



A Narrative Exploration of Transformation of Moral, Social and Cultural Values among Generation Z in the Context of Marriage

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Abstract

Introduction: Unlike previous generations who adhered to a standard and predictable model of marriage, the modern world may offer new opportunities and ideas for marriage to younger generations. Some of these changes in the domain of marriage align with the overarching cultural master narratives of society and are widely accepted, while others may not be fully embraced but are nonetheless considered rational by some or even most members of the community. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of Generation Z's (born between 1997 and 2012) attitudes toward marriage.

Materials and Methods: This study employed a qualitative research design. The sample consisted of 29 male and female participants aged 14 to 27 from Tehran, selected through voluntary sampling. Data were collected using focus conversation conducted in focus groups. For data analysis, the study utilized Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach.

Results: The analysis revealed six main themes related to marriage: "meaning-making of marriage," "partner selection," "traditional family roles," "premarital sex," "parenthood," and "marriage customs".

Conclusion: Findings indicate that while marriage, as a sacred institution, remains intact and continues to be regarded by Generation Z as an implicit reference point with social, cultural, and Moral legitimacy, there is an observable shift away from a singular, fixed concept of marriage. Instead, marriage is increasingly being redefined and reinterpreted as an institution shaped by dynamic individual preferences, with its meaning, role, and significance subject to ongoing reconsideration.

Keywords: *Marriage, Moral values, Cultural values, Master narratives, Generation Z*

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INTRODUCTION

Generation Z includes all those born between 1997 and 2012, who have not experienced a world without digital technologies and social networks [1-3]. They live in a world full of volatility,

uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity [4] and have experienced many political, social, technological and economic changes in their short lifetimes [5]. This generation has grown up in a world characterized by rapid technological

advances, globalization and significant cultural changes. These factors have influenced their understanding of traditional institutions, including marriage and family. Generation Z, who have been constantly exposed to the most information from social networks and media, their orientations towards traditional standards of morality, attitudes towards institutions such as family and traditional authorities, and attitudes towards marriage have become significantly different from previous generations, and the expansion of communication media, especially social networks, has had major effects on traditional cultural developments and the master-cultural narratives of new generations compared to previous generations. Unlike previous generations, this generation is not committed to marriage to continue family traditions or unite two families. If they marry, they decide not to have children and do not consider it as a duty for themselves. Generation Z either decide not to marry or wait until they meet the right person, so they may try various options to find their permanent emotional partner. This generation may not prioritize marriage for various reasons; the importance of financial stability, prioritizing career advancement over relationships, continuing education, increasing divorce rates in society, and fear of commitment. In today's world of constant economic uncertainty, marriage is the last thing on this generation's mind. Gen Z prioritizes their careers over their relationships because it boosts their sense of self-esteem and independence. They see career advancement as a gateway to new opportunities and a new sense of purpose that only marriage can provide. Given the stigma and negative attitudes surrounding divorce, which they see as a sign of failure or shame, Gen Z is afraid that their marriage will end in divorce. This generation may be so afraid of the possibility of divorce that they avoid it by not getting married in the first place. This fear, in turn, leads to a fear

of commitment in this generation. A fear of commitment in this generation can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, as well as preventing them from enjoying relationships [6]. Many studies have been conducted in different countries that indicate a transformation in moral, social and cultural attitudes and patterns related to marriage, sexual behavior and interpersonal relationships in Generation Z. This generation considers marriage and children as a source of stress rather than satisfaction. Young girls are more educated and financially independent than ever before, which has led to a change in public attitudes compared to previous generations [7]. Generation Z believes in the need to pay attention to several important aspects of prior preparation for marriage. These aspects include age readiness, partner criteria, career readiness, psychological readiness and sufficient understanding and knowledge of married life [8]. Generation Z waits longer to get married and have children until they feel financially stable and have a stable job before starting a family [9]. Generation Z does not make decisions based on expectations passed down from previous generations; they evaluate their own personal circumstances and belief systems when making choices and decisions about starting a family. Less than half of generation Z believe that marriage is very or very necessary. Generation Z hope to have reached various milestones before having children, such as "when I finish my education," "when I feel settled," or "when I am financially and professionally ready." They prioritize their mental health when making big decisions like getting married [10]. The current wild and turbulent economy and confusing and unpredictable market have disrupted some of Gen Z's expectations for marriage and having children, with Gen Z preferring to focus on their short-term goals and enjoy the present [11]. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has a "don't get married" attitude, with most delaying marriage until they

are “financially capable” of it. Generation Z are skeptical about the concept of freedom after marriage, believing that marriage may limit their freedom. They believe that parent generation married to obey parental orders or based solely on social, moral, and cultural norms, and that families should not pressure them to get married at all. Marriage should only take place after they have secured a job and are mature enough in all respects [12]. Generation Z cite economic problems as their main fear and concern about marriage, and believe that starting a family at the same age as their parents married is almost impossible for them in the present era [13].

