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Portraits of Middle Eastern Gulf female students in Australian universities

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PORTRAITS OF MIDDLE EASTERN GULF FEMALE STUDENTS

IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Susan Delahunty

This thesis is presented for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Faculty of Education and Arts

Edith Cowan University

Perth, Western Australia

July 2013

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the experiences and insights of ten Middle Eastern Gulf women as they cross international borders to study in Australian universities. The literature indicates that international students in Australia establish their identity within the context of their overseas existence. This is particularly important as Muslims may feel they are being placed in a precarious situation due to, more often than not, terrorism being linked to Islam. Also, when Muslim women wear Islamic or traditional attire, the general public tends to look upon them with curiosity. With this in mind, the complex and changed contexts faced by ten Middle Eastern Gulf female post-graduate students are investigated using qualitative research methods. Utilising a grounded theory approach to interpret data and identify themes from two online questionnaires and personal interviews, individual portraits are created to illuminate their experiences. The research findings reveal new knowledge indicating that education is a structured mechanism for the participants, resulting in the creation of a new hybrid self as a key instrument for survival. This enables them to better understand cultural contexts and barriers arising from class, tradition, religion and learning. The participants indicate that a two-way agreement between educators and learners is paramount to a smooth transition into the Australian education system and a positive return to their home communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GLOSSARY

Abayer	Full length dress (usually black in colour) worn by women
Alhamdulilah	Praise be to God
Ardha	Music ritual
Assalamu Alikum	Greeting (Peace be upon you)
Bedouin	Indigenous population, desert dwelling
Bisht	Camel-haired cloak worn by Saudi Arabian men when the weather is cold. Sometimes called a thawb
Burqa	Veil worn by women (predominantly) in Saudi Arabia
Chador	Traditional Iranian dress for women
Dishdasha	A wide white cotton robe. It has a narrow central front opening and long sleeves
Emiratis	National population of the UAE
Ghutra	Large square piece of cotton held in place by a cord coil worn on the head by men in the Gulf
Hijab	A type of head covering
Iftah	First meal at sunset during Ramadan
Insh'allah	God willing
Maghrib	Sunset
Mash'allah	Phrase used to express joy, thankfulness, appreciation and praise
Niqab	Cloth that covers the face worn by Muslim women
Qahfiya	A closefitting cotton cap
Sakinah family	The performance of the duties and rights of both parties within family life
Salat	Prayers
Sahar	Early morning meal before sunrise
Shayler	Scarf worn by women in the Gulf
Subhan'Alla	Often translated as Glorious is God
Wudu	Cleansing ritual in preparation for prayers

Women are not inherently passive or peaceful. We're not inherently anything but human.

Robin Morgan (1941), feminist editor and writer.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Semah's thoughts…

I am a Muslim woman and I want to know if there is an international Islam? This is because I don't know how I should behave in Australia? How can I behave in a modest fashion when everything around me is so free?

Another thing that bothers me is whether I should shake hands with men? I believe Muslims in non-Muslim countries should feel comfortable living their lives according to their religious faith and upbringing, but it can be difficult when taking into consideration the customs and cultural behaviours of others in Australia.

In my culture and religious belief it is forbidden to touch a man if there is a sinister motivation behind the act (or for a man to touch a women without pure intentions), but this can be difficult in Australia. Am I supposed to identify the intention of the handshake beforehand, or do I simply not shake hands at all and run the risk of offending someone?

In the days of Prophet Mohamed, (Peace be upon Him), an old man once asked, "can I kiss my wife while I am fasting?" This man had been married for a long time. However, when another man asked the Prophet the same question, he didn't get the same reply as the first man. You see, the second man was young and newly married and his intentions were not the same as the old man. How do I then recognise the intentions of people in Australia when they behave in a way that I am not used to? Is there a rule I should follow? In other words, is there an International Islam?

Background

One of the most successful cross-cultural business initiatives in Australia is the current internationalisation of Australian universities. Education is now behind only the mining industry, but ahead of tourism, and is currently ranked as the second largest export business in the country (Larkins, 2008). In May 2012, government statistics indicated that there were 378,535 international students in the country (AEI, 2012). Furthermore, post-graduate

international research enrolments have increased in number over other post-graduate involvement and the English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) are now ranked third for enrolments (AEI, 2012).

This demand has seen the international education sector undergo significant changes to accommodate large student numbers across more than 1200 providers, including school vocational and higher education (Council for Australian Governments, 2010). In fact, the Commonwealth Government of Australia introduced new legislation in July 2012 under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 to support the worth and integrity of the international education sector and to enhance the level of service provided. A number of amendments to the Act were sanctioned in March 2012 as part of the Government's second response to the Baird Review and the confirmed changes took place at the beginning of July 2012.

In order to support the quality of international education, the Council for Australia Governments Strategic Plan, the International Students Strategy for Australia (ISSA), 2010-2014 released in October 2012 made enquiries relating to:

… why they chose to study in Australia, level of satisfaction with their education, pastoral and support services, social integration and the general experience of living in Australia. It will also examine international students' future plans and aspirations (Council for Australian Governments, 2012, p. 26).

The ISSA provides information "to better understand international students' experience of living and studying in Australia" (Lawson, 2012, p. 1). Australia Education International (AEI) previously conducted a national survey in 2010 supported by ISSA that revealed students had a high level of satisfaction with their Australian study experiences. Although there were positive outcomes in the AEI (2010) survey, continual themes were highlighted in relation to supporting the social interaction between overseas students across the wider community. In particular, the report recommended the implementation of a supportive service network to assist with the integration of international students during their stay in Australia (Lawson, 2012, p. 2). The topic of social interaction is not a new concept in Australia and the AEI (2010) survey highlighted the necessity to revisit this element for continuous improvement. Although, globally, Australia has a strong reputation for tertiary education, there are still specific issues facing international students that need to be addressed (Council for Australian Governments, 2010).

Many concerns impact the success of international education and the practicalities must include a balance of social, economic and educational needs. The issues relating to student

health, wellbeing and safety have been raised in previous papers and the ISSA strategy further addressed such issues. While the ISSA strategy will undoubtedly assist in the knowledge and improvement of international education, it is believed there is still a call for better support and understanding of specific international student communities. For example, Lu and Short (2012) identified that Chinese students face more than a few challenges in the Australian study context and Wong, (2009) upholds that recent attacks on Indian learners are only part of other problems facing overseas students during their time in Australia.

Gauntlett's (2005) research pertaining to students from the Middle Eastern Gulf investigates why students from this global region have different experiences than other overseas students in Australia. Many Middle Eastern Gulf students receive monetary sponsorships obliging them to achieve outcomes that satisfy sponsors, often their own governments, to whom they may be tied to for many years (Gauntlett, 2005). As Middle Eastern Gulf students have the highest percentage of students using ELICOS study pathways (AEI, 2012), it becomes central to obtain an understanding as to why they sometimes seem to be different from other international students (Gauntlett, 2005).

The wellbeing of students is paramount, especially during the transitional stage of their Australian educational journey because they need to be placed in a good position to achieve the learning outcomes. Similarly, Semah's thoughts, depicted at the onset of this chapter, require some answers and many Muslim women have voiced they are unsure how to behave due to the mainstream social and religious divides in Australia (Australia Deliberates Report, 2007). Research conducted by Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2007) identify loneliness as one of the symptoms of Middle Eastern Gulf students.

By adding to the knowledge of previous scholars, who have conducted research with Muslim women and Middle Eastern Gulf students (Malik & Courtney, 2011; Harrold, 2009; Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008; Mellor, 2007; Gallant, 2006; Barise, 2004) this particular research builds upon the necessity they report to investigate ongoing developments. Also, as more female Middle Eastern Gulf students are now choosing to study in Australia, their voices in discourses that highlight their experiences and thoughts should be heard and this thesis contributes to the focus of their dialogue.

Islam is a fundamental part in the lives of women from the Middle Eastern Gulf because it forms the basis of their cultural conduct and influences their behaviour and commitment towards others (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2005). This is particularly relevant in Australia where many Middle Eastern Gulf females, like Semah, who introduced the thesis, attend an array of educational institutions (ABS, 2011), and their actions and responses may have a bearing on

how they embrace the educational and social factors facing them.

It is central to record the dialogue of Middle Eastern Gulf women commenting in hindsight to the many major global events and political changes that may have affected the reputation of their national and religious convictions. This is particularly relevant with the increasing Islamist movements prevailing in support of unjust political actions around the globe towards Muslims women (Goodwin, 2006, p. 352). Women from many parts of the Muslim world including Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were interviewed and Goodwin (2006) notes that:

> Advancements made by Muslim women in recent years are being overturned either by fundamentalist movements or by the ruling regimes themselves, which are fearful of the Islamist threat to their power (Goodwin, 2006, p. 352).

In order to provide an overview of the Muslim religious faith, Goodwin (2006) writes that every living circumstance is trusted and contained within the writings of the Qur'an, which dictates the manner in which many women live their lives. There are also separate Hadiths that report the actual events of the Prophet Mohamed and from these recordings, the Islamic code of conduct has been constructed (Goodwin, 2006).

Although it is important for all Muslims to read the Qur'an in its entirety in the original Arabic verse to prevent any misunderstands through translation, Goodwin (2006) reports many cultures interpret these readings differently (Goodwin, 2006, p. 29), which results in distinctive expectations of women. This is particularly relevant because when women from the Gulf region of the Middle East are exposed to non-Muslim social environments, others who have little understanding of their traditional attire, religious and cultural values sometimes judge them unfairly, probably because of preconceived ideas (Kabir & Evans, 2005; Shavarini, 2003; Mernissi, 2000). In fact, Goodwin (2006) writes:

> … it is ironic that the most outstanding contradictions regarding the inequities suffered by Muslim women is that Mohammad, the founder of Islam, was among the world's greatest reformers on behalf of women (Goodwin, 2006, p. 30).

There is a definite need to increase tolerance and understanding of Middle Eastern Gulf women while they live in Australia because their lives are very different from the western perspective. This could be even more critical due to post 9/11 events that have created certain media hype across the wider Muslim and Arabic communities. In fact, 94% of Australians believe the sensationalisation of media stories assists in "straining the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslims" (Australia Deliberates Report, 2007, p. 5). Middle Eastern Gulf

women deserve the opportunity to express their feelings about their Australian educational experience in this current climate because it will be invaluable when endeavouring to understand their needs from a teaching and learning perspective.

Misconstrued judgements about these women must be addressed in order to provide them with a more appropriate and respectful learning environment during their stay in Australia. It is also worth noting that Middle Eastern fiction writers who present tragic and, arguably, distorted Middle Eastern female stories to the world are also misconstrued (Ware, 2010). Such fictional stories may possibly influence attitudes, expectations and treatment of Middle Eastern Gulf women who study and reside outside of their home countries, particularly when translated from Arabic. Rajaa Al-Sanea, a Saudi Arabian Muslim is one fictional female writer who highlights tragic social circumstances of women from the Middle Eastern Gulf through her tales of love and despair.

Girls of Riyadh (2004), is one attempt of Rajaa Al-Sanea to communicate a pathway of love and happiness amid Islamic traditions, through the tale of four women in their life journey. Even though this work is fictitious, Rajaa Al-Sanea received death threats for highlighting several issues that were deemed too close to real life when the book was first published. The issues highlighted in the novel, coupled with her individualistic overseas lifestyle prompted many debates throughout the conservative divisions of the Saudi Arabian society. Much of the world's press and many Muslim groups across Saudi Arabia expressed views. One report claimed that although Rajaa Al-Sanea portrays herself as having western ideas by wearing designer clothes and driving fast cars, she also includes real female experiences of life in the Middle Eastern Gulf region and has highlighted their lifestyle and values (Sunday Times, July 8th, 2007). The more liberal-minded communities welcomed Rajaa Al-Sanea's literary work and promoted her as a role model for Middle Eastern Gulf women. An interview with the Khaleej Times in 2009 highlights her viewpoint is clearly stated:

> You cannot understand a whole society based on one book. Unfortunately it is one among a handful of books that has been translated into foreign languages and that puts a lot of pressure on me as an author.
>
> Yet, I believe that the best way to bridge a cultural gap and reduce stereotypes that the West have about Arabs and vice-versa is through books, because they are honest, they are written by one individual, so it does not involve politics.
>
> (Khaleej Times, March 27th, 2009).

Whether or not stories presented to the world are fictitious, there is still a stereotypical notion of Muslim women perceiving oppression that highlights a lack of liberty across many

social structures. In this regard, many women are looked upon with curiosity throughout the western world (Shavarini, 2003), which emphasises the fact that Muslim women deserve more attention in relation to their traditional behaviour and religious beliefs. In fact, to understand the Islamic world, it is imperative to obtain a deeper understanding of the way women are perceived (Goodwin, 2005, p. 28).

The Middle Eastern Gulf nations

The Middle Eastern or Arab Gulf nations are situated on the western shore of the Arabian Gulf except for Kuwait, which lies between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Across the Gulf Sea is Iran, and, for many, the Arabic Gulf is also known as the Persian Gulf (Torstrick & Faier, 2009). The Geert Hofstede (2001) analysis report for the Middle Eastern Gulf region highlights that the Muslim faith is highly significant and in general there is a distinctive power in relation to religious beliefs.

Historically, from the 15th to the 19th century, the Arab part of the globe was dominated by the Ottoman Empire, but after World War I, the Middle Eastern region became divided between the European victors. This new divide brought different governing systems and laws and certain Arab countries went under European control (Abudabbeh, 2005). In the early 1930s, the discovery of oil in much of the Middle East created major commercial differences. Today, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait have the highest oil reserves in the world (Goodwin, 2006, p. 18) and the rise of the Islamic faith is playing an important role in manipulating this particular area (Cordesman, 2003).

The Arabic Gulf states are now important partners in many business ventures. Goodwin (2006) writes that in recent times, Gulf Arab business ventures have invested over $1 billion in Sax Fifth Avenue and have a major investment in the Gucci business. Coupled with this, Gulf Arabs have purchased Hilton hotels and have spent $2.5 billion in the purchase of an American oil drilling company. In recent times, the Saudi royal family bought $590 million worth of stock in Citibank and has interests in Texaco's refineries (Goodwin, 2006, p. 20). The growing Kuwaiti business portfolio includes:

> … $100 million in AT&T, $52 million in Dow Chemicals and $43 million in Atlantic Richfield (Goodwin, 2006, p. 22).

Abudabbeh (2005) writes that over the last twenty years, the Arabic world has experienced the recurrence of fundamental Islamist movements and the 1991 Gulf war

amplified Muslim recognition and alienation around the globe. The events of September 11th, 2001 and subsequent attacks of terrorism are viewed as the darkest period of Arabic history (Abudabbeh, 2005, p. 424). In 2011, the Arab Spring highlighted behaviours and traditional customs of Arabs around the world and the controversial 2012 movie depicting the Prophet Mohamed further stirred global anger and violence among nations. Although not all Arabs are Muslim, many Arabs have an undeniably Islamic influence on the way they conduct their lives (Abudabbeh, 2005). The Muslim family is sacrosanct and forms the structure of the Muslim existence:

> If the Qur'an is the soul of Islam, then the family can be described as the body (Abudabbeh, 2005, p. 425).

The Muslim culture is very strong and family members have specific duties by following strict guidelines regarding how to behave in an Islamic tradition:

> Whatever befalls one member of the family can bring either honor or shame to the whole family. Family dynamics involve a great deal of self-sacrifice and also provide satisfaction based on the happiness of others or by vicarious living through others (Abudabbeh, 2005, p. 427).

As well, marriage is regarded as a family event and not based on an individual's desire for romance (Mernissi, 2000), and endogamy frequently transpires in many countries. In the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait for example, many men receive monetary rewards for taking more than one wife (Goodwin, 2006, p. 17). Actually, many marriages involve the same lineage and traditional Islamic law clearly permits Muslim men to have up to four wives (Abudabbeh, 2005). Under the rules and boundaries of religious and cultural values, young people are instructed how to behave in society in order to protect their families (Abudabbeh, 2005, p. 431).

Middle Eastern Gulf women are trained during their early years to display public behaviour typical of a lady and are taught to understand that cultural rules and links to traditional and religious values are their guide to acceptable behaviour. The term lady is applied to all women of the Middle Eastern Gulf in their everyday life. The intent is that it is a term of acknowledgement and standing that sets them apart and arguable in a respectful space. The lady of the Gulf is sociologically constructed so that her manner, dress, etiquette, place and family are continually being presented to the world's stage with pure refinery and honour is of utmost importance (Abudabbeh, 2005). Yet, not all women throughout the globe are always appropriately defined entirely by the stereotype of lady as it is constructed in the Middle Eastern Gulf. In certain circles and circumstances, the stereotype is not appropriate and the term is not applied. This particular research discovers some of the circumstances and the thinking and

actions that Middle Eastern Gulf ladies display while in Australia. The use and application of the term lady and the associated expectation is just one cultural factor that influences the experience of Middle Eastern Gulf women studying in Australia.

Research relevance

Existing research theorising structures that link culture, gender and living circumstances frame the basis of this research. Giddens (2006) claims that individual agency is the product of social processing and identity is shaped according to varying circumstances that could include family boundaries, traditional confines, cultural lifestyles and religious faith. This research therefore incorporates the exploration of women's socio-cultural discourses across different sets of values. Socio-connecting identities are constructed within discourse and the power of change depends on specific circumstances (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws & Watson, 2002), which confirms that the self is not fixed permanently in any given situation. In this regard, the research considers what anomalies are associated with living outside usual circumstances, particularly as the contributing women are studying at university in a traditional non-Muslim environment and what, if any, changes take place.

These women have a mix of experiences presented through engagement with the western world and so this research seeks to discover the Middle Eastern Gulf female student who becomes embedded in, and exposed into diverse cultural behaviours across Australia. This research examines what social discourse determines as the motivational characteristics of the Muslim female in the Australian learning context and how individuality responds to different circumstances. The women's habitual behavioural practices before they arrive, during their stay and as their journeys come to an end, are all explored and analysed within the structure of this research. Davies (2000) writes that collective statements in a variety of contexts generate specific discourse connecting individual actions and so this research explores through in depth portraits the women's educational journeys and records their desire to tell their stories in a new social and educational environment.

In order to report the women's perceptions and feelings of living in a non-Muslim country, the manner in which they conduct their lives within the social and educational context is examined. As they mature and inhabit a new environment, their fluctuating responses to new circumstances become relevant and are highlighted throughout the research. Significantly, the women provide their own responses to their journey, mechanisms for adapting, managing and maintaining authority in their lives in these new contexts and an evaluation of their journey. By triangulating the information, an analysis of their actions will provoke further thoughts and ideas.

This specific research highlights the rapid social changes taking place across the Gulf region of the Middle East as it investigates how women prepare to secure their place in education and possible subsequent move into the workforce. Currently across the Middle Eastern Gulf, women are being encouraged to be more educated and yet evidence shows little change in traditional family progression has taken place when this occurs (Green & Smith, 2006).

The research exposes conflicts and dilemmas that Middle Eastern Gulf women face when studying abroad, both while away from home and also upon their return to their own countries and identifies the impact on personal lives as women change themselves to be better accepted. New knowledge from this research hopes to encourage other Middle Eastern Gulf women considering studying in an international non-Muslim educational environment and also encourages support for their participation and success. Researchers, educators and western women will also broaden their knowledge from the findings of this research, because such a limited history of formal education in Middle Eastern Gulf families exists and the new knowledge will assist in a better cultural understanding.

This research covers some of the previously unexamined areas associated with cultural diversities and different beliefs and traditions within the family setting, especially in the Middle Eastern context. The participating women are all Muslims and as Islam is followed by approximately 1.4 billion people throughout the globe, (Kabir, 2005), the teachings of this religion is poignant to discovering whether their religious following encourages or determines a specific study pathway and/or explicit attitudes towards educational support in the women's home country or in Australia.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis firstly provides a general analysis and review of literature pertaining to the lives of Muslim women within an educational and social backdrop. As each literary area is presented, more information pertinent to the women's country of origin, cultural upbringing and individual depictions are revealed and explored in detail.

The methodology for respectfully engaging with the participants and enabling their voices and experiences to be revealed and reported is explored and elaborated in Chapter 3. Qualitative methods based on the philosophy of perception (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), further develops grounded theory approaches to the data analysis in order to help understand the social engagement of the contributing women. Also, the compilation of portraiture techniques, termed by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) and subsequently developed by Jessica Hoffman Davis (2003) is

incorporated to develop rich data representations as the compilation of narratives further supports the true meaning uncovered in the social context (Young & Collin, 2004). Portraiture is a key tool for describing individuality within this research and a geographical summary contextualising the women even further are revealed in chapter 4. Chapter 4 is dedicated to providing historical and country facts, statistical data and customary traditions across the regional areas from where the women originate. This information is provided in order to strengthen the value of the research as it builds on elements identified in the conceptual framework.

The following three analysis chapters report and uncover intimate narratives of the contributing women in order to accurately record their personal journeys. Chapter 5 focuses on the social aspects of the women's journey whereas chapter 6 discusses their educational experiences in more detail. The final analysis in Chapter 7 reveals the future journey that lies ahead for the contributing women and in parts describes their lives upon returning to their home country. Chapter 8 reports more sensitive data across a broader perspective revealing how the data connects at varying levels. Finally, a model of change to inform new practices is outlined, which can be further developed for enhanced success for other Middle Eastern Gulf women as international students in Australia. The model describes the transformation of Semah, an exemplar Middle Eastern Gulf lady introduced at the start of this thesis, who first arrives in Australia with limited knowledge, but who leaves a more independent and better-informed, culturally sensitive and global woman.

Finally, the recorded combination of social and cultural experiences leads to a better model for educating Semah. This framework of success clearly depicts the importance of pre-arrival information that builds on the learning experience. By sharing the learning and encouraging teacher acknowledgement, new university conditions can be generated to successfully create new experiences. In sum, this thesis provides a broader insight into the lives of Middle Eastern Gulf women who experience their education in Australia from the beginning of their journey through to its completion.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is designed to explore existing research in relation to women and their educational experiences outside their home countries. The literature aims to provide background knowledge including the exploration of cultural and gender issues that have a bearing on Middle Eastern Gulf women today while understanding their international educational journey. In particular, it examines the transitional period as the women move away from their native language, their culture and their traditional norms and into a specific second language learning environment. The review is organised into fundamental themes, reflecting social structures and components of traditional influences across cultures (Moghadam, 2003).

The review explores the development and role of Middle Eastern Gulf Muslim women in society and the role education offers women by highlighting some of the factors affecting their educational pathways. The topics explore being female and how cultural and social expectations concerning marriage, religion, and family structures have a bearing on how women live and pursue education. The literature delves into early social responses linking gender roles and how individuals connect to community influences. These issues justify exploration, as they are potentially all applicable to the way in which women are seen and accepted globally within society. Some literature are reported here to enable a deeper understanding of the links between different factors in a range of cultures, whilst other literature reports research into different circumstances and how women address analogous issues by investigating similar cultures, albeit within a changeable living and learning environment.

This literature review firstly explores research of gender development and relationships in order to understand how women in cultural and religious environments are accepted across different societies. It covers how these factors connect in global and local circumstances and explores the wellbeing of women as they move away from their cultural comfort zone into a world that is very different that with which they are familiar. Many scholars have documented the relationship between women and culture and Middle Eastern women are discussed with regards to how other cultures respond to them as individuals (Ramadan, 2011).

This literature review, however, investigates the wider perspective of women and how they respond to changing circumstances including higher education in an international setting. Quite deliberately, identifiable topics include Middle Eastern women's social impact, cultural acceptance, educational journey, and their independence while living away from their usual traditional family setting.

The discussion within this chapter is organised to explore the following themes:

- Gender and relationships
- Women, and culture and religion
- Women and education
- Student perceptions
- Global matters and Muslim women
- Marriage and religion
- Summary of themes

Gender and relationships

Giddens, (2006) clarifies the term sex as the:

Anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies.

On the other hand, gender is quite different and refers to females and femininities and males and masculinities (Skelton, 2007). Gender is a matter of biological sex but reaches beyond this in society as prearranged functions are allotted according to the culture in which a person belongs (Lee, 2004). Men and women can be defined according to the term sex, but the term gender has a different meaning that could change during a person's life time.

Gender socialisation on the other hand, shows that a person of a specific sex at birth will develop the gender at a later stage in life through liaison with an assortment of primary and secondary interventions (Giddens, 2006, p. 458). Interestingly, Bornestein and Bear-Bergman (2010) argue that if gender were deconstructed altogether, it would liberate women even more because there would be no gender rules depicting certain behaviours.

Social stratification within individual community groups highlights fluctuating boundaries according to social and ethnic situations (Abbot, Wallace & Tyler, 2005). A prime example is the Indian caste system (Abbot et al, 2005, p. 58). In fact, feminists also contend that sexual variance in itself is a form of stratification because men are given more power, which further causes social separation between the two sexes (Abbot et al, 2005, p. 59).

Patterns of global stratification should also not be ignored because it can involve the mistreatment of others and Abbot et al (2005) particularly write:

… white, western middle-class varieties of feminist theory and practice are increasingly coming to be challenged as ignoring the experiences of many women (Abbot et al, 2005, p. 59).

There are similarities of women with regard to race, class and age regardless of any cultural upbringing. Some of the common traits include "shared experiences of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation (Abbot et al, 2005, p. 59).

Behavioural activities relating to how ten Middle Eastern Gulf women respond to new cultural settings are a significant element in this research. For instance, the participants originate from similar geographical and socio-economical settings. Therefore by exploring the female psyche and identifying fundamental social behaviours outside their society norms whilst they study in Australia, assists in understanding more deeply how these women respond in an array of circumstances. Social stratification relating to female status, feminine behaviour and cultural upbringing within the Australian context will therefore be discussed and challenged.

Friendships

The significance of friendship has been debated for many years (George, 2007; Weller 2007). Men for example, commonly identify themselves with larger friendship groups, whereas women like to create familiar dyadic associations (Pratt & George 2007). Giddens (2006) writes, occupation, life chances and material comforts are identifiable factors connecting individuals to a friendship group within a specific class structure and social standing. An individual might be locked to a particular social class, but as time evolves, this person can also merge into a different class or stratification more fitting to a specific social standing (Giddens, 2006). As a result, individuals have the ability to move away from specific friendship or cultural groups because certain structures within them can connect to different associations.

Giddens (2006, p. 458) suggests that young people will develop social norms and behaviours corresponding with their sex to produce the gender that is culturally acceptable in their immediate environment. This is evident in Pakistan where parental attitudes limit opportunities for girls from an early age (Haque 2002), which must also have a bearing on how women behave in their later years. Similarly, Dancer and Rammohan (2004) claim that educational products of children are affected by the gender composition of the learning environment, which follows through in the latter years. With this mind, Read's (2011) research is particularly relevant to the composition of friendship groups with young children.

The research conducted in England helps understand how young children merge into friendship groups in order to validate social skills, and behaviours exposed in certain circumstances are relevant to individual successes (Kimmel, 2005). Read's (2011) research involves 7 and 8 year olds attending 51 primary schools in the capital and the north east of England. The female responses show certain traits within the larger social setting of attracting men and identifies that young girls aspire to be like other strong females who want to be pretty and physically attractive.

The research incorporates male and female teachers and in order to understand the construction of the popular student, a series of semi-structured interviews are implemented. The ethnic origins of the students are far reaching inasmuch as only ten of the minority ethnic pupils are located in the northeast of England.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of pupil backgrounds (Read, 2011).

Number of pupils	Male Students	Female Students	White	Black	South Asian	Dual Heritage	Chinese	Non classified
307	153	154	207	52	25	5	1	17

When female pupils are posed the question "who would you like to be like when you grow up and why?" (Read, 2011), there is a mixture of responses. Teachers are chosen as the most popular answer with the girls, with close relatives and friends the least popular. Table 2.2 illustrates a range of responses from Read's (2011) research. The mix of responses also shows there are distinct influences in the lives of younger people particularly relating to celebrities.

Table 2.2: Girls' responses - "Who would you like to be when you grow up?" (Read, 2011).

Person chosen by girl primary student	Number
Female teacher	35
Female singer/group	24
Female fictional book/TV character	24
Mum	22
Female relative/family friend	18
Female friends/peers	13

Hopkins (2002) further endorses the celebrity factor in the lives of younger females, as they tend to experiment with a variety of images in order to connect to pop culture. In this

regard, young girls like to dress and mimic the pop celebrity they admire (Hopkins, 2002). There is also evidence of sexual awareness among primary students and although childhood innocence is present, school cultures still emphasise heterosexuality as a key factor (Read, 2011; Valaitis, 2011; Birkett, Espelage & Koenig, 2009; Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2007; Renold, 2000).

Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2007) purport that friendship groups can influence the way individuality is constructed and Read (2011) further states that individuals are more likely to be unpopular if a particular conduct is not accepted in social circles, which can also result in bullying or violence (Read, 2011). The manner in which children conduct themselves influences other children, which further attracts friendship groups and a similar pattern of behaviour continues into adult years (Read, 2011). Hawkes and Egan (2010) state that the traits of individual agency can be explored further through shared cultural ventures. Individual agency is contingent on communally shared experiences and authenticated associations are constructed and reconstructed through copious discourses (Hawkes & Egan, 2010, p. 152). In fact, the exploration as well as the formation of agency leads to an acceptance of sexual activity and changing behavioural patterns in younger lives (Hawkes & Egan, 2010, p. 153).

Research has identified that at a very young age, girls and boys form relationships suitable to their social environment and certain discourses and rules of behaviour apply within in each friendship group or community. Popularity groups are gender orientated in young people. Boys prefer to belong to sporting groups and communities that demonstrate their athleticism (Pratt & George 2005), while girls tend to be less competitive (Merten, 1997). In this way, certain discourses will be socially dominant and have substantial power in the way young people strive to maintain friendship and social status. The correct discourse and rules within friendship communities are important:

> Girls must be pretty but not 'self-absorbed' about their appearance; they must be attractive to boys but not seen to be too sexually 'forward'; they must be noticed and liked by the 'right people' but not a social climber; independent but not a 'loner', and so on (Currie, Kelly an&d Pomerantz, 2007, p. 24).

Culturally identifiable factors are not just limited to being sexually attractive because being nice and kind is equally important for the popular girl (Read, 2011). The rules are rigid and must be followed to avoid social consequences, however little information is known about what happens when these unwritten rules are broken. Kimmel (2005) suggests that adult men and women are encouraged to follow social rules. Women are viewed differently regarding sexuality. Men obtain their masculine status pertaining to their sexual experiences and desires,

but for women, this is completely different. For example:

> … he's a stud who scores; she's a slut who "gives it up". Boys are taught to try to get sex; girls are taught strategies to foil the boys' attempts (Kimmel, 2005, p. 5).

In many global communities, countless women are led to believe that if they are sexually active then the systematic convention of femininity will be violated (Kimmel, 2005, p. 5). Kimmel (2005) argues that men are expected, within the social order, to heighten their sexual liaisons to substantiate their masculinity, which clearly exhibits the double standards in gender viewpoints across the populace. The gay and women's liberation movements have influenced Kimmel's work in the exploration of sexuality across communities. Kimmel has identified how these prominent movements have protected individuals from homophobic violence, intolerance and trepidation across the wider social order.

Australia has drawn attention to matters facing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007). In fact, this attention has highlighted that many same-sex couples have experienced discrimination under the law in the workplace or homophobic violence (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2007).

There are many global views on gender, and major societies acknowledge specific forms, yet when sexuality is sociologically understood, it becomes a non-essential element within society (Valaitis, 2011). Society fails to acknowledge differences in gender sometimes because of political reasons, and it is almost "… chauvinistic even to hint that any innate differences exist between female and male." (Sax, 2007, p.6). In both genders, cultural upbringing and teenage experiences can add to social distance in adulthood. In this regard, society plays a major role in forming social inadequacies (Giddens, 2006).

Significantly, within Australia there are individuals who originate from approximately 22 Middle Eastern and North African countries who have formed communities on the backbone of their strong Arabic heritage (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2001). These individuals also stem from different religious and ethnic groups, and their socioeconomic and educational backgrounds can be quite diverse (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2001). Middle Eastern and North African cultural groups cluster together by their mutual language and culture, clearly shaping their experiences and ideologies within Australia and their common language and culture draws on that link (Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2001). This denotes a possible connection to social distance across the wider community.

The fundamental differences and the formation of friendship groups particularly in the way society responds or behaves can influence an individual's sex, gender and cultural character (Giddens, 2006; Read, 2006; Kimmel, 2005). Social origin and cultural strength is noticeable at all ages, but the main influences are not how a group is globally identified, but rather how individuals identify with each other on a community and cultural level. These are more prominent, particularly how individuals connect with each other.

There is little documented about how Middle Eastern Gulf women feel about their experiences across society in mixed cultural boundaries and this research generates new knowledge pertaining to this matter. This new knowledge is central to understanding the behaviours of Middle Eastern Gulf women because the manner in which individuals act may not always be indicative of their true feelings (Kimmel, 2005). Individuals conduct themselves according to their socio-economic and cultural setting but there is no evidence that this behaviour is inwardly endorsed (Kimmel, 2005). With this in mind, the exploration of women within their cultural and religious boundaries during their stay in Australia deserves more attention.

Women and culture and religion

The stance on women, religion and culture is well documented in social science literature (Iravani, 2011; Hirst, 2009; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Bartowski, 2000). Historically, religious practices within certain cultures have created many struggles for women. In fact, Bartkowski and Read (2003) chiefly focus their research on the social complexities for women who choose to wear the hijab. Australia is home to many culturally diverse individuals with the 2006 Census indicating more than 120 different religious denominations exist (Hirst, 2009). The 2006 Census showed there were:

> … 21,727,158 people in Australia on Census night. There were 219,440 overseas visitors included in the count. Australia's resident count was 21,507,719, an 8.3 per cent increase from 19,855,287 in 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistic, 2006).

While religious culture may have an impact on how women respond to others in social circumstances, there is still some distance in knowledge regarding how Middle Eastern Gulf women respond to their changing circumstances in a western society. The idea that gender and sexual orientation are immovable opposes a conservative religious standpoint on certain functions that are deemed appropriate for both men and women (Valaitis, 2011; Iravani, 2011; Mernissi, 2003).

In Iran, fundamental demands on women are still being ignored because gender discrimination remains evident across certain areas of society. Traditionalists believe women

are swayed by permissive western ideas, which ultimately endangers their religious and cultural beliefs (Iravani, 2011, p. 119). In contrast, women who belong to conservative religious groups are typically more traditional in the functionality of their gender role (Iravani, 2011, Irvine, 2002; Hardacre, 1997). For example, Hardacre (1997) identified that women from conservative Christian and Orthodox Jewish backgrounds have strong bonds with traditional gender and family roles. Christians acknowledge the Bible has behavioural specifications for men and women and more recently, religious fundamentalists are trying to encourage this to be included in government education policies (Warner 2010; Irvine 2002). Similarly, according to the doctrines, Arabs from both Muslim and Christian denominations demonstrate conduct that befits gender roles within an acceptable family interaction (Haddad 2004; Bilge & Aswad 1996). Women's structural conduct and experiences are:

> … not the same as men's and that sexual difference is therefore an important explanatory variable; and at worst women's experiences are deliberately ignored or distorted. Furthermore, the ways in which men subordinate and dominate women are either ignored or seen as natural (Abbot et al, 2005, p. 10).

While Australia is a leader of the world's most diverse nations, which is evident by the rich culture and large-scale immigration, there is a growing need for more culturally aware professionals (Kiely & Main, 2011). So, while there is an acceptance of cultural struggles, Australia still needs to recognise that improvement strategies should be continued to meet the demands of multifarious identities (Branson, 2011). Globally, the Arab culture has a lot of emphasis placed on traditional functions (Mernissi, 2003). The priority is for women to raise children and be an obedient wife, particularly as religious faith tends to underpin solid gender capability (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 1999).

Muslim women are the cultural focus of the family (Anthias, 2000) and their public behaviour is determined by local community rules so that family honour is protected (Afshar, 1989, p. 271). In Australia, Arab and Muslim migrants formulate many community groups comprising large multicultural societies (Hashemi, 2011). In Australia, these community groups with mixed populations from the Middle East and North African countries speak basic linguistic elements of the Arabic language but with different dialects and colloquial usage (Hashemi, 2011).

In 2011, there was an Arab uprising taking place because of the perception of a lack of democracy and dignity in certain countries. Known as the Arab Spring, this series of uprisings promoted to the world an inherent need for political empowerment as the protestors rejected deprivation and authoritarian rule (Hasemi, 2011). Mellor (2007) maintains that by becoming

educated, Muslim women too, will have confidence and be equipped with more skills to protect themselves across society. In certain parts of England, Islamophobia is an issue troubling Muslim communities (Afshar, Aiken & Franks, 2005). This in itself highlights the need for more research to obtain a deeper understanding of the cultures within Muslim and Non-Muslim social circumstances, particularly as a lot of superficial attention is afforded to feminine specific research. In this regard, religio-ethnicity, coined by Mellor (2007), describes the connection between faith and ethnicity with class and social status and assists in identifying cultural and social boundaries (Mellor, 2007, p. 11).

Within the Islamic faith, men will obey God if they modify their sexual desires and similarly, if women obey their husbands, they too will obey God (Mernissi 2000, p. 20). Mernissi (2003) writes that theories relating to sexuality in Islam, frequently repudiates Christian values. Islam's explicit philosophies deliberate a passive approach and women have to be protected from men's sexual conduct. These theoretical onsets are the result of women covering themselves in order to sexually protect men (Mernissi, 2003). Many Muslim women are conscious that covering the body is a modest act because it helps protect men from women and women from men (Williams & Vashi, 2007, p. 281). In recent times, controversial comments relating to Muslim women and sexuality have made headlines:

> If you take out uncovered meat and place it outside on the street, or in the garden or in the park…and the cats come and eat it …whose fault is it, the cats or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem. (The Australian, October 26, 2006).

And:

> … if she was in her room, in her home, in her hijab, no problem would have occurred. (The Australian, October 26, 2006).

Most research relating to sexual behaviors between Middle Eastern men and women have become problematical because virtually all matters pertaining to this topic tend to be concealed (von der Osten-Sacken & Thomas Uwer, 2007). It should be noted also, that many young Muslim women cover their faces and bodies because of social reputation and visibility, and not because of isolating any sexual advances (Williams & Vashi, 2007). The research further reports that Muslim women who choose not to cover themselves believe other Muslim women within their cultural groups will not acknowledge them if they fail to wear the traditional Muslim hijab. William and Vashi's (2007) research highlights that younger women who wear the hijab, do so as a matter of choice and that in a modern society it is becoming the "nexus between two cultures..." (Williams & Vashi, 2007, p. 284). Younger people are also viewing

their religion differently.

> … God considers you a Muslim or a Christian or a Jew based on your blood … you have to make a conscious decision. And so, at first, I think my parents were Muslim by culture… (Williams & Vashi, 2007, p. 284).

Van Santen (2010, p.2) reports there are additional difficulties regarding wearing the veil and women who choose to cover themselves are often seen as homogeneous. However, global opinion represents veiling as the subservience of women within Muslim cultures and is an illustration of the:

> … focal point of the struggles between Islamic and non-Islamic ideologies and between different tendencies within Muslim societies (Van Santen, 2010, p. 3).

Van Santen (2010) continues to report that education for Muslim women is an integral part of the Islamic culture. Ramadan (2006; 2010) promotes religious awareness from all cultures and encourages an even wider global understanding of both Christianity and Islam. Ramadan (2010), is particularly concerned that the labelling of *we* westerners and *they* Muslims motivates cultural differences and states that perceptions of gender, religious faith, education and community philosophies are prominent in today's social debates (Ramadan, 2006; 2010). In fact:

> From Canada to Australia, by way of the United States and Europe, hardly a western society has been spared its own searing questions of "identity", its own "integration" related tensions, and its own debate on the place of Muslims within its confines (Ramadan, 2006).

Sociologists discuss religious faith as a separate issue, but evidence clearly indicates that cultural differences have major influences in how the actual belief is embraced (Beckford, 2003, p16). In order to integrate more into society, Arabic females in the USA have formed pockets of culturally identifiable groups separating them from religious views and ethnicity across the wider community (Suleiman 1999). Since the revolution in Iran, women have also become more confident in their cultural and religious upbringing, and enjoy participating in social and political debates (Iravani, 2011, p. 118). Ramadam (2010; 2006) however, notes that political discourse results in considerable misunderstandings of the Islamic teachings and these influence the way non-Muslims react towards Muslims in general (Ramadan, 2011). Moreover, viewpoints on religion are constantly being discussed and Muslim communities in general are continually asked to review the status of women (Khan, 2000).

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of religious sanctions amid culture, Iravani's

(2011) research of 880 randomly selected women from the city of Esfahan in Iran discusses this topic further. Analysing the results of two questionnaires, the majority of the participating women indicate they support the rules of their religion, and that as Muslims, their religious belief encourages them to participate more in cultural and social activities. Religious affirmation is not arduous in Iran and women express positive opinions to participate in political and social affairs:

> On the whole we could see a see a liberal view of Iranian women on religious sanctions and attitude (Iravani, 2011, p. 121).

The table below highlights some of the responses from women regarding their interpretation of Islam. It is clear that the participants in Iravani's (2011) research are positive in their position as women in an Islamic environment. They are comfortable working outside the family environment and contributing to social and political decision-making.

Table 2.3: Excerpt from Iravani's (2011) research.

Statement of responses	Percentage
Does Islam permit a woman to wear a uniform dress other than veil?	95
Does Islam permit a woman to work outside the family?	96
Does Islam permit a woman to take independent decision?	90
Does Islam permit a woman to take part in political and other social institutions?	70

Various research projects have examined the connection of religious issues and gender roles with researchers particularly demonstrating a shift in Judeo-Christian thinking showing strong connections between fundamentalism and gender as the more prominent factors (Beyer & Beaman, 2007; Bartkowski & Read, 2003). Incorporating a qualitative research approach to investigate aspects of feminism and religion in the lives of Muslim and Christian women, Ali, Mahmood, Joy, Hudson and Leathers, (2008) identify that culture differentiates religious interpretation. Interestingly, Muslim women promote that their religion supports their feminist principles across complex topics such as gender roles and culture, whereas Christian women report they do not have a connection to feminism as much as Muslim women (Ali et al, 2008).

Female Goddess

Carol Christ's (1979) keynote address at the University of Santa Cruz in California explores why women need the Goddess, and indicates an alternative option. This presentation encourages the expansion of the feminist spirituality and Goddess religion. Christ outlines that the Goddess is an important symbol for women as opposed to the Father in Heaven or his

church on earth. Women find themselves in a man's world (Griffith, 1997; Lawless, 1983), which determines how they fit into most social circumstances. This is particularly relevant when considering the working class environment where men control top leadership positions (Williams & Vashi, 2007).

Utilising anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of religion, Christ bases her argument on the male representation and imagery of divinity and highlights that this has a negative impact on women in general, which has social and political implications (Aune, Sharma, & Vincett 2008). Christ writes:

> Religious symbol systems that focus around exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent. (Christ, 1979, p. 275).

Furthermore, women encounter complex challenges connecting various philosophies relating to "… religion and secularization" (Aune et al, p.15). Four reasons why the modern woman should have the representation of the Goddess as her forceful and reachable religious icon are discussed. The Goddess, as a female symbol, justifies women's power, mind and traditional birthright connecting all women together in order to provide independence away from the male world (Christ, 1979).

Christ (1979) argues that women are not fully able to function daily or relate to the world of religion because the perspective of men is the sole design of these worlds, therefore prohibiting this to take place. Christ (1979) substantiates that the spiritual world is embodied and regulated by men's institutions. With this in mind, women and cultural values can sometimes provide a message to others that may not necessarily be as clear as intended. Iolana and Hope (2011) found that the debate among various religio-cultural groups is now widening to include the concept of feminine divinity.

Even across monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Islam and Christianity, the idea of the sacred female is upheld:

> Hindu Skaktism and their worship of Devi as the Divine Mother and Ultimate Godhead and the Christian devotees to the Mother of God imaged as the Virgin Mary, the Black Madonna, and Our Lady of Guadalupe are well known (Iolana & Hope, 2011, p.8).

Although many western beliefs focus on the Divine Masculine, in recent decades, scholars have been researching the mystics of the ignored feminine features in relation to

religion and divinity. Now, the exploration of the hidden history of women in the religious context is being researched (Christ, 2002).

More recently, *thealogy* scholars, rather than theology scholars, are drawing attention to the manner in which women relate to the Divine Female spirit as they explore:

> … beliefs, wisdom, embodied practices, question, and values as they relate to any religious or spiritual practice, … that upholds the principle of an ontological Sacred Feminine (Iolana & Hope, 2011, p. 9).

Thealogy is derived from the word Thea, meaning Goddess in Koine Greek, plus the word logos meaning discourse (Iolana & Hope, 2011, p.9). Thealogy scholars associate themselves with new trends of feminist ideologies associated with the New Age Goddess and engages in meaningul private research that expands on the Divine woman. In thealogy, comparisons are made across religious beliefs including the resacrilisation of women and the identification that the spirit has a female aspect. Iolana and Hope (2011) argue that there are no particular philosophies or metaphysical conventions that highlight the divinity of women, but that across all religions the vantage areas are put into perspective to reveal the truth about women in a spiritual sense. In fact, "women's rights are oft a matter of women's rites" (Stone, 1979 cited in Iolana & Hope, 2011 p. 10) and theologists are now being asked to offer dialogue around these discussion points.

The behaviour of the Greek Goddess Demeter was not afraid to show her anger and distrust at men when Zeus and Hades stole her daughter. In her anger, Demeter froze the earth and killed all living beings capable of worshiping any male God and she was comfortable displaying her true feelings of anger and distrust (Luzyet, 2011, p. 19).

In fact, women today are often viewed negatively when they display behaviour similar to Demeter:

> Demeter was not afraid to be not "nice" or look "mad" to anyone divine and mortal, which women are only too often called in western culture when they dare to express their rage and grief (Luzyet, 2011, p 19).

And:

> Demeter refused to join the plan of the fate creator Zeus; she was strong enough to be the fate creator herself for her child (Luzyet, 2011, p. 19).

Mary the Virgin Mother showed a different perspective when God took her son. Mary accepted her son's death by respecting it was God's plan (Luzyet, 2011, p.19). In fact, Mary displayed a softer and more gracious female role that is expected across many cultural and religious communities today and in particular, where women follow the male divine plan. Although Demeter and Mary exhibited the same female vivaciousness when losing a child, they did so from changeable historical and social backdrops and show the different strengths of the woman's spirit.

The Virgin Mary has taken on many forms in religious beliefs and in the Lithuanian culture, She is seen in some religious circles as the woman who has replaced the pagan Goddess:

> The first time, in 1445, Mary appeared in Simonys (as small village in Lithuania) drawing the dawin of Christianity. Three children got lost in a forest while picking mushrooms. Scared, they started praying, and suddenly, they saw a vivid light over a pine tree. Staring in the light they saw an extemely beautiful Lady picking fruit from the pine tree. The children became more frightened; they thought that by walking about the forest they angered the Goddess of the Holy Forest, and she wants to punish them because before no human being was allowed to enter this forest. But the Lady said "Do not be afraid. This place has been sacred for ages and such it will remain. My name is The Mother of Mercy. Build a house of prayer in this place, and I will bless the whole country (Luzyte, 2011, p. 25).

In countless European countries there are many legends involving Mary as a spiritual being, including themes with Christian angels and saints. Many of these tales refer to Mary requesting a place of worship in her name or building trust in her, but never indicating a female God in the religion of Mary (Luzyte, 2001, p. 26). A particular legend from Lithuania describes an old woman who lives and runs with wolves. This story signifies that female beings can survive life at all odds because their special inner spiritual powers provides them with the capability to face any barriers and enjoy everything around them:

> This gathering-breathing-loving-singing ritual of reconnection with the Self, and of restoration of the instinctual female power and knowledge parallels … the necessity for a women to keep her soul inside herself… (Luzyte, 2011, p. 27).

The breath and soul are commonly used to describe the spiritual female. All women have the power to transform into their original state through breathing and singing and when doing so, are able to take authority over their own lives and thus connect to the deepest knowledge of oneself and one's instincts (Luzytes, 2011, p. 28). Women often take deep breaths to relax, for example in childbirth or when feeling anxious, because this helps reconect to one's self, thus

allowing a healing power from the spirit to take place and "they find peace and innner strength as well as answers to one's life problems" (Luzytes, 2011, p. 9).

The Virgin Mary is a more sacred component outside of the traditional Christian role who assists women in reflecting and analysing themselves. Stone (2011) suggests that the image of the Goddess should not be adored as a being or any specific woman, but as the female principle controlling the qualities of nurturing and nourishing the continuation of life (Stone, 2011, p. 44). Even today, the feminine divine is often viewed in a negative stance:

> It seems that it's always God who performs all the good miracles. But when a power line goes down in a snow storm or hurricane, or the roof caves in, that's an act of Mother Nature. Really? She's almost always portrayed in that sort of negative way. But Mother Nature is all. Mother Nature is the essence of life and it is this idea that we must really begin to understand in terms of time and in terms of space (Stone, 2011, p. 43).

Stone (2001) further argues that automatic assumptions in religion should be challenged more, as there are many multiplicities in both image and pracices of Goddess worship.

Women and education

There has recently been an advancement of women in education within the western world and individuals from Arabic and Islamic communities across genders are beginning to move to the forefront (Bartkowski & Read, 2003). In historical Iran, female education was only desirable when it coincided with Islamic cultures (Shavarini, 2003, p. 42), however of late, Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar (2002) claim that education is the key to providing women with more control over their lives. Similarly, as more women are educated, democracy in a country will also be promoted because it increases the efficiency of governments (Hashmi, 2009). Accordingly, Annan (2004) suggests that an empowered electorate woman will ultimately be the most cost effective and writes, "… there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls" (Annan, 2004).

Female students in England and the UAE

Mellor's (2007) research discusses the "complexity, ambiguity and fluidity of identity categories" relating to Muslim and non-Muslim women attending university in England (Mellor, 2007, p.14). Gallant (2006) on the other hand, focuses her research on Muslim women solely in the UAE and concentrates on discourse within a changing society across different

circumstances. The two researches have a bearing on this thesis, specifically in regards to Muslim women obtaining their education within a mixed cultural setting.

Mellor (2007) targets the broader religio-ethnic origins within three cities in the north of England and includes interviews and focus groups with Muslim and non-Muslim women. The attention on the broad range of first generation British white women from lower socio-economic classes who attend university is explored in an attempt to identify what challenges are evident. Gallant (2006), on the other hand, focuses her research solely on five Emirate female students who attend the same university, and who originate from the same socio-economic environment.

