded our understanding of Iranian worldviews regarding the concept of manhood. The present study also unveiled the homogeneous nature of Iranian conceptualizations of manhood. This finding contributes to the literature of Cultural Linguistics in that, unlike previous related studies, members of a speech community can enjoy a sense of congruency regarding the perception of particular concepts. This homogeneity reflects the significance of the concept in that particular cultural group. Stated differently, it seems that Cultural Linguistics provides an appropriate analytical framework that assists us to identify co-senses, to borrow Kecskes' (2015) term, that maintain solidarity within a particular speech community. This point is strengthened if we consider the unveiled interrelationship among cultural metaphors, cultural schemas, and cultural categories in the present study.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of the study. By recognizing the structured nature of these conceptualizations, policymakers and educators can develop targeted interventions that promote equitable gender norms. More specifically, stakeholders can create programs that

promote healthier expressions of masculinity, potentially leading to a reduction in gender-based violence and discrimination. Additionally, educational curricula can be designed to challenge and reshape rigid views of gender roles, fostering a more inclusive understanding of masculinity and encouraging positive social change. This is particularly relevant in a rapidly changing societal landscape, where traditional notions of manhood may be challenged by contemporary values and practices. Engaging in this dialogue will contribute to social cohesion and mutual understanding among diverse Iranian communities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The sample size, though diverse, may not fully represent the plethora of perspectives on manhood across all Iranian ethnicities and regions. Additionally, while the study focused on positive and negative conceptualizations, it did not explore the nuances of women’s perspectives on manhood or how gender dynamics play a role in shaping these schemas. Furthermore, future research could explore a wider array of scenarios, including those where male characters take on non-prominent roles, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of manhood. This would allow for a comparison of the conceptualizations derived from different situational contexts and contribute to a more nuanced view of cultural cognition regarding gender in Iranian society. It is also noted that future research might benefit from examining these conceptualizations within other discursive contexts, such as proverbs and literary works, which may provide deeper insights into the evolving nature of manhood in Iran. Therefore, future studies can explore the diachronic evolution of conceptualizations of manhood in the Iranian context.

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**Appendix**

شرکت کننده محترم

پرسش نامه کیفی پیش رو جهت جمع آوری داده های طرح پژوهشی دانشگاهی در باب مفهوم "مرد" در زبان فارسی و جامعه ایرانی طراحی شده است. همان طور که میدانید، افراد یک جامعه میتوانند برداشت های یکسان و یا متفاوتی را از یک مفهوم در موقعیت های اجتماعی داشته باشند. گاه اکثر گویشوران در یک جامعه نگرش واحدی به یک مفهوم دارند و گاه نیز برخی افراد جامعه آن نگرش را به چالش کشیده و مفهوم سازی جدیدی ارائه می نمایند که دلایل خاص خود را نیز دازند. در این پرسش نامه قصد داریم نگرش شما و تصویر ذهنی شما را از مفهوم مرد در جامعه ایرانی جويا شويم.

به شما اطمینان داده می شود که بنا بر قوانین اخلاق پژوهش، اطلاعاتی که در اختیار ما میگذارید صرفاً برای اهداف پژوهش حاضر مورد استفاده قرار می گیرد. بنابراین با اطمینان و آرامش کامل به سوالات پاسخ دهید.

پیشاپیش از همکاری شما در جمع آوری داده های این پژوهش بسیار سپاسگزار هستیم.

جنسیت      مرد زن

سن

میزان تحصیلات      دیپلم      فوق دیپلم      کارشناسی      کارشناسی ارشد      دکتری

قومیت فارسی      ترک      لر      بلوچ      ترکمن      عرب      کرد      سایر

شغل

اطلاعات تماس (شامل شماره تلفن، ایمیل، آیدی در شبکه های اجتماعی)

از شما دوست عزیز درخواست می شود که **محتمل ترین مفهومی** که در مورد "مرد" در هر کدام از موقعیت های زیر به ذهنتان می آید را **در قالب یک یا دو جمله** بنویسید. لطفا در پاسخ خود به دلیلی که آن مفهوم خاص را مطرح کردید نیز اشاره بفرمایید.

- تصور کنید روز سیزده بدر کنار رودخانه ای پرآب رفته اید. شما از بالای تپه متوجه می شوید که پسر بچه ای به داخل آب رودخانه افتاده است. چند خانم از جمله مادر بچه به صحنه خیلی نزدیک هستند ولی کاری از دستشون بر نمی آید. یک دفعه مردی خودش را به صحنه می رساند و خودش را در آب انمی اندازد و بچه را نجات می دهد.

- یکی از همسایه های شما در طبقه چهارم آپارتمان در حال رفتن به مسافرت هستند. یک چمدان بزرگی پر از وسایل دم در گذاشته اند. آسانسور خراب است و مرد خانه می خواهد به تنهایی چمدان را از راه پله به پارکینگ ببرد. خانمش خیلی اصرار می کند که کمکش کند چون چمدان خیلی سنگین است. مرد به حرف خانمش گوش نمی دهد و خودش به تنهایی آن چمدان سنگین را از طبقه چهارم پایین می برد.
- در یک مهمانی فامیلی شرکت کرده اید. برخلاف دیگر مرد های حاضر در مهمانی، یکی از مرد ها از رانندگی خانم ها تعریف میکند و آن را به رانندگی آقایون ترجیح می دهد.
- ساعت سه بامداد در یکی از روزهای اواسط زمستان است. بچه پنج ماهه گرسنه می شود و مرتب گریه می کند. شیر خشک هم تمام شده است. مرد خانه بیدار میشود و در این هوای سرد زمستانی می رود از داروخانه شبانه روزی مرکز شهر یک قوطی شیر خشک می گیرد.
- یکی از آشنا های شما به تازگی تصادف کرده اند. خودشان کاملا سالم هستند ولی ماشین شان خسارت نسبتا شدیدی دیده است. مرد اصلا دوست ندارد خانواده اش قضیه تصادف را جایی تعریف کنند.
- اواخر یک شب، سعید و همسرش، فاطمه، در حال خروج از یک تالار عروسی بودند که گروهی از مردان مست راه آنها را مسدود کردند و به فاطمه همسر سعید ناسزای رکیکی گفتند. قلب سعید بشدت شروع به تپیدن کرد. با مشت های گره کرده و صدایی محکم، جلوی فاطمه رفت. " حرفی دارید؟ با من صحبت کنید." مرد ها ابتدا خندیدند، اما رفتار فاطمه سعید آنها را ساکت کرد. سعید رو به آن ها کرد و گفت: " به چه حقی با زن من این طور صحبت می کنید؟ مزاحم نشید. راهتون رو بکشید و برید." فضا از تنش سنگین شد و به تدریج مردان به سمت دیگری نگاه کردند و خنده هایشان به زمزمه های ناخوشایندی تبدیل شد. فاطمه به سعید نگاه کرد و سپاسگزاری در چشمانش می درخشید. فاطمه حس کرد سعید با قدرت و شجاعت در برابر بی احترامی از او دفاع کرده بود.
- رضا برای نامزدی خواهرش داشت آماده می شد. او که در اتاق نشیمن نشسته بود، مشاهده کرد که خواهرش با شور و شوق با نامزدش گپ می زند. قلبش فرو ریخت. زمانی که این دو خیلی به هم نزدیک شدند، رضا با لحن قاطعانه وارد عمل شد و هشدار داد: " دیگه زیاده روی نکنید. یکم فاصله بگیرید از هم. خجالت هم خوب چیزیه ها!"