Researchers believe that each society, depending on its specific circumstances and characteristics, should understand and study generations, and this has a lot to do with cultural, social, economic, political, and religious characteristics, as well as other human and social categories (14). For example, growing up in Pakistan, Bolivia, Switzerland, or Iran all offer incredibly different experiences and cultural contexts that influence the characteristics and perspectives of members of Generation Z in each of those countries. Much of the research on Generation Z and their characteristics and characteristics is related to Western countries, especially the United States, and is written in the context of contemporary U.S. history and culture. Thus, while it may be useful in understanding Generation Z in a global context, it is very much a reflection of the cultural context of the United States. As a result, to better understand and recognize Iran’s Generation Z, we need to conduct research based on our country’s culture, taking into account its governmental structures, cultural and demographic norms, and specific events. In fact, to gain better and more information about Iran’s Generation Z, there is no one better placed to find the answer than the members of our country’s Generation Z themselves. The present study uses a qualitative method to delve deeply into these

evolving attitudes towards marriage. The findings of this study can contribute to a broader discourse about the future of marriage and family in our society.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study is a qualitative study in terms of methodology. The statistical population of the present study included all individuals who were between the ages of 14 and 27 at the time of the study (1402 AH). Due to the researcher's convenient access and the wide demographic range and necessary diversity, Tehran was selected as the statistical population in this study, and participants of both genders were selected so that the diversity in the study would lead to a wealth of information. Invitations to participate in the study and recruitment of participants in focus groups were made through a public call on social networks, and also using two strategies: "nominations" and "location". Based on the nominations strategy, the researcher invited researchers, scholars, and specialists working in the field of Generation Z in Tehran to cooperate in order to find and identify suitable individuals who were in line with the research. Using the location strategy, the researcher randomly invited people who were willing to participate in the study and met the inclusion criteria to participate in focus groups by visiting places such as entertainment centers, parks, cafes, universities, and schools. These methods helped the researcher reduce bias and prejudice in the selection of participants and gave different people with different perspectives and attitudes an equal chance to participate in the study. In order to maximize disclosure of information among participants, to pay attention to cultural considerations and the sensitivity of some of the topics discussed in the group (such as sex, the issue of virginity and hymen), and to avoid distortion and bias in the information provided due to the inclusion of people of different sexes in

group discussions, all participants in the focus groups were selected from the same sex (homogeneous) so that they could more easily and realistically discuss their experiences and opinions in the group. As much as possible, the researcher tried to ensure that the focus group participants were strangers to each other and did not have a prior and intimate friendship. Finally,

the researcher also considered the age difference between the participants in the focus groups so that the large age difference between them did not prevent them from expressing their opinions and views openly and easily. Finally, 29 participants were selected as a sample using voluntary sampling. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants in focus groups

Groups	Gender	Age	Mean of using mobile (hour)	Job
1	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	23	7	Coffee man
	Male	22	5	Customer
	Male	20	5	Soldier
	Male	22	5	Customer
	Male	18	6	Student
	N= 6	Mean= 20.33	Mean= 5.85	
2	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	16	6	Student
	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	16	6	Student
	N= 6	Mean= 16.66	Mean= 6.66	
3	Female	23	6	Student
	Female	24	7	Student
	Female	25	9	Blogger
	Female	25	10	Blogger
	Female	24	10	Content producer
	Female	23	6	Student
	N= 6	Mean= 24	Mean= 8	
4	Male	17	8	Student
	Male	17	6	Student
	Male	18	5	Customer
	Male	17	7	Student
	Male	20	5	Customer
	Male	18	7	Student
	N= 6	Mean= 17.83	Mean= 6.33	
5	Female	23	10	Student/Blogger
	Female	23	6	Student
	Female	24	6	Student
	Female	22	9	Blogger
	Female	25	6	Student
	N= 5	Mean= 23.4	Mean= 7.4	