Gallant's (2006) selection of participants is based solely on "the perception of the various faculty members of their willingness to speak openly" (Gallant, 2006, p. 56). Defining factors across the two research papers clearly indicate attempts to project the voices of Muslim women, which also has a close connection to this particular research. Mellor (2007) records her difficult experiences when recruiting participants from the Muslim community and notes this was the most disconcerting part of the study. Gallant highlights no difficulties, perhaps due to the fact that she worked at the same university as her participants. Although there are varied strategies to generate interest to prospective research participants, the researcher must be comfortable with the chosen method in order to determine the desired results (Hall, 2004).

Mellor (2007) recruits Muslim and non-Muslim women from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, ranging from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Afro-Caribbean, Black British and African and incorporates a number of recruitment strategies as shown in table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Mellor's recruitment strategy (2007).

Recruitment Strategy	Number of students
Use of flyers	1
Message on Friends Reunited	9
Incorporating a questionnaire at FEC	3
The snowballing technique	11
Creation posters	2
Notification at the university society	1

Mellor's (2007) research defines that religious faith was the prominent feature in her study but also notes that although ethnicity is equally important for Muslim women, this tends to take a "back seat" under their social living conditions in England (Mellor, 2007, p. 202). Mellor further reports that possible global events at the time of her research may have had a bearing on some of the outcomes. These events include terrorist bombings in England by

Muslim extremists.

Although Mellor (2007) identifies that the two participant groups of Muslim and non-Muslim women reside in the same communities and study at the same universities, they in fact, live parallel lives. This is also consistent with Wakeling's (2007) research in that communities in England produce ethnic sectors within its white dominant society. Individuals in the UK have strong perceptions of class and their experiences of others with few privileges in life are not always understood or acknowledged (Mellor, 2007). This lack of understanding has been creating divisions of class within pockets of cultural communities, of which many Muslim women belong. With this in mind, Mellor (2007, p. 202) believes there are scholars who do not take into consideration the ethnicity and religious faith of participants when conducting sociological research. Muslim women who are educated at university level tend to experience discrimination from middle class sectors during their studies as well as in the workplace because of ignorant views of cultural and religious practices (Mellor, 2007).

Although Gallant's (2006) research was conducted in the Middle East, there are some similarities to Mellor's (2007) research inasmuch as the family and community values are prominent across many factors. Family connections and traditions within the Muslim community can determine opinions and divides across countless areas relating to education, as well as community values. Some of the case studies in Gallant's (2006) research indicate mixed reactions to some of the discourse addressed within the family setting and racial discrimination is also evident across society. One participant reports she resigned from her workplace because of discriminatory behaviour. In this regard, Gallant (2006) notes that some of the racial issues are better addressed by "management support and personal interaction" (Gallant, 2006, p. 174).

Gallant's (2006) case study of five Emirati University educated women focuses on how responses to an array of discourse within the workplace and across the family circle are accepted. This ethnographic study posed some political challenges to the researcher within the Arabic and Islamic cultural environment because in the Middle East, it is difficult to write about gender issues from a white western perspective (Gallant, 2006, p. 57). Gallant (2006) however, was able to achieve a sense of trustworthiness with her participants in order to access female students. This was accomplished by incorporating well thought through structured and semi structured interview questions allowing for effective expression in order to understand the individuals involved (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Gallant's (2006) research was deemed a success even though it only captures a small group of tertiary students within a similar cultural setting because the information collated is

appropriately connected across different parameters in order for the analysis to be developed. Working as an educator at the Dubai Women's College, Gallant successfully obtains information using an ethnographical approach, which allows participants to express their experiences and opinions on matters pertaining to religion and women's issues in a comfortable environment. Cultural issues are highlighted as one of the key factors, particularly when Muslim women are required to make decisions as this can have an effect not only the women themselves but also their families.

There is a clear link with the primary and sub-culture when religious beliefs connect to social responses and the family circle (Gay, Ellison, & Powers, 1996). This is also an important element that influences this particular research of Middle Eastern Gulf women undertaking studies in Australia. Both researches conducted by Mellor (2007) and Gallant (2006) explores women during and after their educational journeys. Both discuss the origins of the women, their struggles and their personal ambition and expectations. Mellor (2007) in particular queries the women's future after their exposure to different living circumstances whilst studying in England and suggests their mobility needs to be further theorised.

Barise (2004) also conducts research of Middle Eastern Gulf women studying at Zayed University in Dubai in order to identify cultural variables that affect students' motivation to learn. All the participants are Muslim and the research explores what effects, if any, are evident when women adapt to university life. The majority of students in Barise's (2004) research, that involves twelve students from two different university faculties have no knowledge or experience with western teachers or methods of instruction (Barise, 2004, p. 5). To provide some background, at the time of the research, Zayed University only selected Emirati female students who had the highest grades because English is the language of instruction. In the UAE, government schools segregate male and female students and so in general, female students have limited contact with men outside of their own family.

Utilising Keller's ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction) model for motivation, the emerging positive factors indicate that students enjoy learning through technology, participating in extracurricular activities and learning about real life that concur with their general culture or personal interests (Barise, 2004, p. 5). This further endorses the research undertaken by Harrold (2005), whereby students relate better to familiar topics in the learning environment. In Barise's (2004) research, the negative responses show students struggle with understanding certain textbooks and experience difficulties due to a lack of familiarity with the English language and culture.

The negative elements provide crucial knowledge for educators of Middle Eastern Gulf women, particularly from a non-cultural perspective and in the case of Zayed University, new strategies were implemented at the completion of Barise's (2004) research to assist students and teaching staff to work better together. This is because at the time of the research, students felt there were difficulties relating to their teachers on many levels. For example, at the onset, student interpersonal skills indicated negative cultural experiences, which affect the women's motivation to learn. These experiences included:

> … some male instructors being too close to or touching students, some instructors holding bias against students (that students are lazy, etc.), dressing inappropriately (tight or short dress), and limited instructor-student communication (mainly due to language limitations) (Barise, 2004, p. 6).

After Zayed University implemented new strategies, students stated a better tolerance and understanding of western teaching methodologies and felt more relaxed studying in an independent setting. Furthermore, students reported they no longer felt isolated from their educators (Barise, 2004). The most significant finding however, was the cross-cultural aspect between students and educators and the University is continuing to re-evaluate its methods in order to improve student and faculty orientation (Barise, 2004).

Similar to Gallant's (2006) research, Barise (2004) studies the same culture of Emirate female students based in Dubai, albeit from a different university. The outcomes are striking inasmuch as both papers clearly identify Middle Eastern Gulf women want to be heard but are not always comfortable voicing their opinions due to an array of cultural and religious factors that tend to block this from happening.

Female students in Pakistan

Continuing to explore women's education, Hasmi (2009) investigates female education in rural Pakistan in an attempt to identify what social, family and cultural determinants are evident in the Punjab region. This research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to investigate 750 female students. Issues such as illiteracy within the family and poverty are major factors that highlight the research in terms of gender bias towards female education. Distance from the educational institution is also significant and has a negative effect on female students. However, higher income families and better-educated parents have more options that enable them to provide innovation to their female family members. It is not surprising, the lower caste Pakistani families endure the highest gender bias and major negative effects are reported (Hasmi, 2009).

Today, women are accepted into education on a global level. However, education in Pakistan is a complex but evolving one (Hasmi, 2009; Saeed 2007; Khalid & Khan, 2006). The socio-cultural principles influencing women's place in the Pakistan society (Klein & Nestvogel, 1992) is fundamentally male-dominated and the parental influence is a major determinant (Holmes, 1999). Because of the cultural stance of the country, men usually have positions of power and women are unfavorable in many aspects of education and society (Hasmi, 2009).

Research by Malik and Courtney (2010) across ten public universities in Pakistan explore whether education of women increases their level of empowerment. A survey instrument utilising a five-point Likert scale with responses of 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree', and 'strongly agree' involve thematically designed questions that relate to gender parity. The responses from the contributing 1290 female students and 290 faculty members show that financial independence and better acceptance within society and the family structure are the main benefits to university level education.

Following the administering of the questionnaire, semi structured interviews follow with a shortlist of participants comprising of 10 students and 10 faculty members. Malik and Courtney's (2010) research show that women are unable to advance to their full potential regardless of their education because their sense of self-worth is low. This is also indicative of the research conducted in England by Hasmi (2009) in which culture is a factor. Both researches indicate there are barriers for women, thus leading to a further call for the empowerment of Muslim women.

The Australian experience

In Rizvi's (2005) research, Chinese and Indian university students report changes after studying in Australia. At university in Melbourne a total of 41 students are interviewed and after their graduation, a different group of 38 participants residing in China and India also provide their Australian study experiences. The collective narratives from India, China and Australia show there is an acknowledgement of individual identity shifts. Rizvi's (2005) research incorporates theoretical outcomes from similar studies in order to explore various cultural trends within a transnational context, identifying that the movement of people across many borders provides access to newer cultural practices. Rizvi (2000) writes, "…cultural other is no longer remote, exotic, or mystical and beyond our reach" (Rizvi, 2000, p. 3).

Many Australian students also experience offshore university life. In this context, Chapman & Pyvis (2004) focus their research on twinning programmes offered in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia and discuss multi-dimensional experiences, encompassing varying cultures across the wider community. The authors propose that culture shock in transnational education should not be ignored. With this in mind, Australian universities should consider:

> …cross-cultural training that always focuses on the customs and mores of the country in which a programme is located may not 'acclimatise' academics from Australian universities to the *mix* of beliefs, values, backgrounds and orientations they are likely to encounter (Chapman and Pyvis, 2004, p.39)

International students in Australia cultivate a distinct form of identity deriving from their mobile existence and immersion into different cultural traditions (Rizvi, 2005). Students do not view themselves as migrants, nor travellers and although some have desires to be permanent residents, they are still in transit and therefore unable to fully connect to the society they live in. Their original culture becomes the lesser dominant feature:

> In Australia, international students inevitably develop their identity within the context of mobility (Rizvi, 2005, p. 4).

Likewise, "they consider themselves to occupy an entirely different space" (Rizvi, 2005, p. 4) and in doing so, a developing culture is temporarily formed linking them to a specific place with assembling ethnicity and social groupings:

> Their 'cultures' can be expected to 'travel', developing multiple attachments, accommodating but also resisting some of the norms and claims of national states (Both of Australia and the countries from which they come from). (Rizvi, 2005, p. 4).

With this in mind, students from the first group of 41 participants believe many of their cultural interactions whilst living in Australia remain consistent with their own. However, in contrast, the second group of interviewees identifies a more enhanced global understanding. One student describes himself as:

> …an inter-cultural inter-locuter between India and Australia, and in the longer term, Europe and America (Rizvi, 2005. p. 5).

Rizvi's (2005) research suggests international students have a more cosmopolitan outlook on life based on their transient living experiences within an international education environment that is coupled with their cultural origins. Whilst an investment in international education provides broader global cosmopolitan viewpoints, changes in social and cultural identities show

there are issues relating to ethics and politics that need more unity. With this in mind, the experiences of women who choose to study in Australia are explored further in the following section.

In order to understand students from social and economic disadvantaged areas, Pearce, Down and Moore, (2008) identify conditions that assist students to complete their studies at Australian universities. Conscious of the excusatory nature of educational research labeling working class students as disadvantaged or at risk, Pearce, Down and Moore (2008) encourage student voices to be heard throughout their study. The research involves a group of students based at a rural university campus in Western Australia who are asked to relay their experience through storytelling. The purpose of this strategy is to identify what, if any, issues relating to class and identity are prominent in their lives. A less crude outline of student experiences is achieved when incorporating the practice of observing language and behaviour during the process of storytelling (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008). Utilising an ethnographic approach, the researchers familarise themselves with the students and a variety of observations are undertaken as they listen to individual stories.

Analysing the stories, it clearly shows aspects of cultural, social and pedagogical biases and within the education system this demonstrates that behaviour can legitimise the governing principles of learning institutions (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008, p. 262). Regardless of this fact, the students still report a sense of achievement. Students do not feel a need to assimilate into a new middle class environment, but rather embrace their own identity and class structure as a form of empowerment to encourage and motivate others of a similar culture (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008, p. 264). The research indicates that students reposition themselves in a manner that aids the challenges of university education and these become parallel to their own identity.

Mature university students, or those who articulate to university from TAFE colleges are better able to control their learning because they are more stable in their community life (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008). While taking control of one's learning is an essential factor in learning success, so too are the support structures that institutions put into place to facilitate success. In this regard, a review of understanding the cultural processes across social classes in the educational arena needs to be reviewed because more university students enter from different pathways (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008, p. 268). Mellor (2007) and Pearce, Down & Moore, (2008) clearly highlight that the changing social boundaries within the educational arena are ever present, particular with cultural divides. With the constant influx of international students this may also enhance the numbers of individual student communities, therefore requiring more research. Middle Eastern women are part of today's international student body

and the issues that surround their cultural traditions warrant more attention, particularly as they move into a new social situation.

Transitional period of education

The transition period of education can be the most difficult for students (Randeree, 2008). During this period, experiences comprise of unfamiliar learning and social environments and students have to make many adjustments (Evans, 2000; Ryan & Twibell, 2000). There is, however, a general understanding of cultural differences and acquiring the predominant culture of the host country is crucial to student's success (Biggs, 2001; McInnis, 2001; Ramburuth, 2001). It is a matter of "trial and error" (Hellsten, 2001, p. 8).

Research has shown that studying in the academic transition period is easier when courses incorporate positive and rewarding student experiences that take into consideration their needs (Krause, 2001). Biggs (2001) also affirms that students are able to successfully amalgamate into western university learning environments and Asian students in particular can achieve high academic results (Biggs, 2001). Randeree (2008, p. 7) highlights that during the transition period of education, contextual familiarity and engagement is important, because this helps build the confidence of students. This is further endorsed by other research as learning with real life scenarios proves to be a positive factor in the classroom (Harrold, 2009; Barise, 2004). Although student diligence and educational accomplishment are key factors in achieving learning outcomes (Kuh, 2005), Marsden (2004) argues that support mechanisms for academic progress mainly derives from the social experience (Marsden, 2004, p. 2727).

Due to the complexity of the transition period, researchers have developed theories to help provide a deeper understanding of how students embrace this part of their education. Many educational institutions report that students succeed because they are self-determined to achieve their educational goals and that these students do not necessarily need any intervention from educators. These philosophies highlight varying degrees of student experiences because they academically prepare themselves for higher education.

Frameworks outlined by Tinto (1986) and Braxton (2003) are equally relevant in understanding the transition period of education. Their theoretical frameworks depicts that a mix of sociological, organisational, psychological and cultural contributions are the main factors that lead towards a smooth exit. The manner in which students embrace the transition period of education can be critical to how they fit into their new learning community (Tinto, 1993). Substantiated in Van Gennep's (1960) anthropological exemplary of cultural behaviour,

Tinto (1993) proposes that in order for students to connect to the new learning environment during the transitional stage, they should firstly disconnect themselves from familiar cultural or family groups (Tinto ,1993, p. 93). This enables students to amalgamate normative principles and actions of the new learning environment more easily. There are arguments however against Tinto's theory, as more knowledge is becoming widely available indicating social connections rather than academic amalgamation as the way forward for transitional students (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Randeree, 2009).

More recently, scholars have argued that students are more likely to graduate when they have strong social integration during the transition period of education that incorporates a mix of cultures (Braxton and Lien, 2000). As an example, Randeree's (2008) research of indigenous Middle Eastern Gulf Arab learners indicates that key factors influencing their learning derive from both personal and academic experiences. When instruction is in a second language, it is not a major barrier for students. Randeree (2008) writes that a collaborative approach incorporating traditional pedagogy is one recommendation to motivate students during the transition period of education (Randeree, 2008, p. 9). The stimulus to involve students' cultural ancestry, language, peer group and religious faith is positively encouraged to help reduce their concerns and learning barriers. This is because it assists students to integrate better in the learning forum (Randeree, 2008, p. 10).

Randeree (2008) also offers a personal view as an educator and reports that his own students who have desires to be managers benefit greatly from assignments contextualising the business world. Teachers who offer "a meaningless diagram…" during class for students to complete do not capture the motivation of individuals (Randeree, 2008, p. 11). Students respond better when the learning environment captures real scenarios in the student's social context. By encouraging a classroom atmosphere with empathy and understanding of learner needs, particularly if the teacher is not culturally aware of Middle Eastern Gulf students, the learning can be more manageable (Randeree, 2008, p. 12). Student voices are imperative in regulating the type of international programmes being offered by Australian institutions (Hellsten, 2002; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001) as this will assist in the transition process. In fact, more recently, the needs of international students have been taken into consideration to develop suitable study programmes to incorporate student perspectives better (Hellsten, 2002).

The transition period for international students is moving between familiar environments to an unaccustomed learning setting:

Whilst coming to a new and foreign country is often times an exciting and rich

event, the experience can be constrained by uncertainty and disorientation of finding your way around new cultures and social expectations (Hellsten, 2002, p. 3).

Hellsten's (2002) research into the transition period of education is implemented because of an "…ill fit between expectations before, and the ensuing experiences after the commencement of studies in Australia" (Hellsten, 2002, p. 3). There can be much confusion between the academic teaching staff and international students in relation to cultural and social barriers during this period, which ultimately leads into less amicable transitional learning experiences (Hellsten, 2002). By collating the narratives of nine international students during the transitional period, Hellsten (2002) records commonly ensuing examples articulating the support across a mix of social, cultural and learning areas:

> It was from this intersection that they then seemed able to evaluate their current experiences as more or less amicable (Hellsten, 2002, p. 7).

Students expect value for money but the actual service they receive does not always meet their expectations. Much disappointment is voiced and many students report an overall distrust in the Australian education system (Hellsten, 2002, p. 8). These students tend to sum up their personal and material investment against the learning outcomes and are not completely satisfied. There is an inquisitiveness to experience enculturation into the Australian lifestyle, but due to unfamiliar social and ethnic expectations, students experienced culture shock due to their suspicion (Ramburuth, 2001), resulting in "a less smooth transition" (Hellsten, 2002, p. 9).

Teacher sanctions of other international behaviours in the classroom create disappointment and rejection of the Australian cultural experience and results in transitional students continually questioning specific practices (Hellsten, 2002, p. 9). The wellbeing and perceptions of international students is investigated further in the following section.

Student and educator perceptions

Students perceive the learning environment as crucial to their education and how they embrace it can be equally important. Their personal perceptions also include past learning experiences, cultural divides and different beliefs between teachers and students (Smith, 2007 cited in Barrell & McBride, 2008, p. 1). If student perceptions and beliefs are acknowledged and identified in an educational setting, educators might be equipped with better knowledge to encourage students to achieve their goals in a more relaxed and enjoyable environment.

With this in mind, Harrold (2009) highlights the thoughts and ideas of ten Emirati female students studying in Dubai. Over the course of four years, student feelings are examined as their written work relates to life and learning experiences. Writing genres including a range of communication, business, education, health, social and behavioural science texts are analysed, in Harrold's (2009) research to underline the relevance of course material, preferred learning styles and student/teacher influences relating to learning outcomes.

The interpretation of student texts highlights the importance of encouraging independent learning and critical thinking (Harrold, 2009). Harrold (2009) also highlights that students should not work in isolation for too long in the classroom because teacher interaction is highly important for them. It is perceived that if teachers encourage too much independency, then students might arrive at incorrect information or theories, resulting in further difficulties to correct their work at a later stage (Harrold, 2009).

Teacher characteristics and approaches are important. The students are better equipped to "…think globally, analyse things internationally and create solutions for economic problems" when teachers involved real incidences (student Al-Marzouqi cited in Harrold, 2009, p. 2). Harrrold (2009) endorses the finding of Randeree's (2008) research inasmuch as real life scenarios are of great benefit to students as these connect the primary culture in the learning process.

Cherednichenko's (2009) research in diverse, low socio-economic, western contexts demonstrates that developing constructivist and reflexive approaches in learning environments enhances the student's consciousness of their own learning style and improves learning outcomes. The research examines community engagement in Australia and the US, and the development of educator consciousness in building productive higher education learning environments is directly impacted by practices, that are community and learner responsive, inquiry led and personally relevant to students. Cherednichenko argues "students are agents in their own success, but not the only agents", (Cherednichenko, 2009, p. 7).

The importance of place in enabling academic success is identified, noting that universities have a powerful role to play in educating not only young people but also the whole community (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett, 2009). Teachers might not always be aware of how wide ranging the types of courses can be at tertiary level but when teachers understand this, they are better able to assist and help students mature in the learning environment (Harrold, 2009). The research conducted by Harrold (2009) and the case studies compiled by Gallant (2004) simplifies this in more detail and identifies that student and teacher motivation and cross-

cultural learning perspectives are the most important features to embrace. Both, Harrold (2009) and Gallant (2004) base their studies on Emirati students. Although some teaching strategies and student ideas are outlined in both research papers, there are no set actions suggested by means of a solution. It raises the question as to whether teachers do value student ideas and how best to implement more improved ways to teach this cohort of women. This further highlights uncertainties regarding how the needs of the 21st century woman with a mix of suggestions and ideas regarding education, will be viewed in future education planning and teaching strategies. As students cross international borders for their education, they experience many obstacles, which places different levels of stress on them (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008). They have left their familiar world behind, but are not yet accepted, or do not fully understand the rules of the new world. Some noticeable, recurrent problems for international students include:

> … loneliness, lack of support, few meaningful relationships with host nationals, culture shock, discrimination and racism, language difficulties, unfamiliar modes of teaching and learning, a changing sense of identity, unrealistic family and self-expectations, financial problems, crises at home, and adverse experiences in the host country. (Kilinc & Granello 2003; Lee et al. 2004; Mori 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi 1994 cited in Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008, p. 64).

Surprisingly, even though overseas students in Australia experience problems, they often do not seek any support because they are not usually aware of what services are available to them that offer assistance (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008). In this regard, it is important for educators to specifically understand the cultural norms of the populace in their workplace, so they can monitor student perceptions in order to identify them in relation to the learning process (Barrell & McBride, 2008). Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2007) report that loneliness is a symptom experienced by many international students during their first few months at university in Australia.

Their research includes 200 international students from over 30 nationalities, who are completing their education at various Australian institutions. For many students, they are simply unable to deal with unfamiliar institutional rules, and have to "establish themselves as foreigners" (Sawir et al, 2007, p. 2). The orientation programs offered by Australian universities assist in reducing loneliness because of the connection to cultural activities and social events.

More than 65% of the participants in the study report they experience loneliness and isolation and the table below illustrates the level of loneliness applicable to various nationalities.

Table 2.5: Extract of data from Sawir et al (2007).

Nation	Total women	Women with no problems	Percentage
Indonesia	22	12	54
Malaysia	13	11	85
Singapore	7	7	100
Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam	3	1	33
China	2	13	59
Hong Kong	22	3	60
India	4	2	50
Middle East/North Africa	2	2	100
Europe	2	2	100
Canada/UK/USA	3	0	0
Latin America	2	2	100

Sawir et al (2007) suggest that not every lonely person experiences the same feelings of loneliness and reports that individuals and different cultural groups manage their symptoms differently. Significantly, the students from the Middle East, South America, Europe and Singapore all suffer from loneliness whereas the students originating from the UK, Canada or the US do not. Regardless of the number of students participating from these countries, it is still imperative to acknowledge that loneliness does affect them and is a symptom that should not be ignored. In fact, two students will feel completely different, to the point where one might experience loneliness but the other may not (Sawi et al, 2007). This variation therefore is important when considering that international students are derived from countless cultural and religious backgrounds and not everyone is alike.

In Saafin's, (2008) research in the Sharjar Emirate of the UAE, students better relate to the "human element in the English language teaching process" particularly in an all English or non-native speaking university environment (Saafin, 2008, p. 10). As this is globally relevant, it is apparent that students, whether they are being taught in their own country or overseas, will have a variety of emotional and academic experiences. Therefore, students' language may not always be indicative of what they have learnt, particularly when their cultural knowledge and experiences are unknown (Angelil-Carter, 2000 cited in Ryan & Viete, 2009, p. 305).

There are many challenges in curricula with methodologies in the Middle Eastern Gulf and Syed's (2003) research indicates that many teachers are also challenged with students that have low literacy attainment, and there is a lot of reliance on high stake testing. Palfreyman (2009) suggests that in the Middle Eastern Gulf, there are explicit cultural concerns in higher education, asserting that western teachers might find outcome-based learning coupled with

some traditional techniques useful to them. It is clear that there is an array of foreign teachers in the Middle Eastern Gulf States but they also bring a collection of experiences, which should not be ignored because the nationals are embracing this service (Palfreyman, 2009). Altogether, there is a myriad of elements that lead towards the wellbeing and satisfaction of international students whether pedagogical or otherwise, these should all be taken into consideration throughout their educational journey.

The international educator

Research shows that educators must be mindful of the need to implement cross-cultural reflective teaching practices to ensure methodologies and assumptions are filtered through the local cultural context (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 2). Sonleitner and Khelifa (2005) identify that cultural differences are a major issue with new international teachers working in the UAE. Their study incorporates 23 participants, of which 14 are male and 9 are female. The male-female interaction within Middle Eastern society is initially a hurdle for new male teachers who are not used to the segregation of genders within the workplace.

Furthermore, the type of material included in the learning forum also presents significant problems (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 8). Both male and female teachers report they feel anxious when including potentially inadvertent infringements of local cultural taboos such as watching TV or listening to music. For most of the teachers this would be usual practice in the learning environment but with Middle Eastern Gulf students, the teachers feel they are unable to base any learning around this type of resource without first questioning how many, if any, of their students can participate, or whether it is appropriate for the cultural setting (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 8).

For many of the teachers, there is a feeling that their usual behaviour is restricted because of fear of inappropriate actions or lack of understanding regards to student perceptions (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 8). This also results in more time being spent on lesson planning and consideration of cultural norms. One teacher found the habits of Middle Eastern Gulf students completely different to the western learning environment and reports they frequently interrupt the class, leave the classroom on many occasions, are not able to provide eye contact and have frequent absences (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 9). These behaviours in the classroom can have an adverse effect on both the teacher and student if not fully understood or culturally interpreted correctly and managed appropriately (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005).

New teachers of Middle Eastern Gulf students do not fully understand how to maximize learning potential because there are many gaps in cultural awareness (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 9). Similarly, due to a lack of global knowledge, Middle Eastern Gulf students do not always relate to world issues and experience difficulties with critical thinking and problem-based learning activities because that cultural juncture can be quite vexing (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005, p. 18). However, these hurdles can be overcome with patience, empathy, and steadfast dedication.

Whether a teacher is working in a foreign country or working with international students in a western environment, the divides between cultures are clearly evident and these elements must be continually acknowledged. With this in mind, global matters are further explored in the following section.

Global matters and Muslim women

Beyer and Beaman (2007) report Muslims around the world are continually being placed in difficult situations when Islam is linked to terrorism. Kabir and Evans (2001) also suggest that Muslims are separated more widely from non-Christian communities and that they often experience acts of discrimination because of their colour and non-English speaking backgrounds (Kabir and Evans, 2005, p. 70).

Events such as the 2011 Arab Spring, 9/11, the 2004 Madrid Bombings and the Bali bombings have further amplified global attention of Muslims worldwide. The two wars in Iraq also highlighted fragility of cross-cultural relations in global societies (Holohan, cited in Poole & Richardson, 2005, p. 13). Cainkar (2002) draws on post 9/11 events and implies Arab Americans are more hidden throughout the wider community. This could be due to the fact that during the aftermath of 9/11 a similar war of terror took place on USA streets (Naber, 2006, p. 235). Individuals with Arabic or Muslim names and appearance report persecution and violence from non-Muslim communities.

Immigrant exclusions are common after intense moments of national crisis. In order to identify the effects of 9/11 on the Muslim community, Naber (2006) conducted an ethnographic study between September 2002 and 2003 with two separate Arab and Arab American Community network groups across the San Francisco Bay area. The participants include middle to upper class professionals and new immigrant community arrivals from Iraq, northern Africa, Palestine and Yemen who live in poverty. The Tenderloin area of San Francisco is a typical

development, housing Arab Muslims from Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Yemen. Naber (2006) lived amongst the Arab Muslim communities and relied upon her previous work with similar community groups to increase the confidence of prospective participants (Naber, 2006, p. 239).

The research identifies that different Muslim groups experience certain behaviours according to "class, gender, religion, citizenship and nation" (Naber, 2006, p. 345). Naber (2005) also describes that two middle class Palestinian women experienced harassment in a coffee shop by a man recalling, "I wish Palestine would be removed from the face of the earth" (Naber, 2006, p. 245). However, the less better-afforded Muslim participants experience even more difficult scenarios. In lower socio-economic areas, the police, teachers and employers have more power over working class immigrants and the backlash is even more severe (Naber, 2006, p. 245). The conclusion of the research indicates that State policies and regular harassment at work and within the educational environment have certainly been more intensified post 9/11. In fact, women who choose to wear the hijab, especially among the working class groups were targeted the most (Naber, 2006, p. 237).

It is now an everyday occurrence for Arab Americans to have hostile public attitudes directed at them (Cainkar, 2005). However, some distinctive attitudes within the Arab American community support these ideals because certain religious traditions are primarily identifying ethnicity within society, which inhibits their integration into the wider community (Haddad 2003; Cainkar, 2002). By exhibiting this type of behaviour, the Islamic faith and the cultural quality associated with it further strengthen the divide across communities (Beyer & Beaman, 2007, p. 449).

World events have prompted many changes in Muslim behaviour and activism is becoming more noticeable. Pockets of cultural communities have started to travel internationally because world conflicts have brought large numbers of refugees and displaced persons to new lands (Kay, 1995; Holmes, 1995; Noiriel, 1995; Sword, 1995). Kabir and Evans, (2005) report that while Muslims in Australia are ethnically diverse, arriving from many countries such as Albania, Afghanistan, India, Fiji, Pakistan, Palestine and Somalia, they still unite in their religious faith. Muslim women living outside of their country of origin are also making behavioural changes (Yasmeen, 2007, p. 7). Muslim women in the state of Western Australia are adopting specific strategies to modify their Muslim and cultural status. Yet, although they present different approaches within the public context, their family environment and conduct still determines their specific ethnicity (Yasmeen, 2007, p. 7).

Yasmeen (2007) further identifies that these women have tendencies to prioritise political activism emanating from their anxiety within the family sphere. Similarly, many Muslim women feel subjugated by the non-Islamic practices in their new environment because they believe there is a danger it might westernise their family environment and thus, put their values in jeopardy (Esposito & Mogahed, 2007). This level of thinking may also be attributed to why Muslim women living in Western Australia display activist behaviours as opposed to functioning within a traditional family backdrop (Yasmeen, 2007). When Muslim women are away from their home country, they like to seek out interconnecting cultures to help them assimilate into the new environment (Yasmeen, 2007).

Ramadam (2010), on the other hand promotes the ongoing commitment to social mixing at the school level, because he believes this will move forward into the wider community at a later stage. Ramadan (2010) also suggests that more courageous and imaginative government policies might prompt improvement of individual interchange across democratic populations (Ramadan, 2010, p. 131).

Immigration should be managed properly to take on board the cultural diversity that is expanding across the Western world. Third world countries should no longer be disrobed of wealth and the fleeing population should no longer be treated as criminals when they arrive in the western countries (Ramadan, 2010, p.131). In the USA, Muslim women have a relatively short migration history and great emphasis is being placed on their educational achievement in order to assist with their integration into the new cultural society (Shavarini, 2005).

As far back as the mercantile period, global immigration involved a variety of inhabitants settling in new countries (Billig, 1995). With the constant flow of world immigration, Billig (1995) writes, that divisions across social orders, genders, and ethnicity promote a more distinct regionally mix. This is also evident, as significant ethos links identities together (Sreberny, 2004, p. 84).

In contrast however, some localised and urban cultural communities have opted to stay away from global growth because they prefer to keep their individuality (Sreberny, 2004, p. 84). With this in mind, specific cultural behaviours within the marriage union and across religious faiths draw on this individuality.

Marriage and religion

From a social standpoint, marriage is an accepted sexual and economic alliance of behaviours, between a man and women that is usually permanent with mutual rights and obligations to one another and their children (Ember, Ember & Peregrine, 2009, p. 386). Mernissi (2000) has constantly investigated some of the perplexed consequences of marriage between Muslim men and women in modern social orders. With this in mind, an enquiry of how marriage impacts on women from different cultural and religious backgrounds affords more discussion.

Marriage in Morocco

In present-day tribal Morocco, it is not acceptable for a married woman to openly convey any physical love for her husband or to openly reject him (Mernissi, 1987). Women must not reveal any outward feelings regardless of whether positive or negative in nature. In Morocco, although the main religious belief is Islam and the writings in the Qur'an provide guidance to the general public, there are distinct cultural beliefs that are also present.

Further, Mernissi (1987) purports that Moroccan society promotes the husband to the role of master and not of a lover and his duty must be seen as authoritative. In many instances, the wife must obey him at all times unless it puts her in a situation where she must go against the will of Allah, her God.

If the wife resists her husband's wishes, it is written in the Qur'an that he should follow a strategy including the use of some form of verbal reprimand to rectify the matter but if this fails, he should withhold sexual intercourse (Mernissi, 1987). Finally, if the previous two steps are not successful, it will be acceptable for him to beat her (Mernissi, 1987, p. 111).

Goodwin (2006) further writes:

A man has the right to beat the women in his family. There is nothing you can do (Goodwin, 2006, p. 6).

Nowadays, if a married woman in Morocco can demonstrate proof of any physical beatings in a marriage, she can bring a lawsuit against her husband.

A description of the marriage relationship within Moroccan society is:

The perception of a husband's love and respect as a miracle probably stems from the fact that the woman cannot legally demand respect or love (Mernissi, 1987, p. 109).

The respective rights and duties in the 1957 Moroccan Code are listed below:

Article. 36 *The Rights of the husband, vis-à-vis His wife*

1. Fidelity
2. Obedience according to the accepted standards
3. Breastfeeding, if possible, of the children born from the marriage
4. The management of the household and its organisation
5. Deference towards the mother and father and close relatives of the husband

Article. 35 *The Rights of the Wife vis-à-vis Her Husband*

1. Financial support as stated by law such as food, clothing, medical care, and housing
2. In case of polygamy, the right to be treated equally with other wives
3. The authorisation to go and visit her parents and the right to receive them according to limits imposed by the accepted standards
4. Complete liberty to administer and dispose of her possessions with no control on the part of the husband, the latter having no power over his wife's possessions (Mernissi, 1987, p. 109)

An objective view of Articles 35 and 36 of the 1957 Moroccan Code indicate married women will obtain many marital benefits if subservience is retained. The husband is responsible to provide for the wife and the family, thus allowing women time to fully enjoy the relationship. The Code also demands the husband treat his wife equally in cases of polygamy.

However, it could be interpreted that there is inequality across many areas of the relationship particularly with the right to freedom of choice. The system holds and the law states that married women must obtain permission from the husband to either visit family members or have family visitors enter the marital home. Married women must also admire and respect the husband's family at all-times, thus not providing any freedom of choice.

It is clear, Moroccan society has not extended its social reforms towards male-female associations regarding the equal distribution of power, respect or authority. Across the whole social order, honour and purity are the two main elements. However, individual choice for

women is not evident and this connects the kudos that men are the protectors and authority of all females in the family setting, regardless of whether they are his wife, his sister or any unmarried relative (Mernissi, 1987, p.151).

Marriage in Southeast Asia

In comparison to the Moroccan culture, Southeast Asia has been developing the act of marriage within the constraints of Family law across ethnic and religious boundaries (Jones, Chee & Maznah, 2009). Muslim women are generally viewed more favourable across the Asian world because they are permitted to obtain employment, are accepted freely into society and are involved in education (Fealy & Hooker, 2007, p. 273). This does not mean however that Asian Muslims are any better than other global Muslims. Although women enjoy specific rights in Malaysia and Indonesia, the two countries still have a range of internal opinions that are regularly deliberated on the subject of gender discourse and family issues (Fealy & Hooker, 2007, p. 273). Although, Islam was brought to Malaysia during the 14th Century, as culture and global issues emerged, additional liberal associations materialised seeking a better gender-sensitive analysis within the Islamic faith (Fealy & Hooker, 2007, p. 274).

Many Southeast Asian countries are now signatories to projects that investigate gender inequality (Fealy & Hooker, 2007, p. 273). For women, there are many publications widely available across Malaysia prescriptive of how to be a pious woman and the harmonies of family matters. Regardless of this, women are still a distance away from men throughout all echelons of society and White (2004) suggests they still have a part to play that is based on difference and which is "predetermined, immutable and self-evident" (White, 2004, p. 150).

In 2006, the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore held the International Marriage Rights Conference, which included a practicum on Muslim-non-Muslim Marriage. This event encouraged researchers to scrutinise various legal, cultural and political facets of marriage, with particular focus on Muslim and non-Muslim partners. Malaysia and Indonesia have different levels of flexibility with inter-religious marriage. For instance, under joint Malaysian and Islamic law it is difficult to have a marriage union between Muslim and non-Muslim couples, whereas in Indonesia it can be easier if the non-Muslim partner converts to Islam.

Another important contributing factor leading to the uncertainty of Muslim to non-Muslim marriages includes:

…post-colonial influences and cross-country comparisons of the different legal structures and social conditions … (Jones, Chee & Maznah, 2007, p. 6).

In the Malay communities, the legal system is a mix of civil law taken from the British structure coupled with Islamic law. Interpretations of the two can differ across regions because the Islamic laws were administered at varying times and at different levels. When Malaysia became independent, there were:

…fourteen sets of Islamic family law, one each for the thirteen states and a separate set for the Federal Territories, each administered by a separate syariah court. (Jones, Chee & Maznah, 2009, p. 6).

The different sets of Islamic family law ultimately led to contrasting decisions being made that varied across many locations and with this in mind, marriage, divorce and religious freedom can become difficult to interpret correctly (Othman, 2005 cited in Jones, Chee & Maznah, 2009, p. 7).

In contrast however, the introduction of legislature in 1973 in close neighbouring Indonesia unified the matrimonial law stipulating religious affiliation was not relevant and therefore should not cause any impediment to the marriage union. For what seemed acceptable at the onset, strong opposition soon surfaced and finally a compromise defined marriage as "religious in character" and a continuation of religious and civil interpretations have been ongoing leading to the "compilation of Islamic Law (CIL)", (1974 Marriage Law, Elucidation, Article 2 cited in Jones, Chee & Maznah, 2009, p. 8). The marriage union between Muslim and non-Muslim couples continues to be an issue, as Indonesia encourages converting to Islam, but Malaysia simply does not permit this union of couples at any time. From the two examples provided, the Islamic religious faith depicts features that are prominent in marriage and also shows an understanding that joining family and Sharia law together has led to varying interpretations.

It might therefore be suggested that the different explanations of whether a Muslim and a non-Muslim marriage can go ahead can lead to the provision of mixed messages to global onlookers, thus leading to confusion, inaccurate elucidation and possibly misinterpretation of the Islamic faith itself.

Iranian women and marriage

Rasool (2002) discussed the central theme of marriage with many Australian Muslim women who participated in her work. The women originate from a variety of cultures and

traditions and yet interestingly, marriage and finding the right husband was a collective topic with all of the Muslim women. During Rasool's (2002) coursework for a Master's degree in journalism at the University of Technology in Sydney her interest in Australian Muslim women was of great interest.

As a Muslim herself, Rasool observes how the western world depicts the veil as a means of suppression for women and admits that although some Muslim women experience seclusion and segregation, the wearing of the veil is a more complex issue (Rasool, 2002, p.14; Read & Bartkowski, 2000). Following the successful completion of a documentary screened on the Australian ABC network, the compilation of Rasool's (2002) work include some of the edited experiences of the women who participated in her study. Rasool's (2002) book highlights contrasts in many areas, particularly with the topic of marriage. One Iranian woman enters into dialogue of a personal nature and describes why she chooses not to wear any head covering. The woman describes her previous partying days in Iran under the rule of the Shah and Shahrina and portrays that partying in the company of fine wine and food with both genders of Iran's privileged society was a usual activity. The female quarters where her mother stayed at that time brought the interviewee much security where she could "…escape…" away from the partying whenever the need arose (Rasool, 2002, p. 163).

Many affairs took place and at this time, the chador was worn in public as women went about their daily routines but underneath this garment the finest sheer stockings and the most fashionable attire could be seen (Rasool, 2002, p. 164). Life under Iran's ruling family during this period of time encouraged women to be more expressive in public and to make their own choices. Women had the choice to live either a traditional or modern lifestyle but when the Islamic revolution occurred, many families that opted for the modern lifestyle were forced to seek asylum in western countries (Rasool, 2002, p.163).

One Iranian interviewee subsequently moved to Sydney leaving her mother in Iran. However, upon doing so, the woman found that one of the biggest personal obstacles to living in Australia was dating men within a more open society as she had only done this before in secret parties in Iran under the guise of her mother's protection. Although this woman had interacted with men previously in Iran, it was conducted within the confines of palatial homes under the observation of protective eyes, but as Australia permits less restricted male-female interaction it proved to be a very different situation. In fact, the woman's mother's also reported great concern that her daughter had not been able to find a husband.

At the age of thirty-eight years, the woman revealed she has yet to find a suitable life partner. She believes this leaves her in a precarious situation as her Muslim upbringing clearly defines marriage is important and yet she is not experienced enough in the Australian social environment to develop her communication skills within a western society. There is clearly a contradiction in social behaviour as the woman's mother also questioned "what is the use of all this freedom and dating…if girls cannot find a partner" (Rasool, 2002, p. 166). Regardless of this fact, the woman still felt her decision to migrate to Australia was right because of the lack of freedom she was afforded when the westernisation of Iran ended.

The divergence in lifestyle in the two generations of women, mother and daughter, are particularly interesting as the marriage union is equally important in both of their lives because this forms part of their culture and religious unity. Iranian women are particularly enveloped in tradition, rules and guidelines when it involves family and marital situations regardless of the society in which they live, and this is possibly a way of encouraging them to embrace endogamy.

Summary

The stance of women within cultural communities, education and marriage has been discussed within this literature review and a number of anomalies are identified. For Middle Eastern Gulf women this has great bearing as they travel and study in western societies. This literature review reveals new insights and knowledge relating to women in a global context and in particular within the international educational environment. It has revealed that women take on the role of cultural mediator (Rizvi 2005) when studying overseas while they consistently keep in touch with their origins and traditions and yet still connect to new places and cultures. This is evident in Rizvi's (2005) research, but the type of role women actually undertake is not necessarily exposed as such, or whether there are any negative or positive repercussions to this culturally mixed environment. A safe cultural environment is paramount in fulfilling the needs of both educator and student when women study and live in a traditional non-Muslim setting. Rizvi's (2005) work is measured and expanded upon within this particular research.

Education is a structured mechanism for female students helping to increase their global knowledge within a cultural context (Rizvi, 2005) and education assists women in dealing with barriers arising from class, religion, culture and learning (Malik & Courtney, 2011; Hasmi, 2009; Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008; Mellor, 2007; Barise, 2004; Khalid & Mukhtar, 2002). Similarly, student perceptions have a bearing on the ability to feel connected to new educational challenges (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008) and educators have a need to be aware of

ever changing requirements in a pedagogical environment (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005). It is yet unknown whether the combination of east-west culture continually surrounds the participating women while they are in Australia and more knowledge that can be obtained from their experiences and perceptions will assist in identifying ways of understanding their educational journey.

The literature review has revealed gender statements, behaviours and social discourses are determined early in life and although ongoing changes occur (Kimmel, 2005), pressure is placed on individuals to connect to their cultural and family traditions. Middle Eastern women in particular adhere to certain traditional norms linking social and family orientations (Mernissi, 2010; Ramadan, 2010, 2006; Rasool, 2009; Yasmeen, 2004). As Middle Eastern women travel along their overseas education journey they are confronted with an array of global issues pertaining to their cultural existence (Ramadan, 2010; 2006).

Pressure is also placed on Muslim women from within their own cultural communities because they are viewed as "the recipients of family honor" (Goodwin, 2006, p. 28) and thus have specific instructions on how to behave. Subsequently, there is a clear need to research how Middle Eastern Gulf women, as agents within a structured educational setting, respond to new circumstances. In fact, Goodwin (2006) suggests that:

> …to understand the Islamic world, one needs to decode the way that society perceives women (Goodwin, 2006, p. 28).

Global knowledge puts pressures on the individuality of Muslim women, which are sometimes misled by external issues and the lack of cultural information (Yasmeen, 2004). As education is a structured environment, which claims to offer global information to the participating women, what is missing is information about the authentic description of the lived experience. This research considers the factors previously highlighted in order to answer enquiries relating to how Middle Eastern Gulf women respond when undertaking study at Australian universities.

This research depicts how Middle Eastern Gulf women, as agents, make adjustments decisions to worldwide intelligence, experience new lifestyles and further, form individual personalities. The literature has revealed that Muslim women are expected to behave in a specific manner because of either religious or cultural upbringing, but Goodwin (2006) argues that:

> The Islamists apparently have forgotten, or choose to ignore, the Prophet Mohammad's teachings "there is no compulsion in Islam" (Goodwin, 2006, p. 358).

Although Goodwin (2006) reaffirms there is no compulsion for Muslim women, this particular research enquires into how such a mix might have a bearing on the participating women, particularly in a traditional non-Muslim environment. The literature demonstrates that individual agency is a process that takes place within all cultural boundaries (Giddens, 2006) and that social stratification is highlighted across many levels of society. Yet although literature pertaining to this topic is widely acknowledged, the Middle Eastern Gulf region consists of a unique urbanised traditional lifestyle and therefore previous findings might not be totally conclusive.

However, this particular research opens the door to the experiences of Middle Eastern Gulf women on a personal level and shares their perceptions, understanding and tolerance in an assortment of discourses, particularly on matters concerning friendship, religious faith, traditional and cultural family beliefs and educational attainment in a non-Muslim society. It is designed to maintain an independent stance on all areas pertaining to culture and lifestyle and expands on existing research as it responds to the gaps, which have been identified in the literature.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        EXISTING LITERATURE                          │
│        Thought provoking - women in a new cultural, social and       │
│                       educational context                            │
│                                                                     │
│        Gender and relationships (Read, 2011; Giddens, 2006;          │
│                          Kimmel, 2005)                              │
│        Women, religion and culture (Gallant, 2006; Van Santen,       │
│                             2010)                                   │
│   Women, education and student perceptions (Hellensten, 2010;        │
│      Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005; Hasmi, 2009; Sawir et al, 2007;     │
│             Mellor, 2007; Harrold, 2005; Barise, 2004)              │
│     Global matters and women (Ramadan, 2010; Yasmeen, 2007;          │
│                          Rizvi, 2005)                              │
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  ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH THAT NEED FURTHER CLARIFICATION:

  What are the experiences of Middle Eastern Gulf women, particularly
  their perception, understanding and tolerance on matters pertaining
  to friendship, religious faith, traditional and cultural family
  beliefs and educational attainment in a non-Muslim society, such as
  Australia?
└ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│               RESEARCH APPROACH AND MOTIVATION                       │
│                                                                     │
│   An approach that builds on data in an unobtrusive manner            │
│   including a series of systemic discourses highlighting before,      │
│   during and after the women's educational journey and linking        │
│   previous and existing lifestyles:                                  │
│      • Perceptions and experiences in a non-Muslim society           │
│      • Traditional and contemporary lifestyles                       │
│      • Enculturation and religious boundaries                        │
│      • Perceptions and experiences within Australian education       │
│        (teaching and learning – former and present-day)             │
│                                                                     │
│        QUESTIONNAIRES, INTERVIEWS, STORY-TELLING                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 2.1 - Conceptual Framework

This research has been framed by the work of previous scholars and focuses on the socio-cultural discourses of Middle Eastern Gulf women across a variety of circumstances as they enter university in Australia. The research deliberates how the participating women live and study in a traditional non-Muslim environment and explores how their experiences and perceptions motivate them in the Australian learning context. In particular, how do Middle Eastern Gulf women behave in such a new cultural environment while attempting to achieve educational attainment? Figure 2.1 provides a summary of the conceptual framework for this research, thus, leading to the enquiry how Middle Eastern Gulf women respond to education in Australian universities.

In order to conduct this research appropriately, the correct methodological approach must be implemented and a series of strategies are explored in the next chapter. The discussion in chapter 3 draws on a variety of approaches in order to determine the most appropriate methodology for conducting this particular research.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

This chapter draws from the literature review to identify the direction for the methodology and explores various approaches that are best suited to respond to the research questions. These are established from the introduction and the review of the literature as specific questions addressing the enquiry include the focus question being addressed:

How do Middle Eastern Gulf women understand their experiences of studying in Australia? Further framing questions include:

- Why do the women choose to study in Australia?
- What, if any, experiences are brought back to their home country when their educational journey is complete?
- What are the social factors being experienced?

This chapter discusses a variety of methodological approaches and presents the research design, an explanation of the chosen sample group, the survey and the preferred research instruments. The chapter concludes with essential procedural deliberations such as rigour, reliability and validity; including reporting on the approaches to seeking the integrity of the data through triangulation and indicates possible limitations.

Informed by the knowledge defined within the literature review, a number of research possibilities and methodological approaches are examined to ensure the most appropriate method fits the exploration of this particular research. Methods for research are often categorised into two broad areas involving quantitative and qualitative approaches. While the two methodologies are concerned with description, each approach can be from different perspectives and the deliberation of both is thoroughly examined in order to demonstrate how the best process for this research is determined. What follows is a discussion of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to explore a suitable research approach for this research. Table 3.1 summarises key considerations and different methods are addressed in more detail within this chapter.

Table 3.1: Constructs for the research

Quantitative Methods	Author
Strauss and Corbin (2006)	Although research in education is steering away from the statistical approach, the use of software is becoming more common to assist researchers using quantitative methods.
Kus (2003)	Quantitative methods in an epistemological environment are convincing to produce objective data.
Creswell (1994)	Quantitative methods generalise factual data that helps achieve specific research objectives.
Denzin and Lincoln (2005); Coffey (1999) Guba and Lincoln (1995)	Quantitative methods are unprejudiced and value-neutral.
Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007)	Research sampling comprises of groups with an interest area and conclusions are made from that sample about the population.

Qualitative Methods	
Strauss and Corbin (1990)	Suitable for understanding new perspectives.
Lincoln and Guba (1985)	More beneficial for a naturalistic approach.
Patton (2002)	Purposeful sampling is the leading approach in qualitative methods. However, the researcher must be confident and able to identify relevant characteristics within research.
Hoepfl (1997); Jacob (1987)	There has been an increase in qualitative methods within the education arena.
Glaser and Strauss (1967)	Theoretical sensitivity in reflecting and shaping individual researchers. Qualitative methods also influence the behaviour of research and analysis.

