



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENDER ROLE, ACCULTURATION,  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG  
IRANIAN POSTGRADUATES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN MALAYSIA***

**KATAYOON AHANGAR**

**FEM 2018 5**



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MALAYSIA**

**By**

**KATAYOON AHANGAR**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University Putra  
Malaysia in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**November 2017**

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to Ali, my beloved husband, and my parents, whose unconditional love and support have been gifts that I will continue to cherish throughout my life. Your examples of hard work and persistence have guided me through this process and will stay with me forever. There are not enough words that can adequately express the appreciation I have for you all. You have encouraged me to always strive for excellence. You are the source of my strength and I love you dearly.

To my brother who has been by my side since my childhood. Even today, you are the person I call when I have a fantastic idea that one can only understand when they know me and the spirit from which it comes. I love you and thank you for reminding me of who I always wanted to be and to persevere.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**KATAYOON AHANGAR**

**November 2017**

**Chairman: Rumaya binti Juhari, PhD**  
**Faculty: Human Ecology**

Marriage is a special relationship between two people in which its quality plays an important role in one's life. Marital satisfaction is a personal perception and is strongly linked to the health and happiness of a marriage. This study investigates the relationships between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction and the moderating role of gender role attitude on the relationship between the aforementioned factors among married Iranian students in Malaysian universities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, Berry's acculturation theory, and gender role theory were utilized to provide a valid foundation for explaining relationships between gender role attitude, acculturation, conflict resolution and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students.

In this study, a correlational research design has been employed. An online web survey technique employed 386 respondents aged between 25 and 56 years old that were made up of married Iranian postgraduate students studying in Malaysian public universities. The respondents completed the PREPARE/ENRICH Couple Satisfaction Scale (Olson, Larson and Olson, 2009), the PREPARE/ENRICH Conflict Resolution Scale (Olson, Larson and Olson, 2009), a slightly altered version of the Gender Role Attitude Scale (Prasad and Baron, 1996) and the East Asian Acculturation Measure (EAAM) (Barry, 2001) to measure the variables respectively.

Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the research hypotheses for this study. The results showed that acculturation and conflict resolution have a significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

However, gender role attitude does not significantly moderate the relationship between the aforementioned variables and marital satisfaction.

This study advances the understanding of the importance of conflict management and acculturation as influencing factors of marital satisfaction. It also increases the understanding on the importance of gender role attitude among married Iranian students. This supports the theory that better acculturation and conflict resolution leads to a higher level of marital satisfaction. The finding of this study may potentially be one of the relevant factors for intervention and prevention programs that deals with married Iranian students who are studying abroad, specifically in Malaysia. Acculturation and conflict management while managing various responsibilities as a married student in a foreign country is also important to highlight.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERKAITAN DI ANTARA PERANAN JANTINA, PEMBUDAYAAN,  
PENYELESAIAN KONFLIK DAN KEPUASAN PERKAHWINAN  
DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR SISWAZAH IRAN DI UNIVERSITI  
AWAM DI MALAYSIA**

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**Fakulti: Ekologi Manusia**

Perkahwinan adalah hubungan istimewa di antara dua insan yang mana kualiti hubungan itu sangat mempengaruhi kehidupan seseorang. Tahap kepuasan dalam perkahwinan adalah perasaan peribadi dan sangat berkaitan dengan kesihatan dan kebahagiaan suatu perkahwinan. Kajian ini meneliti hubungan kait di antara penyelesaian konflik, pembudayaan, dan tahap kepuasan perkahwinan serta sikap peranan jantina sebagai moderator dalam hubungan di antara faktor-faktor yang dinyatakan dalam kalangan pelajar-pelajar Iran di universiti-universiti awam di Malaysia. Teori Ekologi Bronfenbrenner, Teori Pembudayaan Berry, dan Teori Sikap Peranan Jantina telah digunakan bagi menjelaskan hubungan di antara sikap peranan jantina, pembudayaan, penyelesaian konflik, dan tahap kepuasan perkahwinan dalam kalangan pelajar-pelajar Iran.

Rekabentuk kajian korelasi telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Soal selidik atas talian melalui laman web yang melibatkan seramai 386 responden pelajar pasca siswazah Iran berumur di antara 25 hingga 56 tahun yang telah berkahwin dan sedang belajar di universiti awam di Malaysia telah digunakan. Para responden telah melengkapkan Skala Tahap Kepuasan Pasangan PREPARE/ENRICH (Olson, Larson dan Olson, 2009), Skala Penyelesaian Konflik PREPARE/ENRICH (Olson, Larson dan Olson, 2009), Skala Sikap Peranan Jantina (Prasad dan Baron, 1996) dan Ukuran Pembudayaan Asia Timur (EAAM) (Barry, 2001) bagi mengukur setiap pemboleh ubah.

*Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS- SEM)* telah digunakan bagi menguji hipotesis untuk kajian ini. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pembudayaan dan penyelesaian konflik mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan tahap kepuasan perkahwinan. Walau bagaimanapun, sikap peranan jantina tidak memainkan peranan sebagai moderator yang signifikan ke atas hubungan di antara pembolehubah yang dinyatakan dengan tahap kepuasan perkahwinan.

Kajian semasa memajukan pemahaman mengenai kepentingan pengurusan konflik dan pembudayaan sebagai faktor terhadap kepuasan perkahwinan mempengaruhi. Ia juga meningkatkan pemahaman mengenai kepentingan peranan jantina di kalangan pelajar Iran berkahwin. Hasil kajian ini berpotensi menjadi salah satu faktor yang relevan bagi program-program intervensi dan pencegahan yang melibatkan pelajar-pelajar Iran yang telah berkahwin dan sedang belajar di luar negara terutamanya di Malaysia. Pembudayaan terhadap kehidupan dan pengurusan konflik dalam mengendalikan pelbagai tugas sebagai pelajar yang telah berkahwin yang sedang belajar di negara asing juga patut diberi perhatian.



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Finally, thank you to everyone who supported or guided me, either directly or indirectly, through the process of completing this final year of research.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:

- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) are adhered to.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CA	Cronbach Alpha
$n$	The sample size
$L$	Value achieved from the power value table for specific $\alpha$ , $k$ ,
$f^2$	Effect size for ordinary least squares regression
K	Number of predictors in the regression model
LV	Latent Variable
FL	Factor Loading
N.S	Not Significant
SD	Standard Deviation
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CR	Composite Reliability
PLS	Partial Least Square
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
INRO	Iranian Name Registration Organization
IFHC	Iranian Family Health Centre
MD	Marital Duration
LS	Length of Stay
INC	Income
ACC	Acculturation
GR	Gender Role
CR	Conflict Resolution
MS	Marital Satisfaction
EDU	Education
ASS	Assimilation
INT	Integration
MRG	Marginalization
SPR	Separation
$Z^2$	Z statistic for a level of confidence
P	Population proportion
d	Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Marriage is a pillar of every society and is defined as a common and strong foundation in forming any given culture (Yektafar-Hooshvar, 2016). Marriage is the binding of two people who have plans to share their lives together and, in most cases, raise a family. It is one of the most important virtues in the relationships among human beings and underpins a solid structure for establishing family relationships that aims to create the future generation (Jain, 2014). The physical and emotional health of adults can be constructively influenced and changed by a healthy marriage (Dwyer, 2005). Hence, the quality of marriage plays an important role in an individual's well-being over his/her lifetime (Mousavi & Mami, 2015).

Marital satisfaction is an individual's overall feeling about marriage and also the key to strengthening the family and increasing physical and psychological health (Askarian Omran et. al, 2016). Marital satisfaction is a complex phenomenon that has been studied by different scientists in various scientific fields such as social science and psychology (Zaheri, Dolatian, Shariati, Simbar, Ebadi, Hasanpoor Azghadi, 2016). There are several factors that can influence the marital satisfaction of couples: stress, lack of partner's support, difficulty in communication and cultural differences are some examples (Nelson, 2015). Unhappy couples have a greater tendency to divorce due to the absence of satisfaction in their marital relationship and the main reasons are conflictive behavior and poor communication (Jain, 2014). Marital dissatisfaction builds an inappropriate ambience in a family and leads them to divorce (Zaheri, et al., 2016).

Taghizadeh and Kalhori (2015) and Schwartz (2011) showed that marital satisfaction is a measurement of marital happiness and stability between couples and has been related to mental and physical health. Additionally, marital satisfaction is about emotional support, mutual understanding, conflict resolution and a couple's ability for problem solving (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). A couple's inability to work out these elements will result in deteriorating quality of their marriage and will create other, more severe, problematic issues such as marital conflict, extra-marital affairs, anxiety and depression (Amidu, Owiredun, Gyasi-Sarpong, Woode & Quaye, 2011).