The data of the present study were collected using focused conversation in the form of focus groups. The duration of each focus group conversation lasted from 2 hours and 30 minutes to 3 hours. To avoid errors and forgetfulness in order to

implement and code the data during the data analysis stage, all focused conversations and group notes were recorded by the researcher on two separate devices (Apple iPhone 6s and Sony ICD-PX470) with the prior knowledge and

consent of the participants and were stored on the researcher's personal computer as password-protected files. The focus group interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher on 118 pages. In order to analyze the data obtained from the focus group conversations, the reflective thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke (2022) was used. Based on the Brown and Clark method, the researcher should perform step-by-step steps to analyze the interviews [15]. In the present study, the researcher went through the following steps in data extraction and analysis of findings: Step 1: Familiarization with the dataset, Step 2: Coding, Step 3: Generating initial themes, Step 4: Development and review themes, Step 5: Refining, defining and naming of themes, and Step 6: Writing up. To increase the validity and reliability of the research, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used [16]. Validity is similar to internal validity, transferability to external validity, dependability to reliability, and confirmability to neutrality and objectivity in quantitative research. The demographic information of the participants in the study is given in Table 1.

RESULTS

The present study used reflective thematic analysis and an inductive approach, which is a bottom-up approach to coding and analyzing data. In this approach, codes and themes are derived from the content of the data itself and are guided by what is in the data, and what the researcher draws during the analysis will be consistent with the content of the data. Based on the findings obtained from the data analysis, the researcher arrived at six main themes: "meaning-making of marriage", "partner selection", "traditional family roles", "premarital sex", "parenthood", and "marriage customs" in relation to the data set. According to Brown and Clarke's [17] recommendations on distinguishing between types of thematic analysis (good, bad,

ugly), in the present study, in order to present a "good" thematic analysis, the researcher has tried to avoid presenting dull and boring themes in the final report, not to leave the themes without literary appeal, and to ensure that all themes presented are based on sufficient evidence (sufficient quotes from participants).

Based on the findings in Table 2, by analyzing the data on the area of meaning-making to marriage, the theme of marriage mindset was obtained by merging the two sub-themes of marriage definition and marriage metaphor. Exploring the mental meaning of marriage among the narratives of Generation Z present in this study showed that in general, two types of mental orientations can be observed among them: external mental orientation and internal mental orientation. In the external mental orientation, participants defined marriage based on legal, social, and cultural requirements such as marriage as a type of contract, while in the internal mental orientation, participants defined marriage based on shared goals and values, respect for individual beliefs and desires, and commitment and loyalty in a joint relationship. Marriage as a "journey" and marriage as a "game" were also the most frequently used metaphors about marriage among the participants, both of which can be related to the challenges and problems, pleasures, new experiences, cooperation, and flexibility inherent in the concept of marriage. The theme of marriage horizon was obtained by merging the two subthemes of reasons for marriage and obstacles to marriage. Concepts such as feeling the need for another, another stage of life, legal, social, and religious benefits and compulsions were the main reasons for marriage, and economic issues and problems, increasing divorce rates, fear of the partner's change, marriage as an obstacle to freedom, growth, and pursuing Personal goals were the most important obstacles to marriage. Finally, the theme of types of marriage was

obtained by merging the four subthemes of temporary marriage, white marriage, same-sex marriage, and ideal marriage. The participants in the study defined temporary marriage based on the concepts of "instrumental use", "lack of commitment", "temporary and contrary to the main purpose of marriage" and "Psychological distress"; white marriage with concepts such as "a relationship without commitment", "legal, social and religious illegitimacy", "escape from the

challenges of formal and long-term marriage" and "a background for a long-term relationship"; same-sex marriage with the concepts of "acceptance and respect for the choice of sexual orientation of individuals", "under the influence of the external atmosphere and situation" and "attitude based on illness and disorder" and ideal marriage with concepts based on "love", "prior recognition", "commitment and care for the relationship" and "mental and intellectual health".

Table 2: List of extracted themes regarding how Generation Z gives meaning to marriage

Themes	Sub codes	Codes (Concepts)
Marriage Mindset	Definition of marriage	Marriage as a contract, marriage as the next step in a relationship, shared goals, aspirations and values, respect for individual beliefs, aspirations and desires while still being in a shared relationship, commitment and loyalty
	Metaphor of marriage	Marriage as a journey, marriage as a game
Marriage Horizon	Reasons for marriage	The need for another, another stage of life, legal, social, and religious benefits and obligations
	Obstacles to marriage	Economic issues and problems, increasing divorce rates, fear of partner's change, marriage as an obstacle to freedom, growth, and the pursuit of personal goals
Types of Marriage	Temporary marriage	As instrumental use, lack of commitment, temporary nature, and contrary to the main purpose of marriage, psychological harm
	White marriage	A relationship without commitment, illegitimacy (legal, social, and religious), escaping the challenges of marriage, a backdrop for a long-term relationship
	Homosexual marriage	Acceptance and respect for people's choice of sexual orientation, influenced by the external atmosphere and situation, attitudes based on illness and disorder
	Ideal marriage	Based on prior knowledge, based on love, based on commitment and care for the relationship, based on the mental and intellectual health of the couple.