Quantitative Methods

Quantitative methods are mainly considered as heuristic because fewer conclusions about the research data are defined prior to the research commencing (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 116; Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Quantitative methods are also valued with regards to obtaining data that clearly produces refined results that assist in answering research questions. Lincoln and Guba (1994) show the distinction between quantitative and qualitative interview methods to

be more than just technical because of the "ontological-epistemological-methodological" extensions. Traditionally, quantitative research methods were utilised in the natural sciences to study natural experiences (Hohmann, 2006). This method aims to measure, predict, or control phenomena. Thus, they are grounded in naturalistic approaches to study experiences. Furthermore, they strive to be unprejudiced and value-neutral, a goal which is frequently at odds with a purpose of qualitative methods. Quantitative research practice in social science has proven to be suitable because the method is strong enough to produce objective data (Kus, 2003). With this in mind, quantitative methods are fitting for this particular research as data can frame useful paradigms across varying constructs.

Examples of quantitative methods are now well accepted in the social sciences and also across the educational arena (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). Nonetheless, future quantitative researchers need to be made aware that there is the perception that this type of approach is unprejudiced and value-neutral (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Coffey, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1995) which can also be seen as a strength in social research because the researcher may closely connect with the research issue. This is because of the belief that the evaluation criteria can only be appropriate in an identical or replicated format (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Quantitative research sampling involves groups with an area of interest and a conclusion or generalisation is made from that sample about the population used to achieve the research objectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

Hohmann (2006) suggests that research in education has steered away largely from the numbers approach with the emphasis being on qualitative methods. However, the practice of including statistical information is still a proven instrument, whether as part of a large project that engages an array of methods, or as the primary research method used for investigating a complete piece of work (Hohmann, 2006).

Working with ten schools, six in Finland and four in England, Berry and Sahlberg (1996) incorporated a quantitative approach to investigate student interpretations towards learning. Using a Likert-type rating scale with a series of attitudinal items, a questionnaire was designed to contain testimonies of attitudes, value of learning testimonials and community behavioural statements to obtain information from a number of school students which were ultimately profiled in a statistical chart. Charting characteristics and variables, the population was subsequently measured for the purpose of reaching a quantitative analysis and this method proved successful in the research (Berry & Sahlbert, 1996). However, it should be noted that although quantitative data are informative, Hohmann (2006) advises that it is necessary that the causal principles are implicit when recording statistical facts because this will avoid

misinterpretation

Data produced in a quantitative research project are commonly the result of a plan postulating the evidence required to be collated (Peers 1996). The flexibility of data is presented in a variety of ways including frequency, cumulative, percentages, variance and standard deviation, which are subsequently graphically displayed. The findings within the Berry and Sahlberg (1996) research, for example, contain the mean and standard deviation information relating to the average and extent of the facts (Berry & Sahlberg, 1996, p. 29), but also incorporate bar graphs to reveal a pictorial association relative to the two sample groups (Berry & Sahlberg, 1996, p. 31). Additionally, sophisticated software packages such as SPSS and ANOVA are now becoming widely available to make quantitative research comparatively less difficult, but for the less computer literate researcher, it is now easy to develop instant tables and charts (Hohmann, 2006).

Peers (1996) offers three general premises that ought to be considered when using quantitative data such as, understanding of basic concepts, familiarity of research design, and knowledge of statistical inferences. Accepting an appreciation of objectivity, the entire quantitative research process is conducted in a structured format and researchers follow standard principles to guarantee validity and reliability of data. Generalising factual data also helps achieve the objectivity by selecting appropriate sample groups (Bryman, 2004; Neuman, 1997; Creswell, 1994).

Quantitative techniques of collating and analysing data have proven to be successful in various research projects in the discipline of education. The benefits have also been considered for inclusion into this particular research, most especially in gathered demographic data. One of the advantages of incorporating quantitative methods for this research are that constructive online questionnaires can be easily distributed and analysed to the sample group and individuals can complete these at their own pace. Data collected through quantitative methods often provides a complementary data source to inform, support and confirm qualitative data (Cargan, 2007, p. 9).

Qualitative Methods

The qualitative approach was initially established from the practices of field anthropologists who studied human conduct in the context in which the subject's actions would be natural and their behaviour would not be affected by the researcher (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 118), thus also aiming to establish objectivity for the researchers. Strauss and Corbin

(1990) claim that a qualitative approach is far more suitable for a researcher to understand new perspectives about matters already known in specific social settings or when quantitative measures are not able to construe a situation fully. Lincoln and Guba (1985) speculate that trustworthiness of research is essential to evaluating its worth. Trustworthiness involves establishing:

- Credibility - confidence that the findings are truthful and accurate
- Transferability - showing that the findings are applicable in other contexts
- Dependability - showing that the findings are constant and could be recurrent
- Confirmability - a degree of detachment to the extent that the findings are formed by the participants and not researcher bias

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (2000) identified two areas in qualitative research namely, the value of research data and causality. When distinguishing different paradigms, the value of the research is considered and possible causal relationships.

Picker (1997) and Cosgrove (1995) successfully incorporated qualitative research methods for their education research. In their research, Cosgrove (1995) included science students and Picker (1997) incorporated students from mathematics classes. Although both devised a different series of approaches, they successfully reached their conclusive analysis guided by qualitative methods.

The most common qualitative methods employed are observations, interviews and the use of focus groups or steering committees. When directly including observations, the researcher is capable of collecting data across a wide range of behaviours (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Besides, Cronbach (1975) indicates that statistical research is not effective in social settings (1975, p. 124) as it misses the social nuance. In order to strengthen the validity of the data, qualitative interviews tend to be used as the primary approach or in combination with observation techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that researchers should use qualitative methods because it can relate more appropriately to personal experiences:

> … if you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 120).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to theoretical sensitivity when describing the skill required in achieving success in employing qualitative research

methods. Theoretical sensitivity reflects or is shaped by individual researchers and influences the conduct of research and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Social science focuses on present day facts that relate to current and everyday changing issues (Cronbach, 1975, p. 126) and in this regard purposeful sampling is the leading approach in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Patton identifies purposeful sampling as:

> … extreme or deviant case sampling; typical case sampling; maximum variation sampling; snowball or chain sampling; confirming or disconfirming case sampling; politically important case sampling; convenience sampling; and others (Patton, 1990, pp. 169-183).

The most beneficial method for a naturalistic approach concentrates on a variety of sampling that easily captures principle ideas of all the participants involved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore:

> … for small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other…Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

In qualitative research, sampling procedures are purposely targeted at information rich cases that offer fundamental and insightful knowledge about the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p.40). Qualitative researchers need to clarify the rationale and criteria for choosing specific samples. Patton (2002) provides a useful summary of purposeful sampling strategies and rationales, some of which include extreme or unforeseen cases, intensity sampling, homogenous sampling, snowball and chain sampling, typical case, critical case, confirming and disconfirming, stratified purposeful, and criterion-based sampling (Patton, 2002, pp. 243-244). Maximum disparity is a useful sampling approach enriching validity of the research (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). Qualitative methods are clearly a suitable approach, but it is imperative to understand the emergent nature of qualitative design because the researcher must be confident and able to identify what characteristics are relevant thus leading the correct interpretation of the meanings in context (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative and Quantitative: Complementary Methods

A debate exists about the comparative worth of using quantitative and qualitative methods (Patton, 2002, 1990; Cook & Reichardt, 1979, p. 7). Much of this debate stems from discussions around the bulk of literature dedicated to global viewpoints, nomenclature and the

analysis of mixed methods studies (Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Conversely, qualitative methods, generally means:

> … any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17).

To summarise, quantitative approaches pursue forecast, and simplification of findings whereas qualitative studies seek elucidation, comprehension, and extrapolation in parallel scenarios, (Sanders, 1997). In fact:

> … it is not that qualitative research is inherently weaker or less rigorous but rather that judgements of 'good practice' in research cannot be made without reference to the social and political context (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 4).

Similarly:

> … studies that collect primarily quantitative data may also include items requiring written responses that will be used qualitative analysis in order to uncover unexpected patterns. In short, qualitative knowledge about setting may be necessary in order to understand the quantitative data (Cargan, 2007, p. 10).

Eisner (1991) writes there is a continuum that travels from imaginary to the scientific explanation and qualitative research sits towards the fabricated end of this scale without really being fictitious. Statistical research is not normally able to capture interactions within social environments as opposed to those who prefer qualitative enquiries (Bryman, 1988, p. 106 cited in Kus, 2003, p. 9). Cronbach claims it is time to "exorcise the null hypothesis" as this does not take into consideration important aspects that are not obvious in statistical analyses (Cronbach, 1975, p. 124).

As well, Patton (2002; 1990) confirms it is not essential to have the two paradigms compete against each other, however, and as no particular research style is superior to the other, both quantitative and qualitative methods are valid in their own right (Cronbach, 1982, p. 231). This is consistent with Russek and Weinberg's (1993) research in that using a combination of both methods provides their research with greater insights. It is important to understand that research, which relies solely upon quantitative approaches, is known to prefer the distribution of questionnaires and surveys that produce statistical data whereas research that focuses on the more qualitative approach delivers additional background knowledge of human behaviour.

A typical example of using both quantitative and qualitative methods can be found in Brown's (1973) study conducted nearly 40 years ago, which clearly introduces the successful combination of both research approaches. Brown (1973) argues that techniques involving observations and tape recordings can be utilised and later when the data is explored it can be successfully examined quantitatively in terms of frequency (Brown. 1973). Likewise, Tashakori and Teddli (2003) write there has been a shift in research approaches right across the 20th century. This new approach has also identified a shift in values and associated research practices as well (Tashakori & Teddli, 2003, p. 10).

Kus's (2003) study is interesting inasmuch as it attempts to show the value of utilising both methods in two separate researches using the same sample group of Turkish Cypriot students. Kus (2003) demonstrates that both research methods, although completely separate from one another can actually provide similar results. This was achieved by conducting a survey interview with quantitative analysis as well as a focus group set of interviews encompassing qualitative evaluation. Initially, Kus (2003) assumed the research results would differ because of the different research methodologies being utilised. However, contrary to this, the research uncovered that both methods are linked to each other and that both approaches captures information adequately. Therefore the overall method chosen by prospective researchers should really depend on the subject matter itself (Kus, 2003). In summary, quantitative and qualitative methods have strengths and weaknesses and therefore any decision should be based on the practical issues of a research method when responding to specific research problems.

This particular research warrants having a sample group from a variety of geographical areas so any information that surfaces can be easily cascaded and linked across an array of similar but also varied cultures. The sample group for this research consists of ten female Middle Eastern Gulf students from both sides of the Middle Eastern Gulf Sea who study in three different states in Australia. The decision to target this assemblage of women is because there is a spread of cultural similarities that may connect them together not only geographically but also from a traditional perspective and so are worthy of exploring. Although they live in different cities across Australia, this research hopes to identify whether their traditional and customary values remain consistent within the Australian context.

Arguably, data gathered in this research will require substantive demographic information, which can be directly compared as well as rich descriptive data about experience, personal change and the perceptions of influences of these changes. Such an inquiry lends itself

to the pursuit of knowledge through both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The literature review identified the following themes and concepts as relevant to explore in the context of this research and influenced the final methodology chosen.

The Table 3.2 – Literature connecting themes for this research

Author	Theme
Kimmel (2005)	Friendships Adult men and women are encouraged to follow societal rules.
Ramadan (2010; 2006)	Culture and Religion Promotes religious awareness from all cultures.
Van Santen (2010)	Women and education Women who cover themselves experience difficulties.
Mellor (2007)	Religion is a prominent feature when Muslim women attend university.
Gallant (2006)	Cultural issues are highlighted when Emirati women have to make decision.
Randeree (2008)	Students respond better when the learning environment captures real scenarios
Sawir et al (2007)	Transitional education period Loneliness is a symptom experienced by many international students.
Hellesten (2001)	Students experience culture shock due to unfamiliar social and ethnic expectations.

Research Approaches

Informed by the research themes and questions, which arise from the literature review above, and the review of research methodologies also discussed earlier in this chapter, the most appropriate method for this particular research includes using qualitative techniques, in order to address and explore the experiences and backgrounds of the participants.

Although the participants are from the same broad geographical area in the Gulf region of the Middle East, there might be variables relating to the manner in which they respond to the

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Australian culture during their educational experience. Thus, causal matters and underlying reasons are similarly explored. Consistent with Gavey's (1989) research, this research cannot rely completely on the power of statistical information, because a natural setting assists in addressing a more postculturalist framework (Gavey, 1989, p. 462). This captures the voices of the women within a modern society and yet understands them in the context of each recount.

Alcoff (1988) makes comparisons between cultural feminism and post-structural feminism and in doing so, draws on the limitations within social movements. Accordingly, a careful response is required to every piece of individual information within this research if it is to achieve the correct interpretation. Identity, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and commonality of experience all involves how others understand the world in specific ways and poststructuralism upholds that in this respect, (Moya, 1997). Individuality however, cannot be revealed without inspiring dialogue because information is dependent on the type of discourse used within a specific environment in order to create the story that is being told (Francis, 2002, p. 46).

To achieve this personal method for authenticity, an opportunity for women to describe their experiences in order to clearly enable individuality is created. A qualitative approach defines any association to their cultural environment, which will be linked to the data and also record popularity and variety in responses. It is believed this may also help understand individual intimate communities that are formed while living outside of their country of origin. In this regard, positivism serves as a necessity in the early stages of social science research projects in forming a constructive environment within social phenomena (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Comte's earlier translation also identified this type of knowledge was founded on "sense experience" that could "only be advanced by means of observation and experiment" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 8).

In terms of social science, it must be understood that occurrences have causes that are determined by variables and that causal links can be identified and understood based on natural science (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 10). Even though there are regularities, only occurrences in the natural world are determined by other contexts. The appropriate approach for implementing qualitative methodology for this research is elaborated below.

Questionnaires

The purpose of using questionnaires as part of the data collection process was chosen because it assisted in identifying basic information and participant concepts. Cargan (2007, p.38) states that principal questioning can help distinguish between factors such as gender, age, location and religious faith, which helps classify specific sample groups. As the participating women in this research are of a similar age and originate from similar geographical areas, it was considered important to administer online questionnaires to confirm and categorise their views at the onset of the enquiry. Furthermore, variables and concepts were clearly identifiable. This approach also assisted in developing subsequent questionnaires because at each probing stage, data became more effective and helped extend and uncover different participant concepts. In this regard:

> … a single event leads to another single event. In fact, it is possible for there to be multiple causal conditions that, when combined, may make the event probable (Cargan, 2007, p. 39).

This unobtrusive approach therefore allows the researcher to distinguish a series of factors across sample groups, thus measuring variables from a distance (Cargan, 2007, p. 57). It also generates a broad representation of social behaviours, which is deemed appropriate for this specific research.

Grounded theory

During the time researchers Strauss and Glaser worked together in the 1960's they produced a comparative research method, later known as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Their collaborative work combines fundamental traditions in sociology (Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Strauss, 1987; Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and draws on a description of true-to-life enquiries in a constantly evolving entity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32).

This particular research is therefore guided by grounded theory with the philosophy based on notion rather than on the theory of testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It develops grounded theory approaches to the data analysis as it identifies schemes within the data and provides information that highlight fundamental discrepancies in understanding a social situation (Glaser & Barney, 1995). Dick (2005) argues that researchers who judge this approach alongside the criteria applied for hypothesis testing research will likely form misjudgments because of the manner in which literature is used differently. A grounded theory approach does not necessarily

have to include different research situations. However, irrespective of which style to follow, Urquhart (2001) reports the importance of outlining theoretical ideas that allow for concepts to be developed through constant comparisons is essential. This is the underlying basis for the researcher, as the grounded theorist avoids preconceptions and in doing so, does not set out to prove or disprove anything. Thus, the grounded theory approach is deemed appropriate for this type of research.

By capturing and analysing data, the continuous comparisons of occurrences will misrepresent, endorse or prolong fundamental areas being studied because without this, the grounded theory approach cannot be developed. Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 113-114) claim that consistently making comparisons facilitates the theories of process, sequence and change and forces the researcher to be more diverse when observing the data. This crafts rich descriptive accounts and forms the argument between the Straussian, or conceptualisation and the Glaserian, or descriptive approaches (Stern, 1994).

Although grounded theory approach is predominantly used for qualitative research (Glaser, 2001), it is also a general method that is applied to the analysis of quantitative and hybrid data collection from surveys and case studies (Glaser, 1998). Nevertheless, researchers who choose to combine both research methods must be careful not to distort true emergence for theory generation (Glaser, 1998, pp. 40-42). This is because a grounded theorist must have sensitivity and be able to take a step back in order to critically analyse the research situation fully. A grounded theory approach is clearly suitable for this particular research because information obtained from the questionnaires and personal interviews are carefully coded and themed at each stage of data collection.

The grounded theory approaches borrowed from Glaser (1995) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) allow for personal interviews to be conducted within a structured environment and thus generate identifiable frames at the early stages, which are unequivocally embryonic. This is because it does not test a hypothesis as such, but it enquires what principles justify the research situation, alongside the implementation of the methods best suitable for obtaining the research information. This is similar to action research (Dick, 2005) whereby the aim is to understand the research situation in order to develop themes, as the data are uncovered.

The literature developed within this research, using a grounded theory approach, indicates that there is a constant comparison of emerging themes taken from recording, documentation, notes and interviews that gradually develop data and later interpretations are accumulated. This has its own foundations of precision and is responsive to the situation in which the research is

conducted (Dick, 2005). Grounded theorists deal with what is actually going on instead of what should be going on (Glaser, 1978, p. 14). There is also a constant need for substantiation and verification, which is determined by the data in order for the final shape of the theory to offer a good fit to the condition. Glaser (1978) suggests two main criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory, are that it is appropriate to the situation, and therefore likely to be successful. In other words, the participants involved in the research situation make sense of their experience and contribution because natural themes will more likely emerge.

Each theme or property identified at the early stages of the research is constantly developed until it becomes saturated and can no longer expand. It is important to note that the information during the constructive interviews identifies the properties linked to the literature and individual themes are gradually generated. The themes that are finally cultivated within this particular research include cultural traditions, marriage, family associations and learning ideas that have an effect on the participating women. In order for this research to be successful, it is appropriate to develop trust between participant and researcher to enable a nurtured and comfortable relationship so that portraits include true and honest narratives. According to Cronbach (1975), researchers have the flexibility to move across different points of a continuum because the analysis falls on a particular point of verification in a naturalistic setting. The applicability is reliant upon the circumstances of the situation and the worth of the research results to the individual readers (Cronbach, 1975). A naturalistic method incorporates significant deducing paradigms of trustworthiness when identifying credibility, authenticity and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Some of the topics under discussion in this research connect to sensitive issues and the mix of emotions that surface from the women provide fruitful data in helping to understand the hurdles facing them as foreign students in Australia. The women are seen to open up by way of feeling more comfortable with the researcher and they show enjoyment when sharing their experiences, which is unlike the usual formal interview methods that do not work with Middle Eastern women (personal communication, Shavarini, 2007). Shavarini (2007) suggests through her research that Muslim women can be intimidated when interviewed in a formal setting. Muslim women are comfortable sharing personal and confidential information in a more trusting environment where they feel a connection to the interviewer and the subject matter. A tape recorder, for instance, can be quite debilitating to the process and it is essential to place the participants at ease with this technology.

In instances where recording equipment is used, the participants are fully informed prior to attending any meetings with the researcher. Participants are also made aware of the steps

taken to ensure the data are safe and only to be used for the purpose of the research (Shavarini, 2007). Throughout research with ethnically religious Iranian women, Shavarini (2007) stresses the importance of ensuring security and safety when women from this geographical region contribute to social science research projects. To compile and record data within this research it is paramount to present the findings in a format that is contextually acceptable and in this regard, the design of individual portraits is chosen as the most appropriate tool. The concepts of individual storytelling utilising portraiture are elaborated below.

Portraiture

The possibility of using portraiture is aimed at developing rich data representations and a deeper explanation of this approach is addressed within this section. Although portraiture shares certain features with other qualitative methods, the voice of the researcher makes it more unique. This is because portraits are created to reveal the researcher's own experience of the participants and the subject area (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005; Davis, 2003). The concept of fusing life history, biography and experience creates rich and complex stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Davis, 2003).

Portraiture is an introduction to research data, as opposed to testing hypotheses and theories (Macintyre-Latta & Thompson, 2011). It explores individual experiences within the complexities of discrete meanings exploring the goodness defined by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Incorporating the lessons learnt from an experience as the subject of an artist's portrait, Lawrence-Lightfoot developed this research method as they:

> … [the portraitists] seemed to capture my "essence", qualities of character and history, some of which I was unaware, some of which I resisted mightily, some of which felt deeply familiar. But the translation of image was anything but literal. It was probing, layered, and interpretive…(Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 5).

The portraiture technique is similar to that of a case study, where case studies explore typical scenarios and make comparisons as individual choices are engaged across individual elements using interviewing techniques (Forsey, 2010; Roberts-Holmes, 2005). It must be noted however that when researchers utilise case studies, they operate within a constrained system because the same set of assumptions are not always present when starting out the research (Stake, 1995; Stenhouse, 1988;). Thus, case studies can move in many directions. Creative writing and narrative is the craft used to fully integrate, analyse and confirm individual stories (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), which differs from case

studies. Therefore, the compilation of narratives using the portraiture approach is dependent upon the meaning attached to temporal and social contexts, and how they interrelate to others and their stories (Young & Collin, 2004). The main qualities of portraiture include evolving themes, interactions, contexts and voice (Dixson, Chapman & Hill, 2005).

This research focuses on the Middle Eastern Gulf environment and the women who originate from that area as an assemblage, rather than on a sole western perspective, and with this in mind, the portraiture technique remains an appropriate research tool. Portraiture further personifies the latest stages of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and places the researcher in an individualistic role. However, this technique can also articulate a changeable environment because it relies on the manner in which individuals perceive strengths and weaknesses (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983).

Macintyre-Latta and Thompson (2011) utilise portraiture methodology as a form of pedagogy to research learning by exploring background situations and methodology. Their work introduced to university graduates the potentials of portraiture as it accentuates the pedagogical opportunities within qualitative research methods. Macintyre-Latta and Thompson (2011) report how distinctive kinds of boundaries can be traded within the research context by way of searching out the boundaries of professional connections. The authors also confirm portraiture is a particularly useful tool as an exploratory method to satisfy research outcomes. In this instance, it shares a form of artistry and is associated loosely under the umbrella of "arts-based educational research" (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 95), since it circumscribes the occurrence of specific appealing qualities and design elements that permeate the investigation. The nature of this particular research is to communicate genuine experiences and accurate feelings. Portraiture records how relationships that are transposed into narratives represent the lives of the participants by depicting their experiences around the research topic (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Conducting a portraiture study, the researcher becomes the portraitist, and so develops a primary source for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997). Similarly, a portraitist has an important role in generating narratives that assist others to understand the world as recorded by the participant. This is accomplished by documenting a factual and detailed record of a distinctive experience in order for the audience to reflect upon and identify with the story (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 13). In this regard, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) rationalised portraiture methodology to highlight school transformations in order to "… capture the complexity and aesthetic of human experience" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 5).

In a similar notion, Dixson, Chapman and Hill (2005) incorporated a series of portraiture studies to demonstrate that researchers' personal and professional connections can be articulated to enable views and subjectivity more clearly. Using portraiture as an authentic research system in a learning and education environment is promoted as a valuable methodology (MacIntyre-Ladda & Thompson, 2011).

One recurring criticism of using portraiture techniques in research, however, is that of counter-stories and goodness. Counter-stories capture negative realities and there is a possibility of revealing complications that might frame the participant's life, particularly as the reader individually interprets each story. Counter-stories also depict an alternative view of how participants successfully negotiate the world because it presents a substitution of the dominant discourse (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 32). Portraiture shows how people connect in their moments of glory and victory (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 23) because it withstands the usual process to record failure. In an effort to produce all things within a healthy and positive environment, portraiture openly includes any contradictory or ambiguous human experiences (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman-Davis, 1997, p. 9). Overall, portraiture enables research to capture true events in a positive and negative light, which merits the decision to incorporate the portraiture technique into the methodology for this research.

While, there has been some debate on the value of using portraiture, a key description includes the concept of capturing what the participants perceive and what is the reality of their environment (Briliant, 1991). West (2005) uncovers different types of portraits in research that include works of art, biographical data and documentaries. It should therefore be noted that conducting research that incorporates a range of participants from distinct, but similar geographical and cultural backgrounds, the data would be specifically individualistic and yet keeping with the context of the overall theme (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

Because originality in every narrative is consequential of ethnicities when using portraiture, the stories are not just limited to reproducing events. The creation of a portrait is an analysis of data from a mix of sources and occurrences. These sketches deliver an authentic narrative forming different thematic topics in order to create the larger story (Smeyers, 2008). It also helps to present a third or triangulated perspective on the experience and further endorses the confidentiality of the subjects. This interpretative activity is distant from the empirical paradigms that control much of social science research (Barone & Eisner, 2006). A perfect setting is developed because positive steps are identified incorporating an assortment of cultural ideas that are captured in their truest form (Charles, 2007). Consistent with Freire (2005) and

Foucault (2001), utilising portraiture in this particular research instills confidence in the women as they tell their stories while their thoughts are recorded in a setting furnishing them with a sense of freedom to express themselves.

Research Design

The examination of Middle Eastern Gulf women in different educational settings is fundamental to the development of the research design, which couples qualitative and quantitative methodologies and encompasses a grounded theory approach. The tools used in qualitative research help create a "personal, intensive and encompassing" environment (Peshkin, 1982, p. 54), when incorporating the diversity of social milieu. This also facilitates the development of community settings different to that of the researcher (Peshkin, 1982). Glaser (1998) notes that a researcher who concentrates on actors provides them with occasions to voice their deliberations about issues they deem important. The same type of articulation sanctions participants in a grounded theory research approach to reflect on empirically noteworthy actions to help gain better knowledge of previous activities and acquiring new visions.

Throughout the early design period, consultation between researcher and participant about participation and ease with the survey, enabled communications to take account of questions that helped trigger discussions between both parties to ensure no language barriers surfaced. Mutual respect is an important factor in a cross-cultural environment (Temple, 1997), and when English is not the first language it is of great importance in the context of bilingual communication (Obaid Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2011). Although Arabic and Farsi are the primary languages of the participants, these were not employed during the research project as all participants are highly competent in the English language and at the time of the data collection, many were undertaking postgraduate instruction in English. Obaid Al-Zubaidi and Rechards' (2011) research was also considered in that there are many academic impediments facing international students, which could include:

> … difficulty adjusting to the various accents of instructors along with their different teaching styles (Obaid Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2011, p. 111).

Similarly, although there were some initially perceived language barriers at the start of the research interaction, these were wholly considered and revisited to safeguard the communication between the researcher and the participants. For example, if the participants indicated that they misunderstood certain phrases, repeated words or simpler synonyms were

used as an alternative by way of a better explanation. This was essential because some Middle Eastern nationalities experience difficulties with either speaking or understanding the pronunciation of the English language (Obaid Al-Zubaidi & Rechards, 2011, p. 112). In this regard, accurate translation in cross-cultural incidences where values and language are not always fully understood by everyone (Temple, 1997) can also be a hindrance. The decision to communicate in English was acknowledged as appropriate for this research and agreed by all participants as suitable. However, a tape recorder was used to guarantee the correct form and register used by both parties.

When observing human behaviour as it occurs in a specific situation, traditional roles and values are more relaxed by way of measuring contextual variables (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This approach, most often pursues an explanation of group structure and substance across experiences and any phenomena can be explained within context. By understanding group behaviours, valuable strategies can be undertaken to eliminate assumptions and biases. Thus, any assumptions concerning Middle Eastern culture were completely rejected and the findings were only based on significance from internal themes that appeared throughout the data collection stage (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

In the context of this research, a snapshot of cultural and societal discourse relating to gender is addressed. It is important to conduct as vivid a representation of the scenarios as possible in order to understand the flexibility of the participant's current situation. Therefore, adapting and relating to personal topics during interview sessions was considered appropriate in these instances. Additionally, some of the topics under discussion in this research connect to sensitive issues and the mix of emotions that surface from the women provided fruitful data in helping to understand the hurdles facing them as foreign students in Australia. The women are seen to open up and express their perceptions and responses more comfortably with the researcher as they showed enjoyment when sharing their experiences, which is further endorsed by Shavarini (2007).

In instances where recording equipment was used, the participants were fully informed prior to attending any meetings with the researcher. Participants were also made aware of the steps taken to ensure the data was safe and only to be used for the purpose of the research (Shavarini, 2007). Shavarini has conducted much research with ethnically religious women, particularly from Iran and stresses the importance of ensuring security and safety when women from this geographical region contribute to social science research projects.

Participant Recruitment

In order to scope the project, an expression of interest was directed to a number of different learning institutions across Australia. Middle Eastern Gulf female students with either Arabic or Persian origins were invited to participate. Women between the ages of 18 and 35 years studying at varying ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students study) Colleges and post-secondary education institutions were targeted. The types of courses were of no significance and expressions of interest to prospective participants were distributed to Middle Eastern Gulf women studying at an array of institutions. A number of approaches were undertaken to seek participants and it was an extended process to convert the prospective participant into an actual confirmed contributor to the research.

To generate interest in the research, contact with Embassies and Consulates servicing Middle Eastern Gulf countries based in Australia, plus many Gulf Community Countries (GCC) and Persian student representative groups were sent emails with a request to inform any of their female nationals about this research project. Principals of educational institutions were contacted across a number of capital cities throughout Australia to invite participation from their Middle Eastern Gulf female students.

Once verbal or written permission was granted, introduction letters thanking the organisation for their assistance and also providing more details of the research and the researcher were sent to these institutions (Appendix A) in the hope that they would promote the value for Middle Eastern Gulf female students to participate in the research. The introduction letters outlined a brief summary of the researcher's experience and the nature of the enquiry to allow key personnel to make an informed decision before contacting prospective participants. It was felt imperative that all institutions were given the opportunity to review the context of the research before actually making contact with any of their female Middle Eastern Gulf student cohorts.

There were other occasions when personal contact was not possible with relevant bodies and at these junctures a mail-out was considered appropriate to inform the recipients about the research (Appendix B). Letters and emails outlining the details of the project were further dispatched to the GCC and Persian Diplomatic Services and GCC student representative groups which included a Project Advertisement (Appendix C) for their notice boards and a Project and Researcher Summary Notice (Appendix D). The Project and Researcher Summary Notice and the Project Advertisement provided instructions for interested parties to contact the researcher directly by email. When contact was made, the prospective participants were sent additional in-depth correspondence about the research and only when they signed and returned the research

consent form, were their details added to the list of prospective participants (Appendix E).

When female students expressed an interest in participating in this research, they were contacted by email enquiring if they had friends or colleagues who might also want to contribute to the research. It was felt central to build a network of students from different study or friendship groups across the Middle Eastern Gulf community groups in order to generate an end result of fruitful data. In many studies, participants with a large network of friends are often included for the purpose of recruiting more people into a research sample (Heckathorn, 1997). This snowballing effect was therefore encouraged throughout the initial participant enquiry stages, because this strategy is a technique used to develop information where participants recruit future interest from their social circles. The sample group therefore being similar to that of a rolling snowball.

It was deemed imperative to adhere to the ethics of conducting this research and therefore, no enquiry to gather research data was made with any Middle Eastern Gulf female student unless a consent form had been signed. Many educational institutions had to abide by their own internal ethical processes and the researcher had to adhere to these regulations in order to meet their requirements. The design for this research relied on triangulated data and the use of grounded theory to inform the construction of portraits as narrative representations of the data. These were further analysed to drive the generation of findings from personal accounts to perceptions of experience, identification of new understanding and knowledge and the final recommendations for improved experiences. Figure 3.3 outlines this process in more detail.

Literature Review

Thought provoking:
considered, reported, and analysed

Individual interviews   **Two online questionnaires**

Portraits developed
and findings were
identified
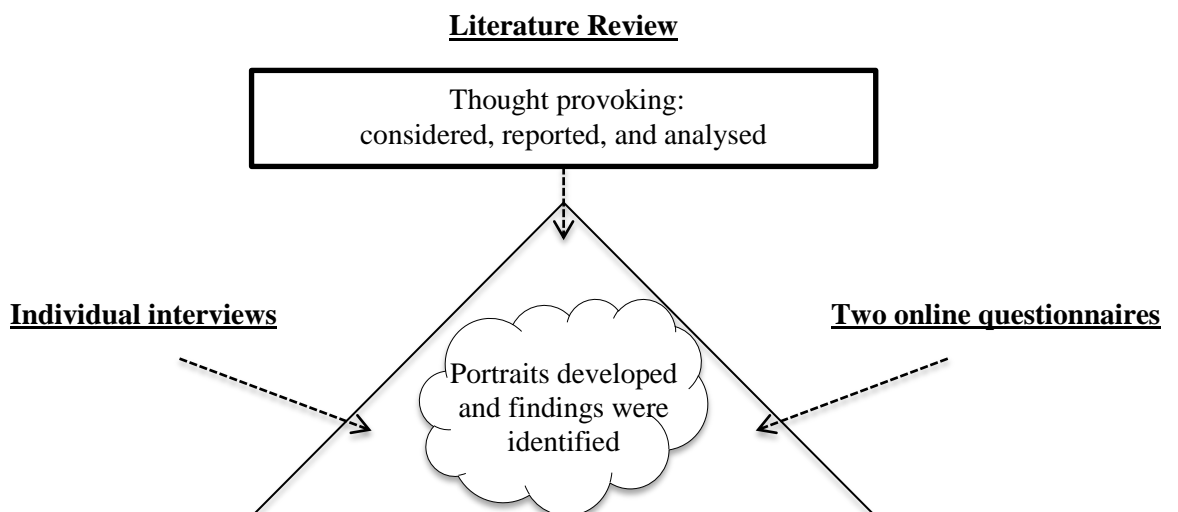
Figure 3.3 – Triangulated data

Research Phase One: part one – Initial Questionnaire

This phase included the wide recruitment of participants to the initial enquiry and letters were sent to these participants thanking them for agreeing to participate in the research. Each of the women completed an online questionnaire that referred to generic instances (Appendix F). This questionnaire was designed to obtain an overall depiction of the student, which also included demographic details and their opinions relating to the Australian education system. From the total of 15 women who participated in the first phase at the commencement of the questionnaire, 9 continued to Phase one, part two of the study.

Research Phase One: part two – Extended Questionnaire

During this phase, an additional participant expressed an interest to join the study. This particular female student reported she had heard about the research through a colleague and wanted to be considered for participation. She was accepted as a participant and once a consent form was signed, she was able to contribute. This participant preferred to send an outline of ideas and thoughts relevant to phase one, part one before answering the questionnaire in phase one, part two. There were 40 questions in phase one, part two referring to specific experiences within a social and educational context (Appendix G).

Research Phase Two: Interviews

The nine women who participated in phase one and the additional participate who joined at a later stage in phase one, part two all agreed to participate in the final phase involving personal interviews with the researcher. This consisted of more in-depth interviews either face to face or by telephone. The interviews involved questions relating to specific personal experiences and were designed to draw on individual occurrences. Each phase is outlined in more detail below and table 3.4 denotes each phase with participant numbers.

Table 3.4 - Research phases

Description of Phases	Total women participating
Phase One:	
Phase one (part one)	15
Phase one (part two)	10
	(9 from part one, plus an additional participant)
Phase Two:	
Face to face (interviews)	9
Telephone (interviews)	1

Participant Communication

Once the participants were confirmed, continued communication was often electronic. Participants indicated they were at ease with this form of communication. It was usual practice for the women to communicate online as they regularly used the Internet for social purposes and so it was deemed appropriate to use this method to communicate with them throughout all phases of the project. Implementing this type of communication approach assists in creating a familiar and comfortable environment for the women (Gallant, 2006).

Research Instrument - Pilot stage

In order to validate the research in phase one, part one and two, an exact replica of the considered online questionnaire were presented to the pilot participants. Appendix F and G denotes the exact questions asked, but the topics are highlighted below.

Phase one, part one.

- Personal details including name, address and contact information
- State in Australia and the name of the institution
- Type and length of course
- Type of accommodation
- First visit to Australia and whether it was the participant's choice
- Difficulty of course and participant's perception of level of difficulty
- Whether the participant has changed her study goals since arriving in Australia
- Teacher support
- Student's perception of passing the course
- Country which parents originate from, level of education of each parent and whether this had an influence on each participant
- Whether any family members had previously studied overseas

- Cultural traditions
- Individual observations relating to the Australian education system

Phase one, part two is further depicted below.

- Personal details including name, address and contact information
- Elaboration on whether the student believes she will pass the course or whether her goals have changed
- Strategies to advise other Middle Eastern Gulf women
- The mix of friendship groups
- Relating to male students
- The importance of family support
- Interaction with teachers and confidence in speaking in the classroom
- Cultural awareness of teachers
- Language issues
- Awareness of other international students
- Trust in the community and within the learning institution
- Differences of studying in Australia and possible recommendations to others
- Obstacles that students experienced in Australia (cultural, educational)
- Australian culture

A pilot questionnaire for phase one, part one was conducted using a group of friends and colleagues already known to the researcher. Pilot studies are utilised in two ways in social science research and can indicate small-scale feasibility studies or trials conducted in preparation for a major study (Polit, Beck & Hungler, 2001, p. 467). Pilot questionnaires can also integrate a mix of quantitative or qualitative methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 47). Some pilot research projects have commenced with qualitative data collection on comparatively uncharted issues and the information has been subsequently used to demonstrate results incorporating a quantitative phrase (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 47).

Ten women from a range of educational and cultural backgrounds were involved in the pilot study. Each pilot participant was forwarded a link to the online Survey Monkey questionnaire with instructions to answer all questions as if it was a real enquiry. All pilot participants were invited to provide honest feedback regarding their ease in completing the questions ranging from how easy the vocabulary was to their understanding and the length of the questions. The pilot participants were requested to make a note of any initial observations

that referred to the questionnaire style and formality. Lastly, any feedback regarding the contribution of any additional information to improve the format and user-friendliness of the survey was encouraged. This pilot enabled the questions and structure of the survey to be verified as appropriate and accessible.

A pilot questionnaire for phase one, part two was conducted using the researcher's university supervisors. There were two respondents. The decision to incorporate a second pilot study was deemed important because the researcher's supervisors could provide a higher level of feedback to that of the first pilot participants. One of the benefits of conducting pilot studies is that it can give prior notice about where the main research project could fail.

It can also provide valuable information such as whether protocol has been followed or whether the research instruments are appropriate (De Vaus, 1993, p. 54) and provide assistance in validating the project. Although important, it must be noted that pilot studies can have limitations. These include the possibility of inaccurately predicting or assuming matters on the basis of pilot data. Winter (2000) suggests:

> One's notion of truth determines one's definition of accurate representation, reliability and trustworthiness. Conflicts as to the nature of 'validity' arise from a lack of consensus concerning a particular theory or philosophy of truth (Winter, 2000, p. 5).

Therefore, conducting pilot studies is not a guarantee that research will be successful. Some of these limitations can refer to statistical foundations because they are mostly based on minor numbers. In this regard, social scientists that are involved with chiefly quantitative research will more than likely contend that a primary feature of a pilot study includes the data not being incorporated to test a hypothesis or embrace data from the actual research when the outcomes are reported (Peat, Mellis, Williams & Xuan, 2002, p. 57).

It has been noted in other research that the topic of pilot studies is not always discussed, used or reported (Prescott & Soeken, 1989, p. 60) and that full pilot studies are not topical in research literature (Van Teijlingen, Rennie, Hundley, & Graham, 2001). However, when they are reported, usually only a particular method is justified, which predominantly refers to only one component of the pilot study (De Vaus, 1993).

For the purpose of this particular research, it should be noted that the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability because it was deemed a crucial part of the methodology being undertaken. Some points are highlighted following the administration of the pilot study. This is important because conducting pilot studies can be very time consuming and fraught with

unanticipated issues (Mason & Zuercher, 1995). Similarly, Crosswaite and Curtice (1994) argue that researchers have a level of accountability, meaning there is indeed a strict need to ensure the best possible use of data.

Overall, the pilot survey was received with a positive response. Many of the pilot participants reported the questions were easy to understand and overall, they had no issues regarding the choices available in the drop down boxes. The test participants worked either with young people or were educators in their own right and in this instance, their feedback was regarded as valuable to the final design of the research instrument. Some of the pilot participants were also currently studying which provided even more authentic responses. Furthermore, the pilot participants derived from a variety of nationalities including British, European and Australian nationals. This was deemed central for the purpose of providing a wider perspective on the design and creativity of the online questionnaires because the responses might differ according to cultural interpretation.

It was also believed that if the pilot participants were limited to only one nationality, it might provide a restricted view because the final research participants are from a range of countries and cultural responses are considered appropriate. It was not an important factor however, for the pilot participants to have a connection to the Arab or Persian Gulf environment. Both pilot feedback responses proved valuable in revisiting the style and length of the questionnaires. Peers (1996) found that common issues relating to questions requiring completion answers are that there are often missing data (p. 3). This is partly because participants sometimes choose not to answer questions that they find difficult, particularly when the questions involve personal knowledge, opinions or thoughts (Peers, 1996, p. 3). In contrast, it was also noted that missing data could also be informative because data that discloses selective non-responses builds on further knowledge (Peers, 1996, p. 4).

Data Framework and Collection

The incorporated methodology included the necessity for both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This combination enabled rich data to be gathered in order to answer the research questions fully. Quantitative and qualitative methods were incorporated because the analysis of structured questionnaires embraced an examination across similar data in order for descriptive data to be illuminated from the survey responses. The qualitative method supported strong individual portraits, the development of concepts and the implementation of a series of themes that stemmed from the exploration of natural social functions. This was considered necessary because relatively little was known about the participant's lives and an in-depth understanding

became more apparent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as each theme was identified.

Finally, the voices of the women were clearly heard incorporating this approach and their dialogues were harvested through their expression (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2004). Accordingly, story-telling that incorporated a portraiture approach, guided by Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), was the most suitable method to achieve the desired outcomes for this research. The participant sample was small and in-depth stories that connected to the lives of each of the women were appropriately developed, explored and reported. The data provided great insight into the experiences and perceptions of this small group of women and an interview protocol was included to provide for, and obtain a deeper understanding of the goals to be achieved. With this in mind, the following aspects of each interview included:

Interviewer profile

In the context of this research, providing a summarised researcher profile, including demographic details to the participants at the interview, indicated the researcher had sensitivity and understanding of the cultural traditions of Gulf Middle Eastern women. This helped create a sense of trust between interviewer and interviewee, particularly when the participants opened up with sensitive information.

Once the women felt they were in a trusting environment, some participants expressed their intention to continue their dialogue when their studies ended in Australia. This was a crucial development in the research because their experiences of returning to their country of origin provided additional data. While not originally sought as part of the planned data collection, these rich extended dialogues between the women and the research, and initiated by the women, strengthen and elaborated the experience initially reported.

Time limit

Each interview was scheduled for no longer than one hour. There were fewer diversions because the time limit provided a structured environment.

Structured set of interview questions

The opening questions were clearly designed to identify an outline of the participant's life in their country of origin and in Australia. The structure of the questions was simple, which created a relaxed and chatty environment between two women. The latter part of the questions

was deeper and more personal, but this did not affect the interview setting as the opening questions were designed to create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

Religious and cultural sensitivities that had a bearing on the women's level of contribution were also addressed and assisted in the development of delicate and complex narratives. Three approaches of collating data within this research were thought appropriate that involved questionnaires, personal interviews and the creation of individual portraits.

Conducting the Questionnaire

The online questionnaires were separated in two sections. Part one was distributed in March 2009 and the second part of the questionnaire in April 2009. Although it was hopeful that a large group of participants would respond considering the various methods used to publicise this research, only fifteen participants confirmed their interest to complete the online questionnaire.

Information taken from the two online questionnaires was collated quantitatively, using simple descriptive statistics. The first questionnaire consisted of 30 questions concentrating on rudimentary information from each participant. This questionnaire was constructively designed in order to capture fundamental information and not be too intense with delicate questions. A series of charts and tables were produced to show the presentation of the intelligence received. The second questionnaire was designed to obtain more personal and sensitive data. The researcher consistently clarified answers and ensured the participants were comfortable with their responses to enable their smooth transition from phase one, part one to phase one, part two. In this regard, ethics approval was obtained at Edith Cowan University to ensure the process of design and data collection were within the rules and boundaries of conducting research that included such a high level of intimacy.

A combination of descriptive and conceptualisation was incorporated by the completion of two questionnaires followed by constructive interviews of each individual. In order to obtain simple descriptive statistics, the first method of collating data involved the distribution of a structured questionnaire. These surveys captured fundamental information for each of the women that expressed an interest to participate in the early stages. The first online questionnaire was designed to provide basic information and was distributed to anyone who expressed an interest to contribute and who signed a consent form. It was entitled phase one, part one. The completion of the questionnaire provided an introduction to the individual lives of the women and obtained their initial responses to family matters and educational opinions.

The second online questionnaire entitled phase one, part two, was more detailed and the enquiry addressed only a shortlist of ten participants. Individual correspondence containing the link for this questionnaire was distributed to selected participants who requested a desire to further continue their participation. Finally, the questions used to prompt discussion during the personal interviews are summarised below, in order to illustrate in more detail the themes. The full range of conversation prompts is further depicted in Appendix H.

General Introductory Questions

1. Why did you decide to participate?
2. What are you studying?
3. Can you explain a little more about your visits to other countries?
4. What perceptions did you have of Australia before you came here to study?
5. I'm interested to know if you are the first girl in your family to study overseas.

Middle Eastern Gulf women

1. Could you give me your perceptions of what you believe a Middle Eastern Gulf woman is like?
2. Describe a Persian and an Arab Gulf woman.

Plagiarism

1. Are you aware of the seriousness of plagiarism?
2. What happens in your country?
3. Have you ever plagiarised your work (deliberately or unknowingly)?

Teaching staff in Australia

1. Can you tell me about your favourite and worst teacher in Australia?
2. What are the differences between teachers from your country and teachers in Australia?
3. Can you provide any advice to teachers wanting to work in your country?
4. Do you think there are specific qualities a teacher must have in order to teach students from your country?
5. Do you think their own personal religious faith makes a difference to how they respond to Gulf students? (I am thinking about religious beliefs that might clash). Would this make a difference do you think?

Genders

1. Do you think men from the Middle Eastern Gulf experience difficulties or problems when they study in Australia?
2. Do you get to socialise more with the men from your country now that you are in Australia or is it no different to when you are at home?

Cultural Clubs

1. Have you ever attend any social functions with the cultural club of your country?
2. How many students from your country are in this city in Australia?

Possible difficulties or hurdles

1. What motivated you to study in Australia?
2. Do you have any difficulties?
3. How do you get on with reading all the articles that are expected at postgraduate level? What assistance do you get with this?
4. What happens if you don't understand all that the teacher says in your tutorials or lectures? Do you have a strategy in place?

Family and friends

1. Can you describe the living environment in your country?
2. Do you miss your friends back home?
3. In your country do the people see a great image of you because you are in this country?
4. Can you talk about marriage in your country and what does it mean to you?

Cultural differences/divides

1. What are the things that make you notice the cultural divides the most?
2. In the news there has been lots of publicity about banning the burqa, has this affected you while you have been in Australia?
3. In your opinion, what is the worst thing about being in Australia?
4. If someone was visiting your country, what would you tell them to look out for the most
5. Do you have any advice for students from your country that might come to Australia?

Place of study

1. Do you think you have chosen the right place in Australia to study? If so, why? If not, why not?

Interviews

In phase two, the researcher met with the women separately in a location that was familiar to them in order to discuss their responses in more detail, and to elaborate on more delicate questions. Personal interviews with the shortlist of ten participants subsequently captured more in-depth responses that uncovered even richer data and are described in more detail in Appendix H.

One participant was unable to attend a personal interview, and opted to be interviewed by telephone. The environment for the face-to-face interviews was within a relaxed setting, as the women were encouraged to participate in a dialogue that openly represented their true feelings. They were invited to participate in more sensitive topics that addressed feelings, opinions and emotions relating to friendship, family and education.

During the interviews, explicit topics were addressed, and the beginnings of personal portraits were created, keeping confidentiality throughout this process. In this regard, the names of the participants and their family members and friends were all changed to hide their true

identity. In some circumstances, different portraits were used to tell the story of other women to further endorse their privacy. This ensured that when sensitive, and very personal events were told, the nationality, place of study and family backgrounds of these specific women were not revealed.

Compilation of Portraits

Individual portraits were created with information obtained from the personal interviews, as well as additional information captured from the questionnaires and subsequent correspondence. The portraits finally provided a respectful representation of the completed data for the women, and were deemed as highly significant to this research. The portraits enabled the context and history of the participants to be captured, developed and elaborated upon in more detail (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005), and the portraitist was able to include creativity in hiding the true identity of the participants. In this way, demographic data was equally significant in the context of these personal experiences.

Portraiture, as an authentic research structure in learning and education environments, is a valuable technique. Portraiture was therefore, clearly the preferred tool and most appropriate method for presenting data within this research project. The use of portraiture allowed all participants to tell their individual stories without judgment or feedback (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), and in order to document the data accurately, the research formulated individual stories with specific expressions that illustrated the women's experiences while in Australia. Hearing and responding individually to each story established new insights to invoke originality from the same text.

Data Analysis

The data were gathered using two questionnaire instruments, individual interviews and the development of elaborated profiles or portraits of some participants. In examining all these data, and building from the conceptual framework initially developed from the literature review, which provoked further thoughts in identifying social processes within a series of living circumstances, a grounded theory approach (Glaser, 2001; 1998; 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was then applied. This approach assisted in interpreting the data in order to understand how Middle Eastern Gulf women perceive their experiences of living and studying in Australia. In essence, this approach utilised an inductive process that entailed taking the themes acknowledged through the literature review and scanning the data for evidence as influences in the women's lives.

The interviews were reviewed and transcribed. Email contributions to expand on existing conversations were also compiled in order to provide a detailed and comprehensive collection of data for the women. This was deemed important because in an educational context, the generation of data from interviews assists in acknowledging or identifying standards. It also presented different perspectives for future deliberation as well as inspired personal reflection. Therefore, by presenting situations from which theories emerge, teachers are able to "think like a teacher" (Wassermann, 1994; Shulman, 1992) and use this information to implement actions where necessary.

Data were coded outlining themes incorporating ideas from separate topics. Labels were physically marked on individual hard copies of the interview transcripts for identifiable purposes, particularly when they needed to be retrieved at a later date. This became an easy task later when the data was reviewed to make comparisons, and ascertaining any patterns of behaviour. In this way, new and emerging themes were coded that were present in the data. This coding task identified a number of new themes and helped prioritise the significance, and importance of various elements relevant to the participants.