As stated by the Iranian Family Health Centre in 2010, many couples suffer from an unhappy marital relationship. After the Iranian revolution in 1979, many Iranian universities were closed because of political and social issues (Shahabadi and Puran, 2009). This made many scientists and students fled the country to reside in other countries to seek better life conditions and education (Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2015). Although relocating to another country is a major opportunity for exploration and personal growth, it can also cause a stressful experience due to the need for adjusting to a new environment (Yoon, 2013; Chang, 2007). The new living environment creates a body of challenges for couples and adjusting to the new culture and adapting to new values and attitudes are considered as two of the most crucial challenges that these immigrants face. The attempt to adjustment is termed as acculturation (Nelson, 2015).

According to the United Nations, globally, there are 200 million immigrants living all over the world (Judith et al., 2011). One of the main host countries for many sojourners in recent years is Malaysia. Yusliza and Chelliah (2010) reported approximately 90,000 international students registered in Malaysian universities and defined international students as individuals who temporarily live in a new country to participate in international educational learning as students. There were approximately 14,000 Iranian students studying in Malaysia in 2011 according to statistics provided by the Iranian Embassy in Malaysia. Among these students, almost half were living with their families (Madanian & Mansor, 2011).

Marital satisfaction depreciates among couples who have conflicts about issues such as finance, household and parenting duties (Clark, 2010). As reported by Ataca (1998), during migration, marital conflicts could create problems in the new environment and culture, and thus, make adaptation even more difficult. Moreover, managing marital conflicts is also known to be an important factor in a married couple's satisfaction (Mousavi, Mami, 2015; Sharif, Soleimani, Mani, Keshavarzi, 2013). Hence, the problems created by migration could increase the chance of poor marital satisfaction and conflicts.

The current study attempts to identify the relationships among gender role attitude, acculturation, conflict resolution and the marital satisfaction of married Iranian students in Malaysia. Being married has an impact on one's life as a foreign student in a new society. The respondents in this study originate from Iran and are currently pursuing their studies in Malaysian universities.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Unhappiness in marriage is a particularly important issue to be dealt with by married couples. Lack of happiness in marital relationships will lead to problems in marriages. Marital issues can be a major source of stress, leading to disagreements between partners (Zarra Nezhad & Moazami Goodarzi, 2011, Zaheri, et al., 2016; Islami, 2017). With the rising rate of divorce among Iranians, searching for ways to keep marriages intact is important. There were 34,759 divorce cases among Iranian couples living in Iran in 2012 (INRO, 2013). More than 50% of marriages in Iran will end up in divorces after three years or more of marriage just because of poor marital satisfaction (Majd, 2009). According to the National Organization for Iranian Civil Registration, every three minutes, a divorce was registered between the years 2009 and 2016. In Tehran, the capital city of Iran, this rate of divorce is estimated to be 1 in every 3 marriages (Ghoroghi, Hassan, & Baba, 2015).

Another crucial factor that affects marital satisfaction is the acculturation process. Acculturation is a process that married immigrant couples go through, in which they need to adapt to the new culture, new forms of behavior and different ways of acculturating. Moreover, among Iranian immigrant couples, acculturation could cause stress which potentially creates marital conflicts or dissatisfaction and make life more challenging in the new culture (Naghdi, 2010). Nearly 45% of Iranians who moved to Western and Asian countries experienced problems, particularly in terms of social and emotional factors (Bozorgmehr, 1998). Among some of the main acculturation factors are inadequate language proficiency, difficulty in communicating with people of other nationalities and lack of social support. These factors should be explored to understand how they may affect marital satisfaction among immigrants.

Several studies have raised our awareness about the increasing marital conflicts and the rate of divorce within the Iranian immigrant community. In America, for example, 66% of Iranian sojourners' marriages end in divorce (Asadinik, 2009; Tohidi, 2004). The divorce rate is high among married Iranian sojourners and is significantly higher compared to Iranians residing in Iran. In addition, Iranian marital satisfaction is seriously affected by acculturation and the level of Iranian marital conflict is much higher compared to couples living in Iran (Azadarmaki & Bahar, 2006).

On the other hand, compared to local students, foreign students suffer more from life stressors that are associated with moving to other countries and adapting to a new culture and way of life. Local students have more social and family support; thus, studying abroad is a life challenge for foreign students and can affect the happiness of their marital relationships



(Ghoroghi, Hassan & Baba, 2015). Consequently, as many Iranians are studying abroad, research on marital satisfaction among married Iranian students should be taken into consideration.