Based on the findings in Table 3, by analyzing the data on the theme of partner selection, the theme of partner selection process was obtained by merging the two sub-themes of selection patterns and the best selection method, and the theme of ideal partner characteristics was obtained by merging the sub-themes of main priorities in partner selection. Based on the analysis of data obtained from focused conversations, two different patterns or strategies were identified in the partner selection process among the participants: in the mutual relationship model, the participants used parents as guides, not the main decision makers in partner selection, and negotiated and talked with them, and in the autonomy and independence model, the main decision makers in partner selection were only the individuals themselves, and they had

complete independence in the partner selection process. The participants differed from the previous generation and traditional methods in the criteria for how to get to know their life partner and choose a spouse, and they preferred modern methods such as getting to know each other well before marriage and sharing in work and educational environments and other public situations such as parks, cinemas, and streets to traditional aspects of marriage. They believed that it is important to know each other before marriage and that both parties should get to know each other's perspectives and perspectives on life, personality traits, and communication styles before marriage. Also, in choosing a partner, psychological variables (sense of humor, ability to listen, optimism, openness, maturity, and mental

health), attitudes toward the opposite sex, and commitment were top priorities.

Table 3: List of extracted themes regarding Generation Z's attitude towards partner selection

Themes	Sub themes	Codes (Concepts)
Partner selection process	Selection patterns	Parents as guides, not primary decision makers, autonomy and independence in choice
	Best selection practice	Long-term socialization in the real world, recognition in shared situations and environments
Characteristics of an ideal partner	Top selection priorities	Sense of humor, ability to listen, optimism, maturity and mental health, attitude towards the opposite sex, committed to the relationship

Based on the findings in Table 4, by analyzing the data on the theme of traditional family roles, this main theme included the sub-theme of gender roles and the theme of role expectations. The pattern of almost all participants was based on the egalitarianism and equality pattern. The respondents defined gender roles in married life based on concepts such as freedom and lack of coercion in choosing a role, mutual agreement based on dialogue, respect for the role, and

support, and explained the change in defined roles in the present compared to the past due to changing conditions in society such as economic changes, and used words such as old, stupid, and a thing of the past about defined and traditional roles, and believed that what is important in cohabitation is equality and the priority of humanity over gender roles and stereotypes.

Table 4: List of extracted themes regarding Generation Z's attitude towards traditional family roles

Themes	Sub themes	Codes (Concepts)
Role expectations	Gender roles	Freedom and non-coercion in choosing roles, mutual agreement based on dialogue, respect, support, changing old thinking conditions

Based on the findings in Table 5, by analyzing the data on the main theme of premarital sex, the theme of premarital sex experience was obtained by merging the two sub-themes of experiencing or abstaining from sex and the importance of virginity in marriage. A group of respondents believed that having sex before marriage is more of a decision based on emotion than rationality, pointing out the effects that this type of relationship can have on the individual's decision-making style or his psychological future. Another group of participants also believed that experiencing or not experiencing sex before marriage can only be accepted based on conditions and stated three basic conditions for

experiencing or abstaining from sex before formal marriage: a) The relationship between two people must be serious, long-term, and based on recognition, commitment, intimacy, and security. b) The priority and necessity of sex education, and c) The condition of control and care. Participants' attitudes towards the concept and place of virginity in marriage can be categorized into two distinct perspectives: 1) a female perspective and 2) a male perspective. For the vast majority of women in the study, "virginity was an outdated concept," and they described the concept of virginity and an intact hymen with words such as "stupid," "a sign of backwardness," "unimportant," and "a thing of

the past." However, male participants in the study viewed the concept and importance of virginity in marriage from two different perspectives: a) messages and consequences and b) a situational perspective on virginity. Some participants explained the importance of virginity for girls based on messages from significant others such as parents or teachers, cultural and social consequences (such as social stigma, rejection, or reduced social support), and individual consequences affecting the future of their married life related to the loss of their hymen (such as infertility), and expressed concerns about these consequences and harms. However,

another group of male participants in the study, who had a situational view of the concept and status of virginity in marriage, reasoned and explained it in terms of 1) the type and conditions of the partner's previous relationship and 2) considering the same conditions in experiencing or not experiencing sexual intercourse with their partner. Unlike the previous two groups, who somehow believed in intact virginity at the time of marriage, this group believed that not having a virginity at the time of marriage could be acceptable or not depending on the type of previous relationship and the girl's past conditions.