Also, coding was generated without any preconceived ideas and with an open-mind. Charmaz (2006) argues that without bias, relevant questions identify how structure and context serve to support, maintain, hinder and change actions or statements (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 94-95). Grounded codes emerged from the data because prejudices and previous knowledge of the participants, and their cultural traditions were put aside. By implementing this strategy, better concentration of discovering new themes and phenomena in the data was achieved (Gibbs, 2006). Constant comparison and coding was implemented to ensure all dimensions were explored within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 75-79). A number of new themes also transpired from existing codes following strategies endorsed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), and also incorporating the techniques of Ryan and Bernard (2003). Consistent queries throughout the coding process included:

- Word repetitions and key words
- Cultural classifications
- Comparing and contrasting of discourses
- Missing information
- Metaphors and analogies
- Transitions and connectors
- Unmarked texts

The following steps were used in the coding process to identify pertinent themes and connections to the women:

1. Behaviours and specific conduct of the participants.
2. Identified events relating to culture.
3. Activities identified as non-cultural and relevant to the participant's experience.
4. Strategies, practices or tactics used by the women during their stay in Australia.
5. General states of mind and conditions and the general wellbeing of all the participating women.
6. What directs the women's actions (meaning and interpretation):

   a) what concepts do participants use to understand their world? What norms, values and rules guide their actions?

   b) what meaning or significance does it have for participants, how do they construe events what are the feelings?

   c) what symbols do people use to understand their situation?
7. Participation – adaption to a new setting or involvement.
8. Relations or interactions.
9. Conditions and constraints.
10. Consequences.
11. Settings – the entire context of the events under study.
12. Reflexive - researcher's role in the process, how intervention generated the data.

With the extraction of themes established and the comprehensive data collection for each woman complete, it was possible to construct the short introductions to each woman around the most compelling issues to provide a simple comparison between each of them. This approach provided the tools to create rich and deep descriptive portraits of some women as exemplars of their experiences. Figure 3.4 below describes the progression more fully and highlights how the coding process was formed.

Level 4
Theories emerged
from saturated
categories

Level 3
Thematic coding created
highly defined themes

Level 2
Following examination of level 1 coding,
individual categories were developed

Level 1
Initial open coding with raw data with the focus on labeling different segments
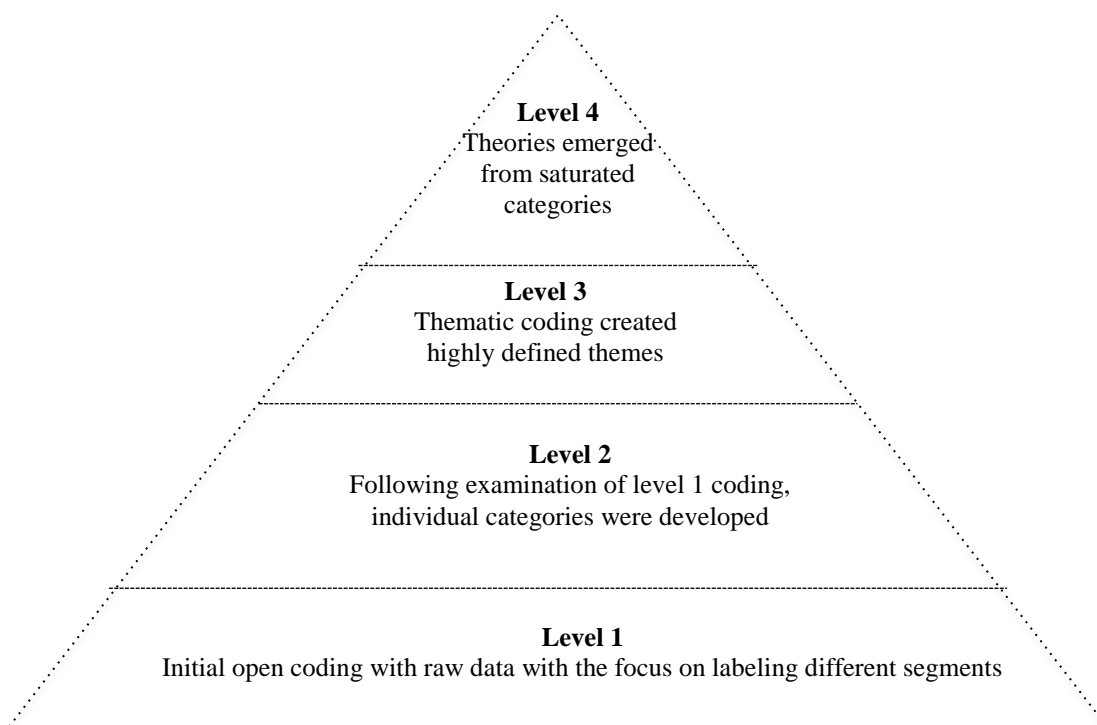
Figure 3.4: Coding procedure and steps for analysis

Finally the summative portrait of Semah, was designed to introduce the critical elements presented in the experiences of the Middle Eastern Gulf women. Their second cultural experience is typified in Semah's story, as she reflects many of the usual occurrences and some of the extra-ordinary experiences the women described. The decision to utilise Semah was imperative to provide an overview of the cultural values and traditions of Middle Eastern Gulf women. Semah assists in understanding the women's roots and backgrounds and provides a very personal introduction to their experiences and further enables the anonymity of the women to be maintained.

Confidentiality

Due to the sensitivity of this research, it was central to protect the anonymity of all the participating women. In order to fulfill this function, intricate information has been slightly disguised in the revealing data chapters. Sometimes the full information discussing where a participant originates from, family circumstances and educational level has been shifted from the reality. In certain portraits, the stories of other women are included as a further disguise. Similarly, individual names and places have been camouflaged at great length so that even the participants themselves will not be able to recognise their own stories.

Certain information of a sensitive nature has not been fully articulated because of possibly revealing the participants' identity. In these circumstances, a brief overview, or specific comments about the topic are disclosed within the data chapters rather than providing the whole portrait of that participant. This has been imperative to adhere to the ethics requirements of this research and to continue to keep the participants' privacy.

Validation and Triangulation of Data

The precise interpretation of validity is debatable in educational and social research because no single definition exists (Winter, 2000). However, it is essentially the means by which the evidence is achieved and different validation approaches are implemented for different methodologies.

Validation could also be viewed as an honest pathway to uncovering different truths (Winter, 2000). The combination of data collection methods in this particular research incorporated a triangulated view being captured and sustained. Guided by a descriptive analysis and incorporating the development of questionnaires and structured interviews, a holistic approach in obtaining information was considered suitable. The wider perspective encapsulated a trustworthy response from each of the participating women.

In order to justify the measure of truth and quality of this research, it was central to perform certain tasks to validate the content. Validating research is an essential component of qualitative studies because of the possible subjectivity simultaneous with the examination and interpretation of results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Similarly, obtaining realistic ideas in triangulation can be difficult (Bloor, 1997). This is because two different approaches sometimes can produce two different analyses, which are not just limited to one biased outlook.

However, it should be noted that the advantage of triangulation is that it helps to develop an examination of a larger range of data thus, providing greater richness. For example, if two views contradicted each other, then the differences are considered to be used to portray deeper and more meaningful data, which can also lead to more refined explanations (Taylor, Gibbs & Lewins, 2005).

The most commonly used form of triangulation for this research was the implementation of multiple sources of data that included answers to the two questionnaires, the actual interviews, and additional written texts and emails. The complexity in analysing and comparing the two different theories was intricate, inasmuch as the main points had to be

identified and supported across all the elements. By validating this method and providing quality to the research, different perspectives of the phenomena became more worthy.

There were a number of steps taken to ensure auditability for this research. Firstly, it was central to cross check the type of questions posed because if there were issues associated with the construction of the questionnaires, there could be genuine barriers between the interviewer and interviewee. The researcher was mindful of the social customs associated with the participants and this was taken into consideration when designing the questions presented in the online surveys. Messick (1989) outlines construct validity should involve three forms of strength across the data:

- The content,
- Synchronising the content, and
- The extrapolation of data.

Incorporating Messick's (1989) approach, one question with the online questionnaire that caused some confusion relating to how participants viewed the trustworthiness of parents, friends and neighbours, was revisited. The responses were not consistent and created some confusion during the analysis. Further clarification was therefore required in order to strengthen the validity, and participants were contacted separately to explain their responses in more detail. Clarification with the participants regarding exact meaning was conducted and inference was extracted from the correct data. By undergoing this process, it was revealed there was misinterpretation of the question from more than half the women that created inconsistencies with the data. After careful consideration it was therefore decided that any data relating to this question was disregarded, because the variances created difficulties in validating the reliability of the responses. At the onset, a brief summary of the researcher was distributed in order to ascertain a type of relationship with the participants, which was a deliberating factor when the reliability of data was reviewed (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Similarly, the design of the questionnaires was designed to nurture the relationship between participant and researcher. The questions extracted simple data at the beginning of the survey, but then subsequently expanded into more sensitive areas once the participants became more involved and familiar with the research. It is important to understand that a questionnaire with debatable constructability would have been likely to indicate inaccurate conclusions (Peers, 1989) and therefore designing the questions in the relation-building format, added to the validity of the research. Also, the quality of data captured during the interview process was equally as important to measure the level of worth throughout the research. In doing so,

attempts were made to avoid use of any idiomatic phrases during the interview process because the participants may have misjudged the meaning and therefore, might potentially respond inappropriately to a situation.

Prior to the interview being conducted, interview questions were revised to avoid the possibility of idiomatic phrases being used. These sets of questions were sent to the participants and they were asked to seek further clarification from the researcher prior to participating in the interview if there were any uncertainties relating to meaning. Similarly, if any possible idiomatic phrases were identified after the interview had been conducted and transcribed, then the participants were contacted in order to clarify the meaning of their original response to that specific question.

To further endorse this, complete interview transcripts were read to participants to ensure the quality and validity of the discourse. Throughout this process, they were able to question, confirm or clarify any of their individual responses. However, when the portraits were constructed, the women were not involved in this process, as the data used for the design derived from individual interview transcripts that were already validated. Figure 3.6 shows the dedicated areas used to incorporate the complete triangulation of the data.

At the onset, a variety of research information obtained from existing literature relating to women in the educational arena was explored and considered. Then, data from the two questionnaires were compiled and coded to identify common themes. Finally, the interview transcripts were segregated into topics to include educational and social contexts, and also the women's thoughts on their future journey. This triangulation of data was used to form individual portraits of the women participating in this research.

Methodological triangulation was attained through the comparison of existing research identified during the early stages and the continuing behaviour of the participants. This theoretical triangulation was accomplished through data collection in comparable circumstances. The cultural context and participant portraits represents the validation of the data derived from existing knowledge, online questionnaires and personal interviews. To further validate this method, implicit and explicit processes were undertaken to identify, critique and analyse conjectures on any communication during the earlier stages of the research (Cherednichenko, Gay, Hooley, Kruger, & Mulraney, 1998).

The collaborative validation process included critical occurrences and behaviours, and "threads and key words" from all sources were paralleled for cohesive and divergent findings

(Cherednichenko, Davies, Kruger, O'Rourke, 2001, p. 6). The descriptive, interpretation and theorising of the data was incorporated into the final creation of the portraits within a cultural context. This supported the trustworthiness and validity of the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Overall, the validation and reliability of this research was considered in all areas to ensure the trustworthiness and strength of the data interpretation. The final analysis took into consideration any limitations placed on the research project or the researcher and the outcomes were described with confidence as to the quality of work. Similarly, the literature provided a guide in assisting in the compilation of rich and worthwhile data in support of the validity of the research.

Limitations

Using qualitative research did have its limitations because of the second language acquisition issues, which has unique problems (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 130). The language alone, on occasions was presented as a drawback, since conclusions about what the participant was feeling may not have always been easily reachable. This research did not explore what the participants thought or felt but rather how the researcher interpreted how the participants felt or thought in their second language. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) suggest this can also create limitations within research projects. With this in mind, the researcher, on occasions, had to infer and generalise more largely than for other kinds of qualitative research so as to arrive at an accurate description.

Although there are limitations when there are different native languages involved, Schlinke-Llano (1983) suggests it is appropriate for participants to be involved in descriptive emulating speech acts in a familiar language-use context. The risks and prevention of risks relating to this were explicitly addressed during the ethics approval process to safeguard all parties and to ensure all areas of concern were considered. It is recognised therefore that although there were possible limitations because of the power relationship between researcher and those being researched, it was concluded this would not interfere with the final data identified. Although the researcher has familiarity with the Gulf Middle Eastern culture, the researcher is a westerner and took measures to provide a constructive and unbiased approach. However, there was an area of caution identified throughout the research process because the Middle Eastern culture, community and, or religious values can sometimes be perceived differently by western values (Shavarini, 2004).

All this was thoroughly considered and measures were taken to consider these limitations. A further limitation was identified in the potential criticism of sample

size. However, it was accepted that qualitative studies of this nature that provide deep and rich descriptions of personal experience, could not normally be generated in broad-based quantitative studies. While generalisable findings can provide evidence, which soundly informs decision-making, they do not claim to be automatically applicable to entire populations. Nevertheless, they do provide valid and trustworthy insights, and new knowledge about individual experiences which can guide and assist new knowledge for decision-makers such as those within education.

It was therefore crucial to discriminate between strong and poor studies, and recognise limitations both in the design and analysis of this research in order to judge the trustworthiness of the findings (Peers, 1996). With the correct methodological approaches in place, a contextual view of the women and their country of origin are further explored in the next chapter. This information is designed to produce a better insight into some of the cultural and family traditions surrounding the lives of the contributing women in this research.

CHAPTER 4 – THE WOMEN IN A CULTURAL CONTEXT

Chapter 3 outlined the appropriate methodology for this research and encompasses a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques. The use of portraiture is also presented as a key tool for describing individuality in order to place specific narratives into perspective. This chapter focuses on cultural descriptions through a geographical overview and contextualises the home countries of each woman. It then presents their demographic profile to introduce them within their cultural contexts and to position their experience in Australia through the backgrounds they bring with them.

World War I "marked a turning point in the political history of the Middle East" (Selvik & Stenslie, 2001, p. 21) and alerted the western world to the complexities of Middle Eastern cultures. Furthermore, in recent times, there has been a general view that "women's legal status and social positions are worse in Muslim countries" (Moghadam, 2003, p. 3), which is consistent with other research indicating there are often incorrect assumptions about Middle Eastern women (Ramadan, 2010; Shavarini, 2003; Mernissi, 2003, 2000).

In order to provide a better understanding of the participant's cultural and traditional values, this chapter outlines fundamental characteristics of the Middle Eastern Gulf. It describes historical values, statistical data and customary traditions that connect to the women's place of origin. These are appropriate in order to understand women, as agents of social change, (Rizvi, 2005; Moghadam, 2003) as collective reformed customs and practices produce a deeper understanding of community values. Moghadam (2003) found that:

> To understand the roles and status of women… it is necessary to examine economic development and political change—which in turn are affected by regional and global developments (Moghadam, 2003, p. 2).

An understanding of the social context clearly underpins the substance of this current research. This research builds on the issues identified in the conceptual framework in response to the broader questions and presents a portrait of the participants in a structured setting. This research travels with the women along their Australian educational journey and captures their voices before, during and after their passage ends. Social scholars have previously researched Muslim women in an educational context (Hashmi, 2009; Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008; Mellor, 2007). Others have solely focused on the Middle Eastern Gulf region (Harrold, 2009; Gallant, 2006; Barise, 2004) and many of the outcomes and new findings have assisted in the development of this thesis. Particular distinctions between culture and class, as well as religious discrimination and the encouraged empowerment of women (Hamsi, 2009; Pearce, Down &

Moore, 2008; Mellor, 2007; Gallant, 2004; Moghadam, 2003) are key factors in this research. Moghadam (2003) suggests:

> Contrary to popular opinion, the Middle East is not a uniform and homogeneous region. Women are themselves stratified by class, ethnicity, education, and age. There is no archetypal Middle Eastern Woman, but rather women inserted in quite diverse socioeconomic and cultural arrangements (Moghadam, 2003, p. 10).

With this in mind, women across the Middle East clearly afford attention in order to highlight their development and progression. It is relevant to overview the women's country of origin in order to provide a broader insight alongside any previous knowledge already identified. Selvik & Stenslie (2011) suggest there are many cases in the Middle East where academic literature focusing on gender shows diverse findings across the private and public domains. The Middle East is highlighted as:

> … a 'mosaic' consisting of diverse ethnic groups, faiths, languages, occupations, and ways of life. However, there are also important common features shared by a majority of the region's population (Selvik & Stenslie, 2011, p.4).

A variety of methodological approaches ranging from ethnographic enquiries (Harold, 2009; Hashmi, 2009; Gallant, 2006; Barise, 2004) to portrait narratives provide a rich and deep expose of participants. It is important therefore, to acknowledge this level of information as it positions participants in a better place when they describe their experiences. Portraiture clearly helps to give them "a voice through the research" (Pearce, Down & Moore, 2008, p. 1), particularly as the acknowledgement of individual stories potentially open up new descriptions about life experiences (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005).

The study of social change has been frequently conducted using comparative methods and achieves deeper insights into society and culture (Rivzi, 2005; Moghadam, 2003). In this chapter, the associations and comparisons across the Gulf region of the Middle East are captured and the nuances relating to social change, culture, experience, background and expectations are also acknowledged.

A composite portrait of a typical woman from the Middle Eastern Gulf, named Semah, follows to illustrate a rich but summative description of the issues and experiences encountered by the participants studying in Australia. Semah has been created from a combination of all the women and getting to know her will enable insights into the thinking and concerns of the participants and will personalise and contextualise the data that follows. Semah is not designed

to trivialise any of the women, but to shield their individual identity and to create a somewhat typical personality with who to relate as the detailed data are discussed. In this way, and by providing a more personalised construction of the experiences, there is the opportunity to become better acquainted with the social and educational narratives the participants reveal at a later stage. Not only does this composite portrait draw on the similarities between the women, it also attempts to highlight some of the distinctions in their discourses.

Although Semah is a composite portrait, the information is derived from a collection of comments, images and events described by the real participants in this research. Some features are documented in more detail later, but Semah shows the amalgamated views within her portrait in order to acquire an understanding of the issues relevant to this research. The narrative that follows is designed to connect with the delicate experiences of the participants as the semi-fictional composite character is given life within the thesis and the women are brought to the surface through her voice.

Composite Portrait of Semah

In the summer months, the temperature in the Middle East can reach as high as 50 degrees Celsius. The terrain is hot and dry all year round with very little rain. On the rare occasions when rain does fall, the desert range can be seen with dotted greenery. Most people are not exposed to the heat because there are indoor shopping malls and entertainment complexes throughout the area.

The stretch of water known as the Persian Gulf separates the two sections of land between the Gulf Community Countries (GCC) and Iran. GCC members prefer the terminology 'Gulf Arabs' and identify themselves as Arabs. Those originating from Iran speak Farsi (among other languages) and do not identify themselves as Gulf Arabs. Al Habtoor (2011), in his letter to the Arab League writes:

The people who live around the Arabian Gulf on both sides are predominantly Arabs. Therefore, by sheer weight of demographics the use of Persian Gulf is inaccurate (Al Habtoor, 2011).

Halliday (1996) however, suggests there has been prolonged resentment, and argues:

Hostility between Arabs and Iranians has been an enduring feature of the Gulf for centuries, if not millennia (Halliday, 1996, p.3).

Semah comes from the GCC and prefers to be known as a 'Gulf Arab'. Perhaps in the eyes of the western world she has a very large family, but in the GCC it is a normal size. Of her ten siblings, six brothers and four sisters, Semah is the middle child, but the eldest female. The atmosphere in her family home is always welcoming and everyone enjoys spending time socialising with each other.

Semah's mother is highly respected and at her happiest when the whole family is gathered in the family home together. Although her father is now retired, he did work as a Government Minister and held a high-powered position. Three of her brothers have followed in his footsteps and now have management roles in different government departments. They are all married and have 10 children between them. One other brother is also married with two children; twins, and three of her sisters have two children each. She loves her extended family dearly, and her home is usually busy with her nephews, nieces and in-laws visiting most days. When asked about her best friends, Semah will always give the sister closest to her as that one special friend that she trusts. This family is close and they share many experiences and activities together.

Semah loves designer clothes, jewellery and perfume. Her wardrobe is full of expensive designer wear and she has a colour for every occasion. However, she wears a long black abayer over these clothes at all times when appearing in public. When she is alone with her female friends, she is not shy to remove the abayer, but it is custom and a national pride to wear the dress of her country when she is in public or at cultural celebrations. Her hair is very long and is usually tied up high with extravagant clips and then covered with her black shayler that matches her abayer. She has many abayer sets, housing splendid sequined designs and tribal motifs, and she never wears the same shoes or matching handbag on consecutive days. Her eye make-up is also important and she uses a lot of kohl to accentuate their shape and colour. With years of practice and observing older female family members, she now has this daily ritual down to a fine art. In Semah's opinion, the women who wear Shaylers or any type of head covering need to accentuate their eyes as this is the only feature that is acceptable to be shown in public.

Coming from the Gulf, Semah is a dedicated Muslim. The holy month of Ramadan is a special event in her life and she joins more than 1 billion Muslims each year to celebrate this event (Bialkowski, Etebari and Wisniewski, 2012). Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and Muslims abstain from food, drink and marital relations from dawn until sunset during this period. They are also encouraged to pray regularly and to be more aware of

contributing to charitable organisations in order to fulfill their requirement of Zakaat (online Muslim living). The Quran states:

Oh ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may [learn] self-restraint... (Quran II:183).

While her family constantly enjoys a close relationship, this special time of the year brings them even closer together. They are a religious family and are very serious in participating in the rituals of fasting during this time. When she is in her country, Semah wakes up early ahead of the sun rising and takes pleasure in eating a sahar breakfast meal with her family. During the month of Ramadan, pre-dawn time is known as sahar and it is very special because this is when Muslims wake early for their first meal of the day (sahar) as well as recite prayers, supplications and litanies (Amini, 2007, p. 90).

Semah states this meal provides the strength needed to get through the trials and tribulations of the day before sunset, which is the next time she can eat again. She is not permitted to drink water, eat food or participate in any pleasurable activity during the hours of sunlight. When the sun does goes down, the sound of 'Allah Akbar' can be heard across the city to inform everyone that the fasting has ended for that day and it is time for Salat (prayer). At this time, she drinks water and eats fresh dates before heading to the Mosque to pray. As a woman, she does not have to pray all the time like the male members of her family, but she chooses to do so.

The holy month of Ramadan is one of the five central pillars of being a good Muslim and most Muslims, like Semah, are extremely ardent about fasting during this time (Ahmad, 2010). Although children, the aged and the sick are not required to fast, there are still steps being taken to ensure the wellbeing of all Muslims during this time. Ahmad (2010) writes that Muslims with diabetes do not necessarily view themselves as 'sick' and so are always keen to fast. He also states that care must be taken more to make sure these individuals are safe during Ramadan and are able to enjoy the religious ramifications of fasting rather than becoming more sick.

With care and attention, all Muslims can enjoy participating in Ramadam and enjoy their family meals. After Salat, Semah joins her family for the first meal of the evening, which is known as Iftah. After the observances of Ramadan, Iftar is often done as a community and many individuals gather together to break the fast together. This is what Semah enjoys and after

Maghrib, a date is the first thing eaten to break the fast before more divulgence into the larger feast.

She is in Melbourne now, studying for a postgraduate degree and lives with her brother and his family in a city apartment overlooking Flinders Street Railway Station. Her twin nephews attend childcare three days a week to give her sister-in-law some free time to shop or visit the local beauty salon. Her brother also studies at the same university, which makes her feel more secure.

Ramadan is very different in Australia. Semah observes how the diverse cultural groups residing in Australia continue to be unaffected by Ramadan, while she continues to follow the rituals. Not only does she miss the sound of Allah Akbar all year round, which is the call for prayer and helps remind her to do this five times a day, but during Ramadan, it informs her when it is the end of fasting each day. Without this, Semah gets a little nervous she might break her fast too early. Also, after waking up early for the Sahar meal, she feels very tired for the rest of the day when she is studying because in her country, the study hours are shortened during Ramadan.

In Australia, there is no special allowance for such times and she must continue as if it is a normal day. She believes her teachers understand it is Ramadan, but they are not permitted to be too flexible and she must still submit assignments on time and attend lectures as normal. She clearly recognises the cosmopolitan environment she lives in, but admits it can be a struggle sometimes. Her brother informed her that he also finds it difficult during the day when people are smoking in the street or sitting outside the cafes drinking coffee and smoking because he can smell the tobacco and coffee aromas in the air.

In their country, it is not permitted to smoke, drink or eat in the street during Ramadan, which eases this struggle somewhat. During Ramadan in Australia she is aware she cannot brush her teeth any time during the day or even chew gum and she is always conscious of the hygiene aspect when she has to sit close to others or join in task discussions in class. Although she tends to experience some difficulties during Ramadan, Semah does admit that she does not expect other cultures to understand or be appreciative of her struggles. What she has learnt from this experience though is that in her country, many non-Muslim foreign nationals also encounter struggles during Ramadan. Many of the coffee shops and restaurants are all closed and if they need to eat or drink during the sunlight hours, they must search out the larger establishments that might have a darkened room away from view that serve limited quantities of

food and beverages. Before studying and living in Australia, Semah had no understanding of this.

It is not just Ramadan that has equipped Semah with the knowledge of respecting and appreciating other cultures. During her time in Australia, Semah has come into close contact with people of varying nationalities, cultures and religious beliefs. In her country, there are many visitors from different parts of the world, but she only sees them from a distance, as the opportunity to liaise with them directly is not presented. In Australia it is more distinctive because she studies and shares the same apartment building with many cultural groups.

One of her friends is from Thailand and is a Buddhist and another friend is a Catholic from Scotland and this has made her more aware of different cultures and religions. Semah enjoys discussing religious beliefs with her friends because she believes there are so many similarities across them all and many paths cross. Prior to living in Australia, Semah did not really understand this. Her keenness to learn about different religious faiths has even motivated her to visit churches and temples of to get an even deeper understanding. She believes this knowledge will help her appreciate people more and recognise the value of their cultural belonging.

Studying at university can be difficult at times. Semah attends classes consisting of both genders, which is a new experience for her. She does enter into dialogue with male students, but is aware of the boundaries. For example, she is happy to discuss the assignments and in-class tasks, but is adamant not to participate in general dialogue of any kind of social nature. Some of her teachers are aware of the segregation of genders in her culture and religion and these professionals tend to place her predominantly in female groups for activities or sit her away from the male students.

The Middle Eastern Gulf male students are the main challenge for her because Semah is aware of the possibility of gossip. Her cultural group live close together in Melbourne, they meet in the same mosque, and participate in many activities together. They know each other and Semah states that one wrong version of events could have dire consequences on an individual. Semah believes she is a good girl and therefore will do nothing to harm her personal image or the respect of her family in Melbourne or back home in her country. She believes that she may even get married to one of the GCC male students studying in Australia and this makes her even more conscious of her behavior with male students. Her family name is vital to her. Middle Eastern Gulf Arabs know family names and when it comes to the time of marriage, the name is very important for both sides.

Women in context by regions

Semah's portrait provides general insights into the very complex relationships surrounding the women in this research. The following information provides individual descriptions of the countries the participating women originate from to set this current research in a more cultural context. The regional areas deserve attention before the introduction of the participants and will serve to offer additional understanding of the women's backgrounds. The countries include:

- Australia
- Bahrain (The Kingdom of Bahrain)
- Iran
- Kuwait
- Saudi Arabia (The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
- United Arab Emirates

Australia

As the women in this research are all based in Australia while undertaking their university education, it is appropriate to include a discussion of the distinctions and culture of Australia in order to set the scene before introducing individual countries of origin and their associated customs.

Australia is often viewed as a relatively new country. While Captain James Cook claimed the east coast for England in the 1700s much has changed since the early white settlers arrived or significantly since the first Indigenous populace dwelled on the Australian continent for a period of approximately 60,000 years prior. Whilst still very controversial and with much progress arguably to be made, the values and principles of Indigenous people are increasingly an integral part of modern Australia and their cultures and traditions have become part of the Australian identity uniting a rich and ancient heritage (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012).

As of February 2013, the population of Australia stands at 22,928,465 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Approximately 400,000 overseas individuals reportedly study every year in Australia (AEI, 2012), with the income from international students contributing approximately $16.3 billion to the economy (Social Trends, 2011). Overseas students help enrich Australia by diversifying communities and underpinning global networks (DFAT, 2012).

Since the white settlement, women in Australia have played a significant role, and have been prominent in many areas of women's rights. Nearly a century ago, the country allowed women to vote and seek election and in 1921, Edith Cowan became the first female to be elected as a parliamentary member. Since that time, many women have placed their mark on Australian history, including May Holman in 1925, who became the first female labour politician, and then a few years later with Florence Cardell-Oliver, as the President of the Nationalist Women's Movement (http://australia.gov.au/about-australia).

It was not until the early 1960s however, that Indigenous women were given the same rights, and Marion Scrymgour became the first Aboriginal female to be given the role as Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory in 2002. Women are now leading figures in Australian society and at the time of writing, Australia has its first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard (http://australia.gov.au/about-australia). Women in Australia have undergone substantial development, particularly in the areas of employment (Social Trends, 2011). Changing social attitudes have specifically aided women's advancement in the workplace, and with a variety of contraception becoming more readily available, women have the option to manage the timing of starting a family (Social Trends, 2011). There is also an increase in childcare facilities, which further contributes to the choices that is now available for women in Australia. Today, the office of the Global Ambassador for Women and Girls, which was established in 2011, aims to reflect the country's commitment to gender equality and acknowledges the global voices of women. The Ambassador's role is to:

> … include co-ordinating and promoting Australia's work to eradicate violence against women, improving access to services for women, the protection of women and girls in conflict zones and increasing the representation of women in leadership roles. (Prime Minister's Office Press Release, September 13th, 2011, p. 1).

The Prime Minister's responsibilities include the need for ensuring a sustainable Australia, particularly as the " … challenges facing Australia are complex and multifaceted" (Hugo, 2010, p. 145). Towards the end of 2010, Australia had 719,600 new migrants with the majority originating from non- English speaking countries (ABS, 2011). The country promotes a multicultural lifestyle reflecting liberal traditions and values (DFAT, 2012) and:

> There are significant challenges, which the nation faces in this area despite a high degree of success in achieving the transition from an almost homogenous Anglo Celtic society to one of considerable diversity (Hugo, 2010, p. 18).

Nearly 400 languages, including Indigenous languages are spoken across the country and English, Chinese, Italian, Greek, Arabic and Vietnamese are the six major ones (ABS, 2012). This mix of language spoken inside and outside of the home adds to the true multicultural traditions of Australia. Although there are many religious followings in Australia, Christianity is viewed as the prominent religious faith (CIA, 2012). The influx of new Australians arriving from the Middle East and Asia has also led to the high growth in religious diversity (ABS, 2012).

There are several different strands of Christianity that attract a following in the country (ABS, 2012). Table 4.1 depicted from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing 1986, 1996 and 2006, defines the complete religious base in Australia and outlines the various religious affiliations that are evident in the country today. Regardless of the increasing number of Middle Eastern migrants, fractions of the Christian faith are still the most prominent within the populace. From the non-Christian denominations, the Jewish faith had the least religious followers and Buddhism the most common. Table 4.1 provides the full list of religious affiliations throughout Australia.

Table 4.1: Religious Affiliations in Australia as of the 2006 Census.

Denomination	Total in 000s	Percentage
Christian		
Anglican	3718.3	18.7
Baptist	316	1.6
Catholic	51269	25.8
Churches of Christ	54.8	0.3
Jehovah's witnesses	80.9	0.4
Latter day saints	53.1	0.3
Lutheran	251.1	1.3
Eastern orthodox	544.1	2.7
Pentecostal	219.6	1.1
Presbyterian and reformed churches	596.7	3.0
Salvation army	64.1	0.3
Seventh day Adventist	55.3	0.3
Uniting church	1135.4	5.7
Other Christians	468.6	2.4
Non-Christian		
Buddhism	418.8	2.1
Hinduism	148.1	0.7
Islam	340.4	1.7
Judaism	88.8	0.4
Other non-Christian	109.0	0.5
Other		
No religion	3706.5	18.7
No stated/inadequately described	2357.8	11.9

The policies and practices relating to Australia's immigration are "among the most micro-managed of all countries" (Hugo, 2010, p. 19). The diversity of nationalities indicates the differences in traditional cultural values and:

> … Australia's demographic shifts imply a high level of diversity that is likely only to become more pronounced (Hugo, 2010, p. 146).

which also:

> … raises complex questions of social politics and national identity that are often difficult to discuss sensibly, but easy to exploit politically, and are vulnerable to the politics of xenophobia (Hugo, 2010, p. 146).

The 2006 census data indicated 44% of Australian nationals were born overseas or had one or more parent born overseas (ABS, 2012). Informed from Australian Bureau of Statistics, the following data in Table 4.2 has been created to outline the different languages spoken at home in Australia. Individuals under the age of 5 years are not included in the data.

Table 4.2: Most popular languages spoken at home in Australia

Language	Number of people	Percentage of population	Percentage who spoke English well	Percentage born in Australia
English	14,577.7	83.0	-	84.6
Italian	311.6	1.8	59.5	41.1
Greek	242.7	1.4	62.6	51.0
Cantonese	236.0	1.3	44.5	18.8
Arabic	224.7	1.3	61.4	38.8
Mandarin	211.7	1.2	37.8	9.6
Vietnamese	181.2	1.0	36.6	25.5
Spanish	93.9	0.5	59.8	21.6
Greek	73.4	0.4	76.8	17.9
Hindi	66.4	0.4	83.0	10.3

Bahrain – (Kingdom of Bahrain)

In 2011, the population of Bahrain was estimated to be 1,323,535 (The World Bank, 2013). The island, officially known as Mamlakat Al-Bahrain, Kingdom of Bahrain is a close neighbor of Saudi Arabia (KSA) separated only by a 23-kilometre waterway. However, in comparison to KSA, it is quite a small country with only 770sq kilometres of land (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). In Arabic, the word Bahrain means two seas, referring to the archipelago in the Persian Gulf just off the coast of Saudi Arabia (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008).

Oil was discovered in Bahrain in the 1930s, but compared to other GCC countries, it is a relatively small amount and the wells are expected to be the first to dry. With this in mind, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah, and the Prime Minister, Khalifah ibn Suman al-Khalifah, launched Bahrain as a commercial hub where many expatriate workers continually reside (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). Although most of the economy is driven by crude oil, gas and petroleum industries, the banking sector has now expanded and large-scale foreign investments and construction projects are underway (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). There has been civil unrest between the Shi'ite and the Sunni Muslim communities since 1999 (Glass, 2008) and the country's infrastructure suffered a lot of damage during the 2011 Arab Spring:

> … close association of religious tendencies with class differences in Bahrain is
> distinctive (Freeman, 2011, p. 1).

In the 1920's Bahrain offered education to both genders and advocated democracy with universal suffrage (Bahrain Economic Development Board, 2008). The first female public

school opened in 1928 marking "the beginning of formal education for girls" (Al Gharaibeh, 2010, p. 97) and in 2001 there were 103 government schools dedicated solely for women. Women have good access to university education:

> They began to enroll in foreign universities in the 1950s when the government offered scholarships to gifted female students to complete their studies in Lebanon. In addition, parents sent their daughters to Egypt, Iraq, and Syria for tertiary studies. In 2004, of the 18.000 students at Bahrain University, 66.1% were female, and at Gulf University in 2002, female Bahraini students represented 63% of the total Bahraini student population (Al Gharaibeh, 2010, p. 98).

The contribution of women in national government is relatively low. However, since the ratification of the constitution in 2002, there has been much progress and women are now being considered for a variety of positions. Data indicates "… 10 women, or 25 percent of the council's members" have been appointed in office (Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed, 2009, p. 25) and their success in local and national elections is often generated by keen involvement in NGO projects (Ahmed, Abdulla Ahmed, 2009). Furthermore, there is an assumption that higher qualified women prefer to be more involved in parliamentary elections (Al-Masry, 2008).

Women are also increasing their contribution in the workplace within both private and government institutions and the Bahraini government is implementing a series of projects to further encourage this involvement (Al Gharaibeh, 2010). Table 4.3, informed by the Labour Market Indicators (Bahrain, 2010) compares the number of women in the workplace in 2002 and 2009 in both government and private sectors.

Table 4.3: Different workforce in Bahrain

Year	Government Sector	Private Sector
2002	14467	14562
2009	19532	26657
Change rate as %	35	83

Although there have been some major achievements for women in the country there are still issues that need addressing. For example, husbands of local women cannot obtain citizenship if they originate from a country other than Bahrain (Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed, 2009). Furthermore, within the Sharia Court, a woman's testimony is worth only 50% of a man's testimony and although women have the right to divorce, their legal claims are not equal to men (Ahmed, Abdulla, Ahmed, 2009).

The punishment for rape is life imprisonment, but according to Bahraini law, spousal rape is not considered a crime. Al Gharaibeh (2010) states, divorce affects the social wellbeing and work environment of Bahraini women because they are used to living a very comfortable lifestyle, within their traditional society. Data from the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (2010) show 1,000 marriages in Bahrain end in divorce each year. Table 4.4 taken from the Supreme Council for Women in Bahrain (2010), highlights some of the reasons for divorce across the country.

Table 4.4: Divorce rates in Bahrain

Reason for divorce	Number
Physical violence against women	155
Bad treatment of women	134
Infidelity	85
Verbal violence against women	53

In Bahrain, women have equal rights to healthcare and education, but cultural circumstances also affect traditional social rules and as a result they are not always treated equally within their community circles (Al-Masry, 2008). It is socially unacceptable for women to live alone, but more recently, Bahraini society has become more tolerant to female group members of the same family doing so (Ahmed, Abdulla, Ahmed, 2009). In 2005, the government implemented a National Employment Project to assist in providing better work opportunities for Bahraini nationals and to provide training for job seekers (Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed, 2009). Women accounted for 81% of the total 7,819 people eligible under this scheme (Baby, 2006) and are moving towards obtaining higher skills to assist their future employment.

Iran

Previously known, as Persia, the population of Iran is approximately 77,891,220 (CIA, 2012). After the collapse of the monarchy in 1979, the Islamic republic rose to power and created rebellious conditions (Esfandiari, 1999). Islam is the official religious faith with 89% representing the Shi'ite sect and 9% representing Sunni. Other religious faiths in Iran include Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian and Baha'i (CIA, 2012). Shia religious communities across the Arabic speaking part of the Gulf region tend to be disadvantaged because of a common conjecture that they have a loyalty to Iran. Meyer, Rizzo and Ali (2008) indicate Shi'ites are:

> … ethnic Persians, even though many are Arabs. Consequently, Shias' loyalty in the GCC countries is often questioned (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2008, p. 300).

During the war from 1980 until 1988 between Iran and close neighbouring country Iraq, women became more involved in the workplace (Esfandiari, 1999), which generated great impacts on their lives:

> … during the war women in Iran were constantly harassed by zealots if they did not adhere strictly to Islamic dress and manner. Those women who complained about hijab or resisted by showing a little hair or wearing bright-colored socks were admonished ... (Moghadam, 2003, p. 27).

The issue of gender in Iran remains controversial. In 1961, Ayatollah Khomeini would not endorse the empowerment of women until 1979 (Shahadian, 2002). However, once the Islamic republic came into power, the Family Protection Law and Family Protection Courts became suspended, which created even further changes for women (Esfandiari, 1999). The revolution gave the Islamic republic power to implement initiatives outlining the responsible duties of women (Shahidian, 2002) involving the reinstatement of polygamy, child marriage with a minimum age 9 years, child custody and free divorce for men (Moghadam, 2003). The authorities at that time:

> … began to encourage *sigheh*, or temporary marriages, under which a man and a woman agree to contract a marriage for a specific time period. Under the laws governing the temporary marriage, the husband had no responsibility toward his temporary wife once the contract period is over (Esfandiari, 1999, p. 40).

Over time, segregation of the sexes was also introduced and male and female liaison was simply not encouraged:

> While strict segregation of men and women in the workplace proved impractical, any mixing between the sexes at work, on university campuses, and elsewhere was frowned upon and could result in job loss or punishment (Esfandiari, 1999, p. 40).

Nonetheless, the 1979 revolution grouped Iranian women together in a political battle even though the "new theocracy systematically rolled back five decades of progress…" (Esfandiari, 1999, p.4). In recent times however, representatives of the Islamic republic use more revised Islamic discourse when responding to matters pertaining to internal social changes, political matters and international attitude (Shahadian, 2002). The University of Tehran accepted women in 1935 and they began attending shortly after. Previous to this in historical Iran, female education was only desirable when it coincided with Islamic cultures, nonetheless the number of women attending institutions of higher education since 1989 has steadily increased (Shavarini, 2003; 2005).

Data shows that from 2006 to 2008, Iranian women occupied 60% of places within higher educational institutions "and made unprecedented progress in all academic, specialist and technical fields" (Khaz Ali, 2010, p. 6). Women studying in Iran are able to initiate major changes in their social status because they have a place of freedom, which can also open up more prospects of marriage (Shavarini, 2005). Today, Iranian women have made their mark within society and around the globe. Mehrangiz Kar, one of the most prominent women's rights lawyer in Iran, was presented as the winner of the 2002 Ludovic Trarieux Prize. The feminist Nobel Laureate in 2003, Shirin Ebadi, also defended human rights and women's rights in Iran:

> She neither left Iran to fight for her homeland in exile, nor has she tried to win the
> support of American feminists who effectively demonized her culture and
> religion (EI Guindi 2003, p. 53).

Kuwait

The population of Kuwait totaling 2,646,314 was recorded as at August 2012 which includes a figure of 1,291,354 non-nationals (http://www.indexmundi.com). In the USA, it is perceived that Kuwaitis need trolleys when purchasing items from expensive designer stores and they are "… the Arabs other Arabs love to despise" (Goodwin, 2006, p. 155). Kuwait is situated in the Northeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula:

> Non-Gulf Arabs will tell you that there are only two classes in Kuwait:
> "billionaires and millionaires; there are no poor people (Goodwin, 2006, p. 155).

It is one of the smallest countries throughout the globe in terms of land area and since 2006 the ruler has been Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah (Kuwait Government online, 2012). The country's population is approximately 60% tribal nomads (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2008). Kuwait is not aesthetically pleasing, unlike other Middle Eastern Gulf areas, as it lacks the energy and efficiency of other countries (Goodwin, 2006, p. 155).

The Muslim Sunni sect is the majority religious group, consisting approximately 70% of the population that includes the ruling family and nation's leaders (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2008). In this regard, the Muslim Sunni populace is more advantaged because they are the majority and hold more control in the country. Similar to other Muslim countries:

> Kuwait's religious conservatives see Islam as the solution, and certainly an
> alternative to a government that for years has been marked by royal nepotism and
> cronyism, resulting in slothful, inept, and dishonest administrators (Goodwin,
> 2006, p. 155).

The country's national activities and cultural interactions are founded upon the Arabic language, which reflects the overall identity of Kuwaiti society and its national existence. The Kuwaiti Constitution promotes the bonding of Arabic across many communal, industrial and social interactions (Kuwait Government online, 2012). Urban town dwellers involved in sea trading and tribal nomads, "who herded sheep and camels and lived in the desert" (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007, p. 301) were the two main community groups before oil was discovered in the region. Today, these two groups do not have full parity with education or lifestyle, as residents in the capital tend to have more social capital.

There are clearly two distinct classes in Kuwait. All origins from families, who migrated from other areas before 1920, and fought against Ibn Saud, are viewed as first class citizens as they have more social prestige over those who settled between 1920 and 1947 (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007). Second class citizens:

> … cannot be candidates for national political office and lack the legitimacy of the descendants of the original settlers (Meyer, Rizzo & Ali, 2007, p. 302).

All citizens must abide by the law governing compulsory military service (Longva, 2000). Kuwaitis in general, like to preserve their national customs, and they firmly believe their traditional dress globally identifies who they are (Kuwait government online, p.1). Usually, Kuwaiti women wear western clothes when going to work but when returning home, they tend to wear traditional attire consisting of long dresses, veils and cloaks (Kuwait government online, p.1). Traditional Costumes for Kuwaiti men and women are similar to other GCC countries.

Single women of marriageable age represent 30% of the country's population (Al-Gharaibeh, 2010) and signify the highest percentage across the whole of the GCC regional area. Women achieving their full political rights experienced a lot of contention after the Gulf war ended in the early 1990s, but they have made their mark on Kuwaiti society (Goodwin, 2006, p. 159). As an example, the oldest female organisation in Kuwait, known as the Women's Cultural and Social Society, holds post-liberation women's conferences on a regular basis, and western perspectives now view Kuwait women as being more liberal than other GCC countries (Goodwin, 2006, p.1 59).

Kuwait is more open to women's matters and the Women's Cultural and Social Society focuses on issues pertaining to gender discrimination and equality in order to raise awareness of women's rights (Meyer, Rizzo and Ali, 2008). Dr. Rasha Al-Sabah is an advocate in promoting

the improvement of education and culture of women (Faraq, 2006) and in May 2009, Kuwait appointed four female politicians (Faraq, 2006).

Saudi Arabia – (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - KSA)

In 1932, following much regional conflict, the different areas across the central part of Arabia was unified to become known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and is currently ruled by the Saud family (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). However, there are certain groups that oppose the family's legitimacy as rulers and refuse to acknowledge the name Saudi Arabia as the name of their country (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010). The unity of the ruling family is one of the most important elements in defining the political stability of the country (Stenslie, 2011). Stenslie (2011) also argues it is the women within the Saud family that keep the power of this dynasty stable:

> The influence of Saudi princesses is hidden and therefore not easily detectable or measurable (Stenslie, 2011, p. 72).

KSA is the original place of Islam and in particular, Mecca and Medina are the two holiest shrines for all Muslims around the globe. One of the pillars of Islam is that Muslims attempt to make a pilgrimage to KSA at least once in their lifetime. The rise of the Islamic faith in the Middle Eastern Gulf region has an important role in influencing the individuality of this country and has strengthened many areas of business and education (Cordesman, 2003, p. 13). As Islam plays a major role in the lives of both Saudi men and women, the manner in which they chose to live their lives tends to be governed by the writings in the Qur'an whether they are in their own country or overseas (Cordesman, 2003).

The country's climate is very hot and desert dry with very few permanent waterways. The population of 26,534,504 was recorded as at August 2012 which also incorporates 5,576,076 non-nationals (http://www.indexmundi.com). Table 4.5 below is an excerpt from the US Freedom report (2008) showing the mix of population in the country. It clearly outlines that the Indian national community has the highest population of 1.4 million with Bangladeshi nationals close in numbers. Non-native English speaking countries such as Sri Lanka and Eritrea are the least number of nationals in the country.

The population deriving from the USA totaled 30,000 in 2008.

Table 4.5 - Population breakdown of KSA

Nationals living in KSA	Number
Indians	1.4 million
Bangladeshis	1.0 million
Pakistanis	900,000
Filipinos	800,000
Egyptians	750,000
Palestinians	250,000
Lebanese	150,000
Sri Lankans	130,000

KSA is a massive oil power because it houses more than "a fourth of the world's total" (Cordesman, 2003, p. 24) and the country is continually being developed. This development has included more independent female roles, and over the last decade women have enjoyed the benefits of traveling overseas to participate in higher education. Statistics indicate that as of April 2010, there were approximately 3,000 KSA nationals studying in Australia (personal communication, Melbourne KSA Student Club, 2010). Female contribution has progressed and in particular, education is increasing in numbers. As an example:

Female graduates were only 15% of total graduates in 1970, but they were 143% of total graduates in 1999 (Cordesman, 2003, p. 12).

Also, women will now be allowed to run or vote in the 2015 municipal elections without a male guardian's approval (New York Times, December 28th, 2011). In 2009, Nora bin Abdullah al-Faiz was appointed Deputy Education Minister for women's education (Stenslie, 2011) and was also the first woman minister in the country. In 2012, Princess Ameerah al-Taweel, the wife of Saudi Arabia's HRH Prince al Waleed Bin Tala, was voted fourth on the list of CEO Middle East 100 most powerful Arab women. Princess Ameerah is known to be an active supporter of a wide range of charities around the world and is involved in many projects at her husband's foundation (Arabian business.com, 5th March, 2012).

Another prominent personality involved in promoting legal rights for women in education and the workplace is Princess Adila, King Abdullah's daughter. Princess Adila is involved in many national bodies such as the National Home Healthcare Foundation, the National Family Safety Programme and the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Stenslie, 2011). Princess Adila's husband is the minister for Education and the female Saudi community is encouraged that she will have some influence on many educational issues for women (Stenslie, 2011). Regardless of the evident progression of women in the country, Goodwin (2006)

highlights there are many Saudi women that still have different opinions:

> In Saudi Arabia, women are raised to be mindless, like babies. Even the most intelligent woman is told she cannot take care of herself, she isn't able. They just want to control people through religion. And if a woman disobeys, they treat her like a bug – they don't think twice before placing a foot on her to kill her (Goodwin, 2006, p. 206).

KSA is the most conservative of all the Middle Eastern Gulf countries (Goodwin, 2006, p. 207). They are not permitted to drive and must use private drivers if their fathers, brothers or husbands are not available to transport them (MOF, 2010). In this regard, Princess Lolway, daughter of King Faisal, publicly stated at a Swiss conference that she would change the driving laws in her country if she had the power (Stenslie, 2011).

In contrast to certain laws in KSA, the royal women do not require a guardian to act on their behalf in order to own a business because they can obtain licenses more easily (Stenslie, 2011) and as an example, the first female only Hotel and Fitness Centre has another royal member, Princess Madawi bint Muhammad bin Abdullah as the Chair of the holding company. Saudi women are clearly becoming more empowered (Noha, 2010). Comparable to the women of other Middle Eastern Gulf countries, the system of social norms and gender roles still requires a particular standard of behaviour:

> Honour … is important. Losing face must be avoided, as the implications can be catastrophic and wide-ranging. A person who falls into dishonour not only brings shame on himself but also on the family to which he or she belongs…there is always fear of a daughter bringing shame… women are expected to show full obedience… (Stenslie, 2011).

Women tend to wear long black abayers decorated with motifs that are personal to their tribal connections (MOF, 2010). When they leave the house, they are ordered to wear a niqab to protect their modesty but some also choose to wear the hijab or burqa (MOFA, 2010). Traditionally the Saudi dress for men is also comparable to the Emiratis, with slightly different collars. Men also cover their heads with a ghutra and on rare colder days, they also wear a bisht over the top (MOF, 2010). Culturally, one of the most compelling music rituals in KSA is the country's national dance, also known as the Ardha. Based on ancient Bedouin traditions, drummers create rhythms and poets chant verses while men carrying swords dance shoulder to shoulder (MOF, 2010).