Studies have noted that shifting gender role attitude among immigrant couples going through the process of immigration can lead them to marital conflicts (Dadras Konestani, 2016; Jain, 2014). Immigrants are more at risk for mental and physical sickness because individuals are separated from their families and they no longer have the *emotional, physical* and financial support provided by their families. The risk is the result of the interaction between expectations and roles of the heritage culture and the host culture. Once immigrant couples are faced with the choice of recreating traditional roles as husband and wife or endorsing more egalitarian attitudes, the gender role becomes an issue and will affect marital satisfaction (Jain, 2014).

Given the importance of marital satisfaction in the overall psychological well-being of individuals and the central role of the family in the health of a society, it becomes imperative to understand how the mechanisms of gender role influences relationships among married immigrants (Park, Jun & Joo, 2017; Jain, 2014). Today, even though gender role, cultural values, and marital relationship have been studied by researchers, there are still theoretical gaps relating to gender role, cultural background and marital satisfaction among Iranian immigrants (Aslinia, 2010; Asadinik, 2009).

Several studies have found that socio-demographic factors can have an influence on marital satisfaction and among these factors, age, gender, marital duration, level of education and financial situation seem to be the most significant factors that affect marital satisfaction (Brako 2012; Bookwala, Sobin & Zdaniuk, 2005; Alder, 2010; Dunham, 2008; Rosen-Grandon, Myers & Hattie, 2004). Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between demographic variables and marital satisfaction.

Previous studies have shown significant relationships between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students living abroad (Kerendi, 1998; Asadinik, 2009). However, based on a search on Google Scholar, PubMed and Science Direct from the year 2000 to 2018, no study has considered gender role attitude as a moderator between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among Iranian sojourner students. Therefore, this study attempts to understand the moderating role of gender role attitude on the above-mentioned factors.

Going forward, the results of this study will identify the way moving to another country influences marital satisfaction among married Iranian students. There is still a methodological gap between this study and previous studies in the literature. According to several evidence of past studies that used qualitative methods of analysis with measuring marital satisfaction among Iranian immigrants, a focus on how cultural differences in the heritage and host culture differ is an important avenue of exploration in the marital satisfaction among married Iranian students that are currently residing in Malaysia (Madanian, Mansor & Omar, 2013; Salehy & Amat, 2013; Mosavi & Mahmud, 2016). The purpose of this study is to provide input towards prevention programs for the reduction of unhappy marriages. Hence, more research on this topic is required.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Considering the problem statement described above, the research questions have been listed as follows:

1. What are the relationships between the social demographic characteristics (age, gender, years of education, length of stay in Malaysia, income and marital duration), gender role attitude, conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysian public universities?
2. What are the unique predictors of marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysian public universities?
3. Does gender role attitude moderate the relationships between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysian public universities?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.4.1 General Objective**

This research aims to examine the relationships between social demographic characteristics, gender role attitude, acculturation, conflict resolution and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysian public universities.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objective**

1. To describe socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, years of education, length of stay in Malaysia, income, marital duration), gender role attitude, conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction of the respondents.

2. To determine the relationships between the social demographic characteristics (age, gender, years of education, length of stay in Malaysia, income, marital duration), gender role attitude, conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among the respondents.
3. To determine the unique predictors of marital satisfaction among the respondents.
4. To examine the moderating role of gender role attitude in the relationships between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among the respondents.

### **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

*H<sub>A1</sub>*. Older respondents report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A2</sub>*. Respondents with higher level of education report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A3</sub>*. Respondents who have been staying longer in Malaysia report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A4</sub>*. Respondents who earn more income report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A5</sub>*. Respondents who have been married longer report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A6</sub>*. The level of marital satisfaction among male respondents is significantly higher than female respondents.

*H<sub>A7</sub>*. More acculturated respondents report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A8</sub>*. Respondents with better conflict resolution report a significantly higher level of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A9</sub>*. Gender role attitude is positively related to marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>A10</sub>*. The level of marital satisfaction is significantly predicted by socio-demographic characteristics, gender role attitude, acculturation and conflict resolution among the respondents.

*H<sub>A11</sub>*. Relationship between acculturation and marital satisfaction is significantly moderated by gender role attitude among the respondents.

*H<sub>A12</sub>*. Relationship between conflict resolution and marital satisfaction is significantly moderated by gender role attitude among the respondents.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Despite several studies that have been conducted on the role of marital satisfaction among couples, rigorous research focusing on the role of marital satisfaction among Iranian couples and investigating the relationships between gender role attitude, acculturation, conflict resolution and marital satisfaction has not been undertaken at the time of this study. Consequently,



this study attempts to bridge the gap in the body of literature on marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysia.