Table 5: List of extracted themes regarding Generation Z's attitude towards premarital sex

Themes	Sub themes	Codes (Concepts)
Premarital sexual experience	Experience or abstention from sexual intercourse	Based on emotion not rationality, dependent on the quantity and quality of the relationship, the priority and necessity of sexual education, individual choice subject to control and care.
	The importance of virginity in marriage	As an outdated concept, messages from significant others, cultural and social consequences, individual consequences affecting life together, depending on the type and conditions of the partner's previous relationship, equal conditions for men and women in experiencing or not experiencing premarital sex

Based on the findings in Table 6, by analyzing the data on the main theme of parenting, the theme "Deciding to become a parent" emerged from the integration of two sub-themes: prerequisites of parenting and challenges of parenting. The theme "Parenting Model" resulted from the integration of two sub-themes: the corrective model and the inverse model. The theme 'Ideal Parent' was derived from the integration of two sub-themes: mindful parenting and gentle parenting. The participants in the study believed that becoming a parent in the future requires the acquisition of some prerequisites, all of which are necessary for this, and if they have these prerequisites, they will accept the role of parenting and can introduce themselves as a good parent. For some respondents, becoming a parent required accepting limitations and changing their

lifestyle, and the idea of what will change with the arrival of a child played an important role in shaping their attitude towards becoming a parent. The second common concept that participants mentioned as one of the main prerequisites for deciding to become a parent in the future was striving for personal growth and improving mental health. This generation, aware of the challenges associated with the role of parenthood, prioritizes mental health and personal growth in their decision to become a parent. A large group of participants evaluated the decision to become a parent in terms of various aspects such as personal and social freedom and restrictions, as well as economic variables related to it. Some people belonging to this group believed that they were not yet sufficiently prepared and needed to become a parent and would prefer to postpone it

until a later age. They perceived parenthood as a “restriction” and believed that the birth of a child entails restrictions on personal freedoms and the need to accept a lot of responsibility for raising a child. The common strategy of this group can be described with this short phrase: “Not yet, maybe later!” In general, it can be said that this group accepts married life but, under the influence of several factors, refuses or postpones the acquisition of the status of parenthood. Two different patterns were observed in the parenting models of the participants in the study: 1) the corrective model and 2) the reverse model. In the corrective model, while people had great respect for the hardship and effort of their parents in their own past parenting style, they believed that those methods should be modified and changed and based on more freedom, dialogue, and the spirit of the times. However, a group of participants believed that they would adopt a completely reverse model for their future parenting. This group would choose unique parenting styles that fully reflect and are in line with their values and beliefs and allow their children to express their individuality and freedom beyond traditional norms. These

individuals have learned from their childhood experiences to adopt different parenting styles for themselves and, in some cases, use their parents' parenting styles as a guide to “what not to do.” In other words, they put the slogan “I will never raise my children the way my parents raised me” at the forefront of their parenting methods and styles. According to the respondents, the ideal parent is someone who is well aware of the spatial and temporal differences between generations and has sufficient understanding and knowledge in the field of parenting. They also believed that ideal parents are unconditional supporters who are accepting and empathetic without judgment, and children can talk to them easily and without obstacles. For the participants, this type of conversation meant a conversation based on equality, tolerance, and transparency, in which parents have no superiority over their children and both parties express their opinions or reasons without using power. The last important characteristic that was frequently observed in almost all responses of male participants in the study in the “little z” age group was respect for choices and non-coercion.