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a Muslim country populated by a diverse cultural mix (http://www.uaeinteract.com). The country is firmly embedded in the Islamic culture, which is far beyond a religious faith, as it controls all aspects of local life (Explorer, 2007, p.26). Prior to 2nd December 1971, the UAE was known as Trucial Oman, or the Trucial States under British protection but maintained its own individual sheikhdoms.

Today, the seven Emirates comprises of Abu Dhabi, the capital city, Dubai, the commercial and tourist centre, Fujairah, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Qaiwain and Ajman. Each Emirate has its own ruler, but the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, is currently the President of the whole country (Dubai Explorer, 2007, p. 3). The Vice-President, His Highness, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, rules Dubai. The majority of the population across the UAE resides in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (http://www.uaestatistics.gov.ae/CensusEN/tabid/202/Default.aspx). Historically, for three months a year, the local population across the UAE fished for pearls and as communities scattered along the coastal areas, they began to form families from a mix of nationalities and Bedouin tribes (http://www.uaeinteract.com). The country consists of:

> … 7.2 million people at the end of 2011 and the figure is expected to grow by around 5.6 per cent to 7.6 million at the end of 2012 (http://www.uaeinteract.com).

The UAE has undergone dramatic physical, economic and social changes in its short history and Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum worked closely with his father who passed away in 1990 in developing the Emirate of Dubai (Explorer, 2007, p .4). The deceased Sheikh Zayed, is still acknowledged as a philanthropist and highly respected international businessman for progressing the UAE into a business and commercial hub. Currently work is continuing to develop this particular Emirate, and in 2009, a total of 30,000 construction cranes were in service in Dubai (Gulf News, 18th June, 2009).

Although the UAE is undergoing major social and development changes, Emiratis still keep their traditional lifestyles within a modernising culture context. For example, they have their own way of speaking and greeting each other and their specific attire identifies them across other GCC countries (http://www.uaeinteract.com). In general, Emiratis wear traditional dress in public. Women usually dress in a long black abayer made of sheer flowing fabric that falls to the floor and a traditional shayler that covers the hair (Explorer, 2007, p. 29). The men wear long gowns known as dishdash or khandura.

Specific to this geographical location, Emirati men tend to greet each other with a rub of the nose and a kiss on both cheeks. Even when they are in other countries they will greet nationals from their country in this manner to show recognition of their culture and nationalism (http://www.uaeinteract.com). Apart from cosmetic modifications, the late President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan encouraged social changes across the country, in particular, for women:

> Nothing could delight me more than to see the woman taking up her distinctive position in society ... Nothing should hinder her progress ... Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications (http://www.sheikhmohammed.ae, p. 1).

One leading social change within the UAE is the key shift in female literacy and higher positions in the workplace (http://www.uaeinteract.com). More recently, the government is showing support for the employment of women and has introduced maternity leave, equal pay for equal work and equal benefits (Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 2003). The developments have now seen women being appointed to the Federal Cabinet, and in 2004 Princess Lubna Al Qasimi was appointed Minister of Foreign Trade (Talhami, 2004). Also, the Sharjah Emirate has now accepted five women to join the Consultative Council (Talhami, 2004). Table 4.6 below, shows the comparison of male and female political figures across the different Emirates of the country. Women in Parliament are now beginning to have a stronger presence.

Table 4.6: The political empowerment of women in the UAE

Roles	Female numbers	Male numbers
Women in parliament	23	78
Women in Ministerial positions	17	83
Years with female Head of State	0	50

Although women are sharing their voices in the political arena, there is still evidence that there are still barriers across the UAE workplace:

> … women encountered male prejudice, which hindered their career advancement … (Omair, 2011, p. 30).

In general, women have higher levels of education than men, but women do not always choose education for career reasons (Abdelkarim, 2001). In fact, one of the reasons why female education is valued is because there is a possibility women may receive better marriage proposals (Abdelkarim, 2001, p. 14). The mean age of marriage for women in the UAE is 24

years, with 19% of married women between the ages of 15-19 years. Acknowledging the world's gender difference, the UAE is ranked 103rd place in the world for progression of its women (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2011).

The Gender Gap Development report in 2011 also indicated there is 91% of female literacy in the country and the highest gap between men is more noticeable in tertiary education. Many women choose to work in the education field and in the UAE female teaching staff hold the highest place over men in the primary education sector. However, fewer women take up positions as teachers in the tertiary area. Table 4.7 below shows the level of education reached between male and female students. It is interesting to note that women have the highest level of literacy in the country and also hold the most teaching positions in both secondary and tertiary education.

Table: 4.7: Educational Attainment in the UAE

Educational attainment	Female	Male
Literacy rate	91	89
Secondary education enrolment	84	82
Tertiary education enrolment	41	22

Table 4.8 below shows the mix of male and female teaching staff across the education sector. The table illustrates that there are more women working in the primary and secondary education sector than tertiary teaching.

Table: 4.8: Female educators in the UAE

Female educators	Percentage
Primary female teachers	86
Secondary female teachers	58
Tertiary female teachers	41

Demographic imbalances are becoming noticeable in the region because of the increasing number of expatriate workers. There are also less Emirati women in the work force and unemployment is rising (Randeree, 2008). As the expatriate community is beginning to constantly increase across the UAE, Emiratis are now marrying nationalities extending further outside of their local region (Randeree, 2008). A knock on effect is that with such a highly

diverse multicultural mix, the growth of tertiary education does not always suit everyone (Randeree, 2008), and more individuals are choosing, or are encouraged to study overseas.

Synopsis

The six countries depicted in this chapter provide a broad representation of the background countries of the women involved in this research. The data is provided to help create a base knowledge from where the women originate and offer a deeper understanding of their overseas educational experience within Australia. The map depicted in figure 4.9 shows parts of the Middle Eastern regions of the world.

Figure 4.9: Middle Eastern Gulf Map. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Middle-East-map.gif

Connecting the women

The countries of the GCC, where the contributing women in this research have their origins, are most typically viewed as the world's major oil and gas-producing areas (Hanzieh, 2010). The portrait of Semah depicted earlier in this chapter was also developed through data reported by the contributing women to include regional and cultural information. Semah enabled a personal connection of one woman through whose eyes the rest of the data can be

interpreted.

Introducing the women

The information described earlier in this chapter provides a broad overview of Middle Eastern Gulf countries. It also depicted various statistics and data showing women's involvement across the regions. Furthermore, the composite portrait of Semah was devised to produce a collection of information describing traditional influences from a mix of the region, in order to generate a deeper appreciation of the Gulf lady who is educated in Australia. What follows is a compressed profile of the actual women participating in this research in order to introduce them prior to specific information being revealed in the forthcoming analyses chapters. Their countries of origin are excluded in the profiles to provide added anonymity to the participants.

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of the cultural divisions and in order to introduce the data in a better context, portraiture methodology is utilised to create a collection of the women's narratives so that summative and formative issues can be addressed. To allow a brief insight into the women, a succinct summary is initially provided and the ten contributing women are now revealed.

Individual Profiles

1. Aisha

This is Aisha's first visit to Australia and she lives with other members of her family. Her parents are both from the same country. Her mother did not have any formal education and her father went to a specialist language school. Aisha is the first female member of her family to study in Australia. Her mother initially encouraged Aisha to get married and have children but both parents now encourage her continuing studies. Aisha believes that teacher support is important for international students, and in Australia she has been fortunate to experience this at her university. In general, she believes education in Australia is higher than her own country and the classroom environment is more comfortable and friendly. She admits in her country she does not have to worry about plagiarism, but feels Australia is sometimes too serious and a lot of pressure is placed on students to avoid copying or to academically reference correctly. Aisha's main difficulty is the technical side of the English language, because she has to study a lot more than usual in order to write assignments at the expected level. Aisha believes teachers in Australia are very kind.

She lives with family members and believes other female Middle Eastern Gulf nationals who do not have family members in Australia can get very lonely. Aisha is not used to socialising with male members of society and when she first arrived in Australia she found it very difficult just communicating with non-female shop assistants. She also recalls that she felt uncomfortable when she first started studying in Australia because there were a number of Middle Eastern Gulf Arab male students in her class. She was not used to this environment and it took a little while to build up her confidence. Aisha experiences no financial issues as she has her family to help. She lives with them and has no pressure or worries regarding money.

2. **Amani**

Amani is not the first member of her family to study overseas. Her mother and father completed high school and tertiary education overseas. In her country, she lives in a large apartment owned by her family. Other female members of the family have houses. She believes the best part about Australia is that she can be independent all the time and not rely on anyone. She also believes Australian people do not behave correctly all the time and that the country is not completely safe. She finds it difficult getting used to seeing people kissing in the street or using bad language. Amani believes that wearing a headscarf and revealing her traditional cultures in public is the worst part about Australia because there is a general feeling of non-acceptance. She feels that others look at her differently and although this is part of her identify, she is a modest woman and dislikes the attention she draws from others. In fact, she does not always wear a headscarf and likes wearing western clothes in public because this provides her with a sense of liberation as well as anonymity. In this regard, she wears makeup all the time and believes she has even adopted some of the Australian culture.

Amani believes the education in her country is the same as the Australian system but feels the style of teaching in Australia is more superior and the classrooms are much better. She does note however, that there is more respect towards the teachers in her country. She is happier when teachers in Australia recognise and respect her religious belief and customs because when she uses religious phrases such as Insha'Allah, this is sometimes misinterpreted, particularly if teachers are not fully conversant with her culture. In general, Amani is of the opinion that teachers do not fully understand the difficulties associated with studying in a foreign country. In her country, educators do not take plagiarism very seriously and students are permitted to copy other work. Amani likes the way the teachers behave in Australia and how they let students work out concepts for themselves. This is different from her own country and she says many teachers verbally abuse students by calling them names such as donkey

when they have difficulties understanding certain educational topics.

It has not been easy to make friends in Australia, and most of her friends come from other Arab countries. She is very happy her friends are from countries comparable to her own because they share similar cultures and have the same ambitions. Amani and her friends travel to other places in Australia together even though her family would not like it if they found out. She also has more male friends in Australia than back in her country and enjoys studying with male students because they have a different way of thinking. Amani has encountered problems dealing with finances because this is the first time she has been overseas alone and is used to having her family look after financial matters on her behalf.

3. Amel

Amel's mother and father were educated by completing undergraduate and vocational studies. She is the first female in her family to study overseas. In Amel's opinion, the best aspect of studying in Australia is being independent and not being spoilt by her parents. She likes it that most Australians understand the Muslim culture but dislikes that Australia is so far away from her own country. Whilst in Australia, Amel has chosen to wear western clothes all of the time with a headscarf showing some of her hair and she always wears makeup. She is of the opinion that the Australian education system is of a very high standard but she does feel that teachers do not always respect international students. She believes other international students who do not originate from the Middle Eastern Gulf have little understanding of her particular culture. She is comfortable however to approach her teachers if she experiences any issues, and is comfortable in her learning environment, including asking questions in class.

Amel would be more confident if teachers in Australia understood her religious beliefs more because she would feel even more comfortable approaching them with more personal issues. In general she does not believe all teachers understand the obstacles Middle Eastern Gulf women face, and feels her place of study should include a counselor who definitely understands Middle Eastern Gulf cultural traditions. It has been easy for Amel to make friends in Australia because most of them also originate from other Middle Eastern Gulf countries. She specifically chose her closest friend because she comes from that area and they are able to share each other's experiences and support each other through their studies through this connection.

At the start of her educational journey in Australia, Amel found it difficult to manage her finances because she has never had to think about money. In her country, she is able to spend money without considering any consequences.

4. Ermina

Ermina's parents originate from different countries. Both only completed primary school. She is the first member of her family to study overseas and visit Australia. The best thing about Australia is the freedom and lifestyle but she does not like the fact that there are groups of people who dislike Arabs and Muslims, and she has met these type people during her time in the country. Ermina enjoys the way women have the freedom to speak to men at any time in Australia. She chooses to wear western clothes all of the time while studying in Australia but she does wears a headscarf to cover parts of her hair. She wears makeup every day.

Ermina is happy to study in Australia. She feels the teachers are of a high standard and they understand the difficulties associated with being an overseas student. She would prefer to be taught by Muslim teachers but feels that if the teachers understand her culture and religious beliefs, it would definitely help her. She is comfortable approaching teachers with academic and personal problems, as she believes they will give her constructive and good advice. She favours counselling staff at her university to have connections with her culture because she believes this would be more productive to the students. Ermina was taught how to reference correctly in her country but was not fully aware of the seriousness of plagiarising. In general, Ermina finds her studies in Australia easier and believes it is also quicker to qualify than in her country.

It has not been easy to make friends in Australia and Ermina is very much alone. She keeps in touch with her friends in her home country by email and using social network sites. She finds there is not much opportunity to network face to face with others in Australia because of her nationality. Ermina feels uncomfortable with male students, particularly those from her own country because she says they gossip and spread rumours across her cultural community. Ermina is a sponsored student and receives a salary each month and is responsible for her own finances. She finds this difficult because she is not used to handling money. She is fortunate however to have a member of her family in Australia who helps her with financial matters.

5. Maryam

This is Maryam's first visit to Australia. Her mother studied overseas when she was younger. Maryam enjoys living peacefully in Australia and dealing with people who respect others. She enjoys the way Australians smile, are friendly and highly educated. She does however dislike the way Australian locals dress during the summer and that they are relaxed

walking semi-naked in public. Maryam wears her traditional dress in Australia all the time and keeps her hair completely covered. She does not wear makeup. Maryam enjoys studying in Australia and believes her teachers are approachable. She did not really know how to academically reference correctly when she first arrived, but now understands the seriousness of plagiarism. The teachers also appreciate and acknowledge her cultural and religious beliefs.

Maryam believes it is easy to make friends in Australia and many of her close friends come from many parts of the world. Her closest friend however, originates from the same country and they share the same interests. Maryam believes life in Australia is more difficult for male students who originate from her country because they have no experience dealing with women. In her country she was separated from male students, but after she joined the workforce back in her country, she began to understand how to interact with men more. Maryam has no major concerns with money. She says this is because she works in a professional environment in her country and is used to dealing with finances.

6. Nacera

Nacera's mother and father are both GCC nationals. They completed postgraduate and degrees. She is not the first member of her family to study overseas. She enjoys a simple life in Australia and believes many Australians respect other religious beliefs. However, she does not condone, in her opinion, the antisocial behaviour that occurs in Australia. Nacera wears a headscarf with western clothes and does not wear makeup. She is generally happy with the Australian education system. However, she does not believe teachers fully understand the difficulties associated with being an international student and highlights many do not understand her specific culture. She is sometimes misunderstood when she accidentally uses Arab phrases such as "insh'Allah" and believes she would enjoy her studies more if teachers appreciated and recognised what these phrases mean to her. She likes the way she is given ample opportunity to study and research information independently, because she believes she learns faster this way.

She finds the Australian accent difficult to understand sometimes but the more she converses with native Australian speakers the easier it becomes. It has been difficult making friends in Australia, and all of her friends come from countries that are similar to her own. Her closest friend in Australia also comes from the same county and Nacera feels this makes their friendship stronger because they share the same cultural experiences and religious faith. She does not trust other students except those that originate from her part of the globe. Nacera does not have the opportunity to mix with male students. She works on her own a lot and tends to

stay with female friends. Nacera has experienced difficulties dealing with money matters in Australia and emphasises that this is because she was not required to balance finances back in her country.

7. Nawal

Both Nawal's mother and father went to school. She is the first female member to study overseas. The best part about studying in Australia is the resources that are available to the students. She likes that most people in Australia are relaxed, generally respect the rules and trust the government. She also likes the fact that if Australian people disagree with something, they will be strong enough to speak up and demonstrate in public. There are some things she does not like. For example, the way some women dress in the street, the sexual freedom portrayed in public and on television and the hygiene in public toilets. In particular, she feels uncomfortable using the toilet facilities because there is usually no bidet available or water facilities in the cubicles.

Living and studying in Australia is a good experience for Nawal. In her country of origin there is little communication with foreigners, therefore she believes studying in another country has a lot of benefits. She believes the opportunity to understand different cultures is amazing and even though many of them are so different from her own strict culture, she believes she has become more open minded. She feels her own religious beliefs have become stronger since living in Australia. Nawal views the people in her country as warmer because she likes the strong religious connection that determines this lifestyle. In Australia, Nawal wears modest western style clothes with a headscarf and never wears makeup.

Nawal believes the Australian education system is more systematic and the classrooms have more equipment. She believes Australian educators are committed but students do not necessarily show teachers respect. Nawal would be encouraged more if teachers in Australia understood her religious beliefs. She feels the ideal counselor at her university should be a woman with a good understanding of the religious culture and customs of students. Nawal had no understanding of the seriousness of plagiarism before arriving in Australia. She was of the understanding that copying work from others and not mentioning author's details were acceptable because it was never an issue if anyone plagiarised in her home country. The biggest obstacle for her is writing in English because she has experienced some language barriers. However, her university offers specific workshops to provide extra support and she feels this really helps her. In addition, Nawal says it has not been easy making friends in Australia particularly when she first arrived because she was quite shy. She has now met some people

who have the same backgrounds and origin as she does, so she is not alone. She also has members of her family with her in Australia.

Nawal is comfortable talking to male students but she has no interest in making them her close friends. Nawal does not fully understand money matters and would like to have had some help and advice on this before she arrived in Australia. She admits managing money can be a little difficult at times.

8. Rebab

Rebab's parents do not originally come from the Middle Eastern Gulf. She likes the different culture that Australia offers and came here because her sister was also studying in the country. She likes being exposed to other cultures and nationalities. During her time in Australia, Rebab has experienced aggressive behaviour. She mostly wears western clothes, covers her hair, and wears a lot of makeup. Rebab finds it difficult sometimes studying in Australia because it can be culturally challenging, especially when some of the teachers get involved in religious affairs or cultural issues. She believes international students respect teachers more than the local students. Rebab would prefer to be taught by teachers who understand the culture of students.

Rebab is a gregarious kind of student with a lot of friends. She has special friends of all nationalities and enjoys going to clubs, coffee shops and shopping with them. She has made a lot of friends from many countries. She is comfortable liaising with male students and experiences no difficulties being with them in a social or study environment. Rebab feels she is financially independent because she lives with other members of her family. She does not have any concerns dealing with financial matters.

9. Reem

Reem's mother and father come from different countries and have been educated. She describes her upbringing as fairly modern because she was given the basic rules and her parents did not interfere. She comes from a large family and enjoys living and studying in Australia because Australian people are optimists. She believes they are friendly in nature. The only negative aspect of being in Australia is that she misses her family too much. In Australia, Reem dresses in western clothes all the time but does wear a headscarf. She does not wear makeup. Reem respects her teachers and believes they truly understand what it is like to be an international student. She believes the Australian education system is of a very high standard

and would recommend more of her friends from her country of origin to study here. Reem would be happy if teachers in Australia had a good understanding of the Islamic religious belief because it would demonstrate they were more open and could relate to some of the difficulties students encounter, particularly during Ramadan. She believes teachers are fully aware of the difficulties international students face, specifically the language barrier. She has learnt a lot since being educated in Australia, particularly with regards to plagiarism. Although she understood how to academically reference correctly before arriving in Australia, Reem has gained more knowledge about the seriousness of plagiarism.

Altogether she believes her experience in Australia is less stressful than in her country because teachers are more approachable and friendlier. In her country, students are reprimanded if they make errors and she feels many students lose confidence because of this. Some of the difficulties with studying in Australia relate to writing and understanding the Australian accent. Whenever she has big assignments, she tends to get stressed because of this. Reem's closest friend is from the Middle Eastern Gulf and is best friends with this girl because they have the same interests, and are from very similar cultures. She does socialise more with male students in Australia and admits if she were studying in her own country there would be less opportunities. She believes she is more comfortable socialising with men because her family is trusting and open. She is also happy with the progress of women in Middle Eastern Gulf.

Reem believes Middle Eastern Gulf male students at university are friendlier in Australia than back in her country. Although she does not need to socialise with men from her own culture she feels it is easy to walk down the street with a man in Australia because nobody takes any notice. She said there would be a lot of gossip if she did this in her country. She feels both men and women from her country know the limits of mixing with each other in Australia. She keeps in touch with her Middle Eastern Gulf friends in Australia and overseas by using online social network sites on a regular basis. Reem has no issues with finances and believes she manages her money well.

10. Sumiah

Sumiah has another member of her family in Australia with her. She likes the freedom and justice that Australia offers but is not happy with the way some people are allowed to behave. She says living in Australia has given her an insight about alcoholics and drunks. The worst thing about living and studying in Australia is that she cannot find many places to pray. In her country of origin there are several public areas to pray including shopping centres and walkways and she has been used to having these facilities available to her. In Australia, Sumiah

dresses in western clothes all of the time and wears a headscarf. She does not wear makeup.

Sumiah feels the teachers in Australia are committed to their jobs but would prefer to be taught by a Muslim. She feels complimented when Australia teachers understand or acknowledge her religious beliefs. In general, she believes the teachers recognise the difficulties related to being an overseas student but says the counselors should also be knowledgeable of her culture. She was only made aware of plagiarism after she arrived in Australia, as it was not taken seriously before. She has made a lot of friends in Australia. She met her closest friend in the mosque who is from the same country. They share the same interests and do most things together. Sumiah does not socialise with male students, particularly if they originate from the Middle Eastern Gulf. There is no possibility to socialise with Middle Eastern Gulf men in her country either. Before Sumiah arrived in Australia as a student, she was already working and experienced in dealing with finances and understanding the responsibilities surrounding the economies of the household.

Conclusion

Although geographical and historical similarities, such as religious faith, cultural traditions and friendship relating to gender between the women have been presented in this chapter, there might be other factors external that have a bearing on the outcomes of this research. Some of these factors may include the effects of global conflicts, economic stability and world politics involving the Arabic and Muslim nations. For example, Beyer and Beaman (2007) write there have been a number of terrorist attacks across the globe post 9/11, which has created an unreceptive environment for Muslim communities around the world.

A further political move in August 2010, involved the French government banning the wearing of the burqa in a public place. A journalist based in the UK, brought to the surface some concerns on this topic:

> French police said they will be enforcing the country's new burka ban "extremely cautiously" because of fears of provoking violence. They fear Muslims extremists will use the law to provoke fights with officers, while rich visitors from countries like Saudi Arabia will also cause trouble (www.telegraph.co.uk, August 6th, 2010).

As Saudi Arabia was specifically mentioned in the article as a nation that might react, it was deemed important to understand the thoughts and perceptions of the women in this research, because of family, social or religious connections to that country. In this regard, the women were questioned specifically about cultural traditions and experiences when wearing

their national attire in Australia and whether they had any personal opinions on such recent laws. The stories in the media referring to Middle Eastern attire generated much discussion across Australian communities:

> A call for a controversial ban on wearing the burqa in public has split opinion and sparked outrage from the Muslim community who labelled it a political stunt. (The Advertiser, May 7th, 2010).

Kabir and Evans (2005) argue that Islamic attire influences how others view Muslims and therefore in the context of possible discrimination, the contributing women were asked how they felt about world events and world political provocations being raised by the media. Also, since Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in December 2010 in protest against the Tunisian government, mass demonstrations in support of his act have taken place across many Arab nations (Arnoni, 2012). The beginning of this event that formed the Arab Spring, (2011) and the public political stance of several Arab and Muslim nations have generated more global awareness, particularly outlining the human rights violations and the "extreme poverty/concentration of wealth" currently taking place (Armoni, 2012, p.8). These issues have led to much unrest throughout Middle Eastern regions and may have a bearing on how the women respond regarding specific cultural circumstances while living in Australia. In particular, the Arab Spring has been promoted as representing:

> … a failure of legitimacy on the regimes, corruption, mismanagement, suppression of dissent, inattention to public needs, and kleptocratic entrenchment of military officers, their families, and their cronies at all levels. The regimes and their populations have established a social contract, a contract kept together under fear and suspicion (Arnoni, 2012, p. 38).

In general, the people of the Arab nations find they are not able to publicly express themselves for fear of reprisal and therefore causing complete unrest. The data from this research consequently provide further insight into the capabilities of Muslim women living in a western society, which communicates controversies surrounding their religious beliefs and cultural traditions.

This research reports on how ten Middle Eastern Gulf women respond to some of the social rules and conventions that impact on their culture. Aside from similar geographical connections, this current research explores whether there are other associations. Some of these elements incorporate how they respond to their educators in an Australian setting, their approach in communicating with other members of society, both male and female, and how women encounter cultural divisions across society.

Within this chapter a series of issues are raised acknowledging cultural and traditional familiarities. As individual geographical data and information are provided, the connection between the women and their backgrounds become more prominent and place them in the context of this research better.

To further report on the findings of this research, specific elements are grouped together and highlighted in the following chapter. The information includes documenting more specific individual narratives and delves into the thoughts surrounding the Australian educational journey more exclusively. Chapter 5 explores the lives of the women within the social context and highlights their traditional origins and their perceptions of cultural issues in a non-Muslim environment.

CHAPTER 5 – THE WOMEN IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

The following three chapters describe in more detail core themes that have been developed through the data analysis, specifically the coding processes. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative evidence, personal stories depicting the women's view and perspectives of their educational journey in Australia are legitimately represented around three separate topics over the next three chapters. This chapter focuses on the social issues, which is particularly relevant because Muslims are currently being judged globally due to a series of world events (Beyer & Beaman, 2007). The topics explained separately in the ensuing chapters concentrate on the following areas:

- Chapter 5 - Social context
- Chapter 6 - Educational context
- Chapter 7 - Thoughts for the future

By first detailing personal stories of the participants through further development of each portrait, the core themes are further contextualised. The stories are then followed by a discussion of particular exemplars derived from qualitative data and linked with more summative quantitative analysis to provide an overall perspective of the women's experiences. Each chapter follows a consistent format revealing the distinction and connection between the women. As each theme is exposed, the representations are revealed. The women's feelings, personal connections and values are portrayed alongside each other in order to show their passion for, and the worth of, their Australian educational journey.

Table 5.1 expands on, and summarises the first theme that emerged from the data, which relates to the social context. This framework reports the concepts that form a structure for reporting the experiences and understanding for each woman. The women's actions are summarised as the norms, significance and symbols of their behaviour and shape the responses that were identified in the data.

Table 5.1 – Coded themes identified for this research relating to the cultural context.

Themes	Concepts	Actions (norms, significance, symbols)
Social Context	Getting involved in the dominant culture	Physical and psychological changes
	Old and new thoughts about culture	Traditional dress, language, religious connections, social functions
	Friends	Joining friendship groups, friends from back home
	Marriage	Male and female interaction Loneliness and isolation Possibilities in Australia and elsewhere Local cultural observations Traditional expectations

The social experience

Although similarities between cultural traits and regional areas have been documented in the previous chapter, what follows is a more personalised response regarding the experiences of their educational journey. It is important to explore this element, because educational journeys can be difficult when students find themselves in a strange and encompassing cultural environment (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008).

Personal changes, the formation of friendship groups and viewpoints on marriage are described within this chapter. By way of presenting the discourse, individual portraits of the participants have been created from information they provided in phase one, online questionnaires and phase two, interviews. Explicit portraits are then compiled and depicted in more detail to represent the legitimate purity and perspective of their responses regarding specific topics relative to the social context. The stories of Amani, Sumiah and Rebab, depicted below are particularly forthcoming with the discussion of sensitive issues within a social setting that openly report their feelings of survival in an unfamiliar territory as they underwent their educational journey. A separate critical reflection and further discussion then follows incorporating thoughts and comments from other participating women to provide additional information.

Amani's story

I wanted to participate in this research because I have a responsibility to help other girls that (sic) are thinking of studying abroad because I get lonely in Australia and I feel there is nobody here to help me. This might be the same for other Gulf women. I don't know.

You need to understand that most women from my part of the world have excellent lifestyles and they receive free education that is government funded, that supports them when they are studying overseas. Most people in my society are grouped into 4 classes ranging from rich, above middle, middle and poor. There is no pressure on women in my country and they only have to think about the way they look and nothing else. They spare no expense in making sure they own the most beautiful clothes, wear the most expensive makeup and drive the car that they want. We have it very easy in our country and after women finish their studies they can find secure employment if they want to, as a teacher or a manager or even as a doctor or dentist. Of course, they are not forced to work and it is their choice. The foreign people from Asia and India do the lower level jobs so we don't have to worry about that.

Girls from the higher classes are able to study abroad by themselves, but I can also tell you that, in Australia, most people from my country are not very strict. What I mean is, women are unattached to their culture when they come here. They don't wear modest traditional Gulf clothes, they go out with their friends without a chaperone, have boyfriends and even go to mixed parties. I have also met really nice Muslim women in Australia who drink alcohol and do a lot of things that Islam says we are not allowed to do. On the other hand, I have to tell you that I have also met very strict Muslim women in Australia who don't do any of these things, because not everyone is the same. One thing for sure is, no matter what they do or how they behave, all the women, regardless of how they behave, still have an attachment to their religion and I'm very happy about that.

I've told you about the women from my country who study in Australia, but I want to tell you more about the women who are not lucky enough to be here and have to stay in my country. These are the women from the poor classes who are mostly uneducated. They don't get much opportunity to do

anything except get married when they are around 17 or 18 years old, have children early and spend their time organising the house. Their husbands, who usually cheat on them, often physically or emotionally abuse them, but they are not allowed to talk about it because nobody wants to listen to them. The women who are lucky enough to get divorced in these situations are seen by our society as if something is wrong with them and it is always their fault that the marriage broke up. I am saying these words because I am high class and have studied in many places and therefore know lots of different classes of people and I think others should know this story too because it is not fair for all the women in my country. I think by telling you this, other people will understand us better. This research gives me an opportunity to do just that.

I have a good relationship with the men in my family but I can't do what I want when I am in my own country because I have to follow the cultural traditions, like covering my body and be modest all the time. In Australia however, I wear skirts that go to my knee with high heels, which I like very much because this makes me look attractive. It is in my culture to be an attractive lady and take care of myself so I don't see anything wrong with what I do here in Australia really, except that it would not be allowed if I did this in my own country. This saddens me. The main point is, when we are away from our family we can be the person we want to be and the choice is ours alone. I am very lucky that way and I thank God for this opportunity (Alhamdulilah).

My social life in Australia is completely different to my social life back home. I am not supposed to take off my hijab or go out with men on my own, but I do here. In Australia, I have so much freedom to explore what is really going on in the world and it excites me as much as my studies. I have lots of men friends from my culture and I trust them because I know they will look after me. However, if my family were here, they would not allow me to have these friends. My family would make me study all the time and just have female friends.

Back home it is more social for people to ask about your life and your studies because they care about you, but here it is not like that. The people in Australia mainly care about time, money and work and they don't really care about other people or how they feel. Everyone is so distant. Also, in the street you can see people kissing each other while back home you would never see a

man even kissing his wife in public. Did you know that in Australia so many people use bad language but in my country they are far more polite?

The burqa

In the news there has been lots of publicity about banning the burqa and I personally think women should not wear one because it is not something that women really have to do in Islam. I think women wear a burqa for cultural reasons. Australia is not a good place for women to wear a burqa because it is not a Muslim country and people don't understand what it represents and I also think a lot of people are afraid of women who cover up. I think this is because of the media and everything, so I think a hijab would be enough to wear in Australia if women felt they needed to cover.

My family also agree that a burqa is something that should not be worn in non-Muslim countries because people don`t really understand what it represents. It is difficult to practice Islam in non-Muslim countries, especially with so much ignorance about. There are other members of my family who think women should not even wear either a hijab or a burqa outside of our country and they believe women should be free to wear whatever they want. I think the worst thing about being here is that we can't really practice our religion properly without being judged by others. In fact, studying in Australia can be difficult for this reason and I think I am alone a lot of the time because of what my religion represents. There is really nobody here who understands this or who is really able to support me.

When I first came to Australia, I actually wore a hijab and other students at uni were quite nasty to me. Sometimes they laughed at me, they were sarcastic and nobody talked to me or sat next to me in lectures. I even had the feeling that the teachers didn't take me seriously. I actually started to have quite a bad time and so I decided to throw away my Muslim clothes and when I did this, everything changed. Now that I don't wear Muslim clothes, I am not different anymore and everybody treats me well. I get along with everyone and when I go out, nobody gets annoyed at the way I look or makes bad comments to me anymore. I wear modern clothes and my hair is always loose and I fit into society so much better. Nobody takes any notice of me because I am like every other woman.

Amani's story is a personal reflection describing how she feels about her own culture and also describes the actions she undertook to be accepted into the Australian social environment. She is keen for other Middle Eastern Gulf women to understand the difficulties she experienced in case they also feel the same. She does not want them to feel alone. An important point Amani raised was that she did not realise there might be cultural difficulties in Australia before she arrived. She thought:

Australia would be the same as how it is depicted in the movies.

And:

I really don't get along with the way society is in this country but I am trying my best to fit in.

Amani changed her physical appearance in order to be socially accepted because she was unhappy with how she was being treated when she wore a hijab. She desperately wanted to fit in with society:

When I started uni it was totally different because students were so nasty to me because I wore a hijab and whenever I asked the teacher a question they laughed at me and I got really depressed. I was very lonely.

Amani is also steadfast in exposing to others what it is like for women in her part of the Middle Eastern Gulf. She believes strongly that many women are abused and even though it is common knowledge, Amani feels nobody is really interested in doing anything to rectify the situation. Clearly, Amani portrayed only one perspective, but she felt strongly enough to voice this opinion and wanted to be heard. She says she is fortunate to experience life in Australia, but admits many women who derive from the lower social classes in her country do not have the same opportunities. She also believes if more women were given the same opportunity to participate in international education, they would increase their knowledge on global matters which will increase their confidence to speak up for their rights.

Amani is not the first woman to change her appearance while studying in Australia and considers this should be an option for all women if they feel the necessity to do so. Views across the western world include that covering the hair for Muslim women can be suppressive, and this causes several problems for women (Read & Bartowski, 2000; Rasool, 2002; Read, 2003). However, Williams and Vashi, (2007) have a different stance, and believe women wear the hijab to be connected to a specific community. In Amani's particular situation, she felt others connected her to a negative society and when she changed her appearance, she reported

her life was transformed for the better. By removing her hijab and changing her appearance, she felt she fitted better into the dominant society. She also recommends other women who experience similar difficulties, because of their origins or religious beliefs, should consider taking the same action.

Amani often makes trips to other Australian cities with her friends and enjoys independently exploring the country. She does admit however, that her behaviour would not be appreciated back home, as her family would never accept the lifestyle she has adopted while studying in Australia. She enjoys her new lifestyle, and understands not all women from her country have the same opportunity. She also understands that when she returns to the Middle Eastern Gulf, her life will return as it was before her educational journey in Australia began.

Sumiah's story

I was brought up in a busy city, which was full of life and connects all parts of the country. My mother is a housewife and my father started out as a pearl diver before settling into the job he has now. I think my family is average, not too rich, but certainly not poor. Many men in my family have studied abroad in some capacity, but my sister and I are the first women to do so.

I think I manage well with the different cultures within Australia because I respect what others believe in. I have learnt a lot about other countries through the different people I have met. Similarly, the teachers here really understand my culture and religious beliefs, which has also helped me to settle in.

I know some men through the mosque or the Embassy, and in both cases they are mature and well behaved. However, I have heard stories about some bad behaviour, which is not in our Islamic teachings. These stories relate to men from the Gulf who drink alcohol, go with foreign women and don't care about their studies. I have only heard these stories so can't say for certain if they are true because I have never met any of these men personally. Of course I feel ashamed about this type of behaviour and am not proud that they represent my culture. My friends also feel the same way because we know the Australian people are judging us because of this.

My religion is something that helps me get through difficult times in Australia. I always manage to pray and fast because I believe a good Muslim will always find an opportunity to do this even if it means praying in the corridor. I think Australians who are not Muslims are inquisitive about my culture and when they first meet me, they ask me lots of questions. I don't mind answering them because I think when they know more information they learn to be more respectful that I am a Muslim.

When I feel homesick I like to go shopping. I thank God that I always have enough money to do this because I don't know what I would do if I couldn't. I am happy with my financial situation. Without money I think life would be very hard and I am very lucky. I am a sponsored student, which means I receive a monthly salary from my government. I find the money I receive is enough but if I am short, I think this is because of my wrong financial management. I do try to be responsible with my money but it is a new thing for me and I have never had to be concerned about how much I spend. Yes, I do ask my mother for help if I'm stuck and she always sends me more (Alhamdulilah).

I also talk to my family back home when I feel lonely or I get reassurance by visiting a friend. Life in Australia does get lonely because the culture is so different from my own and I believe others are constantly judging me. I have learnt a lot from being here about real life though, especially driving safely and when I return home, I will try to stick to what I learned here. If anyone gets angry at me because I won't speed anymore, I will tell them that I want to drive within the rules and stick to them just like I did when I lived in Australia.

I'm really not sure what the future holds for me but I am looking forward to going back home. I think my life will be different when I return. I'm not sure whether I can keep myself different or change back to the way I was. My friends faced some difficulties when they went back home after studying overseas because they were so different than the rest of the people. They have advised me to change back to my own culture because it will be easier for me to fit back into society when I return so I have a lot to think about. I have changed since I came here. For example, I'm more practical and I wear comfier shoes, carry practical bags, sometimes even take the same bag to work every day. I'm not sure whether I will still do this when I go back home because life there is

different. People make judgements in my country too much, and for different reasons. They will smile and say Assalamu Alikum when they see you, but if they notice you wearing the same shoes or the same bag two days in a row, they will talk about you or make you feel really uncomfortable. I will see how I go when I return back home and insh'allah it will be fine. By the way, I have changed my appearance since I came here. I used to go out all the time in designer clothes, but not anymore. I am happy to wear more practical clothes because I feel it is the right thing to do. I know people from my culture here look at me but they are not as bad as when they are back home. It just doesn't feel that important anymore. We are all more flexible in Australia and I know many students from my country make changes themselves too.

Before I came to Australia, I was used to mixing with people from other countries because we are also a minority in our own country. There are lots of expatriate workers and there are more of them than us locals. I also went to school with other nationalities and so was used to seeing different cultures, but when I came here I had to learn some things quickly, some behaviour things like not to make eye contact with strangers, especially if they have been drinking alcohol. I didn't know about that in my country.

Burqa

When I heard the news that someone in parliament was trying to ban the burqa in this country, I got really scared and was even prepared to leave. It's bad enough being judged by others here in Australia because of my religious beliefs, but I wasn't prepared to put up with a political fight as well. I only wear a shayler and so it didn't really affect me personally. However, I still think if the burqa were banned, this would be the first step, with the niqab closely following and then the shayler being banned. I spoke to my religious leader in the mosque about this political move, and he said if it got worse in Australia, I should try to find somewhere else to complete my studies. I am grateful it never got any further because I really like it here.

In general, Australia is a great place to study. It is a friendly country but I have to remember that it is not a Muslim country and that people behave in different ways. I also have to remember that I can't always behave how I want to because it is not a Muslim country but it is so much more relaxing here.

I have already encouraged other women from my country to come here because it is very nice and they will experience a different life.

Sumiah enjoys studying in Australia and admits she did her research before arriving here so she knew what to expect. Similar to Amani, Sumiah indicated the need to change her appearance but for different reasons. Sumiah felt relaxed swapping her designer clothes for more comfortable attire because other Muslims from her country living in Australia did not judge her as much. Although Middle Eastern Gulf women have a need to be attractive (Read, 2011), Sumiah's physical changes also endorse Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar's (2002) argument that education provides them with more control over their lives. Sumiah was happy that she had more confidence to wear the same shoes on consecutive days with or without a matching handbag, which is a significant personal and cultural adjustment for her. She claimed she was more relaxed in her new environment even though she experienced some difficulties when she first arrived:

... I was walking and this guy was walking and then he told me one word starting with "F". This made me cry for a long time and I thought "why am I here" really! It was a shock for me.

Rebab's story

I had the chance to live my early childhood in a cultural environment where thousands of people from different countries visit (Alhamdulilah). My parents are not originally from the country where I was born which I think has given me a broader insight into life's differences.

I love Australia's unusual weather, rich culture, uniqueness of each capital city, and the history. It is all so interesting. The differences in culture that I notice are mainly related to social customs and religious behaviors but to be honest, I am used to living with various races and backgrounds so I know how lucky I have been all my life.

In Australia, Gulf men are exposed to things that are non-existent back home. What I mean is, unfortunately, most families raise their sons in a strict way and so when our men leave our country they want to experience everything that is forbidden in the name of religion, law or our cultural society. I am proud however of the men who are morally aware because they set good examples to others, but unfortunately there are others that make mistakes and their behaviour has an impact on all the students from our country. I know

Australians will judge all of us because of the behaviour of a few and this is not fair.

Islam is a big part of my life and from the moment I open my eyes in the morning, to when I go to sleep at night, I try to do the right thing. A lot of my friends and other students ask many questions about my religion and I try to explain Islam's impact beyond praying and fasting. It can be complicated and I don't think they really understand much at first, but I think the more patience I have and repeat my stories, they get a better idea

I feel down about studying sometimes and whenever I feel sad I tend to call my parents first. Friends who share the same obstacles are also good to be around as long as they help to figure out how to overcome the problems. I am used to being taken care of by my mother and this is what is difficult because she is not here with me and I miss her so much. However, I am very lucky that I have other members of my family living with me in Australia and we have a strong bonding together.

Of course money makes a big difference to me while I am in Australia! I have to make plans much more ahead so I don't get into trouble with finances while being away from my parents. I am a sponsored student and so are my sisters and we have all learnt how to deal with the financial issues together to make sure our individual expenses are taken care of. All of us enjoy spending our money and having the freedom to spend it on whatever we want. My life is so different from back home because finances are not something any of us usually get involved with.

When I am older, I would love to come and visit Australia again with my husband and children and try to re-live my young dreams again. I would definitely recommend studying in Australia to other women as long as the Aussie people and the women from my country keep open minds about cultural differences. I think Australia is a safe place to raise children because families enjoy a lot of natural attractions. Aussies love life, love surfing, having BBQs and they have so many multi-cultural festivals. This would be great to pass on to my daughters.

Muslim women not living in their country report making behavioural changes (Yasmeen, 2007), and Rebab confirms this to be factual. Her life has changed since studying in Australia,

but she is not sure whether these changes will have an effect on her when she returns to her home country. Similarly, she mentioned that the men from her country also changed their behaviour and recalls that their actions have an effect on all Middle Eastern Gulf students. She does believe however that she has been able to fit into Australian society because of her previous global cultural knowledge and the extended visitors to her own country.

Similar to Sumiah, Rebab recognises the importance of understanding different people and their traditional values. Both women felt they were judged because of their religious and cultural origins and both women also felt comfortable debating cultural differences whenever the opportunity arose because it would assist in educating others. They believed they had a role to play in educating others about their traditional upbringing. Khan's (2000) research also acknowledges that in the Muslim world, women's status are being reconsidered and if the participating women in this research can assist in redefining some of the issues, then this would be a positive move forward.

Further thoughts

After reviewing the three stories of Amani, Sumiah and Rebab, it is evident there is a representation that some Middle Eastern Gulf women studying in Australia accept and recognise that physical and psychological changes need to take place while outside of their home country. In particular, Amani and Sumiah felt the need to personally change their own appearance and Rebab and Sumiah mentioned that men from their country tended to make dramatic cultural changes. Interestingly, Rebab felt these changes occurred because men lacked global experience and she was prepared to accept ignorance as the reason. Sumiah and Rebab felt their dialogue with others could even alter negative perceptions towards Islam and they were content discussing their lives and cultural upbringing in order to create more positive opinions.

All three women agreed they had a personal choice to change their lives while living in Australia. Amani changed her physical appearance and Giddens (2006) reports this as an attempt to connect to friendship groups. She admitted a need to fit into Australian society and that her life was more contented when these alterations to her lifestyle were made. Nowadays, people feel they are citizens of the world and as they travel more, they easily identify with the local culture (Castells, 2010). The stories of Amani, Sumiah and Rebab support this claim.

In some cases however, the aftermath of a western experience can cause some women to respond negatively because of the stress they feel with fitting in with the dominant culture. Some participating women have provided surprising contributions that are quite serious in

nature. In some instances the women admitted turning their back on their culture altogether. These women returned to their countries for a temporary time or even suffered major illnesses:

I was admitted to hospital for one week and the doctor wouldn't let me go to university...I then tried to commit suicide because I hated all the gossip that was going around about me. I took some pills hoping to end my life.

And from another participant:

I smoke and drink alcohol and I have a boyfriend. I enjoy living like this because I have complete freedom. I can wear fashionable clothes and the world can see me. Of course my family would kill me if they knew and I know it is haram. When I go back home, I will change back again and nobody will know anything different.

Amani and Sumiah had their own individual reasons for making personal changes, and they also felt that living in Australia provided them with the freedom to choose. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2007) suggest that communities can have an effect on a person's individuality, and this has also been confirmed by some of the stories provided by the women in this research. Rebab was happy to experience changes in her life while in Australia but she also knew the changes were temporary and once she returned to her country, her life would revert back to what it was like before she arrived in Australia. She was comfortable with these expected transitions. This was a shared view for many of the women interviewed. Every woman was adamant her life would return to how it was before she left.

None of the women noted any difficulties with the changes they made. Some expected there would be differences and others expected challenges in the transition from eastern to western culture. However, it was evident that some women not only changed their external appearance but also their behavior. This included going to nightclubs, drinking alcohol and smoking, but these were extreme actions and not all the women were involved. Regardless of the extent of the changes, many of them were unsure whether their experiences might affect them personally when they returned to their country of origin.

Friendships and Middle Eastern Gulf women

It is evident from the three portraits of Amani, Sumiah and Rebab as well as other narratives from women participating in this research, that life for Middle Eastern Gulf women will change during their Australian educational journey. Many women admitted their life in Australia was lonely at times and tried to find solace by contacting their family or friends. Unfortunately, not all women were able to do this and some who had great difficulty finding a

positive solution to their loneliness, resorted to extreme measure as they became more isolated or depressed.

Of the 10 women who completed the questionnaire relating to making friends in Australia, the data indicated 6 had no difficulty. The social impact of being a Middle Eastern Gulf woman studying in Australia has different outcomes for individuals. For example, many made friends with other students originating from the same cultural background and reported this provided a sense of belonging.

Others chose to make friends with students from different countries and felt this provided a richer understanding of global cultural matters. Women who made friends within their cultural boundaries felt it was because this friendship offered security while they were away from their familiar surroundings. Table 5.2 depicts the responses from phase One, part two.

Table 5.2: Data relating to friendship

Answer Options	Response count
We are from the same country	2
We are the same culture	6
We have the same ambition	5
We are studying at the same institution	3
We are similar ages	3
We help each other with our studies	2
We live in the same place in Australia	1
We knew each other before we came to Australia	0
We are so different and enjoy learning about each other	0

In phase one, question 8, participants were asked to select any response that was appropriate to their personal situation. Data shows there were several reasons why friendships were formed, but the most popular answer indicate it was because of cultural connections. Furthermore, the women were asked whether they planned to keep the friendship when they returned back to their own countries.

Table 5.3 below depicts that 9 out of 10 women were favourable of keeping their Australian friendship continuing once their studies were completed. The table indicates the different areas where Middle Eastern Gulf women felt comfortable developing their friendship groups. None of the women knew each other before arriving in Australia but their culture was a deciding factor in making friends. Furthermore, the data reveals that they are not different to each other and they do not have to learn about their culture.

In addition, the table below shows the responses to the question posed relating to maintaining friendships in Australia when the women have completed their studies. The question investigated whether the women felt they would continue with their friendship with those they met in Australia when they returned to their home country.

Table 5.3: Maintaining the friendship

Answer options	Response count
Yes	9
No	0
Not sure	1

One feature in common was that the women needed support while studying in Australia because of the differences in culture. Not all the women were fortunate to have their family members with them and so friendship was an important element during their studies. They felt they could trust their friends in Australia and many believed they could continue the friendship when they returned to their home country.

The responses revealed that the women reported they were comfortable being friends with others who originate from their own country or from countries with some kind of similar cultural connection. Table 5.4 below depicts nine responses outlining how the women chose their group friendship combinations. Apart from two, all of the women indicated they had formed friendships with others from countries within the Middle East. One student did not have any friends and did not indicate her reason for this.

Table 5.4: Friendship by nationality.

Responses	Comment
Participant 1	The Gulf countries, Australia, China, Vietnam, India, Japan and the US
Participant 2	The Gulf countries, India, China, Brunei, Kenya, Japan
Participant 3	The Gulf countries, India, China, Australia, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brazil
Participant 4	Australia, Norway
Participant 5	I do not have friends here
Participant 6	Arabic countries only
Participant 7	The Gulf countries
Participant 8	The Gulf countries, Egypt, Australia, Hong Kong, China
Participant 9	The Gulf countries, Australia, Germany, China, Nigeria, America

As the discussion of friendship progressed and participants discussed the different

relationships they were exploring in Australia, they were asked to comment on their interaction with men. Their responses reveal a range of views and experiences. Of all the women participating in this research, some had significant differences with male friendship groups in Australia and in their country of origin. The following quotes from other participants reflect different viewpoints:

> *Yes I don`t mind studying with a boy. Well boys have different ways of thinking and I love to share my ideas with a boy. I have more boy friends here than back home.*

One participant said:

> *Talking to a strange man is difficult. I don't talk to men in my country.*

And another participant commented:

> *If you walk in the street here with your male colleague nobody thinks anything is wrong. If you walk in the street with a male in my country everyone thinks there must be something going on.*

Table 5.5 reports the data from question 10, phase one, part two, and illustrates the summative experiences of the women regarding their interactions and relationships with men. It shows the majority of the ten participating Middle Eastern Gulf women are comfortable being in the same class as men. They are they equally contented interacting with men while studying in Australia. During the personal interviews, many women stated they were happy they had Middle Eastern Gulf men in their class because they could demonstrate to them their ability to study at university level. This could also be construed as demonstrating their worthiness of marriage because some women did mention in their personal interviews a need to educationally prove themselves to prospective husbands.

Table 5.5: At ease with male students

Answer option	Response count
Yes	8
No	1
Not applicable	1

The next portrait to be presented is the voice of Aisha. Her story depicts her reluctance at having to study with male students. Aisha was not comfortable having men of any nationality

or cultural background belonging to the same study group. Women from the Middle Eastern Gulf are not always comfortable when men are present because they are simply not used to interacting with men in a social setting. Aisha pointed out in her profile that she was not sure how she should behave in the presence of men in any capacity outside of her family group and openly states she had to learn new behaviours to fit into the Australian environment. She also had to build up her confidence so when she was in a situation where men were present, she would not feel intimidated.