The contribution to the field made by this research would be providing a potential explanation of the relationships between conflict resolution, acculturation and marital satisfaction among Iranian couples. It is anticipated that the findings would create an appropriate framework of counseling activities to address the unique needs of married Iranian students and to improve their mental health needs. This study is important in the development of the theory. Moreover, it will help and support practitioners who provide counseling services to Iranian couples who may be facing distress and conflict in their marriage due to immigration.

This study aims to examine the predictors of marital satisfaction. It also provides information regarding problems that can arise because of two different cultures and the body of knowledge of acculturation. This research can expand the knowledge and deepen the understanding of marital satisfaction among sojourner Iranian students and increase the literature relevant to gender role attitude, acculturation and conflict resolution associated with marital satisfaction among sojourner Iranian students.

The findings of this study can be helpful for mental health organizations to organize some policies to enrich marital satisfaction and manage conflicts, thus preventing divorce among married students. Moreover, the findings will be useful for the couples as well as they will be able to understand how factors such as moving to another country, gender role attitude and resolving conflict can affect their marriages. Therefore, the results can bring benefits in developing prevention programs for psychologists and counselors to manage the marital problems effectively. Hence, it is important to study marital satisfaction to increase knowledge on marriages. Married students who are satisfied in their marriage may have found ways in dealing with their conflicts and supporting their spouse.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

### **Marital Satisfaction**

Conceptual: Marital satisfaction is the emotional and cognitive evaluation with regards to an individual's level of contentment, communication, intimacy, commitment and stability in his/her marriage. Marital satisfaction is an overall measure of an individual's level of satisfaction in the marital relationship and how satisfied the couple is with different aspects of their marriage (Olson, Larson & Olson, 2009).

Operational: Marital Satisfaction is measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale (PREPARE/ENRICH, 2010). A high score indicates adaptability and high marital satisfaction while a low score shows low marital satisfaction. The range of scores for this scale is as follows: 41-50 to be considered a very high score, 37-40 to be considered high, 29-36 to be considered moderate, 23-28 to be considered low and 10-22 to be considered very low (Olson, Larson & Olson, 2009).

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conceptual: Conflict resolution defines people's attitudes, feelings and beliefs about the resolving of conflicts in their marriages. It outlines the level of sincerity of a couple's expressions when resolving a matter, the attitude towards how couples tends to end arguments and the level of contentment with the fashion in which the issues are being solved (Olson, Larson & Olson, 2009).

Operational: Conflict resolution was tested by applying the PREPARE/ENRICH Conflict Resolution Scale. This scale evaluates the aptness of couples to settle issues through discussions. A high score reflects an efficient discussion in which the issues with the spouse are resolved, while a low score indicates high inefficiency in discussing and solving issues with the spouse. The range of scores for this scale is as follows: 41-50 to be considered a very high score, 35-40 to be considered high, 27-34 to be considered moderate, 23-26 to be considered low, and 10-22 to be considered a very low score (Olson, Larson & Olson, 2009).

### **Acculturation**

Conceptual: Acculturation refers to communication approaches that people assume when interacting with people with two or more distinctive different cultural backgrounds. The changes that occur in each case are dependent on several factors such as a person's loyalty to the new and old culture (Barry, 2001).

Operational: Acculturation is measured by a slightly altered version of the East Asian Acculturation Measure (EAAM) developed by Barry (2001). The acculturation score is tested by dividing the sum of the scores by the sum of several items (Barry, 2001). The scale used the median as a cutoff point score (Chu, White & Verrelli, 2017). A high score indicates high acculturation while a low score reflects low acculturation.

## **Gender Role Attitude**

Conceptual: The gender role is explained by attitudes regarding issues such as how housework or childcare should be shared between men and women that stems from ingrained cultural norms within a society (Prasad and Baron, 1996).

Operational: The gender role is measured by a slightly altered version of the Gender-Role Attitudes, Beliefs Scale developed by Prasad and Baron (1996). The scale includes three parts: belief items, policy items, and moral items. The median is used as a cutoff point score. A high score reflects a more egalitarian attitude while a low score indicates high inequality roles among couples (Prasad & Baron, 1996).

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

This study investigates the relationships between gender role attitude, conflict resolution, and acculturation with marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysia. In this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development (1979), acculturation model developed by Berry (1997) and the gender role theory created by Kidder (2002) are employed to explain the relationships between the studied variables.

#### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development**

A human ecological model was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) in the field of developmental psychology. This theory states biological, historical, and sociocultural contexts of individuals can influence their psychological human development and is affected by the various kinds of environments. This model explained the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between a person's development and their environmental contexts. A human ecological model demonstrates the five environmental systems; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The marital relationship is unique for every couple. However, there is no doubt that conflicts are highly likely to happen between all couples (Skowronski, et al., 2014). The married students in this study are not an exception from the above either. Their living condition is a temporary one and being in a foreign country would make them react differently in this new environment and like any other couple, they are surely faced with various sources of marital conflicts (Romano, 2001). In this study, the experiences of Iranian sojourners can provide an important contextual understanding of this group's acculturation challenges at the macro-level and how these

challenges can influence their marital relationships at the micro-level. According to the ecological theory, individuals (husband or wife) are not only adapting to their new environment but are also changing the new environment to reach their satisfaction in the marital relationship. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains in detail how backgrounds and related factors can influence marital quality. It shows how multiple environments can influence the quality of marriage (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The microsystem describes factors that are rooted within the couple themselves which can affect their marital satisfaction, such as the couple's interaction, commitment, patience, and respect. The mesosystem explains the relationship between the microsystems in an individual's life. It indicates the link between a couple's home and their workplace. Hence, the mesosystem can be understood as a system of microsystems.

The exosystem describes the social environment that one spouse does not directly experience but one that can still influence a couple's interactions such as one spouse's workplace. The macrosystem describes factors that root from the couple's surrounding environment and structural factors that put extra pressure on their marriage.

The chronosystem consists of changes in the individual's lifespan. This would also include the socio-historical contexts that can influence a person. Such events can be sociocultural, occurring between the individual and his or her environment, or biopsychological, occurring within the individual. Examples include the experiences of getting married, going through a mid-life crisis or getting a divorce as important life transitions which may affect the couple's marital relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The ecological systems model explains how internal factors among couples and the external factors from their surrounding interact with each other and how it eventually determines a couple's marital satisfaction. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model recommends that people exist within a diversity of life settings, beginning at the individual level and extending to outward levels such as family, workplace, and society (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The ecological system theory demonstrates that the marital satisfaction can be influenced by an extensive spectrum of factors.

### Berry's Acculturation Model

The second approach is Berry's model of acculturation (1997), as shown in Figure 1.1. According to Berry's model, there are three factors that encourage the existence of different variety in the cultural group. These factors are voluntariness, mobility, and permanence. The latter explains that those who have migrated to permanently settle in a new country and whom are considered as immigrants. The other two reside in the new environment temporarily such as sojourners. In this study, the individuals are living temporarily in Malaysia. Although there are variations in factors leading to acculturation, one of the main conclusions that has been reached is that the basic principle and process of adaptation would not differ regardless of the factor and groups (Berry, 1997).

Berry's model suggests that acculturation is multidimensional and has four strategies, (a) separation, (b) integration, (c) assimilation and (d) marginalization. Separation (attempting to retain the heritage culture and refusing to accept the receiving culture), integration (open to receiving culture and retaining the heritage culture), assimilation (accepting the receiving culture and rejecting the heritage culture) and marginalization (rejecting the receiving culture and rejecting the heritage culture) (Berry, 2003).

**Berry's Acculturation Model**

Yes	<b>Assimilation</b>	<b>Integration</b>
No	<b>Marginalization</b>	<b>Separation</b>
	No	Yes

**Figure 1.1: Berry's Acculturation Model (1990- 1999)**

The acculturation model provides a system that helps understand the development of the person's adaption to the new cultural environment (Berry, 2003). Berry's model addresses the relevance of multicultural societies, minority people and groups, and, in fact, how people are willing to adapt to the acculturation process. Today, many ethnic groups have managed to revive their ancestral language and heritage culture. Culture, as a process of a cultural change, is unidimensional as a process of forced



contact between groups (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Furthermore, Berry's model explains that acculturation is directed towards the original and host culture, while maintaining the original culture and keeping a relationship with the larger society to find personal adjustment in the new society (Berry, 2003).

## **Gender Role Theory**

The third theory is the Gender Role theory which describes the relationship between social pressures and an individual's internalized culture in defining their gender role (Kidder, 2002). Individuals usually relate such pressure and assumptions from the society to typify themselves and others. The way individuals apply these norms to characterize themselves plays an essential part of their lives and affects their relationships. Gender role theory provides a portrait of women as a member in the society who keeps the relationships by being social and caring and the society does not expect them to do other activities that are interpreted as manly (Williams, Consalvo, Caplan, & Yee, 2009).