Table 6: List of extracted themes regarding Generation Z's attitude towards parenthood

Themes	Sub themes	Codes (Concepts)
Deciding to become a parent	Prerequisites of parenting	Accepting limitations and changing lifestyle, Personal growth and improving mental health
	Challenges of parenting	Limitations in individual and social freedoms, Insufficient economic security
Parenting model	Corrective model	More freedom, based on dialogue, In line with the spirit of the times
	Reverse model	In line with one's values and beliefs
Ideal parents	Mindful parenting	Accepting and understanding intergenerational differences, Sufficient understanding and knowledge in the field of parenting
	Gentle parenting	Accepting and empathizing without judgment, able to dialogue, respecting choices and not imposing coercion

Based on the findings in Table 7, by analyzing the data on the main theme of marriage customs, the theme of marriage laws was obtained by merging the two sub-themes of official marriage registration and conditions of the contract, and

the theme of journey towards married life was obtained by merging the three sub-themes of engagement period, wedding ceremony, and wedding dowry. The vast majority of the participants in the study agreed with official

marriage registration and believed that official marriage registration distinguishes it from other types of marriage (such as white marriage) and makes the relationship between two people accepted and recognized in society and the family. A large group of female respondents agreed with the conditions of the contract of marriage and considered these conditions to determine the rights and positions of women in marriage. A small group of female respondents also had a critical attitude towards various conditions included in the contract, such as the right to education, employment, the right to divorce, dowry, etc., and considered it a sign of a kind of slavery and commodification of the female sex, which does not guarantee the quantity and quality of the relationship between men and women in the future. For the male respondents present in the study, the conditions included in the contract were a sign of gender discrimination or a kind of pressure lever from women. The vast majority of participants described the engagement period as a period for gaining more knowledge and information about the individual, his family, and his circle of friends, and a stage for gaining confidence in the continuation of the relationship and overcoming doubts before

entering the stage of official marriage. A group of participants also believed that the engagement period is a “tool for getting to know each other in traditional marriages” and is mostly used for people who have no previous acquaintance with each other. Participants’ perspectives on the meaning, structure, plans, and preferences of wedding ceremony can be categorized into two specific types of attitudes: 1) “minimal attitude” and 2) “my day, not your day attitude.” The main characteristic of the minimal attitude is an intimate, fun, and relaxed atmosphere with selected and happy people away from some traditional elements and values. The second attitude is that this generation prioritizes their own peace and happiness rather than fulfilling the desires of others at the wedding. Two common perspectives were observed among participants regarding the wedding dowry: 1) the collaborative perspective and 2) the critical perspective. In the collaborative perspective, respondents described their views on the wedding dowry with terms such as “agreement-based,” “fifty-fifty,” and “half and half,” and based on the critical perspective, respondents described the wedding dowry with concepts such as “irrational,” “bad custom,” and “misconception.”

Table 7: List of extracted themes regarding Generation Z's attitude towards marriage customs

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes (concepts)
Marriage rules	Official Marriage Registration	Legal, cultural and social legitimacy, A guarantee for the future of the child
	Conditions of the Contract	Determining the rights and positions of women in marriage, A sign of slavery and women being commodities, No guarantee of the durability of marriage, Gender discrimination in favor of women, A lever of pressure from women
Journey to life together	Engagement Period	A stage of further understanding, A stage of gaining confidence and overcoming doubts, A tool for getting to know each other in traditional marriages
	Wedding Ceremony	A small celebration, The presence of family and close friends, Limited cost
	Wedding Dowry	A mutual agreement, half and half, Irrational, a custom and a wrong belief

DISCUSSION

Marriage in the Iranian context and culture is considered a sacred bond between a man and a woman, with the goal of forming a family and continuing the generation. Marriage is also seen as a means of creating emotional, spiritual, and social bonds between complementary partners. The aim of the present study was to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) in various areas related to marriage (meaning-making of marriage, partner selection, traditional family roles, premarital sex, parenthood, and marriage customs). This study examined how various factors such as technology and the spread of social networks, economic issues, and cultural and social norms can affect their attitudes and decisions in these areas. This research also sought to highlight the unique challenges that Generation Z faces in dealing with the institution of marriage, providing valuable insights for psychologists, policymakers, and society at large. Based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of meaning-making of marriage, it can be explained that the meaning of marriage as a binding agreement that dates back centuries has remained unchanged among Generation Z. Despite having individualistic values, this generation also pays attention to the practical and religious benefits of marriage and uses it as a way to facilitate life and gain social approval. Economic problems and fear of divorce are among the main fears and concerns of this generation that prevent them from prioritizing marriage. This generation, observing the world around them and the astonishing statistics of divorce, separation, and infidelity in past and even current generations, considers mental and intellectual health and “therapy” in general as effective ways to deal with these challenges and problems in marriage. Psychological readiness for marriage is an important factor in the decision to marry in this

generation, which can predict future marital satisfaction and reduce the divorce rate in this generation. It seems that by adopting a “slow life” strategy and pursuing individual needs such as financial stability and security, career and professional advancement, Generation Z delays marriage and even having children, and spends more time reaching adulthood. The findings of this part of the study are similar and consistent with the results of some studies in other countries [9, 10, 12, 13, 18].