Only one woman chose to answer, not applicable, which could be interpreted that when Middle Eastern Gulf women are in a cultural environment very different from their own, they are not sure whether they should accept or disregard the social boundaries. Equally, it could also be construed that women have no intention or desire to change their behaviours whatsoever to accommodate the dominant cultural expectations. Aisha openly admitted she experienced difficulties when communicating with men:

> *When I talk to boys in the shops or in the medical centre here it was very difficult the first time because I am not used to mixing with boys that are not part of my family.*

In contrast, some of the women had no difficulty socialising or communicating with men and some even revealed they had more male friends in Australia than in their own countries. Amani described in her portrait she enjoyed wearing fashionable western clothes and felt more secure in the presence of men from her own culture. She positively enjoyed making friends with Middle Eastern Gulf men because she believed they had a place in her life while she lived and studied in Australia. She reported they had a better understanding of cultural issues and would take care of her in times of difficulty.

Aisha's story

Out in the street, Aisha said she wore a niqab and full traditional dress, but once inside her own apartment, she enjoyed wearing jeans and t-shirts.

> *It is not easy being close to a man because I have little experience. I am not comfortable being around them because I only know my father and my brothers.*

> *While I am studying here in Australia, I live with other members of my family. They are my friends and I am never lonely because they are with me all*

the time (Alhamdulilah). My family is my life and I am so close to them. I tell them everything and they support me 100%. I don't really have many friends that are outside my family. I sometimes talk to other girls from my country, especially if I go to parties with my family and they are there, but nobody is close to me. I keep myself to myself just like in my own country.

I don't go out much but I do go to social gatherings with my family with our cultural group. For example, during Eid we meet and eat together, or we celebrate other events with our community. We all live close together in the same suburb so we are never alone. My life has not really changed since I came here because I live the same as I do in my country. There are small differences of course but this is because we are not in a Muslim country. I know I have interact with men while I am in Australia, but I still feel protected by my religious and cultural rules.

When Aisha was asked about her views on marriage, she provide some revealing information:

To be honest, I am not that interested in getting married just now. Before I came to Australia, I had two offers of marriage and I turned them both down. One man asked my father if he could marry me and my mother encouraged me to say yes. It was difficult, but I decided not to marry that one. When the second man asked my father, I was definitely tempted to say yes but I decided not to because I didn't think I was ready. The problem with turning down the second man is that now I don't know if anyone else will ask me again. I might have a reputation of saying no. Our community is very small and if I live here or back home, everyone gets to know everything.

I think that if I get married now, I will not be able to finish my education and do the things I want to do and this is why I made the decision not to marry the second one. If I married him, I would have to look after him, which is my duty. I know my eventual husband will look after me, but I also want to achieve something in this life before I get married.

When I turned down the last offer of marriage it was difficult for me. My mum kept putting the pressure on me to say yes. It is my culture to get married and have kids so my mum was doing the right thing because she has to

make sure my future is taken care of. Insh'allah, I will get some more offers. I spoke to my father about my decision not to marry the second man and I told him I wanted to come here and do my studies before I do anything else. He was very supportive and let me come because I have other family members living and studying in Australia.

After I get my higher qualifications I will return to my country and insh'allah someone will still want to marry me. I want a husband who is a good Muslim and who prays 5 times a day. I want a husband who will also let me do the things I want to do and let me continue with my work. Of course, I have to look after him first, I know this, but insh'allah, he will do this for me too.

Aisha is a strong-minded woman who wants to achieve her personal goals first before she focuses on her marital responsibilities. Many of the women in this research felt the same as Aisha regarding the rules of friendship and marriage. All the women were conscious about the rules connecting their religious beliefs. The overall feeling was that westerners did not really understand the separate role of men and women within an Islamic environment, which has caused many concerns (Ramadam, 2010), particularly during the marriage union.

On more than one occasion, the women enquired about the rules regarding interacting with men in Australia. Some were also confused by the local male/female interactions and did not know how to behave themselves. Some women even attempted to research if there was an international Islamic rule to follow in these situations because of the conflicting cultural conducts. There are certain social rules in particular that created difficulties for the women and many were conscious of their actions in the presence of others in these situations. This included being observed or judged by other members of their own cultural society.

Comments from other participating women relating to behaviour included:

Our community is small and everyone knows each other. We know the family names and if we don't behave properly, there could be negative gossip here and back home.

One thing is really bothering me, and that is I am not sure if I should shake hands with men. I'm not sure what others will think of me if I do the wrong thing.

And another participant commented:

In Australia, the relationship between men and women are so different. When I meet people for the first time, they want to kiss me and I don't know what I am supposed to do when this happens. It scares me. I try to respect social rules but over here it can be so difficult.

Every unmarried participant in this research had a desire to find the right husband and had an expectation that this would occur. Unanimously, they depicted their ideal husband would be a Muslim who followed the five pillars of Islam. Aisha was happy to provide her perspectives on marriage in her country.

In my country, a woman has much better prospects of marriage if she is well educated because she will have better opportunities to meet people and will be better read about life. I think it is an important skill to be a good wife and mother. Although I understand the husband will take care of his wife's needs, I believe educated women have a better understanding of their rights when they do become a wife and mother. I really like education over here because it shows us how to live independently.

Nawal, had a different perspective on marriage:

Women from my country believe men should have more education than girls. I think this is because of the way men are in my culture. I think the more education a man has the more power he has in life. Men from my country like to have more power over their wife – and they are in charge. They are more dominant and stronger in the marriage and so they should not marry someone who is stronger than they are. Men in my country have to provide a comfortable life for their wife and their family and so they should have every option to do this. As a woman, I accept this and will be directed by my husband. My husband's opinion comes first.

Although the two women originate from the Middle Eastern Gulf, Aisha and Nawal clearly have different cultural ideas on marriage. Aisha understood if a woman achieved educational goals it would assist in her quest to find a husband, whereas Nawal had contrasting opinions. Regardless of the difference in viewpoints, both women agreed the wife should accept the man's role in the marriage union as the key figure to support the family. This tends to be less of a cultural viewpoint as it reflects their Islamic beliefs.

Other participants offered different standpoints on marriage as follows:

I have to travel abroad sometimes for conferences and work. In my country I don't think it will make a difference to getting married if I am a qualified

professional or not. The Middle Eastern mentality is that the man must be in control of everything and as the wife she has to stay at home and take care of her husband's needs. For me therefore, I don't think being a doctor has any advantages in finding a husband. It will definitely not give me more chances to get married but that is fine with me.

And from another participant:

In general women these days are ambitious and like to get educated. Many of them think about a Master degree. Before if women said they wanted to get a Master degree many people would say "what about marriage" but now it is OK.

In some cases however, some women responded with serious negative comments when describing the marriage union in their country. In this regard, some participating women have provided surprising contributions that are quite grave in nature. In these instances the women singled out their culture as the factor to blame:

Some men from my country think they have a right to mentally, physically and sexually abuse their wife. I hate this part of my culture and I am embarrassed that it goes on but there is nothing I can do about it.

Men from my country like to marry younger girls (8 to 10 years) and most of them, but not all want to control these young girls. If the girl has grown up into a woman, then these men won't want them. It's just what happens in my culture.

Not every woman contributed negative comments regarding marriage and not every woman shared similar viewpoints. To the women, marriage was clearly an important event in their lives and many were eager to settle down into a marriage union. Overall, this was the connecting factor between them regardless of their individual viewpoints on marriage in their country or specific culture.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter discussed the social impacts of studying in Australia and incorporated whole and part portraits focusing on elements relating to family, friendship and marriage. The impacts have emerged as themes from the data and it was identified that women felt more confident when they made physical changes because this helped them assimilate better into the Australian society. The women felt that physical changes assisted in disguising their traditional values and their external image relating to their original religious and cultural upbringing. They voiced certain struggles when dealing with their old identity and their new lifestyle in Australia. There was a perception that change was an important function they had to address while living and studying in Australia.

There is evidence that some of the women were susceptible to psychological traumas and one woman in particular suffered difficulties with being ostracised by her own Middle Eastern Gulf community due to the manner in which they behaved towards her. This specific woman voiced disappointment because she identified with this cultural group across many elements of her life prior to arriving in Australia and yet she felt the necessity to separate herself from them when in Australia. In this regard, many of the women had mixed reactions while living and studying in Australia as their cultural identity at varying levels were questioned. They perceived that the dominant culture forced them to liaise with men from all nationalities and in a variety of circumstances, which was not necessarily the behavioural norm in their cultural upbringing. Furthermore, the cntributing women reported they understood the behaviour of men from Middle Eastern Gulf counties when they, too made radical behavioural changes. Although some of the changes Middle Eastern Gulf men made involved their conduct towards women in general, the participants were accepting of this.

It was clear from the data that newly formed friendship groups were generated from individuals originating from similar Middle Eastern Gulf countries or comparable cultural and religious origins. The participating women tried to live within the boundaries of their former cultural upbringing by keeping similar acceptable female friendship groups. They also accepted that their husbands or male family members would continue to be accountable for them while they were in Australia and in many instances the women prolonged the guise of their cultural traditions in regards to their own independence. There were some deviations to this however, inasmuch as some participants commented that women should be given more freedom as they are probably more equipped to deal with life differences in Australia. The women reported that in a marriage union, their culture dictates that men should be in control. However, some women were not comfortable with this and reported they would like to be able to participate more in the decision-making. These particular women reported some serious concerns with men who had total control over their wives while they were in Australia.

The elements identified above clearly had an impact on how the women lived their lives while in Australia and also had an influence on the way they responded in certain social situations. While studying in Australia, the women participating in this research recognised they had to obtain a solid understanding of how to react towards men in a social setting. This included interacting with men in the classroom, communicating with them in their community and within the marriage union. There were clear rules that needed to be adhered to and the women recognised that if these guidelines were followed then they would be accepted into both cultural settings.

The women explained that they had to understand the boundaries within social engagements because if they did not, they ran the risk of upsetting their own cultural community. However, in order to connect or to fit in with the dominant Australian, or multicultural society, sometimes they broke their local social rules. On occasions when this occurred, this caused the women psychological harm because it conflicted with their original traditional and religious beliefs. In one severe case, a woman tried to commit suicide because she could not accept the seriousness of the cultural divides.

Additionally, all the women interviewed understood they were different because of their clothing or religious beliefs. Many were proud to wear their hijab but in doing so, still wanted to be accepted by other cultures. Even though they felt different, they endeavoured to implement strategies to feel connected to the Australian culture without disconnecting from their own community groups. Some approaches involved psychological and physical changes and Rizvi's (2005) research also indicates that international university students experience identity changes while they are in Australia. This is because international students find themselves in temporary conditions and they have to engage in different cultural and social conditions.

Other tactics undertaken by the women in the social context of their studies included keeping a strong network of friends and family to support them. Interestingly, Ramadan (2010) suggests that Muslims initiate a continuous deliberation of cultural differences because the sensitivities toward gender, religious faith and community philosophies are quite evident (Ramadan, 2010). In sum, the conditions within the social context identified the women's perceptions and experiences involved:

- Struggles with former identity
- Certain changes in conduct
- Inconsistencies with cultural group behaviours
- Balancing male/female relationships
- Understanding world perceptions of their cultural upbringing
- Acceptance of multicultural ideologies

The next chapter contains further narratives that explore and discuss the women's thoughts and perceptions in relation to their educational experience.

CHAPTER 6 – THE WOMEN IN AN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Aspects that define and influence the social lives of the women within this research were reported in the previous chapter. In particular, their behaviours across a variety of social circumstances within the Australian cultural context were discussed. This chapter moves forward to explicitly report the views of the women in relation to their learning experiences and in particular, offers new portraits of Nacera and Ermina, who are introduced to exemplify their journey.

Central themes identified in this research are illuminated within the educational context by presenting the portraits of two more participants, Nacera and Ermina and also highlighting appropriate excerpts from other participant narratives. All stories subsequently outline individual exemplars that include a blend of qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide an overall perspective of the women's experiences. Table 6.1 expands on concepts that have emerged from the data and shape the findings by forming a structure for reporting both negative and positive experiences.

Table 6.1: Coded themes identified for this research relating in the educational context.

Themes	Concepts	Actions (norms, significance, symbols)
Educational Context	Interaction with students	Commitment to other Gulf female students Making friends with other Gulf female students
	Interaction with teachers and comparisons with traditional upbringing	Connecting with teacher strategies Language and cultural barriers
	Study habits	Plagiarism Experiencing difficulties with the learning process
	International comparisons	Teacher behaviours Education systems

Specific areas such as the ability and ease of studying within the Australian system, student and teacher interaction, study habits, comparisons with other educational systems and

specific unfolding occurrences are all discussed within this chapter. The dialogues of the various women strengthen the legitimacy of the reported insights.

To begin, the following points highlight the reasons why the women chose to study in Australia. There were a variety of motivators for studying in Australia and these elements are highlighted through the presentation of portraits and individual narratives:

- *Since I am a sponsored student, I decided to go to Australia based on information I had from other members of my family.*
- *I preferred to study in a country whose people language is English (sic). Since I have a scholarship, there are some restriction for sending students to other countries, so I chose Australia*
- *There are a few universities in the world that have the discipline I want to study.*
- *The living cost in Australia is not too high compared to other countries.*
- *Australia accepts international student to be part of the society.*
- *Australia is a quiet place with good education and good universities that have a variety of majors*
- *The standard of the universities is high and are highly recommended in my country*
- *I want to study where my friends are also studying.*
- *I have family members in Australia.*
- *The level of education is so high. It is a safe country. The people are friendly. The weather is good. Australia is highly recommended by the Ministry of higher education in my country.*
- *I have other family members here and they encouraged me to join them.*
- *It was my Dad's dream.*

Nacera, the first woman to be introduced in this chapter, was interviewed in a university library. She was very keen to discuss the experiences of her educational journey and wanted to share her views on the advantages and disadvantages of being a Middle Eastern Gulf woman at university in Australia.

Nacera's story

> *I came to Australia because it seemed a quiet place that offered good university education with plenty of majors to choose from. Both my parents are university graduates and have studied overseas so I guess this is why I am here.*

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They really encouraged me. The course I am studying is about right for my ability and Insha'Allah; I will be able to pass this course without too much trouble.

I really like it that teachers support my studies and are always available to help me. Sometimes I even think the teachers here help me achieve higher results. I actually think the standard of education here is excellent compared to the system in my country. The teachers really have a commitment to their jobs and I can see this in their teaching. I am not sure though that they understand or have a lot of knowledge about Gulf students. I know there are a lot of international students here, but we are different. For example, some teachers say assalum-alikum to us to fit in with us, but I think they sound stupid when they are not Muslim. I don't think it is appropriate for a non-Muslim to use these phrases.

Also, I don't think the teachers understand what it is like for us to study in a second language. I think sometimes we miss important things in lecturers, but I am not scared to put my hand up and ask questions. Usually the teachers will quickly answer the question and then move on.

The Aussie accent and culture is not easy to understand and this can cause us problems. When I first came here I couldn't understand Aussies when they spoke and it was very frustrating. Even teachers use a lot of slang but I don't think they realise how difficult it is for us. We don't learn Aussie slang in our country, we learn English. I see lots of foreign students using a translator in class because they miss what has been said so it isn't just for us Gulf students that I am talking about.

If I could choose the ideal person at university to offer international students some study support, I would say that person would have to be a woman if the student is female, or a man if the student is male. I don't think it would work any other way because the university really has to consider the cultural stuff. I think the ideal person would be someone who understands young people and who fully respects other cultures and religions. You know, the fees for international students are very high and I think there should be more respect for us in general or at least more effort should be made to understand us better.

What I like best about studying in Australia is that we have independence to do our own research and I like this because it is a great way to learn. The teacher guides us but we have complete freedom. What I dislike is the amount of reading we have to do. There really is so much of it and we have to be careful not to plagiarise when we use the text in our writing. Australia is very strict with this. I had no idea when I first came how to include other work and reference it correctly. Well, I did know how to reference but what I mean is, I didn't know how to do it the Aussie way. In my country they don't tell us it is a crime, because that is what I was told when I got here. I think there are lots of Gulf students who plagiarise and they don't even know it is a crime. I know many students, not just women, who copy from each other or copy from the Internet. Students from the Gulf always help each other because we want everyone to succeed. It's normal.

In my country I have seen students copy in exams. They pass the answers to each other or they wait for one student to write the answer and then it is passed around without the teacher knowing. These students don't do this because they are bad. They do it to be helpful to each other. It is natural for us to help each other. The problem is, we are not really told anything different so you can't really punish those that do it because they don't know. Right?

I would say to any future student planning to come here "you must change if you really want to see inside the world". I say this because we have to change the way we study when we come here. I mentioned the plagiarism and the copying, which is a big thing, but there is a completely different way of teaching here because we are treated different by the teachers. We have to change our ways to keep up and be successful. This is very important for us. With the right attitude and knowledge we can do this. Also, the Aussie culture is very different to ours and if students do not open their eyes and see the world differently, they will find a lot of problems. Sometimes there is antisocial behaviour here with overseas people so that is why I would give this advice to any other women coming here from my country.

There are a lot of international students here but I don't really have any friends outside of my own culture. I have a mixed class when I attend lectures. There are so many nationalities. I don't think the Aussie students respect the teachers as much as they should. In my country this is very

different. I think this is normal though for the Aussie culture to have students disrespect teachers.

Overall, Nacera reported she was coping well with her studies and had received a lot of support from her family members. She did, however, report she felt teacher attitudes were not always consistent. While she admits teachers were helpful and supportive, she also reported they had a lack of cultural knowledge that prompted her negative feelings towards her teachers in general. In particular, she felt uneasy that non-Muslim teachers used Islamic phrases to Middle Eastern Gulf students and was quite upset.

Kilpatrick (2006, p. 23) notes there are globally more non-native English speakers than native English speakers and therefore consideration of cultural backgrounds should play an important role when the language is used for educational purposes. Kilpatrick's work would therefore support Nacera's comment regarding the teachers' lack of cultural boundaries when communicating with them in the English language as this could have a negative effect. Although some of the women indicated they accept non-Muslim teachers using Islamic phrases, Nacera's comment brings to the forefront a possible need for teachers to be more culturally sensitive, as not all students are alike.

Language was a significant matter and, while Nacera demonstrated very good English language skills, she did report she was not fully conversant with how it should be used in the Australian context. Interestingly, she felt Australian colloquialisms and accents were difficult for many international students and not just limited to those from the Middle Eastern Gulf. Although Crystal (2003, p. 1) states English is becoming widely spoken and viewed more as a "global language", there may possibly be a need for a more international version so that all can be understood in a variety of areas. Crystal (2003) also explains there are several places across the globe where people rely on English for its "social wellbeing" (Crystal, 2003, p. 29). In this regard, language teachers might possibly have more success in the classroom utilising student centred and communicative approaches in order to contextualise the target language more (Lochana & Deb, 2006, p.141).

Nacera identified that her language barriers were due to the localised use of the language, and so placing the English language in a social context within the classroom could possibly assist her overcome such obstacles. She did not specify any issues with slang, but rather how the Australian culture used words in different contexts. Regardless of some of the hurdles, Nacera still felt she was capable of passing her course and that university in Australia was far more superior to universities in her own country.

Ermina is now introduced depicting her views on education in Australia. Ermina wanted to be interviewed somewhere quiet because she was concerned others from her community might notice her involvement in this current research. It was important for Ermina to remain anonymous and respect for her privacy was paramount at the interview.

Ermina's story

I wanted to study in Australia ever since I was a young girl. I had travelled before and so I didn't have a problem moving to a new country. My mum was very supportive and encouraged me to do this.

The education here is quite serious. In my own country we used to copy and paste and not do our own work at all. We would organise our paragraphs in such a way that the lecturer would encourage the students to copy and paste as well. I did the referencing at the end and in-text, but the lecturer didn't teach us how to organise to do it with a proper method like the lecturers do here.

My friend studies in Brisbane and once she asked me to send her an assignment to look at. I sent it to her and told her to read it and look at the way I express my ideas so she could write something similar. I also sent my articles to give her an idea of what to use as a reference. To be honest, I'm not sure what she did with it, but I have a feeling she copied most of it. I had to help her because she was my friend and from the same country as me. In my country, we always help others that need it.

I am telling you this because I don't agree with cheating or copying but I do agree with helping your friends. I have seen people cheat in exams though before in my country. The lecturer knew this happened because the students would whisper to each other in the exam and the lecturer heard it but did nothing.

You might not know this, but there are good reasons why students cheat. Some of them just don't have time to study. I have seen many girls who are married and have children and their husbands don't like them studying too much. They expect their wives to be available to them all the time. I knew one girl who said that if her husband saw her studying at night he would fight with her and he said, "you are always studying and I want you to sit with me". She

got in so much trouble and she was sad a lot of the time because she couldn't do her work. So I understand why they cheat, especially the women and if they need help, then they know we will help them because we have to look after each other.

It is different for the men from my country though. Most of the men from my country just play while they are here in Australia. They are very lazy but they still pass their courses. I think they get a lot of help from their friends. I know they pay money sometimes for assignments if they can't get their friends to do it for them. They are not dumb and I know they can do much more than what they do and it makes me angry. I remember saying to one student who wanted to be a chemical engineer that I wouldn't want him to be in charge of a petrol company because I wasn't confident he would know what he was doing. He got angry with me but I still said it because I wanted him to realise what could happen. The problem is there are some teachers that even help them and it is wrong but it would be terrible if all the men failed their courses because we are all sponsored and so they have to do something. I have given you a negative image of my country, but the longer the men stay here, many of them eventually do their own work, so it is not all that bad.

The language is a problem sometimes for me too. Sometimes when I write an assignment I can't express myself as well as I like. The lecturer tells me to try but I don't expect to get the same mark as an Australian student because they are native speakers and they understand better than me. Before I used to carry a dictionary, but now each time I have to translate some words, I put them straight into my computer and then I try to memorise them later on. I also try to use the same words when I speak because this helps me remember them better.

One of the good things about studying here is that I have freedom. In my country I can't drive and sometimes the bus takes hours and when I get to uni I am already tired and this puts a lot of extra pressure on me. Here, it takes no time at all to get to uni and I have the freedom to go as I please. This has got to be the best part for me. I can go to the library or go with my friends and study, which helps us a lot and it, is fun.

I would recommend other women study in Australia. I think they will definitely learn how to write assignments properly as well as referencing. The quality in Arab countries in the Gulf is not the same as here. I also think new students should do an academic preparation course first and then they should go and do their undergrad or postgrad degree course. This will stop many problems because the language will be a block for many of them. It doesn't matter if they are good at English because they will still come across problems with writing and listening.

I would say to new students that the standard of Australian education is completely different to our country and the classroom environment is very good, mash'allah. Not all teachers and students respect us though and I will make sure any new students are aware that there could be problems. The teachers are more formal in my country and they are informal here. In my country teachers give you outsourced exams and don't concentrate on anything. Here they give you exams on the topic they teach you and tell you the name of the book that refers to the exam. In my country we don't have lots of books and the teacher gives us pictures or notes and copies questions from a book and because we don't know the book it is hard for us to study on our own. Here it is a European style.

A most interesting point raised in Ermina's portrait was her somewhat contradictory comment regarding cheating. Ermina had no issues with sharing assignments with other women from the Middle Eastern Gulf and her justification was based on the cultural behaviours of men. She reported women from her country did not always have the freedom to fulfill their study commitments and as a community, they are comfortable seeking support from their friends within the same culture. This daring acknowledgement demonstrates the Middle Eastern Gulf women in this research possess a form of strength that signifies a commitment to each other. Similarly, Nacera also reported it was natural for her cultural group to help one another and even questioned whether there should be any consequences due to this action, particularly if women clearly did not know anything different.

Further, Ermina's perception is that some men from the Middle Eastern Gulf do not study as much as they should but still managed to achieve their goals through other means. Yet on a positive level, she suggested these men eventually matured and developed in their own time and obtained more positive study habits. Other participants also mentioned Middle Eastern Gulf men easily get involved in activities that are not within the acceptable boundaries of their

cultural upbringing. For example, Rebab's view in the previous chapter defined this type of male behaviour as ignorance and suggested it was the manner in which they were raised in the Middle Eastern Gulf.

Further Thoughts – Making Changes

One comparative element identified between Nacera and Ermina was the necessity to make changes. Nacera made a point of narrating that many Middle Eastern Gulf women planning to study in Australia would benefit by changing their behaviour in order to see the world clearly. She felt that without altering individual study habits or views on cultural issues, future students would be faced with many difficulties.

Ermina on the other hand, reported that due to the standard of education in Australia, Middle Eastern Gulf women need to change their approach and writing style in order to achieve better learning outcomes. Clearly, different forms of changes were discussed but it was still significant in order to achieve the educational goals by both women.

Academic Practices

Both women discussed the differences with academic practices such a referencing in their home country and Australia. They both reported that when they first arrived in Australia, they were not fully aware of how to apply the rules of referencing. They also shared an opinion that they had been taught the correct approach to referencing their written work while studying in Australia.

Many women in this research collectively had the same view that they did not know how to reference correctly before they arrived in Australia. These women were not fully aware of plagiarism. Comments from some of these participants are indicated below:

> *In my country, a person can easily go to the library and take a thesis and copy some parts of it to your thesis and nobody would know. They [teachers] are serious about this in a PhD but usually it is not serious with other qualifications, a Bachelor or a Master degree. You know, we don't have a system that can stop this. Well, when I left my country to study here, there wasn't one.*

And from another participant:

> *I am aware and I learnt about this in the English programme at the University. Before that I thought that if I cut and paste from any book or piece of paper it was ok but at University here, they taught me you have to reference this stuff properly. When I did my Bachelor degree and I had to do an assignment, I would just go to Google scholar and find some very good websites and cut the whole lot (I didn't know) and put it in my assignment. I still referenced the person and the name of the book but I didn't paraphrase anything.*

Another participant commented:

> *Actually when I came here to study the English course, they increased our awareness about plagiarism. They really focused on this because they know we don't have the copyright things or are as serious or as critical in my country. When I came here they were like emphasising it and told us how serious it was. They even went to the extent to tell us that we would lose our chance to complete our studies if we did it.*

Nacera and Ermina were clearly not alone with their thoughts on plagiarism. Although many women were initially confused about how to reference when they first arrived in Australia, they felt their new knowledge could assist future students. One woman expressed her disappointment that the university in her country did not teach her how to reference correctly before arriving in Australia and because of this, she did not fully comprehend the strict rules of plagiarism. This particular woman reported that if she had been taught referencing skills earlier, she would not be so nervous now when she writes assignments.

She states:

> *Every time I write a single word I have to think about if I have to reference it.*

Two other women offered comments for improvement:

> *I think that we should try to convince the authorities in my country that they should pay extra care about plagiarism and the important issues of our society and education. They could follow the same systems as in other countries. It would be better talk about plagiarism. Improving the culture of the student would be a good start because I think when they get to university overseas they have to be careful.*

And the second participant said:

> *Teaching students the regulations and the punishments involved might stop them plagiarising or cheating in any way. These students only think about their marks and so if they really knew what would happen to them if they got caught, they might think differently. I think teaching them over and over again how to do it is the only way.*

Heberling, (2002) argues that the Internet has encouraged cheating to take place and mentions several websites where students can purchase assignments. This is a serious matter and one that is not only exclusive to Middle Eastern Gulf students. The Huffington Post in Canada (May 23rd, 2010) reported that in 2008 a university professor accused a Canadian student of cheating when he participated in an online study group created on Facebook (http://www.huffingtonpost.com). Contention followed this accusation as the student cohort argued they were part of an online forum to swap ideas with other students for the purpose of improving their written assignments. They claimed study groups, whether based online or not, were the same type of forum. However, the university ruled in favour of the professor and perceived the student's action to be a breach of the university's academic integrity policy.

Many of the women in this research felt academic integrity was an issue for Middle Eastern Gulf students, both in their own country and also in Australia. They also mentioned they enjoyed participating in online corroboration forums and felt comfortable partaking in study forums. There was openness reported across the Middle Eastern Gulf community towards sharing and it was evident that collaboration between students was present. The women recognised their cultural behaviours may challenge academic integrity, but also reported they had a duty to support each other. Regardless of this however, the women did admit the necessity to learn how to reference correctly while studying in Australia because this new knowledge provided them with skills to help improve their writing. The women further reported their language skills were constantly being improved during their stay in Australia. Both Nacera and Ermina conveyed difficulties in the language for different reasons. Nacera faced difficulties with the local language in context and Ermina faced difficulties with her writing. This information points to a possible need for teachers to improve their language delivery when foreign students are involved in studying at university level.

International Education Viewpoints

All the contributing women reported their families were proud they were studying in Australia. All conveyed they had received total commitment and support from their family and

that without that family support they could not achieve their goals. There was also a mix of how many women had family members who had previously studied either in Australia or in other countries overseas. The responses included:

My family is proud that I am the fourth in our family to be studying abroad.

And another participant commented:

My mother supports me because she wants me to be happy and she also studied overseas. But, sometimes my mother is afraid when I wear the hijab here.

Table 6.2 and Table 6.3 represent the number of family members who have studied overseas. These are collated from phase one of the questionnaires. Table 6.2 clearly demonstrates that out of the 15 women who answered this question, 11 had other siblings that had previously studied overseas. Furthermore, in Table 6.3, there were 6 women who indicated they had one or more parent who had undertaken studies in a different country.

Table 6.2: Siblings who have studied overseas.

Answer options	Response count
Yes	11
No	4

Other family members who have studied overseas are depicted below.

Table 6.3: Parents who have studied overseas.

Answer options	Response count
Yes	6
No	9

Table 6.4 depicts the different elements of studying in Australia. There were many responses, ranging from family encouragement to lifestyle and safety and assists in understanding the women's motivations. Some of the responses relate solely to the academic and learning areas of university study. However, the most popular answers refer to the social and living conditions in Australia.

Table 6.4: Popular answers regarding studying in Australia.

Participant responses
• The fact that a multicultural environment helps widen and diversify the knowledge about other cultures and societies • Living peacefully and dealing with people who respect the time and the person in front of them. • High standard of education offered • Meeting people from different cultures • Security • Freedom, course options • Learning styles are much better • It is quicker to graduate in Australia

Teacher interaction

The portraits so far have identified that certain cultural issues can create drawbacks for women studying in Australia. Aisha, who was introduced in the previous chapter, also had some revealing facts to report regarding the cultural divide.

Aisha's story

I had a male teacher here in Australia when I first came and it was a little difficult for me. Firstly, I was not used to such a friendly and open teacher. He was a very nice man and so kind but when I graduated from his class he wanted to give me a certificate as a surprise for me. He walked up to me in front of everyone and tried to shake my hand. I was so embarrassed because in my culture, I am not allowed to touch a man who is not a close member of my family. I was scared and didn't know what to do so I just told him "sorry, I can't, I can't". I think he realised then that I couldn't touch him and so he put both his hands on the certificate and everyone clapped for me instead.

I was very sad about that incident because I had not experienced anything like that before. Not touching the opposite sex is part of our religion and everyone should try to accept this when we are here in Australia. I don't think many Australians realise. When I told the teacher later on about why I couldn't shake hands he asked me whether it was Allah or the Prophet that said this rule and I was so pleased that he took an interest in Islam. This tells me that

the teachers in Australia, if they really want to, will try to understand us Muslims more and if they did this, they would try not to do things that embarrass us. I'm not sure if it just Muslims that go through this because there are a lot of different religions and cultures here in Australia.

I told my family about what happened and my older brother was very understanding. He told me not to be worried about these things because Australians didn't mean to be disrespectful to us and he encouraged me to socialise more with men and women in a plutonic way so I could get more confidence and also understand them better. I feel uncomfortable still but I know my brother is right.

When Aisha was introduced in the previous chapter, she raised her concerns about communicating with men. Her concerns were also evident in the classroom as she reported she was not sure how to deal with cultural differences within the classroom when it involved touching. Although Aisha experienced difficulties, she was able to overcome these by discussing her religious obligations with her teacher and obtaining advice from other members of her family. Not all women felt the same as Aisha. Some women mentioned there were no cultural issues and some believed their teachers understood them well.

One participant mentioned:

During Ramadan, the teachers here understand our culture very well. Back home at this time of the year nobody eats and the restaurants are closed until the sun goes down, but here at lunchtime everyone is eating. It can be very difficult for Muslims. I remember one time 4 of us who were Muslims had to do our final presentation on the first day of Eid. The teacher told the class that the Muslim students could do their presentations first and if we didn't finish by lunchtime then we could catch up later. She knew we wanted to leave early to celebrate Eid and she made sure we did just that. She was really nice and I was glad she understood us.

One participant commented she believed there were similarities across the Australian and Middle Eastern Gulf cultures. She reported several areas were the same and that these similarities made her feel more comfortable while she was living in Australia. Her comments are depicted below:

I am amazed that both cultures are very similar. I am amazed that here in Australia there are very strong families ties even maybe more than my country. I didn't know that. I have witnessed families sticking together a lot in this country.

Also, the shops are open very late, sometimes until Midnight and people have busy lives. All of these things are exactly the same as my culture and I feel at home more in this situation.

Although there are many expatriate western educators working in the Gulf, there are nevertheless, still many students who are not exposed to western teaching approaches or westernised classroom methods (Barise, 2004). For the students who did not have this prior experience, their opinions were not always positive. Some of the negative responses identified by Harrold's (2009) and Barise's (2004), showed that Middle Eastern Gulf students had difficulty understanding textbooks because of their limited skills of the English language as well as their lack of knowledge with western cultures. The students participating in the two researches for example, simply did not always understand the context of the writings they were studying and analysing in class. This endorses a key point uncovered in this current research as one participant commented:

It is difficult to do all the readings and to be able to analyse the text and summarise it because I don't always understand the exact meaning. What I mean is, my English is good but sometimes I experience problems. When this happens, I spend ages with a dictionary or a thesaurus trying to figure out what it all means. If I still don't understand, then I will ask my friends or sisters to help me with the work. It can be very time consuming and I get restless. I am intelligent, but this is a real stumbling block for me.

Barise (2004, p. 6) argued that Gulf students felt western teachers had either a negative opinion of them or did not fully understand how to behave appropriately within a Muslim cultural setting. This would endorse some of the comments reported by the women in this research, as cultural matters were clearly evident in many of the statements. Most had issues relating to gender, but other women felt they should comment on general teaching approaches. For example, some of the dialogue includes:

Don't only look to the knowledge and information, because teaching students is more than just providing information. Teachers should try to deal with how to show students how to deal with life or social skills because this is so important. It is not just A.B.C.

I was surprised with the teaching here. My niece is in school here because I am here with some of my family and every week or second week she has to do show and tell. She brings something from the house and she has to explain this. It is great for presentation skills and the first time I did this was in my bachelor degree and it was a big hurdle because I was not used to it.

One other participant further advised:

I believe teachers should study something about psychology or special education because they have to deal with people from different cultures and I don't believe they really understand the world well enough. They should know about behaviours and all different people. If they knew this, they wouldn't make so many mistakes.

Many women offered advice to improve specific hurdles Muslim women themselves experienced within the classroom environment, which sometimes caused feelings of embarrassment, such as those described here:

Teachers must have a good understanding of the culture. For example, for me, when we are in the middle of a meeting in Australia, I have to leave to do my prayer and then come back. This comes with my culture. So, a teacher who understands this and knows the type of food we eat has special qualities. That type of teacher would also fit in well in my country. Without this understanding it is very embarrassing when I have to leave before the meeting has ended.

And another participant commented:

I think teachers should know about different religions. Teachers need to know that I can't sit beside a man especially if it is a small space between us. Also, if teachers include some games in the classroom, I can run but I can't play catch with men. This put me in a difficult situation when it happened in my English class.

I know some teachers like to have fun in the classroom, but they must get a better understanding that what is fun for them, or some students, will not be fun for others. There have been awkward moments for me in class because a teacher thinks she is making her lessons fun.

The women were particularly interested in offering suggestions to teachers who were considering working in the Gulf. When asked how a non-Muslim should behave when working in their country, the following advice was provided:

I think the only thing teachers should look out for is their clothes. I suggest the female teachers wear ordinary clothes but with longer sleeves or longer skirts because the culture where I come from is different. Everyone is covered and they don't draw attention to themselves. For example, if someone were exposed on the beach, people wouldn't like it. We are a very modest society and anyone coming to my country should know this.

And another student commented:

There are a lot of limitations or restrictions if you are going to teach ladies in the UAE if you are a man. Some men teachers here are so lovely that they want to

hug you and in my culture this is unacceptable. For example my supervisor here in Australia was a man and at his farewell party, he hugged everyone and when he came to me, he said "I wish I could but I know I can't" but I let him shake my hand instead. I was so happy because he understood my culture. Hugging or touching would definitely not be allowed in my country and I think men teachers planning to go there should really think about this because they would definitely get into a lot of trouble.

One other participant suggested:

I would suggest someone working in my country should try to look normal and not show any beliefs or thoughts in public. They could wear jeans, a t-shirt, do their hair nice and that's it. I would ask them to say please whenever they ask for something, they should smile maybe and say sorry when they do something wrong. We expect everyone to have good manners and respect people and the laws of the land.

Teacher interaction is an important factor where international students are concerned because non-native speaking students are susceptible to facing a number of hurdles (Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008). Students often need the support of others to help overcome cultural difficulties and Russell, Thomson and Rosenthal (2008) encourage more teacher awareness. One of the women in this current research felt she was viewed differently from other students and reported troubles because of it:

My colour is different and I look different from all the rest of the students. You know, my hijab and so on. This person was Australian the same as my supervisor and she was there to help and guide us. I think I found out later that she was Jewish. Yeah, I did, I found out that she was Jewish and I think maybe that was why she was so bad to me. She was so mean to me and I kept thinking, that if I want to pass I had to accept her behaviour.

And another participant commented:

Teachers seem pretty aware of our background and where we come from. However, they still cannot distinguish between what is a religious custom and what is our social and cultural behaviour. There are big differences and many teachers who don't know this have treated the Gulf students with disrespect.

I cannot be judgmental of the teachers who do wrong by us. Communication with others can answer a lot of concerns, behaviors, or even beliefs. However, I would never trade what I believe in for what the majority demands unless I see this in my own mind.

A more serious story involved one woman becoming scared of a teacher while studying in Australia:

Something difficult happened to me with a female teacher here. I'm not sure about her nationality but she was blonde like an Australian. She was very strict and expected everyone to know everything. She was surprised if anyone spelt something wrong. The class with her was very scary. She shouted a lot and asked us questions one by one and if we didn't know the answer, she would laugh or shout at you.

I remember one time she asked me why I didn't know how to spell an English name. Some other student asked how could we spell names that were foreign to us and she just laughed. Sometimes I didn't know the difference between the first name and the family name but she would not accept that.

I had a bad time with her and I hated English. She ridiculed me so often. I felt down because of this teacher. She sat all the time at her desk and didn't walk around the classroom or do anything to encourage us. She just asked people to answer her questions and if we didn't know it, she said we were not clever enough and it was no good. I thought of leaving that course three times! I had another friend who only spent 3 days with her and then she left.

The participating women reported both negative and positive teacher interaction, which would indicate that the level of awareness between both parties is in need of further improvement. The comments were particularly relevant to a lack of knowledge regarding cultural behaviours. Interestingly, one woman commented that her cultural beliefs stopped her making any judgements, which would be seem as a constructive action towards improving the collaboration between teacher and student.

Improving the learning experience

Teacher interface is not only essential on a social level, but it should be maintained within the learning environment. The women were asked their thoughts regarding how teachers could possibly make improvements. The question provided a series of responses as follows:

My advice would be for teachers to be positive and not to force the students to do things they are not happy to do. They should teach them how to do it first because if the students are intelligent enough, they will be able to do it. Just show them the proper way and they will do it. Give them the information and underline the most important thing. In my country, the teachers don't encourage us to self-learn or read by ourselves.

And another participant commented:

Students from my country, especially the modern generation, are very noisy. Teachers of these students will have to make their lessons interesting to keep them focused on their studies because there are many things that stop them from focusing. I think we have very talented students and this makes the work for the teacher very hard. The students are not lazy, they are just not disciplined enough to study that's all.

Whether a teacher is in Australia or in my country, they need to understand what is acceptable in our religion and this needs to be remembered when they are giving a lecture. We have some families in my countries that are not very strict religiously but they are still very strict about the girls. Therefore a male teacher would need to be very careful how to behave with girls because others could see the motivation behind some of their actions differently. It can be difficult for him.

One of the women reported that teachers in Australia had a lot of patience and took a gradual approach in the classroom focusing on teaching communication skills. This participating woman said she learnt to develop her English skills incorporating a step-by-step approach and reported this was valuable to her learning outcomes. Not all teachers made the correct choices when planning educational programmes but the women did report they understood that educators around the globe possessed strengths and weaknesses. Although some women claimed teachers from the Gulf, had less patience, many believed the weaknesses of Australian educators included their lack of cultural knowledge. A comparison between the educational system in Australia and across the Gulf countries was raised in the participant interviews as well as in the questionnaires. A variety of viewpoints were provided:

I can better compare the Australian Education system with the system in my country because there is not much difference between the teachers as they are nearly the same. The system here is more systemic though and with better facilities. For example, if I have some problems here with my computer, there is a system, which is easy to get my problem fixed. In my country it is more difficult. I don't know where to go or if it will be fixed. The university in my country where I did my masters was the best university in town but we didn't have enough computers for the students and we had to share but here there is better good Internet access and we can access journals and there are enough computers for everyone.

Question 26 from phase one, part one of the online survey required the participants to indicate their responses on specific aspects of the Australian education system. Table 6.5 below outlines the different aspects that required a response from the women. The elements ranged from the standard of education in Australia to how other international students responded the women.

Table 6.5: Views on the Australian Education System.

Individual responses
- Standard of Australian education compared to your country   - Classroom environment   - Teacher's respect for international students   - Student's respect for the teachers   - Teacher's respect and knowledge of Gulf students in particular   - Teacher's commitment to their job   - How other international students respond towards you

The participant responses regarding the standard of the Australian education system compared with education in the Middle Eastern Gulf are specified below in table 6.6. The data show that the women reported the Australian system highly motivated them as learners and that they felt it was clear and systemic. Although Australian education is completely different from the Middle Eastern Gulf, the women reported it was much better than their own country, particularly in terms of standards. Some of the women reported they felt the Australian education system was more superior to their own country because the universities were older and had time to develop better systems. In this regard, some comments related to the manner in which the material was presented to students in class and many felt it was clearer and easier to understand. In fact, none of the women reported any negative aspects of their educational experience in Australia.

Table 6.6: Responses regarding the standard of Australian education

Individual responses
- Highly motivated   - It is more systematic and clear   - It is completely different   - It is excellent   - It is very high. The main difference from my country is that the universities are older and have a reputation   - The way the information is given is the same, but the way of teaching is much better   - Much better   - Higher standard because of the long experience and there are better facilities available for research   - It is way better

Many of the women were very motivated to participate in the educational system in Australia because they believed the standards were higher than their own country. They felt universities had a good reputation and some were further impressed with the onsite services available to them:

My uni is like a friendly village. It has everything I need like, a doctor, a
psychologist, great library facilities, wireless internet and lots of good lecturers.
It is a nice place with a modern campus and people from all over the world are
here.

The responses regarding the classroom environment compared to the Middle Eastern Gulf are indicated in table 6.7. The women believed the learning setting was sometimes challenging because of their cultural background. They felt they sometimes experienced awkwardness from others because of their religious belief or traditional upbringing. However, they did enjoy the fact that classrooms were better and this encouraged a friendly environment. The full set of responses expressing the individual thoughts are listed in the table below:

Table 6.7: Responses regarding the classroom setting.

Individual responses
- Multiculturally challenging   - More equipped   - It is good   - Very good   - Nice and friendly   - Australia has a much better classroom environment   - Good, comfortable   - Friendly   - Very relaxed in Australia   - OK   - It's quite good

Although some women commented the classroom setting was friendly and comfortable, they did mention that cultural issues added to some of their challenges. One participant reported she needed time to settle into her new Australian classroom:

At first we asked each other about our studies and what was going on because
we were all so different. In the beginning there were some of us who were
embarrassed.

Other women reported they felt complimented that the classroom was a positive environment and their religious beliefs were respected. The responses from participants relating to teacher respect for international students are provided in table 6.8. The table illustrates that the women felt other international students were mostly respectful towards them, but that teachers did not always understand their religious and cultural differences. Some women also felt the teacher-student liaison was quite different to the Middle Eastern Gulf. In particular, one participant reported that not all teachers responded favourably towards international students, and one woman felt that she experienced racism.

Table 6.8: Teacher behaviour towards overseas students

Individual responses
• Mostly respectful until some teachers get to religion and culture • Same as in my country • Yes, but not all of them • Very good • Teachers respect every student regardless of their background • Sometimes I feel they annoy the teachers in Australia. This doesn't happen in my country • Good • Respectful • Most of the academic staff are good. Some, and other staff can be racists • Fine, but not always

Comments relating to teacher cultural and religious boundaries were highlighted with some women reporting they respected teachers more when the women's own personal beliefs were acknowledged. In contrast however, some comments illustrated a negative reaction or a feeling of discomfort when teachers discussed or highlighted religious and cultural topics:

> *Teacher's respect for international students is mostly courteous until some teachers get to religion or cultural issues.*

Other responses included the ease and support the women experienced from their teachers in Australia. Some women reported they were not sure whether they had fully gained the respect of their teachers and described mixed feelings. Participant responses in relation to teacher respect and knowledge of Middle Eastern Gulf students are further outlined in table 6.9. The women reported that in general, teachers have an overall knowledge of Middle Eastern Gulf

culture. Some women indicated they experienced certain issues regarding respect, but others stated that they believed the difficulties were due to teachers not fully understand the importance of Islam in their lives.

In contrast, there were women who reported no relationship issues with their teachers.

Table 6.9: Teacher respect

Individual responses

- They have general ideas about Gulf students, but it is hard for them to accept or to understand how religion appears in every aspect of students' lives.
- I can say just about my supervisor who has a good knowledge and respect for us. I don't know about other lecturers.
- Yes, but not all.
- Nothing special.
- For the two years I was in Australia, I didn't see any issues dealing with Arab or other nationalities. I did have one exception in my bridging course. I think she had a personal problem, which can't be generalised to the other students.
- In Australia and Kuwait, the teachers respect the students.
- High.
- They have respect, but not sure about their knowledge of us?
- I am the first student from the Gulf to study in my specialist medical field in Australia and I think now the lecturers know more about my culture because I am here.
- Not that good, but all right I suppose.

Many women believed teachers in Australia showed great respect towards them, but cultural knowledge was emphasised as an area that required improvement. There were mixed reactions to the amount of knowledge teachers had about the Middle Eastern Gulf in general. However, one woman in particular, highlighted her admiration for one of the teachers because she reported this teacher had a high level of knowledge of Middle Eastern Gulf students, as well as cultural understanding:

He is good with everyone but he recognises I am from a totally different culture. He is very, very nice because he has experience dealing with people from Arabic countries and I am safe with him as my teacher in Australia.

Participants were also asked to comment on teacher commitment compared to teachers in the Middle Eastern Gulf. The responses are outlined in table 6.10. Overall, the comments were positive, inasmuch as the women felt teachers were trustworthy and encouraging. They also commented this was similar to their experiences in their own country.

Table 6.10: Australian teacher commitment

Individual responses
- Trustworthy   - Better than my country   - Yes   - Very good   - Similar in both   - I think they work hard to help us, especially in studying the language   - Encouraging   - Great   - Committed, that's what I like

The women reported that teachers in Australia were committed to their role as educators; they work hard and were trustworthy. One participant in particular, preferred the teachers approach to students in Australia and remarked:

Being positive is the major difference between the teachers in Australia and the other teachers I had in my country. If teachers were to give us advice in my country they would say "do it like this" or "don't do it like that" because they were not flexible. Australia is the opposite and teachers often say, "have you tried another way to do this". They make us think for ourselves. I think the Arab way doesn't teach the proper way.

Similarly, many of the women reported they felt encouraged by the teaching staff in Australia, with comments focusing on the acknowledgement of different teaching styles and approaches towards them.

The responses regarding how other international students responded towards the women are further highlighted in table 6.11. Many women reported that other international students did not culturally or religiously understand them. They were continually asked questions about their traditional origins and values but were happy to provide answers because they perceived it helped clear much of the confusion.

Table 6.11: Views on other overseas students

Individual responses
- Differently, depending on their previous image of Saudi's, Muslims and single females   - Good   - Some are nice and friendly and some are not   - We study in a lovely environment, which is not new to me. In my country I have studied in a much similar environment   - They are very nice and I have a lot of friends in class   - They usually ask about our behaviour if it relates to religion. They are confused about the hijab and why we are different from other people   - Friendly   - I don't know many of the international students, but they seem fine   - Fine most of the time but they don't understand us often and think wrong things about our culture

Some women shared their experiences with other international students who have incorrect opinions or misleading information about the Middle Eastern Gulf culture. The women feel these international students display negative behaviour towards them because of distorted perceptions regarding their religion and culture and in these incidences report they are not keen to interact with them.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter revealed how the participating Middle Eastern Gulf women perceived, understood and experienced their education in Australia. By incorporating larger descriptive portraits as well as several excerpts of the participating women, specific areas relating to teacher/student interaction, learning strategies, cultural behaviours, and educational systems were explored and reported. The information that emerged from the data suggests that some women felt they have to encompass changes in the educational arena in order to fit into the Australian learning environment. They felt this wass due to incorrect perceptions or negative assumptions about their cultural origins. The women did agree that one major change was the acceptance and appreciation of multicultural behaviours.

When the matter of academic integrity arose, the women reported they were not completely aware of the rigid rules concerning plagiarism before they undertook a commitment

to study in Australia. They also believed there were some barriers regarding the English language, particularly in regards to colloquialisms and understanding the local meaning. Also, some women felt they had issues with writing to an acceptable standard because many felt they were not fully proficient enough.

One particular area that was identified included the fact that Middle Eastern Gulf women felt they had to offer support to each other regardless of the situation. For example, married Middle Eastern Gulf women who studied in Australia, experienced educational obstacles because of the expectations within the marriage union. They reported they had a priority to take care of their husband foremost, and that their studies were of a lesser priority. Other Middle Eastern Gulf women offered support because they understood married women were not always able to fulfill their role as student and wife equally. Furthermore, in the educational setting, some of the women reported that on occasions, teachers displayed disrespect towards them by exhibiting racist conduct. In this regard, the women believed they experienced certain difficulties in the learning environment because their cultural and traditional behaviours were not fully understood.