There are two main type of gender roles by definition: traditional and egalitarian (MaCarthy, 1999). Gender role explanation has been projected in the roles of men and women in both the work and home environments. Individuals with the tendency towards more traditional gender role would prefer men to be associated with work as he has to provide for the family while women are associated with responsibilities at home as she has to care for the family. On the other hand, individuals with egalitarian values believe that gender role would equally accept the participation of men and women at work as well as home (Hochschild, 1989).

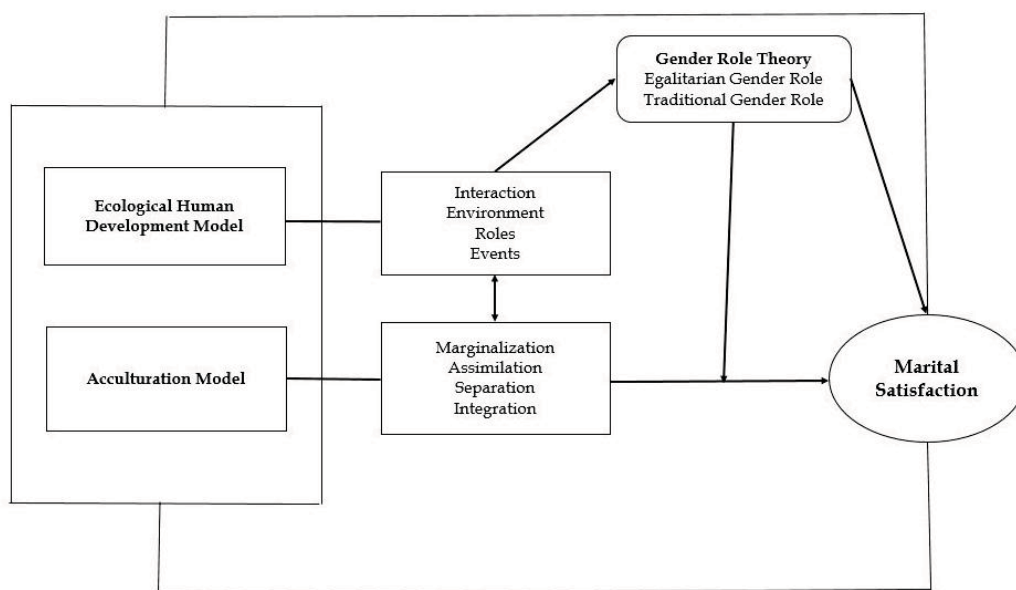
## **1.9 Integration of Theories**

Looking at the current literature on marital satisfaction, one cannot find the theoretical approach describing the relationships between gender role attitude, acculturation and conflict resolution with marital satisfaction among married Iranian students. This multi-dimensional theoretical perspective allows for a meaningful context in which to understand the impact of gender role attitude, acculturation and conflict resolution on marital satisfaction. Thus, this study integrates three theories (Bronfenbrenner ecological model of human development, acculturation theory, and gender role theory) to widely investigate marital satisfaction. The integration of the three theories in understanding marital satisfaction is shown in Figure 1.2.

Ecological theory serves as a main theory for this study. Concepts such as environment, interaction and adaptation are relevant to the study and are related to other theories. Ecological theory helps us understand how human surrounding impacts married Iranian sojourners' experiences across different contexts such as the microsystem (e.g., partner, family), exosystem (e.g., university, workplace), and the macrosystem (e.g., social community and the larger society). In this study, the participants are living temporarily in Malaysia. Acculturation, in the context of this study, refers to an individual's adaptation to a new environment and modifying the environment to achieve their desires. Interaction refers to where information and meanings are created between individuals in the family and other subsystems. The temporary situation of the participants in a foreign country may affect the outcome.

Berry's model explained how people are willing to adapt during acculturation process in multicultural societies (Berry, 2003). Also, Berry's acculturation model explains psychological processes specific to immigrants when they find themselves in a different culture and society. Gender role theory by Kidder (2002) provides a further understanding of the moderating role of gender role attitude. Thus, gender role theory was adopted to complement the ecological model in explaining the links between conflict resolution and acculturation with marital satisfaction.

Given the conflicting findings on the relationships between gender role and marital satisfaction, this study will examine the moderating role of gender role in the relationships between acculturation and conflict resolution with marital satisfaction among married Iranian postgraduate students.