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of partner selection, it can be said that the traces of Iranian-Islamic tradition and culture are evident in it, and this generation, due to their upbringing and strong emotional ties with the family, care about their parents' opinions when choosing a partner. This phenomenon is more evident in Eastern and Iranian cultures where family values are very important. This generation differs from the previous generation and traditional methods in the criteria for how to meet a partner and choose a spouse, and they preferred modern methods such as getting to know each other well before marriage and sharing in work and educational environments and other public situations such as parks, cinemas and streets to the traditional aspects of marriage. Although the innovation of huge technologies has given Generation Z great access to meeting partners, this generation values real connections. While their online world may include a large number of “friends” or “followers”, it is real relationships that are truly valuable to them. The main priorities of this generation in choosing a future partner reflect this generation's strategy to reduce the risk of divorce or post-marital incompatibility in the future. Also, given the importance of mental health among the participants in the present study and the emphasis on the use of psychological services and premarital counseling, it can be said that awareness of the importance of mental health and

well-being and attention to it have increased significantly among younger generations, which is likely due to a combination of increased awareness, learning about the experiences of others through various media (in recent years we have seen an increase in celebrities and athletes who have normalized the conversation about mental health and openly talked about their struggles with mental disorders), and the expansion of the mental health industry and the reduction of stigma, which has provided more resources for discussing experiences and receiving care in the current era. The results of this part of the study are consistent with the findings of other studies [8, 18].

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of traditional family roles, it can be explained that because this generation grew up in a time of increasing awareness of gender equality and widespread access to social networks, this perspective has deeply influenced their perspective on marriage. This generation's perspective on defined roles in the family is based on an egalitarian and egalitarian model and has moved significantly from a discriminatory perspective to an egalitarian one. The power of the traditional narratives of "men as breadwinners" and "women as housewives," which for many years were considered the main and powerful narratives for our society, has been severely weakened among the new generation and is now being replaced by narratives based on a new and more equal gender contract. These results are consistent with the findings of some studies [19-21] and inconsistent with the results of some other studies [22, 23] that showed that Generation Z believes that men are the head and breadwinner of the family, that men have the first and last say in the family and are the main decision-makers, and that women are responsible for caring for children and managing household chores.

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of premarital sex, it can be said that Generation Z, by adopting an open approach to personal choices, has a different view of the issue of premarital sex and the importance of virginity in marriage, and has distanced itself from external obligations. Instead of following social norms and rules, they make decisions based on their individual priorities and circumstances, and combine this freedom with awareness, recognition, control, and care. Due to their access to more information and awareness, they (especially women belonging to the Big Z age group) are seeking cultural and social changes to move from old and oppressive practices to open and educational discourses. This type of attitude is not only an individual statement, but can also pave the way for a collective change in society that values women beyond physical and traditional indicators. Also, contrary to our cultural and traditional narratives that consider intact hymen an important moral standard and that losing it can have negative consequences for girls, Generation Z youth are seeking to create new conversations and more humane attitudes about virginity and its place in marriage. These changes may gradually lead to deeper cultural changes that move towards accepting diversity in individual experiences and respecting women's rights. These findings are consistent with the results of some other researchers [24-26].

Based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of parenthood, Generation Z has a conscious and rational approach to this area and views parenthood not only as a personal decision and dream but also as a deep social and psychological commitment that requires sacrifice, energy expenditure, acceptance of fundamental changes in lifestyle, financial stability and security, understanding of generational differences, lack of coercion, and psychological readiness. The decision to become a parent for this generation is

not considered a natural duty, but rather a planned act that is regulated based on needs, living standards, and psychological, social, and economic issues. If the findings of this study are reliable, it can be said that their direct experience with mental disorders and receiving medical care will transform them into empathetic, sensitive, and responsive parents who are capable of developing bonding and communication relationships for their families. The results of this theme are consistent with the findings of some researchers in other countries [8, 9, 12].

Finally, based on the results obtained from the analysis of qualitative data on the main theme of marriage customs, it can be said that Generation Z, aware of the significant and long-term consequences of marriage, has a realistic and pragmatic approach to marriage laws (official registration and conditions of the contract), engagement period, wedding ceremony, and purchasing a wedding dowry. Instead of focusing on romantic ideas, they pay special attention to the importance of planning and financial challenges, relationship security, and the need to know their partner better. In general, it can be said that this generation's attitude towards marriage customs is based more on logic and rationality than on emotions and established cultural narratives. The results of this part of the study are consistent with the findings of some studies [23, 27].