Regardless of these differences, many women conveyed there were several comparisons to the education system in Australia and their home countries. Although they reported there were some areas in the Australian system that was of a higher standard, in general they felt it was quite similar. Furthermore, the women enjoyed the freedom and flexible approach that is offered in Australian universities. The components highlighted in the tables show how the women in this research embraced their studies while living in Australia, and also how they conditioned themselves to behave in certain circumstances. As an example, while studying in Australia, the women acknowledged a need to attain a certain tolerance of behaviours that were occasionally unfamiliar, or even shocking to them. These behaviours involved teacher and student responses towards them as Middle Eastern Gulf female students, and one participant reported that certain teacher actions made her aware how different she was from everyone else in her class.

On occasions, women were exposed to conditions that contradicted their traditional values, such as male teachers being too close, which further endorses the research conducted by Barise, (2004, p.6). Although the women understood male teacher closeness to students was the usual form of conduct at university, this type of behaviour did place a certain amount of pressure on them. In fact, some women felt they had to compromise their own cultural upbringing and shake the teacher's hand for fear of being isolated. The women demonstrated on the one hand, an openness to accept the Australian culture, but also said there was a pressure to

conform, in order to fit in with the western lifestyle. For some women, they changed their habits because they wanted to conceal any embarrassment or feelings of stress and isolation, but others were happy to adopt a new form of conduct. Other women took the stance of remaining loyal to their cultural values and continued to live within their traditional origins.

Regardless of how the women responded and behaved in these situations, it was evident many were unsure of the correct resolve and reported difficult conditions. In fact, some women recounted they were often placed in circumstances where their cultural and behavioural origins were put to the test. Some even experienced discrimination from others, which also validates the research conducted by Gallant (2006) and Mellor (2007). Behaviours within the Muslim community have created divides across many areas in education (Gallant, 2006) and the women in this particularly research also reported similar circumstances.

A major cultural trait that was identified was the unanimous support women had for each other. There was an unspoken agreement, a type of protocol of practice that clearly defined how they accepted and agreed upon a code of behaviour between them. Regardless of any educational and social challenges, Middle Eastern Gulf women understood they could rely on each other for support. This commitment is not without some concerns because it also placed them in danger of breaching academic integrity. Some were not fully aware of the seriousness of their supportive actions. As one participant naively reported:

Back home, I never wrote an assignment. One time I had to write a report and I was totally panicking about that because I had no experience how to write something in my own words. In the end, one of the leader girls wrote it for me and I did well. I was very grateful to her.

There was undoubtedly a supportive environment and the women reported they had a duty to help each other. They explicated that although they understood there might be limitations, they felt they had no choice but to break the rules from time to time in order to assist one and other. Their cultural traits and traditional upbringing determined this level of behaviour and support regardless of the consequences that might face them. There are well-defined rules within their own community that are not questioned in terms of female support and these women understood and accepted this. They also felt the actions of men from their cultural community placed additional pressure on them to adhere to cultural rules within the marriage union, and family environment. There was an understanding that married women had a priority to their husbands and family first and foremost, regardless of their study commitments. In these instances stronger support was fostered from within the Middle Eastern Gulf female community. The women were selfless in their actions. They were prepared to enter

into an academic arrangement with each other to permit the copying of work in order to release the cultural and family pressures placed upon them.

Similarly, the women also ignored incidences when other students cheated and clearly accepted that students from the Middle Eastern Gulf, both men and women, might participate in some form of plagiarism. There was no evidence to depict the women knew it was an actual academic crime, and although they knew others might perceive what they were doing was wrong, they did not fully understand the dire consequences. Women knew it was unacceptable to participate in the copying of work, plagiarism or cheating but not to the level that they were aware that it was an illegal act, which is why they continued to help each other. However, once the legal reality was fully understood, it was evident that they accepted the boundaries, changed their actions and became optimistic by offering advice to new students to abide by such rules. This was demonstrated in their narratives as they offered advice to prospective students and also to the educators in their home countries to prepare students more fully in the international expectations of university education. In other words, once the women became aware of certain academic illegalities, their actions suggested a shared change in their agreed code of conduct. They still offered support, but within certain boundaries. In fact, once the understood the academic rules more fully, the women had a better awareness of how they could provide support to each without placing added pressure on themselves and without negative consequences.

Finally, all the women appreciated there were positive and negative attributes to being educated in Australia, but overall they were happy to be involved in the Australian education system. Their families were proud and supported them as best they could. Women supported other women and reportedly believed their education in Australia would make a big difference when they returned to their own countries. Some of the negative aspects of studying in Australia related to cultural and behavioural issues but the women felt the longer they remained in Australia, their situation improved and they learnt strategies to deal with obstacles they faced. Many women were proud to recommend Australian tertiary education to other Middle Eastern Gulf women, but also advised prospective future students to arrive with strong English language skills and be prepared for cultural and educational differences.

In sum, the conditions within the educational context identified the women's perceptions and experiences involved:

- Limited understanding of academic integrity
- Unconditional female to female support
- Inconsistent behaviours toward Middle Eastern Gulf women in the educational arena
- Changing lifestyles within university

Information from this research is further expanded as the next chapter explores what happens when the women's international education journey comes to an end.

CHAPTER 7 – THE WOMEN'S FUTURE JOURNEYS

Data outlined in the previous two chapters have provided an insight into the lives of Middle Eastern Gulf women as they undertake university study in Australia. So far, the women so far have reported their experiences within a variety of social and educational contexts. This chapter considers the next stage in the lives of the women and reflects what happens when their educational journey in Australia reaches its conclusion. New insights about their prospective choices are revealed and these generate further discussion and insight.

Two separate groups of women are described in this chapter. One category comprises of women who still reside in Australia and they offer individual accounts of what they believe life will be like for them when they return to their country. The other group encompasses women who have actually returned home after completing their studies in Australia. Through their collection of narratives, the latter group describes actual experiences of returning to their home countries with memory recounts of their time in Australia.

Overall, a range of opinions and intimate feelings are revealed through exemplars emerging from the data that delivers an overall perspective of both groups of women and their experiences. Also, in order to continue to respect the privacy of the women, no names, including pseudonyms, are mentioned in this chapter, as some of the women could still be identified due to the depth of data and the location that is reported. Table 7.1 below introduces the coded themes identified from the data and frames the structure for reporting the women's dialogue across various circumstances.

Table 7.1: Coded themes identified through participant dialogue regarding the end of the journey

Theme	Concepts	Actions (norms, significance, symbols
The Future	Thoughts of the continued journey	Retaining identity but making changes
	Experiences and feelings	Implementation of new ideas Changing viewpoints Anger, sadness, confusion
	Knowledge and understanding	Recognition of global differences Encouragement of other women
	Profession and work	Contribution to society Empowerment
	Relationships	Changes with family, friends and colleagues Uncertainties
	Life as is	Family and memories

Responses recorded at the beginning of the journey are highlighted in some of the dialogue because certain opinions altered as the women's journey ended, or were approaching the end. These specifically related to cultural and religious behaviours and the women are not identified by name in order to completely disguise their changes of opinion. Furthermore, the women's acceptance of change, an appreciation and understanding of global cultural differences, the strengthening support of women and the implementation of strategies incorporating the Australian experience are all discussed.

While, incorporating a mix of stories, the women are still able to reveal whether they feel their experiences in Australia has had an impact on their present or future endeavours. In this regard, one woman reports her need for knowledge has increased since studying in Australia and believes this will assist her future plans:

I can't believe that I read more because I never did this back home. Living in Australia has generated my interest about the world and I think when I return to my country I will continue to be intrigued by what is happening around me. I never thought about global matters before, but I woke up and saw life. I think that if I know more about different world issues, I will be able to make a contribution as I get a better understand of things.

Learning about other nationalities is important for another woman because she feels studying in Australia elevated her communication skills. She reports others accept her more because of her improved communication skills:

Since I have been in Australia, I have learnt that I shouldn't judge others based on my own experiences and knowledge alone. There is more to a person than language and appearance. Australia has taught me that communicating effectively with others can answer a lot of questions. For example, we can find out about their likes, dislikes or cultural beliefs this way. Just by knowing how to speak properly with other people means we learn a lot about them.

The participant continues to discuss her thoughts about other cultures:

Our culture identifies who we are as individuals and if other people stopped to talk to us, they would find out who we are and what we represent. I think if we also stopped judging others too soon, maybe they will stop judging us so quickly as well.

In Australia there are people from Asia, Middle East, South America and Europe living and studying here with me and we are all so different. I have been lucky to get to know some of them. I live in the Gulf state and we have many, many visitors each year from all over, so when I return to my country, I have no doubt, I will look at these travellers differently. Maybe I will be able to say Konichiwa if they are Japanese or Nee How if they are Chinese (student giggles). I try to do that now with some of the Japanese and Chinese students and we have a big laugh about it. It's even funnier though when they try to speak my language.

Arriving back home

Returning to their home country generated mixed reactions for some of the women. One woman who has since returned to her home country reports the following:

Participant 1:

I am back in my beautiful country and have got a fantastic job. It is what I have always wanted and I am so blessed that I have been able to achieve this. I thank Allah every day that I was able to experience so much in my life and for giving me the strength to stay with my convictions. It has not been an easy journey because there have been many troubles along the way.

Life in Australia was great fun but so hard at times. I know I changed a lot when I lived there, sometimes for the better but sometimes for the worse. There was a lot of temptation to taste the other side of life. I was lucky that I

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had other members of my family supporting and helping me because I stayed true to my beliefs. There was no choice to change I know this now. At the time, I felt guilty when I changed the way I dressed or behaved and socialised in a different way, but I know I did nothing wrong and feel I am a better woman for it. I don't regret anything I did in Australia.

My new job here in my country is brilliant. I have a place in life and I am able to contribute to the economy of my country. My family is so proud of me and they know that without studying in Australia, I would never have got the chance to work for them. When I applied for the job, I was able to give them an Australian reference and I think that helped my application.

I think my family understands that I have changed a little since being in Australia and I actually feel more grown up too. This can only be a good thing surely? I must remember though that the life I had in Australia has now ended and I am back in my beloved country living with my family in a familiar Islamic surrounding.

Participant 1 expressed her happiness to be back in her country, and at being able to revert back to life amid her cultural values and practices. She reports her success in getting the desired job in her country and mentions her objectives have now been reached. Her reason for studying in Australia was to obtain a western qualification so she could achieve her employment goals. In addition, this participant felt the Australian work reference assisted in these endeavours.

When participant 1 was posed questions pertaining to cultural norms, she voiced that she never lost her cultural roots while living in Australia and although she adapted to a different way of life, she feels she was still true to her own cultural beliefs. She reports it was because her only focus was to achieve her educational goals and her future objective to secure employment in a multinational firm. This also seemed to have given her sense of empowerment because she mentions she was now able to make a contribution. Participant 1 also comments there were some issues during her educational journey. She feels she had to make some minor changes in order to fit into the Australian lifestyle but upon reflection, reports this was expected. She clearly has no regrets with making the changes and feels it is accepted that women from the Gulf do this when they live in Australia.

Another participant who had returned to her home country also re-evaluated her own knowledge and behaviours at the end of her journey, as follows:

Participant 2

It was hard for me when I returned to my country because it was like a reversed culture shock! The years I spent in Australia meant it was my second home, and so I had to readjust to a new home and lifestyle again when I returned back to my country. It was a bit weird.

I had to re-adapt to my native tongue and learn to speak Arabic properly again, which was quite odd because I had spent so long speaking Aussie English. There are lots of English speaking people working in my country, but I don't usually get a chance to speak with them. This was the biggest challenge for me when I returned home, not speaking to the foreigners. You see, I was back home, I was speaking Arabic again but I could only look at those who spoke English. It was not my place to be with them anymore.

Getting back my old life meant I had to get back to my old lifestyle and connect to my old friends all over again. It felt strange at first and I cried a bit at the beginning. I cried because I missed Australia but I also cried because I was so happy to be back with my family and living in my familiar Muslim culture, but it did feel like I didn't belong at first. Now, it's so good to hear the call for prayer throughout the day. I really missed that so much.

I learnt quite a lot about life when I lived in Australia, I am more aware of environmental issues. I didn't really know much about that sort of stuff before but in Australia there are people all over the place that tell you about these matters.

I also have a greater awareness of how others see Islam especially the role the media plays. It was a shock to me at times the way the media in Australia described Islam and Muslims. Sometimes it was very difficult to be in Australia because I didn't know what the impact would be for me personally.

I remember there was a big story in the newspaper about a man who dressed as a Muslim woman and I think he stole money from a bank. He was

completely covered up and everyone thought he was a women. There were lots of shows on the TV and everyone discussed whether Muslim women should be forced to change their clothes. I think someone even compared us to the young people who wear hoodies and these people said we are a security risk. At that time, I found it hard to believe Australian people were so stupid. Alhamdulillah, everything worked out fine, but it was a bit scary for a while.

On a personal level, independence is the main aspect that has changed in my life. I believe I am now more conscious of the world around me. I know more about the rules of life. I have gained so much respect for other people, their identities and their opinions.

For sure there are many changes to the way I live my life now that I have returned! Firstly, I walk more because in Australia many of my friends had cars, or we just used the local transport. I don't do that anymore because if I go out by car, someone in my family will drive me. I also don't eat as much junk food as I did in Australia and so I think I am a lot healthier.

One woman still studying in Australia, raised concerns regarding some of the behaviours of other Gulf women. This woman is still residing in Australia.

Participant 3.

Yes, women from my part of the world came to study here but you have to remember that Australia is not a Muslim country. This is very important because it is very different for women.

The most powerful places in the world are non-Muslim, English-speaking countries and these places have the best education and everything so if we want to have some of that power, we have to go to one of those countries. Everyone looks up to people who come from these places.

As Muslim women, we have had to sacrifice our own culture, our own beliefs and put ourselves in danger just so we can get visit these powerful places and get a higher education to better ourselves. Of course we could stay in our country, keep with our religion and maybe even get married, but we know if we want better things, we have to leave all that behind us. We could

have stayed with the security of our family and not put ourselves in difficult situations because sometimes it is dangerous for us in Australia.

The world has changed and everyone needs a good education. The Qur'an says we must try to educate ourselves more and more. However, when we study in Australia, some women forget our culture and our religion and the damage is terrible.

I have seen Gulf women from my part of the world wearing inappropriate clothes, drinking alcohol and swearing with no respect for herself or anyone else. I have seen some of them with Aussie boyfriends and behaving badly in public. I can honestly say, Australia has done that to them. I know these women would never behave like that back home, but Australia is free and allows this stuff to happen.

I think some Gulf women don't feel they have a home in Australia by the way they accept their haram life because this temporarily makes them feel happy during their lonely periods. They are lonely, they miss their family and so they turn to the bad side of life for comfort.

I feel angry at Australia because these women should have been more protected and I honestly don't know what will happen to them when they return home. The other women all know what they have been doing and as we are a small community, sometimes words go around. Insh'Allah, these women will be fine and will be protected, but I have a terrible feeling there will be many, many problems for some of them in the future.

Participant 2 reports the educational journey for Gulf women is not always positive. Similarly, Participant 3 reveals some women make drastic changes while living in Australia and this clearly saddened her. For this reason, Participant 3 blames Australia, its people and its cultural traditions for initiating the behavioural changes of some Gulf women. In fact, Kimmel (2005) argues that the social interactions of others are sometimes influenced by socio-economic and cultural settings, which could possibly be one of the reasons for the women making such radical changes to their lives while in Australia. However, Participant 3 reports Gulf women who choose to participate in a typical Australian manner might suffer future dire consequences because of cultural community responses.

All three participants voiced an understanding that changes in behaviour seem to be a requirement for Middle Eastern Gulf women when studying in Australia. Participant 1 reported she understands the necessity of change and is also steadfast her own behaviour was completely honourable during her stay in Australia.

Evidence also suggests that once women return to their home countries, some of them have a slanted view of how they actually behaved when they lived in Australia. For example, during her stay in Australia, one participant reported in her earlier portrait that she enjoyed getting involved in many social activities that could have been frowned upon by other Gulf nationals. She believed that at that time, she felt some of her actions would be interpreted as unacceptable by her own community, but she ignored this fact and continued with this lifestyle. Yet, when this participant returned to her home country, she placed little importance on that particular aspect of her behaviour because she viewed her actions as entirely satisfactory.

Similarly, Participant 2 recognises the Gulf cultural community expect changes to take place, but there are certain limitations. However, participant 3 clearly voices concern that too much change can create the possibility of causing negativity among women within the cultural community back in the Gulf, and that under no circumstances are any changes acceptable. This might be due to the fact that the behaviour of Muslim women is often protected from public scrutiny (Afshar, 1989, p. 271). Participant 3 has a valid opinion and she may be correct in her assumptions, however others might view the changes in behaviour of some Gulf women described in Participant 3's narrative as positive actions. This positive stance could be argued from the perspective that the women benefitted by being able to taste and experience other traditions and values across the western world as they immersed themselves into a different lifestyle.

Regardless, there were major changes evident in the lives of some of the women studying in Australia. There was striking cultural conflict of a negative nature on some occasions and the women who were affected had to find suitable approaches in dealing with this roller coaster journey. Nevertheless, different women reported mixed reactions. It should also be noted that although conflict of cultural interest is identified, while the women were living in Australia, there were no negative feelings or comments about any major changes made in behaviour. It was only when the women returned to their country and were away from the Australian lifestyle, did they feel the necessity to voice these type of concerns and re-evaluate or reflect on matters more vividly.

Finances

Upon returning to their home country, some of the women portrayed their thoughts regarding finances as follows:

Financially, my life has not really changed that much. In my culture, our parents and male relatives are obliged to financially support female members of the family. When I was in Australia, our government requested a male relative accompanied me to Australia and he was sponsored financially, to undertake this duty. Therefore, life was no different for me when I was in Australia or when I am in my country now.

Another woman also commented:

I am now working fulltime and have a lot more money for myself. This is quite new to me because I never worked before in my country. My family always looked after me. Generally speaking, my life has changed that way because I am more independent now.

A further participant reported:

Financially, life is no different for me here in Australia or in the Gulf. I worked in the Gulf before I came here and I will continue to do so. The only difference is, Insha'Allah, I will have a higher qualification when I return and this will gain more respect in my workplace.

Although many Gulf women have been identified as living in poverty, the financial situation of the women in this research is not a major issue as they are wealthy enough. Many of them live within the rules of their cultural society, which includes male members of their family being totally responsible for this matter.

Socialising

As Participant 1 continued with her narrative, she was asked whether her educational journey in Australia had improved her social skills in any way. In particular, the subject of communication with men was mentioned:

Now that I am back in my country, my interaction with men is slightly restricted in terms of meeting them face to face. I still chat online with them but I try to limit the time spent for this purpose because it is not really allowed.

If I chat to men online in Australia, I usually contact their family or mutual friends first and then if they are available, I chat to them afterwards. My parents are fine with me contacting them because they know there is nothing sinister in this kind of friendships. My parents met a lot of my male friends when they visited me in Australia and are also interested in how they are doing now.

Some of the men I met actually contacted my father and brothers and asked about me and that's really nice because they understand my life is different now. They are also confident that my family understand and will accept their emails or skype and facebook messages when they enquire about me.

An additional comment reveals she was the target of racism against Muslims in the way the media is allowed to operate in Australia. Interestingly, she is not the only woman to feel this way.

Now that I am back home, I can remember a few incidents that I would describe as racism. Yet, these incidences have not affected the way I feel about Australia. The media in Australia has a big impact on people's perception about Muslim and in particular, Muslim women.

It is so obvious and can be seen through attitudes towards us when they show documentaries, news items and one off interviews in the street. It is a shame that they are allowed to show us as sinister people. We are the same as everyone else and just because we dress different or just because we pray in a different way, doesn't mean we are bad people.

When this participant was interviewed previously in Australia, there was no mention of racism or any negativity toward the media or the Australian culture. It could therefore be construed that once the woman returned, she was able to view her life in Australia with more objectivity. Similarly, it could be interpreted that the dominant culture back in her country had an influence on her memory recall.

What the future holds

Many women wondered about their future and everyone who participated in this research reported they were happy they had the experience of studying and living in Australia. One woman in particular discussed the possibility of some women staying in Australia permanently:

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Participant 4.

My visa is about to expire but I haven't finished my thesis yet so it is a big worry for me. I have applied for an extension but I don't know if it will be granted. This means that I might have to return to my country and finish my thesis there.

There are many nationals from my country who have similar experiences as me but instead of returning home, some of them make the decision to stay in Australia. Some women will do whatever they can to stay in Australia permanently and never return home.

I would describe them as modern women. They don't wear our traditional dress when they are in Australia like I do. They have boyfriends and they live their life like westerners do. They could definitely not stay the way they are if they returned to my country because it would be a big problem for them. Some women just have to keep the Aussie lifestyle because they have a different way in their mind and they feel they will not be able to express themselves if they returned home.

There are a few options for these girls to stay in Australia. One is to find an Aussie husband to marry because that would be simple. Another way is to apply for PR on persecution grounds because the Aussie government will understand their plea. The other way is to apply for PR because they have good skills and have the ability to work in a good job here. I'm not sure how easy it is for them to make their application but I do know women who have PR.

There was a movie about my country and an actress got in big trouble for telling the truth in it. My country is not free. There is no freedom and many young girls do not want to return home because of this reason. They are looking for more social freedom. They want the freedom to wear what they want, to say what they want and to be themself anytime they want without any restrictions.

I am a serious woman. I am married and my husband supports me. I am happy to have this temporary life in Australia. I really enjoy it and the longer I am here, the easier it gets. It was difficult at first when we arrived because the culture is so different.

I have a friend whose son was only a baby when she first came here and he is becoming more like an Aussie every day (participant giggles). He goes to childcare and has lots of Aussie friends. He will be fine when they return back to their country. They speak their language at home and he speaks English when he goes to childcare so he is now bilingual. It's a good start in life for him.

This participant reported the serious attempt of some women electing to stay permanently in Australia rather than return to their home country. Although she understands the other women and their reasons, she is happy to return to her country even without knowing if she can complete her thesis in Australia or not. She recognises there are strict guidelines that must to be followed by her government in conjunction with the Australian immigration department to extend her visa but she is happy to accept whatever final decision is made. It should also be noted that this participant is not the only woman to be concerned about the status of her student visa. Other women reported they were unsure if they would be able to complete their studies before the student visa expiry date and some were not sure whether an extension would be granted. This was indeed a worry for some of the women who participated in this study.

There were some other thoughts and one woman reported she would take some valuable experience back to her country:

When the time comes, I will be sad to leave, but at the same time, very happy to see my family again. It has been a long time since we saw each other. I have definitely changed. Although I really like my country, I think I will experience some difficulties when I return because there will be some things that will really annoy me. These things will include not being able to say what I want all the time. When I return to my country, I will try to continue doing many of the things I do now such as go to the gym every week and keep on studying. I will also cook lots of different international foods and I will continue to be critical of things that annoy me.

One thing I do know for certain is that my faith will be so much stronger. Australia has done that for me. I am much stronger and my love for Allah is deeper. Maybe this is because I had to fight to keep strong in my faith in Australia because it is not Muslim. I'm not sure, but I am sure of my stronger faith.

One other participant recommended others visit Australia:

The majority of Aussies are friendly and I have some beautiful memories. I would recommend other women visit the country. They should even consider spending their honeymoon down under as it is a very romantic place.

However, the same woman had some suggestions for future students:

One thing I will say though is that new Gulf students that go to Australia for the first time should not be expected to integrate completely into the one culture. That's not fair. I would say to the Australian government and the people, that they should let these Gulf students be who they are and they should be allowed to enjoy the country with their own cultural eyes and not be forced into something they are not.

For many, the Australian journey was a temporary experience:

I feel that no matter how long I stayed in Australia, my heart was always in my home country.

And another participant remarked:

I am not sure if my life will return to what it was like before I moved to Australia because I think I will have to make some changes. Certain thoughts and aspects of my previous lifestyle have definitely changed or developed since I have been in Australia because I am not the same person anymore. I am sure I will not live the same way I had before I came here. One thing for sure is, I will always, always remember and be grateful to God that I had time in such a beautiful country.

Another woman felt her memories would always be with her:

I loved my time in Australia and I hope I can share these wonderful memories with my daughter one day when I get married. Insha'Allah, she will also have the same opportunities that I had.

One woman's journey however is still unresolved:

I am not sure if the (my) community will still talk about me when I have left? I am sure they probably will not. I think they enjoyed judging me and I think they really wanted to hurt my feelings. I can't wait to leave the place because my own kind has pushed me away.

My feelings for Australia are now mixed. I have bad memories of my own community treating me so badly. Then again, I did love the life here at the beginning before it all began and I did learn a lot about life. There are many things I would never have experienced back in my country if I didn't come to Australia, so I must be grateful for that.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the final part of the women's Australian educational journey. The portraits and additional discourses identified several key factors as strong influences on the experience of these women.

On a positive level, the women reported they had new interests about global issues, environmental matters and a better appreciation of different cultural conditions, which they perceived enhanced their lives during their stay in Australia. Some women particularly enjoyed reading more and believed this provided even deeper knowledge, and in some incidences felt more empowered. They believed these particular elements further extended their communication skills, as they were able to portray greater confidence when exposed to the changing circumstances in their lives.

However, some returning women reported experiencing difficulties settling back into their own culture by displaying mixed feelings of sadness and anger, particularly in regards to the level of changes in lifestyle others made. Upon returning to their home country, others reflected on their own adjustments in lifestyle while in Australia and were unable to accept some of the changes they personally made. In fact, in some of the recall, these women seemed to unintentionally not respond or recognise their conduct, because of mixed perceptions. Another woman highlighted anger towards her own cultural community because she felt ostracised by their actions towards her and she perceived this had a negative impact on her overall memories of Australia which greatly disappointed her.

Australia was highly recommended to other Middle Eastern Gulf women as a place to either study or to visit and there was a positive desire to share experiences with other females from Middle Eastern Gulf cultures. Some women conveyed they had strong religious connections to Islam during their time in Australia as the differences in culture helped to cultivate their belief even further. These women perceived this as a positive experience.

It is clear that after spending time studying in Australia, not all women had the same reaction or experiences when considering their future endeavours. However, there were indications that more positive viewpoints were evident at the completion of their journey, with an increased level of understanding in cultural difference, including a more refined interaction with individuals from other traditional upbringing and societies.

Remarkably, some of the returning women felt strongly about the level of behavioural changes others made and blamed the non-Muslim cultural environment for this. In these circumstances, the women found comfort in focusing on their Islamic teachings and became more religious during their time in Australia. In contrast, some women struggled with their former cultural and religious identity when exposed into the western lifestyle and sought solace by veiling themselves with new cultural behaviours. However, it should be noted that whilst women did make modifications to their conduct during their stay in Australia, there was no evidence to place blame on other cultures or the local lifestyle. Although this may have been a

contributing factor, the actual decision to make changes should still be placed on the individuals themselves.

It was evident that the various changes to their lifestyle while in Australia were instigated by the women's desire to succeed and live comfortably in the country. Their traditional upbringing, religious faith and academic achievements were constantly questioned throughout their journey and were clearly contributing factors to the manner in which they chose to live their lives. The women reported that changes in identity and lifestyle within the educational environment had both negative and positive repercussions but they ultimately conveyed an overall contentment with their experience. Although they had to embrace their traditional upbringing upon returning to their home countries, many women felt they were still able to share valuable experiences with other Middle Eastern Gulf women. Some questions however about the future of these women remain:

- Do the women have to make further changes when their educational journey ends?
- How much of a desire to educate other women about their Australian experiences is apparent?
- What are the struggles with combining western and Middle Eastern culture?
- Does academic integrity remain with the women and if this is passed onto other women, in what form?

The final chapter that follows highlights key factors identified from the women's portraits, and endeavours to provide answers to the questions raised above. The chapter delves deeper into the women's personal lives, and explores their traditional identity before their journey in Australia began, and the enablers that instigated alterations during their journey. Lastly, a model of change is depicted incorporating the women's perceptions and experiences. As the model is examined, the advantages and disadvantages of the women's Australian journey are also discussed.

CHAPTER 8 – THE JOURNEY EXPLAINED

The detailed analysis provided in chapters 5, 6 and 7 illustrates a combination of information highlighting the manner in which ten Middle Eastern Gulf women conduct their lives in Australia while studying at university. Each chapter specifically addressed topics within the social and educational context, and highlighted their reactions to an array of Australian living circumstances. The chapters discussed the traditional upbringing before the women left their country of origin, their social lifestyle during their educational stay in Australia and their thoughts upon returning back home. This final chapter brings together the concluding findings and highlights more personal and deeper explanations in four themes:

- The women's perceptions of the social context
- The women's perceptions of the educational context
- The women's perceptions of returning to their country following their Australian study experience

Examining the interview data using grounded theory approaches enabled speculative ideas to be developed through constant comparisons (Urquhart, 2001). This proved successful in enabling the research to probe more deeply into the women's reports and interpretations of their lived experiences. It exposed richer descriptions of their thoughts and understandings and broadened the knowledge already provided in previous research projects. Grounded theory approach is appropriate for qualitative research (Glaser, 2001) and was deemed suitable because no preconceptions were formed or assumed before the research commenced. Similarly, the analysis was designed to prove and/or disprove any features relating to how the women encompassed their educational journey in Australia. This chapter draws together the evidence presented and works to explain the influences prompting their specific actions, which are then further coalesced and reviewed in order to provide a structure for future social and educational successes.

Multifaceted and interconnected themes and concepts have been identified through the data analysis and change was strongly evident among all the participating women. Changes in behaviour and appearance were explicit at many levels albeit with differing intensities. Regardless of whether the changes were within the social or educational context, all the women reported the necessity to make a conscious effort to alter their conduct and way of life in order to survive in their new non-Muslim, multicultural environment. This supports Rizvi's (2005) research revealing that international students in Australia change their existence when they engage in a variety of cultural circumstances.

To analyse the actions of the women further, Giddens' (2006) theory of the relationship between personal agency and structure is contemplated, in that people within specific social structures are seen as creating opportunities according to their social circumstances. This is particularly relevant when deliberating the type of changes made by the women. It is evident from their portraits that they displayed behavioural signs clearly identified with Giddens' (2006) theory inasmuch as many moved away from their social and cultural expanses in order to be accepted into their new social environment in Australia. Social pressure was a feature shaping their behaviour. By acknowledging social demands as a key factor that formed their conduct, what follows is a more interpretative analysis of responses in order to explain their actions even further. Six main topics are addressed individually and are discussed to reveal key knowledge and explain why the women expressed specific feelings and changes of behaviour during their journey. The individual topics represent six key areas of influence which were considered in the literature, brought to surface during the interviews and uncovered in the portraits:

- Old behavioural practices
- Noticeable areas of change
- External influences
- New behavioural practices
- Connections between the women
- New hybrid identity

A more descriptive analysis of each of the six topics is address below.

1. Old behavioural practices originating from home country

Prior to arriving in Australia, many of the women had endeavoured to prepare for a new experience outside their cultural norms. They had undertaken research about Australia prior to arriving in the country and collectively had a variety of expectations. They also shared specific traits with each other such as their closeness to family members, their cultural and religious beliefs and an overwhelming respect for other Middle Eastern Gulf women.

Regardless of the preparation they undertook, the women who had family members studying or living in Australia felt they were better equipped with this prior knowledge pertaining to any possible hurdles facing Middle Eastern Gulf students living and studying in the country. This was because of the perception that additional support and the shared

experiences within their family circles provided them with more strength to deal with any unknown circumstances. Upon arriving in Australia, these women continued to live in a familiar cultural environment with their family members, which they believe provided security and assistance, particularly during their transitional passage from a total Muslim environment to a less familiar position in Australia. In these instances, many of the women quickly settled into their university life at the beginning of their journey, without responsibilities because the male members of their family continued to follow cultural traditions by taking care of them.

Consistent with the findings of Hasemi (2011), the women who did not have family members in Australia made a choice to live in residential districts with an existing large Middle Eastern Gulf community. Women without family members in Australia chose to live in a Muslim or Middle Eastern Gulf environment because they felt more at ease living in familiar surroundings because it was easy to form friendship groups and obtain pastoral care when required. In chapter 5 one participant described her occasional loneliness because she felt separated from her culture and recalled that she did not always understand the Australian way of life. She felt uncomfortable wearing a hijab because it was her perception that she was too different from other students, however she felt she gained more strength knowing her familiar cultural community were close by. In similar circumstances, many women had a need for extra support from members of their cultural community to ease the burden of dealing with everyday issues in a non-Muslim environment. This was chiefly significant at the commencement of their educational journeys.

The women accepted that men are more dominant in their culture. Mernissi (2000) acknowledges this throughout her work and writes that Muslim women readily accept obedience to men's instructions. Similarly, the majority of women in this research displayed modesty in their appearance and behaviour because they believed this was a cultural expectation at the beginning of their educational journey. They endeavoured to continue to be modest throughout their time in Australia. Although some women felt they would have liked more responsibility while they were in Australia, they still continued to accept that their cultural and religious traditions did not readily allow gender parity across an array of social circumstances and remained conscious of this fact. Williams and Vashi (2007, p. 281) highlight that non-Muslims sometimes view the behaviour of Muslim women in these situations as submissive, particularly when women wear clothes that cover most of their body, or when they do not display any sexuality in the public forum.

The work of Williams and Vashi's (2007) is consistent with the findings of this particular research. For example, many of the women reported they experienced anti-social conduct towards them when they wore Muslim attire and believed they were targets because of this fact. Also, one participant described experiencing racism by some of the teaching staff because, in her opinion, the teaching staff did not fully understand her cultural and religious convictions.

At the beginning of their journey, many women felt they behaved in accordance with specific Middle Eastern Gulf expectations in order to be accepted by other members of their cultural community. These expectations included the way they dressed, spoke, socialised and prayed, which they believed shaped the basis of original customs and traditions from a mix of countries across the Middle Eastern Gulf region. They reported that public conduct was crucial to their existence whether in Australia or otherwise because they represented their family name, which identified them to other members of their community.

Data disclosed that the Middle Eastern Gulf community is very close and a good family name is central to continuing a specific lifestyle and maintaining an acceptable image regardless of whether a family member lives overseas or in their home country. Many women believed one of the benefits of having a good family name could include prospective marriage proposals. Because of this fact, upon their arrival, they undertook a position that was not only acceptable to their family, but also across the wider Middle Eastern Gulf community. The fact that the women were conscious that any information pertaining to their actions could be reported back to their home countries is consistent with the research undertaken by Williams and Varshi (2007) in that social reputation is an important factor to their overall success. However, the women did report that it was not an easy task adhering to their customary expectations, as there was a lot of pressure placed on them when they were exposed to non-Muslim circumstances. They were conscious of judgments being made about their conduct while they were in Australia (see Chapter 5) including the impact any impressions might have on their family in their home country. Insightfully, one participant recalled that it was not just the Muslim culture that made judgments, but also other cultures, which involved international students.

Figure 8.1 shows the conditions enabling the women to continue with their traditional customs and behavioural upbringing at the commencement of their educational journey. These external factors continued to be in the forefront of their lives and thus created an expected standard of behaviour. The old identity was prominent when the women first arrived in Australia and the diagram incorporates their feelings at the start of their educational journey.

OLD IDENTITY

Conditions and Enablers

Family devotion and public awareness

Islamic faith and traditional upbringing

- Display of traditional behaviours following local and religious customs
- Strong support for other women
- Respect for the role male members of the Gulf community undertake
- Desire to make a difference to women by being educated overseas
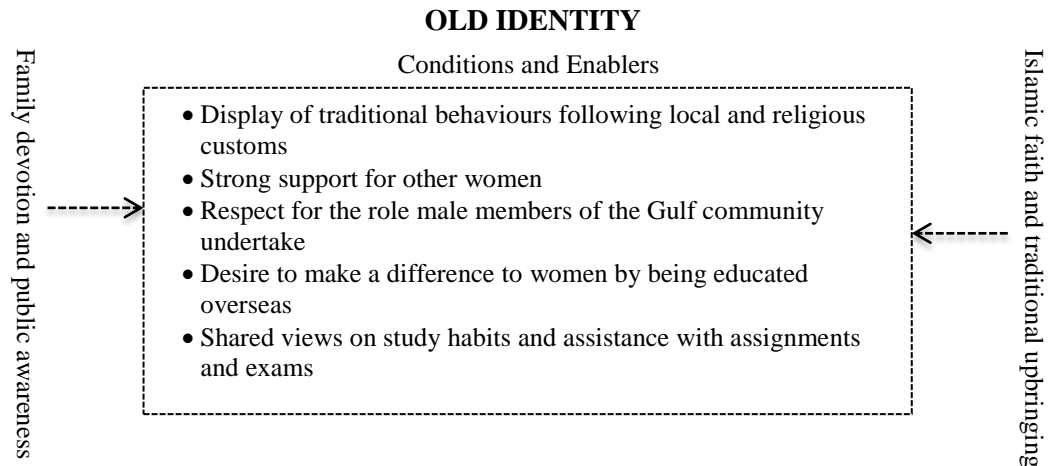- Shared views on study habits and assistance with assignments and exams

Figure 8.1: Old Identity prior to arriving in Australia

At the start of their journey and within the educational context, 100% of the women felt a need to support each other with their studies. Yet, as the women began to understand the rules of the Australian education system, they realised the dangers they faced in regards to these rules, with particular emphasis on understanding the practice and impact of plagiarism.

Achieving and maintaining Australian standards and adhering to academic integrity was a constant hurdle for the women because copying in exams or assisting with assignments was deemed acceptable in their traditional culture back home, even though they understood it was not customary in the Australian academic world. Regardless of this fact, as was shown in Chapter 6, the women remained content to support each other in their studies at the beginning of their journey and they were prepared to suffer any consequences to this effect, as their primary focus was the support of their friends and colleagues. They simply did not fully understand the seriousness of entering into acts that may not always demonstrate academic integrity.

1. Noticeable areas of change

As the women settled into their Australian lifestyle, there were noticeable areas of change including some adjustments to their own accustomed behaviour. This entailed shifting their views or opinions sometimes in order to be better acquainted within a non-Muslim society. Many reported this was necessary in order to feel less isolated from the more popular cultures. The women believed these popular cultures were very different from their Muslim and Middle Eastern Gulf upbringing.

Some of the women made changes to their public image in order to be better acknowledged by the wider Australian community, such as removing some of all of their

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Muslim attire. These women reported they felt the necessity to connect outside of their own cultural origins in order to integrate more. Hawkes and Egan (2010) endorse that this type of conduct is a genuine desire to form more relationships when individuals are exposed to different social circumstances. Many portraits of the women who chose to behave outside their cultural norm in the public arena indicated an interest how other non-Muslim females lived although most still kept their friendship groups safely within their own cultural boundaries. They felt it was the perfect opportunity to make minor adjustments to experience other living conditions and although the changes they made were not necessarily acceptable to other Middle Eastern Gulf individuals, they felt Middle Eastern Gulf women in general were empathetic to this action.

Some behaviours were more extreme than others. Certain women chose to no longer cover their bodies in a modest fashion or wear a headscarf as deemed by their origins, which is again consistent in Kimmel's (2005) research in that individuals sometimes exhibit behaviours that disregard the usual matter of course usually encouraged by their fellow community members. Kimmel (2005) notes this conduct is specific and that individuals sometimes develop more sexual behaviours, thus risking being viewed differently by their own cultural group. As an example, one participant reported she felt an obligation to completely change her external appearance, and to an extent, her true identity. She chose to wear western clothes and participated in other leisure activities that might be deemed unsuitable by her own culture. Another participant reported she innocently tried nurturing friendships with Middle Eastern Gulf male students during her time in Australia, but this association was frowned upon by her own culture. Many women felt that regardless of the changes, their actions on occasions were viewed as extreme across the Muslim culture and yet they remained confident with their lifestyle changes.

Unfortunately there were repercussions from publicly befriending male Middle Eastern Gulf students and one woman reported that men and women from the Muslim community were critical towards her when she did so. Taunts and negative comments were widespread across the Muslim society as reported by this participant. The woman was so distraught by the negative responses from her own cultural group that she had considered and attempted suicide at one point. She felt her family name might be tarnished if the wider Middle Eastern Gulf community promoted her actions in a negative manner. This woman reported that although the Middle Eastern Gulf community is small in comparison to the rest of Australia, any negative feedback to family members residing in their home countries could have dire repercussions. Fortunately, this woman was able to seek assistance from Australian healthcare professionals and other members of her own family already residing in Australia. This network provided the extra support she required in order to continue her educational journey.

External influences

The Australian and world media generated conditions that instigated personal changes. In these instances stories from the world press, coupled with the lack of local public awareness towards the Islamic faith made the women feel isolated. They felt the media initiated negative responses from the general public.

Consistent with Ramadan's (2011) work, some of the isolation the women experienced may possibly be due to political motivations. They felt unable to consistently follow accepted Muslim community rules because many burdens were placed upon them to conform. These pressures included media coverage relating to Islamic fundamentalist behaviour, political debates and public discrimination against Muslims in general. For example, during the period of conducting this research, Islamic fundamentalists led certain global terrorist attacks, which the women believed increased the negativity towards Muslims, which was encouraged by the world's press and political forum.

Political moves towards banning specific Islamic dress across non-Muslim societies were highlighted in the press during the undertaking of this research. Although many women disclosed in their personal interviews a disagreement with banning the burqa, they felt uneasy being in Australia during this time specifically as they believed their attire was a crucial factor in identifying whom they represented. Some women believed the general public in Australia chose to target them because of their appearance, as this was a connection to their Middle Eastern origin and Islamic faith. They felt isolated in many social circumstances and reported some of the actions towards them were in the form of discrimination and anti-social behaviour. This discrimination was also experienced in the learning environment, as some women reported other international and local students as well as teachers displayed unfavourable reactions towards them, because of their attire.

One woman reported that the external pressure placed upon her was paramount in her returning to her country after experiencing several negative occurrences during the first semester at university. She made a conscious choice to implement an alternative lifestyle upon her return to Australia and described this was a more enjoyable experience. Some of the influences placed on the women in Australia were not completely isolated to the public arena as family pressures were also evident. In this research, married women felt they were not always able to fulfill their role joint role of student and wife because of their traditional and cultural upbringing within the marriage union. It was reported that on occasions married women did not

always have time to study because their husbands placed many demands and expectations upon them and in their cultural tradition, they were duty bound. When these instances occurred the women sought support from other Middle Eastern Gulf women who were always willing to provide them with the assistance they required.

The women also reported that they placed added pressure upon themselves because of their own personal drive to obtain their qualification and to experience life in a western society. They reported their families were proud of their achievements particularly as some were the first in their family to be given the opportunity to study overseas, but this placed a lot of pressure on them to accomplish their educational goals. These women were driven to make a success of their educational experiences in Australia.

4. New practice and behaviours

The new practice and behaviours adopted by women were, in some circumstances, quite dramatic. One woman completely changed her appearance, tried smoking, drinking alcohol and even socialised with men, knowing her family would not approve of her conduct (chapter 5). She reported that she followed a difficult path by changing her appearance so much, but still felt it was fitting to her lifestyle in Australia. According to this woman, bold moves were undertaken because, in her opinion, it was the only way she could survive in an environment, where she felt, was hostile towards Muslims. Indeed, when she was interviewed, this woman wore no head covering, dressed in traditional western clothes and reported her life had changed for the better while experiencing life as a western female. She was accompanied by a male acquaintance and emphasised her contentment from experiencing this new and different lifestyle.

While studying in Australia, another woman reported that she not only changed her appearance but also her demeanor towards men in general. She enjoyed wearing glamorous head coverings with less modest clothing and relished partying and socialising in the trendy parts of the city in the company of male and female friends. Regardless of this behaviour, she further reported her change of behaviour did not in any way reflect negatively on her studies as she was still achieving her expected grades. She conveyed her behaviour remained firm within the constraints of her moral beliefs and traditional upbringing.

Data further pinpoints that some women felt they could learn more about society and the world in general when they took on board new identities. They believed that as they changed, they were more accepted by other cultures and they no longer experienced discriminatory or

negative acts directed towards them. These women believed they had gained more confidence to research and learn further about world matters in general.

Religious faith was a further highlighted feature in the new practices of the women who contributed to this research. Some women openly admitted that some of their conduct could have been construed as actions against the teachings of Islam and their cultural traditions. These women however acknowledged that their changed responses also helped generate a stronger Islamic understanding. For example, one woman reported that while she was living and studying in Australia she obtained a much stronger faith in Islam because it helped her survive more easily amid the western society. She believed that by being stronger in her religious faith, she was able to ignore, in her opinion, the forbidden Islamic behaviours she often witnessed in Australia. She felt able to put the Australian culture into better perspective because there was a difference in religious upbringing and she was therefore able to make better judgements, which ultimately eased her difficulties of living and studying in the country. She described a better understanding of other cultures because of her exposure to the Australian lifestyle and at the same time, felt she was still able to keep within her own religious boundaries.

Some women reported they initially had questions about other religions and, in particular, how others viewed them as Muslim women. It was reported that although some women were aware of other religious beliefs, they had not previously been out of their country or had much opportunity to explore these beliefs and therefore had a lack of understanding and sometimes tolerance of others. On a positive level, they conveyed the longer they stayed in Australia, the more they explored different possibilities, which led to a much better understanding of other cultural and religious viewpoints. The women perceived this further improved their level of communication outside of their cultural norm and some visited churches and temples and enjoyed debating religious issues with others. The women were steadfast in promoting religious strength to others who asked questions about their culture and had the determination to promote their cultural and religious beliefs as well as more patience to discuss these issues at length.

Figure 8.2 captures three connecting factors that relate to change, namely; the social context, the educational context and future endeavours. It represents the women's feelings at being introduced to new friendship groups and opportunities, which created occasions in which to interact with a variety of people. For many, this new and sometimes difficult experience steered them to make physical and personal changes. However, their religious convictions and family traditions were consistently challenged when these situations occurred.

The diagram shows an array of new social behaviours that progressed into the learning environment, thus providing new challenges in the educational context. Many women reported they were open to a different range of learning approaches, and they felt a deeper appreciation and awareness of their new Australian environment. In sum, figure 8.2 shows their exposure into their new social and educational situation assisted in producing more innovative women hosting fresh feelings and ideas, which also impacted on their future endeavours.

BEHAVIOURS AND FEELINGS IDENTIFIED (after leaving home country)

Social Context

Physical and psychological changes
Interactions with men
Freedom to socialise
Friendship groups
Marriage thoughts
Religious convictions

Educational Context

Study behavioural changes
Plagiarism acknowledged
Language barriers
Women support each other
Enjoy varied learning methods

New feelings about the Future

Feeling of empowerment
A desire for new interests
More awareness of the world
Understand multicultural ideas
Stronger religious faith
Sad and happy memories
Uncertainty and excitement

Figure 8.2: Behaviours and new feelings

5. Connections between the women

It is interesting to note that the women's conduct during their stay in Australia sometimes prompted minor and major changes in the manner and unity they demonstrated towards each other. It was uncanny inasmuch as they each seemed to understand that changes were made in order to survive in a non-Muslim country. They clearly acknowledged and accepted this fact as their experiences developed. The women responded with a caring attitude towards other Middle Eastern Gulf women who chose to make major changes in order to fit into the Australian society. Regardless of the level of transformations, the women were empathetic and comprehended the reasons behind some of the major deviations from specific areas of conduct. In the social and educational context, social pressures, family burdens and personal beliefs were factors leading many of the women to disguise their own identity and this was the prominent connection between them.

As the women travelled further along their journey they seemed to mature and gain a deeper appreciation of worldly matters. Some reported they became more interested and better acquainted in the environment and found political matters thought provoking, which was a new experience. Figure 8.3 reports the list of connectors that facilitated these new feelings and behaviours and shows the burdens placed upon the women from a number of external sources. These were initially established from the women's individual desire to experience new things, but then in some circumstances, advanced more to an appreciation of the Australian lifestyle. Their conduct was determined by addressing these external pressures placed upon them.
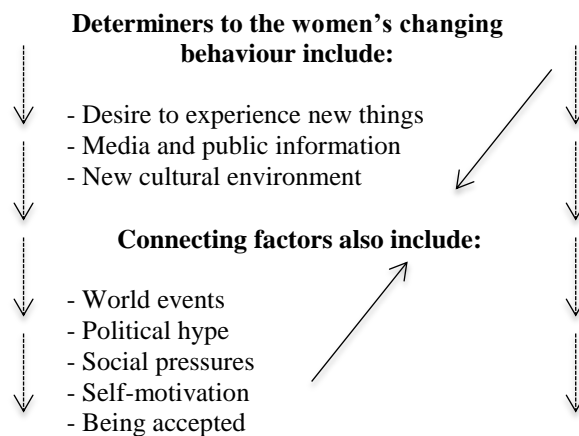
Determiners to the women's changing behaviour include:

- Desire to experience new things
- Media and public information
- New cultural environment

Connecting factors also include:

- World events
- Political hype
- Social pressures
- Self-motivation
- Being accepted

Figure 8.3: External factors contributing to change

6. New Hybrid Identity

There were multifaceted identifiers clearly shaping how many of the women experienced university life in Australia. These identifiers emerged from the data to reveal a new hybrid form of Gulf Middle Eastern woman. They deeply believed their Middle Eastern Gulf cultural origin was the correct and true philosophy of life to which to adhere, but they also had the perception that it was necessary to make transformations in order to fit into Australian society, but not a complete transformation. They felt they could not survive in their natural form, even though they tried adapting but as it was difficult to balance both set of cultural behaviours, they opted to de-identify with both and created a new female form. Developing this new female form was not necessarily a conscious decision made by all of them, but evidence from the individual portraits shows each woman did make transformations.

While in the midst of an unknown territory, these women became hybrid adaptations and felt they were happy to recreate themselves as a kind of chameleon in order to be de-identified across society. In particular, there were some women who were not comfortable being connected to their own culture because they felt it enticed negativity from the general public and

so their hybrid selves helped in these circumstances. There were others who felt a stronger connection to the Islamic faith and this hybrid form accepted actions by others that were not usually evident in their culture. All the women felt that to some extent, Australia had set them free and this de-identification process enabled them to participate in social circumstances that were not normally available to them. They no longer judged others because they were different, and thus accepted their new educational and social circumstances (chapter 7, p. 180). Sumiah in particular felt comfortable making changes to her personality and appearance because Australia afforded her such an opportunity (Sumiah, p. 132). Even though the women knew some of their behaviours might not be accepted in their cultural communities, they remained confident their new ability to express themselves would not be detrimental to their original form.