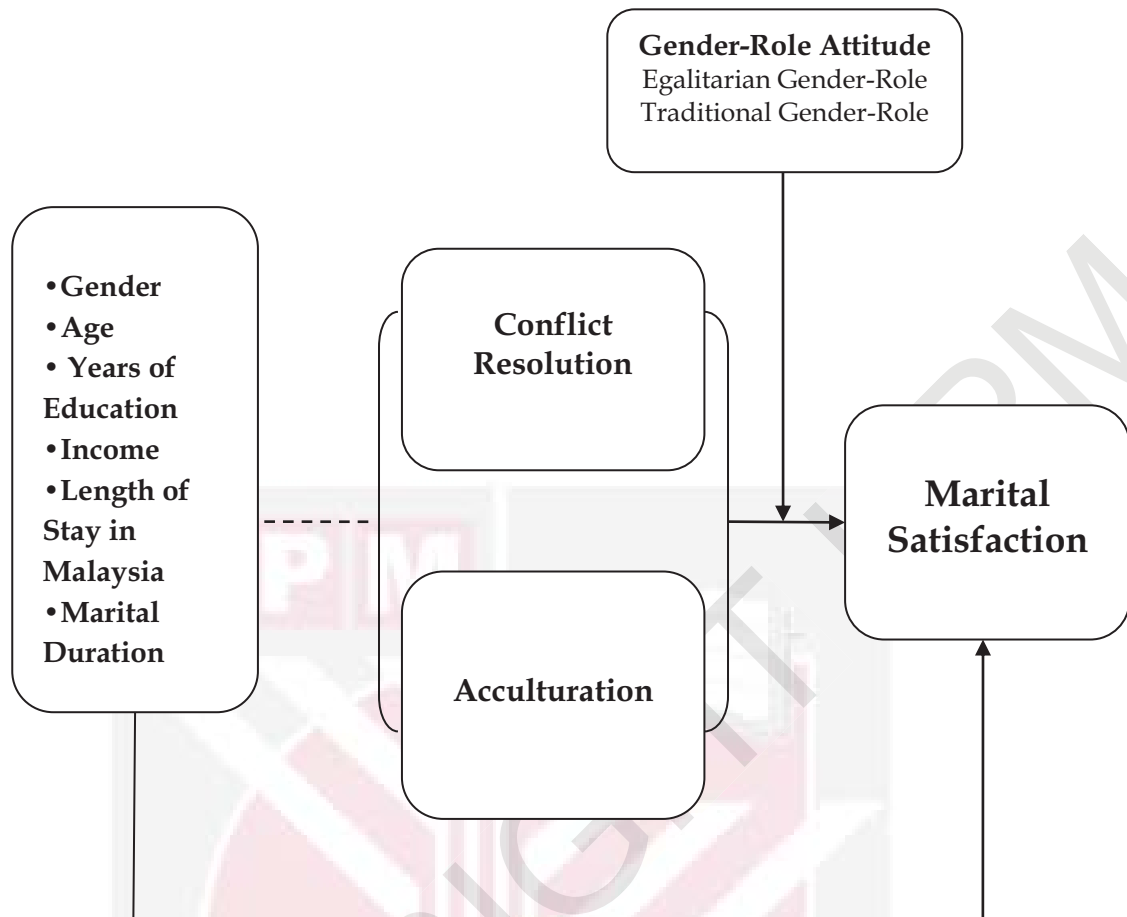


**Figure 1.2: Theoretical Framework**

### 1.10 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1.3 is based on the ecological model of human development, Berry's model of acculturation and gender role theory. The arrows designate the divisions and relationships between the variables of the research. The background profiles are related with both the independent and dependent variables directly. Moreover, independent variables have an influence on marital quality, which is a dependent variable. This framework represents a research map and summarizes the ideas and variables relevant to the study to examine the correlation between the background profiles, gender role attitude, conflict resolution, acculturation, as well as marital satisfaction among married Iranian students in Malaysian universities.





**Figure 1.3: Research Conceptual Framework on the Demographic Backgrounds, Gender Role Attitude, Acculturation, Conflict Resolution and Marital Satisfaction**

### 1.11 Chapter Summary

Introduction to the study was presented in Chapter 1 which comprises the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and definition of terminologies. It also covered theoretical background and conceptual framework that clarifies the relationships between different variables. The following chapter will review the existing literature to develop a good understanding of acculturation, conflict resolution, gender role attitude and marital satisfaction among married Iranian students.

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