Given the results of the present study in the area of traditional family roles, which show that assigned and traditional roles are not accepted, especially by women, it is suggested that a kind of revision and semantic transformation be carried out in the superior documents in the area of general family policies and the content of textbooks and mass media programs that serve as cultural narratives in the area of marriage, so that these narratives are more in harmony with the realities of the young members of our society and the conflicts resulting from the changes in the

process of family modernization are somewhat reduced and we witness more stable marriages. This generation believes that the family will be more stable when and only if it is built on a new and more equal gender contract. Therefore, the decline of the old norm of "man as breadwinner, woman as housewife" may lead our society into a stage of normative confusion and conflicting expectations about relationships and family formation. The results of this study, especially in the area of parenthood, are likely to contribute to a better understanding and knowledge of families, youth education authorities, and politicians and policymakers in the field of family. This information can be presented to the community through national media, educational workshops, and podcasts. These can equip parents with models and education that are consistent with the spirit of the times, reduce the gap between generations, and consequently help reduce conflicts between parents and children belonging to this generation. Also, given the importance of psychological and economic challenges and variables that were abundantly observed in the participants' narratives in various areas of marriage, educational programs and mental health support services that address financial planning and respond to the psychological needs of this generation can equip Generation Z with the necessary tools to manage these complex challenges, which will likely lead to easier marriage in this generation.

Like any other study, the present study also had limitations. Similar to any study with a qualitative nature, the findings of the present study will remain at the exploratory level and there are clear limitations in terms of the generalizability of these findings and general conclusions in this study. Also, the findings of the present study were obtained based on a small-scale study and a specific geographical area. All participants were born and lived in Tehran or had lived in this city for many years. Given the wide cultural diversity

in our country, this small sample is very likely to have differences from individuals belonging to Generation Z in other urban and rural areas. Therefore, the general themes revealed in this study need to be examined in more depth in other parts of our country in future studies. Also, one of the most important limitations of this study was the limitation related to the presence of the researcher or the researcher's effect. The responses heard, interpreted, and analyzed by the researcher in group interviews will likely be heard, interpreted, and analyzed differently by another researcher. It is therefore fair to say that the focused conversations were not only influenced by the phenomenon being studied, but also by myself as a researcher.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that Gen Z's approach to marriage is more based on what works best for them personally, rather than adhering to a pre-determined script written by previous generations. For many of this generation, marriage is just one option and may not necessarily be the most appealing. They are more cautious when considering marriage. This caution, likely influenced by their youth, the uncertainties and economic, social and cultural upheavals of today's world, and exposure to a vast amount of digital content and news about countless stories of failed relationships, instability in marriages and the complexities of married life, suggests that Gen Z is approaching the prospect of starting a family with a more measured and logical approach rather than an emotional one, reflecting a shift in attitudes towards this stage of life. They believe that marriage should be well planned and should be seen as an act that carries tremendous responsibilities. The current generation wants to be prepared, especially financially and psychologically, to take on this responsibility, and since it takes time to achieve psychological

and economic self-sufficiency, they tend to postpone marriage. It seems that Generation Z will delay marriage and even having children, taking more time to reach adulthood by adopting a strategy of "slow life" and "pursuing individual needs such as financial stability and security, career and professional advancement." Overall, while marriage as a revered and sacred institution has not yet disappeared and is still considered an implicit point of reference that has legal, social, and religious legitimacy among this generation, a "postmodern" trend in marriage is recognizable in this generation—a move away from a single, fixed concept of marriage toward an institution that varies according to individual preferences, and whose meaning, role, and importance are being reconsidered and redefined by Generation Z.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants agreed to participate in the study based on an informed consent form before participating in the focus groups and signed it. Ethical considerations for participating in the study based on this form included full awareness of the research objectives, voluntary participation in the study, full authority of participants to withdraw from the study, a complete description of how they would cooperate in the study (such as costs of participation in the study, duration of interviews, information that would be asked of them), possible benefits of participating in the study, possible harms and complications in the study, and confidentiality of all information related to the study participant (publishing the research results without mentioning the participant's name and characteristics). It should be noted that access to all data in the present study was limited to the research group only and was not shared with any other individual or institution outside the research group.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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