It was if by veiling themselves in their new hybrid form they were able to justify their new feelings. It was symbolic to how they lived their lives back home when they covered themselves in their traditional attire because this provided them with the female rules of engagement across society. Similarly in the Australian context, when they became veiled in their hybrid form they were better engaged to embrace the experiences of the Australian education system. The evidence in Shaikha's portrait showed there was a kind of danger attached to her new lifestyle as it introduced different social circumstances outside of her usual cultural boundaries. This behaviour was deemed contradictory to her usual social upbringing and dangerous circumstances arose from her own cultural community as well as her personal psyche because she was aware her hybrid form would not necessarily be culturally or religiously acceptable. Overall, the women reported that their life was very different in Australia and they felt a need to welcome the changes, which are highlighted by events described in many of the portraits in chapter 5. Although they were comfortable with their change of behaviour, the women firmly believed any adaptations were temporary to suit their current social situation.

Details from chapter 5 illustrated that the women made alterations to their behaviour because they wanted to be better placed in Australian society. Not all women however, made the same level of change, but it was evident that every women either experienced physical or psychological modifications. Chapters 5 revealed personal stories about the dangers involved and one participant revealed her family would "kill" her if they found out what she had been doing. This was quite alarming due to the closeness of the Middle Eastern Gulf community where "…everyone knows each other" (chapter 5). When the women described their lives in Australia, they reported they had learnt more about different people of the world. This is consistent with Castell's (2010) research in that people integrate more as they travel because they endeavour to identify with different cultures. As the women's journeys progressed, many became more receptive to other cultural traditions.

All the women believed they would return to their home country with positive feelings about their experiences in Australia. Some experienced difficulties during their stay, but regardless, they still felt the journey was worthwhile and in these instances, were happy to revert back to a level of their former self without feelings of guilt or disappointment. In chapter 7, one portrait disclosed:

> *I cried because I missed Australia but I also cried because I was so happy to be back with my family and living in my familiar Muslim culture.*

And another woman described:

> *It was hard for me … I had to readjust to a new home and lifestyle again when I returned back to my country.*

Although the women had good intentions to revert back to their former selves once their journey was over, they reported there were aspects of their Australian experience that remained with them. They could not disregard specific experiences because they felt these experiences were responsible for maturing their own personal global growth. They had a better understanding of matters that are not normally discussed within their usual social circles and in many instances are excluded. They enjoyed the continuation of this new experience and found it difficult uncovering and moving back to their former selves.

This was evident in chapter 7 where one woman claimed her family was aware of a change in her personality when she returned home. Another woman revealed the "reverse culture shock" was not easy and she struggled with her old and her new life. In fact, the portraits in the data chapters show the hybrid women were better at describing life as an international student because many experiences remained permanently captured as they recalled their stories.

Chapter 7 revealed the women's experiences in Australia provided them with the confidence to achieve more once they returned to their home country. This is because they felt they were better equipped to contribute across a variety of social areas. Some portraits described that the women felt their communication skills had improved and they had gained more knowledge and interest in global matters. One participant reported:

> *…I am more aware of environmental issues. I didn't really know much about that sort of stuff before but in Australia … (Chapter 7).*

Understanding the New Veil of a Hybrid Self

As the structures linking culture, gender and living circumstances have framed the basis of this research (Figure 2.1, p. 48) a model of change has been generated to help understand the women's perceptions of studying in Australia. Their lifestyle involved a mix of discourses and a series of systemic behaviours outside of their cultural norms determined their change (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws & Watson, 2002), which also included socio-cultural conduct across different sets of values (figure 8.2, p. 189). The behaviour of the women and their new feelings within the Australian context created a new hybrid form in order for them to feel comfortable in their new surroundings. The data revealed that studying at university in a traditional non-Muslim environment had many difficulties and the women in this research made a conscious decision to personally alter themselves. The data and emerging findings from all levels of this research have informed a structure that reflects these modification and changes.

Taking into consideration the changing actions identified within the social and educational context, their journeys were influenced by a variety of factors that empowered adjustment to their lifestyle. The structure of a model is outlined in more detail in figure 8.4, illustrating the women's demeanour at the start of their journey through to their conclusion. The diagram describes fundamental characteristics and personal traits, which the women self-reported before their arrival in Australia, inasmuch as strong cultural upbringing including religious faith had a major influence.

The external pressures they faced, including family background, media and political hype, world events and social burdens were continually in the forefront of their lives during their time in Australia and they were faced with a series of choices of change (figure 8.3, p. 190). In this regard, the women felt a need to alter themselves and this was determined by the strength of these pressures and, to a certain extent, they continued to revise their conduct throughout their journey. This is consistent with Caskell's (2000) research in which a variety of social environments generating different behaviours within certain social circumstances. The hybrid women adopted noticeable alterations that varied in intensity according to the strength and influence of the contributing factors that surrounded them at individual moments in time. Some women became veiled in their own cultural beliefs still assuring tolerance of others, whereas others became masked with stronger western ideologies. At the conclusion of their journey, the hybrid women did not fully return back to their former selves but kept a semi-permanent portrait of their Australian experience close by in order to share their experiences with other women.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

Changes are experienced
- o   An acceptance into society and the learning environment
- o   Social, family and personal pressures become evident
- o   World events and media hype provides some uncertainty
- o   Traditional upbringing and religious beliefs strengthen

THE JOURNEY ENDS

Memories and questions still remain
- o   Some uncertainties about the old and the new lifestyle
- o   Positive feelings of empowerment and more knowledge
- o   Feelings of displacement and reverse culture shock

THE CREATION OF THE HYBRID SELF

Provides a more comfortable environment

Figure 8.4: The hybrid self – A model.

Social and Cultural Experiences

The model shown in figure 8.4, displays the connectors between the old and new practices and feelings throughout the women's educational journey in Australia. The principal trigger that highlighted their alteration in behaviour fundamentally involved the pressure they felt was placed on them to be more accepted into the Australian society. This determined the level of behaviours across an array of cultural settings.

Not all the women were identical hybrids but they did report some similarities such as a need to be accepted by the dominant culture. The women who returned to their home countries voiced mixed feelings about the changes they made, particularly when they were once again exposed to their familiar traditional surroundings. At the beginning of their return, these women conveyed some feelings of isolation in their own culture and in some cases, had difficulty readjusting. By wearing their traditional attire at the beginning of their journey, they presented a sense of self-identity to the world that depicted what they believed, but when they returned, they had to re-identify and in a sense mask themselves again with their former self to be accepted back into society. There was a kind of misplacement at the beginning of their return as they had feelings of uncertainty in their familiar cultural surroundings. The women reported other women, not participating in this research, who had completed their educational journey overseas, also advised that they should change back to their former self as soon as possible because it would be easier to accept their familiar Muslim society (chapter 5). This did not mean they were against their traditional upbringing, but had to readjust back again.

The women acknowledged the alterations they made not only created difficulties as Muslim women within their own cultural communities in Australia, but also created difficulties in their familiar family household. In fact, Chapter 5 revealed that other Middle Eastern Gulf community members had mixed reactions when some women publicly portrayed their new behaviours back home and some stories depicted revealed the necessity to respond and acknowledge their Islamic culture as soon as possible upon returning to their countries. Irrespective of the changes and specific personal experiences, the women perceived their hybrid self to be understood by other Middle Eastern Gulf women. They felt this supportive sisterhood network was important to them.

Finally, as the women evaluated their own personal journeys in Australia, they were not always comfortable admitting to certain behaviours. They were not content to communicate any conduct in Australia that might incriminate them with their own cultural community upon returning to their home countries and chose to edit some of their personal stories to suit their familiar cultural upbringing. On the other hand, some women were more than satisfied with the manner in which they conducted their lives in Australia and openly reported their experiences to other women in Australia and back home in their countries. They conveyed that their journey away from home in fact brought them closer to the women of their own culture.

Regardless of their experience, overall the women indicated they were comfortable with what occurred during their educational journey in Australia. They had established strategies to live within the boundaries set out by their own cultural community and for the most part, participated as the expected Middle Eastern Gulf lady. Once their journey ended, their memories stayed with them and the women made a vow to share their experiences with other women upon their return. They believed their voices should be heard because this would eventually change the mindset of their own community groups over time. They felt their discourses would be the start of major changes in their country and women may even be considered for different community roles and responsibilities in the future.

A suggestion to educate Semah – the typical Middle Eastern Gulf female student

The collective insights regarding how Australian educators could teach Middle Eastern Gulf women are incorporated into a model designed to educate Semah, the composite woman introduced at the start of this thesis. Collectively, the women believed that if educators were more knowledgeable with the nuances and traditional surroundings of their cultural and religious customs throughout their learning journey, their learning experience would be even more enjoyable. They reported some teachers in Australia were indeed knowledgeable and

culturally sensitive than others and this had a bearing on how their education was embraced. As an example, for the most part, their cultural traditions dictated their behaviour in the learning environment, particularly in regards to participating in certain activities with male students. They believed that if educators were more understanding, Middle Eastern Gulf women would feel less isolated.

Individual portraits illustrated a cultural deficiency that needed to be addressed, which endorses the findings by Egege and Kutieleh (2004) in that:

> Bridging programs should not only address language and academic proficiency, but the cultural and social transition of students into the Australian university context (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004, p. 77).

And

> There is a definite benefit for university educators to continually monitor the social implications as well as educational needs of their international learners (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004).

If cultural boundaries were clearly acknowledged the women firmly believed they could share a better learning environment with other international students. Also, research has identified that local students tend to avoid multicultural group involvement (Woods, Barker & Hibbins, 2011), which could infer why not all the women extended their friendship groups to other cultures. They believed this is a factor that needs further consideration in order to assist the learning of Middle Eastern Gulf women. In chapter 5, one participant explained that non-Muslim students asked too many questions and yet even when she tried to provide them with explanations, they continually misunderstood her religious convictions and sometimes made negative judgements towards her and the Middle Eastern Gulf culture. To further sanction this, the 2011 ISSA report also recommends the wider Australian community improve their actions in order to include better support and understanding of overseas students (Lawson, 2012).

Gauntlett's (2005) research indicates that there is a continual need to manage the integration of Middle Eastern Gulf students in order to align their learning experiences with local and other international students. This is consistent with the voices of the women in this research because they reported that they felt different from other students and that on many occasions, their personal cultural identity was not easily accepted into the wider community.

Managing the Learning Environment

Informed by the portraits outlined in this research, the women felt there was a need to devise improved conditions that assist in fostering their experiences at Australian universities more. It was revealed they had a desire, but not enough confidence to participate in the local educational settings and they would have liked to have been given more support to encourage this desire. On many occasions, they felt quite separate from other students and tended to seek the permission from their cultural groups to participate in certain forums. These women were continually aware that the Middle Eastern Gulf community was present in their lives throughout their Australian experience and although they did make changes they still sought guidance in relation to how they should communicate and behave in the Australian context.

Data indicate the women would positively benefit and enjoy the opportunity to gain more authentic learning opportunities as this might help them accept the Australian lifestyle more and thus ease their transition into a new learning environment. This would also expand into the social context and thus enhance their own experiences and hopefully encourage other cultural groups to be more open and understanding towards them.

The ten portraits have contributed to the design of a model to further support to help understand the necessities of this student cohort. The model outlines a structure that would culturally prepare them to live and study in Australia. Consistent with research conducted by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006), students who are placed under jointly accepted cultural rules improve self-sufficient lifestyles while undertaking their educational journey and this model takes account of these issues.

This research provided an indication of the challenges facing Middle Eastern Gulf women who study under different sets of educational guidelines and exceptional cultural circumstances. The representation of personal portraits offered a deep and meaningful insight into some of their experiences, and provides the data for the design of an improved educational model for similar Middle Eastern Gulf women. Although their experiences have been documented within this thesis, the factors identified might also benefit the wider community if explored even further. It is not a model suitable for all Middle Eastern Gulf women, but forms the basis of understanding the educational needs of this group of women.

The model highlights a process for educators to reflect upon different approaches involving consistent feedback, monitoring and reevaluation of the learning experiences. Although this may already be happening, the model offers the current perceptions of a small group of Middle Eastern Gulf women who feel their voices are not always heard. They reported a lack of confidence in seeking support from educators because they feel there is a lack of cultural sensitivity within some Australian universities. This might be a cultural issue rather than an educational one, but as the women reported this throughout their portraits it should not be ignored.

Complex matters pertaining to social, political and cultural features emerge into the classroom environment, and the women feel this puts varying amounts of pressure on them to respond in a specific manner. They also highlighted that social and educational contexts work in parallel and it is believed that if these are continually managed effectively and recognised by their educators, deeper insight could benefit other Middle Eastern Gulf female students arriving in Australia after them.

Model for Success

Figure 8.5 incorporates data from the social and education aspect to provide a structure to help Middle Eastern Gulf women succeed. It shows the beginnings of their journey and depicts a more motivating route to educational attainment. The women recommended that prior to leaving their home country, significant aspects of university behaviours should continue to be communicated to new Middle Eastern Gulf female student considering Australia as their place of study, because this would be fundamental in cultivating their knowledge and thus work towards more commitment.

Although the women did their own research before arriving in Australia, they did not always obtain exact information about Australian education and those without family members in Australia were not completely aware of the learning and social expectations. The women felt this could have been a factor why they struggled at the commencement of their journey and sought out their own cultural communities for guidance because they were not confident or widely knowledgeable.

The women believed the preparation for their journey was not extensive enough to provide ample or indeed accurate information prior to arriving in the country. Although some received information from previous Middle Eastern Gulf female students, this information was not all-inclusive. Some women only relied upon information from the universities, the television

and the print media, which did not necessarily provide them with the holistic knowledge required to understand the expectations within Australian universities.
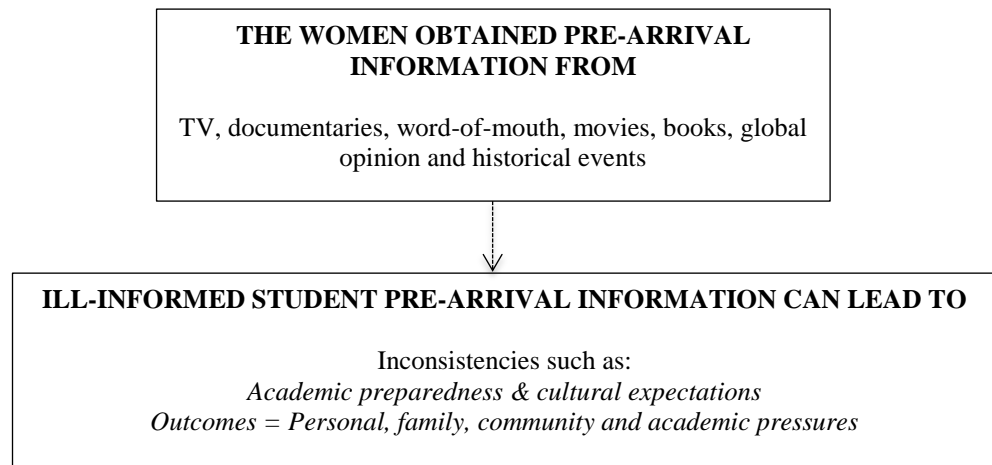
<div style="border:1px solid black; text-align:center;">

THE WOMEN OBTAINED PRE-ARRIVAL INFORMATION FROM

TV, documentaries, word-of-mouth, movies, books, global opinion and historical events

</div>

<div style="border:1px solid black; text-align:center;">

ILL-INFORMED STUDENT PRE-ARRIVAL INFORMATION CAN LEAD TO

Inconsistencies such as:
Academic preparedness & cultural expectations
Outcomes = Personal, family, community and academic pressures

</div>

Figure 8.5: Preparing to arrive in Australia

The learning experience journey

A strong bonding towards other Middle Eastern Gulf females during their study experience on occasions resulted in non-conformity of academic integrity and an acceptance of certain acts of plagiarism. It was clear that this was a cultural issue. It was identified during in-depth conversations that this explicit area of their educational journey was the most difficult to overcome. They reported they clearly had a commitment to other women from their cultural backgrounds and there was an unwritten act of support in all areas surrounding their educational experience. For example, in Chapter 6, one participant admitted that regardless of gender, many Middle Eastern Gulf students commit acts of plagiarism. She reported there was a comradeship encouraging all students to succeed regardless of their actions and if this meant not working alongside academic integrity rules, then the women were still prepared to do this. They simply did not fully understand the seriousness of committing acts of plagiarism and they conveyed dedication to assist each other was paramount.

Sensitive information suggests the women believe they require more in-depth knowledge relating to university conditions before they leave their countries as this might lead to more confidence and a better respect for adhering to academic guidelines. This is because the women recorded that academic integrity was not fully communicated to them in their own countries. Some women conveyed that teachers in their country did not take plagiarism particularly seriously and were not fully prepared for such drastic changes to their study conditions. The

women believe a knock-on effect would eventually take place over time, as word of mouth is a constant form of communication in their cultural communities. Chapter 5 described ignorance at teacher expectations and if the learning objectives were communicated to them in a different format, they would achieve better outcomes and inform other women of their culture.

Chapter 6 shows that some women believed an improved understanding of cultural matters were important in the classroom environment because Australia had many international students. This is also consistent with Barise (2004) in that Middle Eastern Gulf students embrace a learning environment with authentic experiences because they are better prepared to enter into a learning agreement. One participant reported she enjoyed focusing on communicative skills in the learning environment because it assisted her development at a comfortable pace, particularly as the Australian teaching styles were quite different to what she was used to. In fact, Barise's (2004) research confirms that Middle Eastern Gulf students are not always familiar with western teaching and classroom methods.

The women reported they would welcome learning mechanisms that manage and encourage an open environment in order to stop some of the racism and isolation they felt that divided cultural boundaries. They suggested teachers and students should be assimilated more to improve some of the communication hurdles and cultural boundaries facing them. In general the women had an overall positive experience in Australia, but there were hurdles to their learning and figure 8.6 has retrospectively incorporated their suggestions and experiences. This design and is only indicative to this group of women. Figure 8:6 describes how once in Australia, the women believe a two-way contract of understanding between educators and students would be beneficial to their cultural group. They perceived they would enjoy even more new and supportive teaching ideas and the differences in philosophical approaches using agreed mechanisms linking cultural boundaries would be a possible approach to achieving better satisfaction.

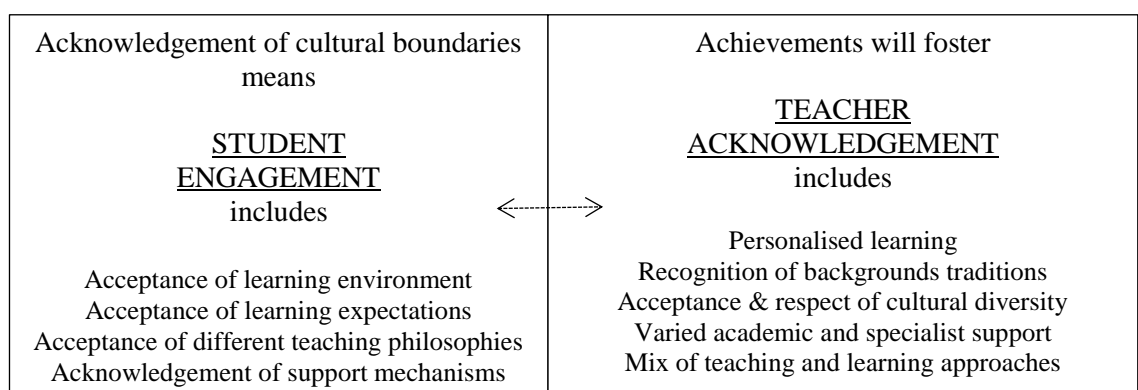| Acknowledgement of cultural boundaries means STUDENT ENGAGEMENT includes Acceptance of learning environment Acceptance of learning expectations Acceptance of different teaching philosophies Acknowledgement of support mechanisms	Achievements will foster TEACHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT includes Personalised learning Recognition of backgrounds traditions Acceptance & respect of cultural diversity Varied academic and specialist support Mix of teaching and learning approaches

Figure 8.6: Perceptions that include new learning strategies

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A suggested model for educating Semah is depicted in figure 8.7. It incorporates data from chapter 5 where the women reported more support was needed in order to accept and respect academic rules more fully and appreciate the learning environment more. They believe a second language environment, on occasions, causes hurdles and sometimes the main points are lost in translation and reported this caused issues for some women regarding the level of writing they produced.

The model shows what the women feel would work for them at the start of their journey to its completion. The model includes their thoughts and suggestions reported in earlier chapters to indicate a method that would successfully teach a typical Middle Eastern Gulf female student. It is not indicative of all female Middle Eastern Gulf students, but leads to further exploration across the wider populace.
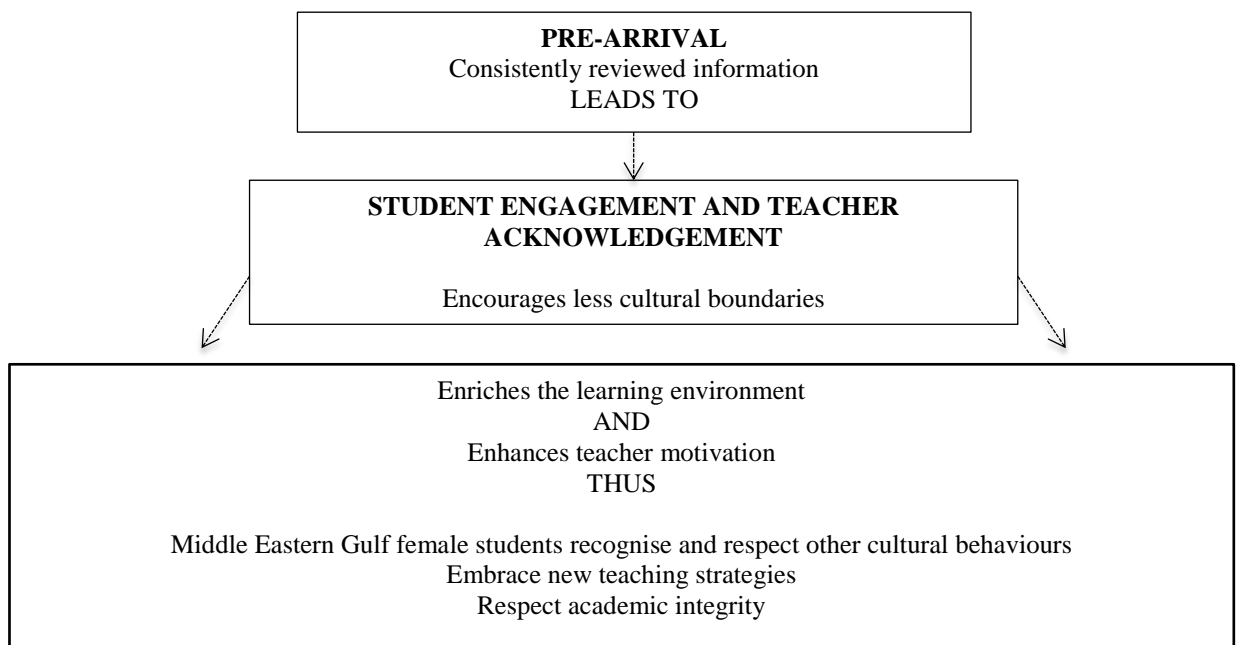
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              PRE-ARRIVAL                 │
│    Consistently reviewed information     │
│               LEADS TO                   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND TEACHER         │
│          ACKNOWLEDGEMENT                 │
│                                          │
│     Encourages less cultural boundaries  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
   ↙                                    ↘
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Enriches the learning environment                   │
│                        AND                                   │
│            Enhances teacher motivation                       │
│                       THUS                                   │
│                                                              │
│ Middle Eastern Gulf female students recognise and respect    │
│              other cultural behaviours                       │
│            Embrace new teaching strategies                   │
│              Respect academic integrity                      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 8.7: Educating Semah

Learning environment

For the most part, this research uncovered that the ten participating Middle Eastern Gulf women are sheltered from responsibilities in general. Being responsible in Australia was a completely new concept and without a lack of support from teachers and cultural communities they experienced many hurdles. They felt that temptations placed an adverse effect on them, which typically involved moving away from their usual cultural behaviours. This was a continued cycle.

They felt if their educators were more knowledgeable in the fundamentals of their cultural upbringing and expectations, with particular consideration given to the added pressures of their own drive to behave as a Gulf lady, this would improve their experience. It was important to behave in a manner guided by their cultural boundaries even if this meant facing certain social and educational exclusions. Their cultural upbringing was more dominant throughout their journey and they have asked for educators to be aware of this. For example, they were not always permitted or comfortable participating in mixed gender activities and when they opted not to become involved, the women in this research felt other students and teachers judged them unfairly which put them in an isolated place. Some of these exclusions involved non-Muslim activities or educational celebratory events, which placed additional pressure on the women to, either, conform or become discounted, thus risk being further isolated by their own cultural groups.

The women communicated that Middle Eastern Gulf women would comfortably accept new and innovative teaching strategies because on the whole, in Australia they enjoyed new learning experiences and in general were eager to contribute. However, they have asked that their educators be more aware of them as individuals who are quite different from other international students. They conveyed they would enjoy participating with other students more if inventive learning strategies were implemented in tutorials and lecture halls that created a more conducive environment for them. This might possibly include gender based tasks or simply administering more guidance to other students at the onset to clearly identify cultural diversity in various circumstances. They believed a 2-way contract with their teachers clearly outlining expectations would assist in this instance. Cultural issues were the main concern and the women communicated a need for an improvement in this area. In chapter 6, one portrait revealed:

… Not touching the opposite sex is part of our religion and everyone should try to accept this when we are here in Australia. I don't think many Australians realise.

Conclusion

It is recognised that the operational emphasis on educational and social integration is not always sufficient within the university setting (Kuh et al, 2006; IDP Education Australia. 2002). Similarly, explicit areas of academic integration are not always available (Berger 2000) and on occasions, there tends to be a lack of support for student educational awareness (Kuh & Love 2000). Although the women in this research have produced similar thoughts and ideas, this is

not a new concept, but one that would need further processing. Rizvi (2005) confirms cultural difference is becoming more distant and so linking ethnicity and social grouping into the learning environment could create a new perspective within the educational arena. As an example, when there were no readily available authentic and continuing supportive mechanisms in place for the participating women, they felt they had to seek alternative guidance through their own cultural groups, which sometimes provided a biased or simpler view. In doing so, this created confusion and the women were not comfortable portraying their identity as a Middle Eastern Gulf woman in such circumstances and sought other means to live comfortably in Australia.

On occasions the women felt isolated from the learning environment because of a lack of understanding of their cultural beliefs and traditional upbringing. As a result, many opted not to extend their friendship groups to other nationalities or local students because they were unsure of the social boundaries. Others became more isolated and felt their teachers did not understand them fully. By crossing international borders for education, some of the women perceived there was pressure placed upon them to make physical and psychological changes in order to ease into the Australian learning setting. For some of the women, these changes caused additional anxiety when their transformations contradicted personal cultural opinions, and they felt they were placed, on occasions, in precarious situations.

However, the women reported that some of the changes provided more positive results. They obtained a stronger belief in their own religious convictions and connection to their culture, which helped guide them to understand the wider community even better. This was because as they became more comfortable in their own cultural beliefs, they were more relaxed responding to others traditional and religious behaviours. They reported a deeper understanding of multiculturalism and deference and conveyed they had more confidence and determination to explore this even further.

Many of the participating Middle Eastern Gulf women disclosed they felt stronger and more empowered as they matured along their educational journey. They acquired positive ideas regarding their own future endeavours and reported a deeper knowledge of global issues. Although the women reported there were on occasions, negative stances to being educated in Australia, their positive experiences were far greater. Overall, the women enjoyed the learning approach in Australia including the use of different type of resources available but they still felt this could still be improved even further. They believed that they quickly obtained independent learning skills early in their educational journey. They reported their Australian learning experience made them stronger women with a determination to have their voices heard by others when they returned back to their country of origin.

Finally, the women accepted that their Australian educational journey was a temporary experience and this motivated them to embrace as many of the multicultural facets available within the limitations afforded to them. They expressed a need to report their journey to other women when they returned to their country of origin so they too could embrace a similar experience. They were hopeful that as more women from the Middle Eastern Gulf became educated in Australia, their own countries would implement changes to their cultural traditions and encourage more independence to women in general. The most common discourse was that the women's memories would be cherished for all time because studying and living in Australia was a valuable and unforgettable experience.

The composite portrait of Semah was designed to show a mix of experiences of the ten women involved in this research. The portrait of Semah and other portraits assisted in hiding the women's true identity but still allowed their voices to be heard. Although Semah is a fictional character, what she says is true. Each diagram depicted in this last chapter has been designed from the data revealed by the women and it is hoped that although this research incorporated a small sample of women, other educators might consider these suggestions as an updated introduction for the future development of Middle Eastern Gulf women. Other research of Middle Eastern Gulf and Muslim women who have crossed international borders for educational purposes, have provided a platform on which to build. The new knowledge revealed by the collective experiences within this research, provide critical insights and advice for all educators of Muslim women. It also provides some principles for consideration by all educators working with diverse student groups.

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Appendix A

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Date

Hello,

PhD Research Project

Thank you for agreeing to assist in seeking participants for my PhD project.

This project will investigate what support is available for Gulf women while they study in Australia. It will consider academic and family support, and will also investigate the type of discourse and cultural differences that might become important to the learning outcomes.

It is hoped that my research will assist Educational Institutions to provide significant advice to future teachers of Gulf female students whether they are taught in Australia or overseas and possibly design initiatives to obtain a better understanding of female student requirements. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of this research will provide a series of support mechanisms for Gulf women during their studies away from home.

What does participation in the research project involve?
Participating and the collating of data will be in two phases as follows:

- In **Phase One**, *Part One*, participants will be invited to complete a general questionnaire outlining their family background and general views of women in education.
- In **Phase One,** *Part Two*, participants will be invited to complete a more in-depth questionnaire giving them an opportunity to focus more on their personal opinions regarding women and education.

- In **Phase Two**, if they are placed on the shortlist, I plan to interview them personally. The interviews will take about 60 minutes to complete and will be arranged at a convenient time and place. The meetings will be recorded and I envisage meeting with them approximately three (3) times over a six (6) month period. Coffee shops, cafeterias, university campuses and libraries will be the type of locations sought for

these face-to-face meetings. At these interviews, participants will have an opportunity to discuss their opinions in more detail about women in education and their own personal experiences of studying in Australia. These interviews will be designed to not interrupt their studies or lifestyle in any way.

Do participants have to take part?
No. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If participants do not want to take part in the project, then they simply do not. This decision should always be made completely freely, and all decisions are respected without question. For example, if participants choose to participate in one part of the project and not continue to the next part, then they can withdraw without penalty at any time. Furthermore, if participants should progress from one stage of the project to the next, I will confirm with them that they are still happy to continue before they contribute any information.

What if participants were to change their mind?
If a decision is made to participate, it will need to be made by **XXXX** to be included in the project. Once a decision is made then participants can change their mind at any time. If the project has already been published at the time they decide to withdraw, any contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication. There will be no consequences relating to a decision by them to participate or not, or to participate and then withdraw, other than those already described in this letter. These decisions will not affect their relationship with their teachers or their educational institution.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researchers office and can only be accessed by me as the researcher. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding documents. The data is maintained in a way that enables the researcher to de-identify and then re-identify an individual's data and destroy it if participation is withdrawn. A coding system will be introduced to help identify the names in this regard. Participant identity will not be disclosed at any time. Participant privacy and the confidentiality of information disclosed by them will be assured at all other times.

It is intended that the findings of this study be reported as a PhD thesis through a publication. Access to this can be made by contacting the Faculty of Education at Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Perth, WA. It is expected to become available in July 2011. Furthermore, you may email me to receive a copy of articles or a summary of the research.

What are the benefits for future educational and language institutions?
Future educational and language institutions will benefit from any new and improved learning support initiatives that result from this study and will assist future students to study better in a more supportive learning environment.

Are there any risks associated with participation?
There is a very small risk that participants may feel uncomfortable about discussing their family and learning experiences. A Consent Form and this Information Letter about the project will carefully inform them of the procedures. Participants can withdraw at any time without consequences. Also, participants will be able to discuss any concerns with the researcher who will provide support and encouragement at all times.

Is this research approved?
The research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 3622).

What should institutions do if they decide to assist in finding participants?

If participants are still happy to participate in the research, they will need to sign the attached Consent Form. This can be scanned and emailed to me or it can be posted to: *Susan Bessalem, c/o Higher Degrees Office, Faculty of Education and Arts, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford Street, Mount Lawley, WA 6050.*

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact me on XXX or you can email me XXX. You can also email my supervisor, XXX. Alternatively, if you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, Tel: (+61 8) 6304 2170, Fax: (+61 8) 6304 2661 or research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Yours faithfully

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Consent Form – Educational Institution (School, College, University)

- I have read this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.

- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I am willing to allow students to become involved in the research project, as described.

- I understand they are free to withdraw participation at any time within 5 years from project completion, without affecting their relationship with their educational institution.

- I give my permission for the contribution that they wish to make to this research to be published as a PhD project.

- I understand that a summary of findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Name and position of (printed):

Email address:

Signature: Date: /   /

Appendix B

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Date

Manager
Educational Institution

Dear

PhD Research Project

My name is XXX and I am writing to ask if you could assist in finding prospective participants for my PhD project?

This project will investigate what support is available for Gulf women while they study in Australia. It will consider academic and family support, and will also investigate the type of discourse and cultural differences that might become important to the learning outcomes.

It is hoped that my research will assist Educational Institutions to provide significant advice to future teachers of Gulf female students whether they are taught in Australia or overseas and possibly design initiatives to obtain a better understanding of female student requirements. Furthermore, it is hoped that the findings of this research will provide a series of support mechanisms for Gulf women during their studies away from home.

What does participation in the research project involve?
Participating and the collating of data will be in two phases as follows:

- In **Phase One**, *Part One*, participants will be invited to complete a general questionnaire outlining their family background and general views of women in education.
- In **Phase One,** *Part Two*, participants will be invited to complete a more in-depth questionnaire giving them an opportunity to focus more on their personal opinions regarding women and education.

- In **Phase Two**, I will meet with short listed participants and interview them personally. The interviews will take about 60 minutes to complete and will be arranged at a convenient time and place. The meetings will be recorded and I envisage meeting with each participant approximately three (3) times over a six (6) month period. Coffee shops, cafeterias, university campuses and libraries will be the type of locations sought for these face-to-face meetings. At these interviews, participants will have an

opportunity to discuss their opinions in more detail about women in education and their own personal experiences of studying in Australia. These interviews will be designed to not interrupt their studies or lifestyle in any way.

Do participants have to take part?
No. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If participants do not want to take part in the project, then they simply do not. This decision should always be made completely freely, and all decisions are respected without question. For example, if students choose to participate in one part of the project and not continue to the next part, then they can withdraw without penalty at any time. Furthermore, if they should progress from one stage of the project to the next, I will confirm that they are still happy to continue before they contribute any information.

What if a participant was to change their mind?
If a decision is made to participate, it will need to be made by **XXX** for a participant to be included in the project. Once a decision is made then participants can change their mind at any time. If the project has already been published at the time a participant decides to withdraw, any contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication. There will be no consequences relating to a decision by them to participate or not, or to participate and then withdraw, other than those already described in this letter. These decisions will not affect their family's relationship with their teachers or with their educational institution.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researchers office and can only be accessed by me as the researcher. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding documents. The data is maintained in a way that enables the researcher to de-identify and then re-identify an individual's data and destroy it if participation is withdrawn. A coding system will be introduced to help identify the names of participants in this regard. Participant identity will not be disclosed at any time. Participant privacy and the confidentiality of information disclosed by them will be assured at all other times.

It is intended that the findings of this study be reported as a PhD thesis through a publication. Access to this can be made by contacting the Faculty of Education at Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Perth, WA. It is expected to become available in July 2011. Furthermore, participants may email me to receive a copy of articles or a summary of the research.

What are the benefits for future educational and language institutions?
Participants will benefit from any new and improved educational support initiatives, which will result from this study and will assist students to study better in a more supportive learning environment.

Are there any risks associated with participation?
There is a very small risk that some of the students may feel uncomfortable about discussing their family and learning experiences. Consent Forms and Information Letters will be sent to Students about the project and they will be carefully informed that they can withdraw at any time without consequences. As their educational institution, a member of the administration will also need to sign the enclosed Consent Form. Also, students will be able to discuss their concerns with the researcher who will provide support and encouragement at all times.

Is this research approved?
The research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 3622).

What should I do if I decide to assist you find participants?
If you are happy for your students to participate in the research, you will need to sign the attached Consent Form. This can be scanned and emailed to me or it can be posted to: *Susan Bessalem, PO Box 262, Spring Hill, Qld 4004.*

I would also be grateful if you could please send the attached **'Project and Researcher Summary'** letter to any *female GCC nationals* on your database informing them of the project. This will notify them how to make contact with the researcher.

Furthermore, if you could place the attached **'Project Advertisement'** on your notice board/s this might also help generate some interest from your students.

Once contact with the researcher has been made by interested parties, the participants will be sent Introduction Letters and will be asked to sign Consent Forms before their involvement will commence.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact me onXXX or you can email me XXX. You can also email my supervisor, at XXX Alternatively, if you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, Tel: (+61 8) 6304 2170, Fax: (+61 8) 6304 2661 or research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

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- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I am willing to allow students to become involved in the research project, as described.

- I understand they are free to withdraw participation at any time within 5 years from project completion, without affecting their relationship with their educational institution.

- I give my permission for the contribution that they wish to make to this research to be published as a PhD project.

- I understand that a summary of findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Name and position of (printed): _____

Email address: _____

Signature: _____   Date: /   /

INFORMATION LETTER TO PROSPECT PARTICIPANTS

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Hello, my name is XXX and I am currently completing my PhD at Edith Cowan University in Perth, WA.

My research interest focuses on female Gulf students who study in Australia. I want to find out what educational support is available to these students and how they settle into their studies in a new country that is very different from their own. I am also hoping to discover whether the differences in culture, family traditions, family settings, religious celebrations and attitudes might have an impact on the way the student embraces their studies.

Although I am Australian, I have previously lived in the UAE and worked at a university in Dubai. I am also married to a Muslim and believe I have respect for, and a good understanding of the Gulf Middle Eastern culture. I have also taught the Australian University Preparation Course to non-native English speaking students and have worked at Language Colleges. Many of my students have come from the Gulf region of the Middle East.

I would really like you to participate in my research and feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and ideas with me. I believe that together we can jointly create a new educational pathway for future female Gulf students. This project will also assist educators both in Australia and the Gulf to have a deeper understanding of how to respond to female students from your part of the world.

If you would like to participate in this research, or if you know anyone who would like to participate, then please send an email to XXX with **"I AM INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR RESEARCH"** in the subject line and I will respond back as soon as possible. Your identity will not be revealed at any time throughout the project and you can rely on confidentiality at all times!

In my response back to your email, I will send you a Formal Introduction Letter about the project and a Consent Form that you will need to sign in order to be able to make your contributions to the research. If you would like to contact me personally to discuss any of the above in more detail please do not hesitate to do so.

I hope we will be working together soon!

FEMALE STUDENTS WANTED FOR

PHD RESEARCH PROJECT

Would you like to take part in my PhD Research Project?

To be eligible, you must be a

Female Middle Eastern Gulf Student
studying in Australia either at a:

1. Language School

or

2. Completing a *Foundation year* or *Diploma course*

or

3. IELTS/TOEFL preparation

or

4. Undergraduate/Postgraduate course at University

My research will explore how female students from the Gulf area of the Middle East settle into their studies in Australia and what support mechanisms are in place to help them.

If you would like to know more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.
XXX

Expressions of interest close XXX.

THANK YOU IN ANTICIPATION

FEMALE STUDENTS WANTED FOR PHD RESEARCH PROJECT

<u>Would you like to take part in my PhD Research Project?</u>

To be eligible, you must be a

<u>Female Middle Eastern Gulf Student</u>
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If you would like to know more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.
XXXX

Expressions of interest close : XXX.

THANK YOU IN ANTICIPATION

Appendix D

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Hello, my name is XXX. I am a registered teacher and am currently completing my PhD.

My research interest focuses on Gulf women who study in Australia. I want to find out what educational support is available to these students and how they settle into their studies in a new country that is very different from their own. I am also hoping to discover whether the differences in culture, family traditions, family settings, religious celebrations and attitudes might have an impact on the way the student embraces their studies.

Although I am Australian, I have previously lived in the UAE and worked at a university in Dubai. I am also married to a Muslim and believe I have respect for, and a good understanding of the Gulf Middle Eastern culture. I have also taught Academic English, IELTS preparation and the Australian University Preparation Course to students from Gulf Community Countries and surrounding areas.

I would really like you to participate in my research and feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and ideas with me. I believe that together we can jointly create a new educational pathway for future female Gulf students. This project will also assist educators both in Australia and the Gulf to have a deeper understanding of how to respond to female students from your part of the world.

If you would like to participate in this research, or if you know anyone who would like to participate, then please send an email to XXX OR XXX with **"I AM INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN YOUR RESEARCH**" in the subject line and I will respond back as soon as possible. Your identity will not be revealed at any time throughout the project and you can rely on confidentiality at all times!

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I hope we will be working together soon!

Appendix E

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
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Date

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- In **Phase Two**, if you are placed on the shortlist, I plan to interview you personally. The interviews will take about 60 minutes to complete and will be arranged at a convenient time and place. The meetings will be recorded and I envisage meeting with you approximately three (3) times over a six (6) month period. Coffee shops, cafeterias, university campuses and libraries will be the type of locations sought for these face-to-
- face meetings. At these interviews, you will have an opportunity to discuss you opinions in more detail about women in education and you own personal experiences of studying in Australia. These interviews will be designed to not interrupt your studies or lifestyle in any way.

Do I have to take part?
No. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you do not want to take part in the project, then you simply do not. This decision should always be made completely freely, and all decisions are respected without question. For example, if you choose to participate in one part of the project and not continue to the next part, then you can withdraw without penalty at any time. Furthermore, if you should progress from one stage of the project to the next, I will confirm that you are still happy to continue before you contribute any information.

What if I was to change my mind?
If a decision is made to participate, it will need to be made by **31st March, 2008** to be included in the project. Once a decision is made then you can change your mind at any time. If the project has already been published at the time you decide to withdraw, any contribution that was used in reporting the project cannot be removed from the publication. There will be no consequences relating to a decision by you to participate or not, or to participate and then withdraw, other than those already described in this letter. These decisions will not affect your relationship with your teachers or your educational institution.

What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?
Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. The data is then stored securely in a locked cabinet in the researchers office and can only be accessed by me as the researcher. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding documents. The data is maintained in a way that enables the researcher to de-identify and then re-identify an individual's data and destroy it if participation is withdrawn. A coding system will be introduced to help identify the names in this regard. Your identity will not be disclosed at any time. Your privacy and the confidentiality of information disclosed by you will be assured at all other times.

It is intended that the findings of this study be reported as a PhD thesis through a publication. Access to this can be made by contacting the Faculty of Education at Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley, Perth, WA. It is expected to become available in July 2011. Furthermore, you may email me to receive a copy of articles or a summary of the research.

What are the benefits for future educational and language institutions?
Future educational and language institutions will benefit from any new and improved learning support initiatives that result from this study and will assist future students to study better in a more supportive learning environment.

Are there any risks associated with participation?
There is a very small risk that you may feel uncomfortable about discussing your family and learning experiences. A Consent Form and this Information Letter about the project will carefully inform you of the procedures. You can withdraw at any time without consequences. Also, you will be able to discuss any concerns with the researcher who will provide support and encouragement at all times.

Is this research approved?
The research has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference 3622).

What should I do if I decide to assist you find participants?
If you are still happy to participate in the research, you will need to sign the attached Consent Form. This can be scanned and emailed to me or it can be posted to: *Susan Bessalem, c/o Higher Degrees Office, Faculty of Education and Arts, Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford Street, Mount Lawley, WA 6050.*

I would also be grateful if you could please forward details about my project to any of your friends, or other students you feel might want to participate and let them know how to make contact with me.

Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact me on XXX or you can email me XXX . You can also email my supervisor at XXX. Alternatively, if you wish to speak with an independent person about the conduct of the project, please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, Tel: (+61 8) 6304 2170, Fax: (+61 8) 6304 2661 or research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Yours faithfully

Edith Cowan University
2 Bradford Street
Mount Lawley WA, 6050
Telephone: (+61 8) 9370 6220
Facsimile: (+61 8) 9370 6664
Mobile: (+61 4) 0405 0827

Consent Form – Student

- I have read this document and I understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.

- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I am willing to become involved in the research project, as described.

- I understand I am free to withdraw participation at any time up to project completion, without affecting my relationship with my educational institution.

- I give my permission for the contribution and understand this research will be published as a PhD project.

- I understand that a summary of findings from the research will be made available to me upon its completion.

Name and position of (printed):

Email address:

Signature: Date: /   /

APPENDIX F

<u>**Phase One, part one**</u>

Your personal details

- Name
- Where do you live in Australia
- What country are you from
- Email address
- Phone number

In what state are you studying?

- Queensland
- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Australian Capital Territory
- Western Australia
- Northern Territory

What is the name of the institution where you are studying?

What are you currently studying?

- IELTS
- TOEFL
- University Foundation Studies
- Diploma in any subject
- Undergraduate studies
- Postgraduate studies
- Other

How long is your course?

In Australia, I live:

- With a homestay/family
- With my friends or relations
- By myself
- Other

This is my first visit to Australia

- Yes
- No

It was my choice to study in Australia

- Yes
- No

Why are you studying in Australia?

The course I am studying in is:

- Easy
- Difficult
- About right for my ability
- Not sure

I believe I will be able to pass this course

- Not sure
- Yes
- No

Have your studies in Australia made you change your goals?

- No
- Haven't thought about it
- Yes

Teacher support is important when studying overseas.

- Always
- Sometimes
- Not at all

My teachers support my learning

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

My teachers help me achieve higher results

- Always
- Sometimes
- Never

I find it difficult studying in Australia.

Always
Sometimes
Never

What country does your mother originate from?

- UAE
- KSA
- Oman
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Qatar
- Iran
- Iraw

- India
- United Kingdom
- Other

What country does your father originate from?

- UAE
- KSA
- Oman
- Kuwait
- Bahrain
- Qatar
- Iran
- Iraw
- India
- United Kingdom
- Other

Please indicate the highest level of education your father completed?

- Postgraduate university study
- Undergraduate university study
- Vocational study at college
- Apprenticeship study
- English (or other language) study at a specialist language school or college
- High school
- Primary school
- Other

How much impact did your parents' education have on your own personal goals?

- A lot
- Some
- None at all

Have any of your siblings studied overseas?

- Yes
- No

Did any of your parents study overseas?

- Yes
- No

How do your family feel about you studying in Australia?

Do you celebrate any of the following?

- Eid Al-Aidha
- Eid Al-Fitr
- Makara Sankranti
- Vishu and Tamil New Year
- Easter

- Christmas
- Other

If you ticked other to the previous question, please provide more information about the celebration.

Please comment on your observations on the aspects of the Australia Education system.

- Standard of the Australian education compared to your country
- Classroom environment
- Teachers' respect for international students
- Students' respect for teachers
- Teachers' respect and knowledge of Middle Eastern Gulf students in particular
- Teachers' commitment to their job
- How other international students respond towards you.

End of questionnaire

Appendix G

<u>**Phase One, part two**</u>

Your personal details

- Name
- Where do you live in Australia
- What country are you from
- Email address
- Phone number

Where are you studying?

- Queensland
- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Australian Capital Territory
- Western Australia
- Northern Territory

I noticed in part one of the questionnaire you believed your would pass the course. Can you explain why you feel this way?

Do you have any strategies or advice you can give other Middle Eastern Gulf women studying in Australia?

Has it been easy to make friends?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

What countries do you friends come from?

Tell me about your closest friends in Australia. For example, how did you meet? Why do you believe you are friends?

I chose to be friends with this person because (you can choose more than one answer)

- We are from the same country
- We are from the same culture
- We have the same ambitions
- We are studying at the same institution
- We are similar ages
- We help each other with our studies
- We live in the same place in Australia
- We knew each other before we came to Australia
- We are so different and enjoy learning about new things
- No reason, we just connected when we first met
- Other reason

Do you think you will stay in touch with this person when you finish your studies in Australia?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If there are male students in your class, do you feel comfortable that you have to interact with them?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

How important it is that your family support your future plans and decisions?

- Not important at all
- Very important
- Not that important

When you are in the classroom, are you confident asking questions?

- Yes
- No

In general, when you ask questions in class do the teachers (you can choose as many answers as you like)

- Give clear explanations most of the time
- After answering your question, clarify with you that you understood the answer
- Quickly answer your question and then move on to continue the lesson
- Explain the answer swiftly so as not to disrupt the class, but is available to provide further information afterward
- Not explain the answer fully
- Make you feel uncomfortable asking questions
- Compliment your inquisitive nature
- Emphasise to the class the appropriateness of your question
- Enquire why you asked the question in the first place
- Not take much notice of the question and continue with the class

Do you feel comfortable approaching your teacher?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Tell me how you feel if your teacher uses the following phrases.

- Complimented that they make an effort to respect my religious beliefs
- It would sound stupid if they were not Muslim
- I wouldn't care if they used the phrases or not
- If they are not Muslim, I wouldn't like it
- If they were not Muslim, I would question why they used these phrases
- I would respect them more (especially if they were not Muslim)

- It would encourage me because I feel they were understanding of my culture and religious beliefs
- I would gain confidence with the teachers and might even approach them more with any study or personal issues
- If the teachers weren't Muslim it would demonstrate to other international students the significance of the phrases used in my culture

When you say insh'allah to non-Muslim teachers, do you think they misunderstand the correct meaning?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

In general, do you believe the teachers understand the difficulties associated with studying in Australia, particularly when English is not your first language?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Would you prefer to be taught by Muslim teachers in Australia

- Yes
- No
- Don't care either way

Would you like to be taught by teachers who understand the Muslim culture?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Do you find it difficult that teachers do not speak your language?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

Have you ever approached a teacher in Australia with a problem not associated with your studies?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

If you answered yes to the previous question, could you explain the nationality of the teacher, the nature of the problem and if or how the problem was resolved?

Have you encountered problems with other international students?

- Yes
- No

If you answer yes to the previous question, could you indicate the nationality of the student, the nature of the problem and if, or how the problem was resolved?

Who would you trust the least?

- Parents
- Siblings
- Other family members
- Teachers
- Friends
- Homestay/family
- Neighbours
- People in authority (e.g. Academic supervisors, police, immigration etc)
- Students in your class (other than those with your nationality or culture)

Do you find studying in Australia easier than in your country?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Would you recommend studying in Australia to your friends?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

In your own words, what is the best thing about studying in Australia?

Have you experienced obstacles while studying in Australia (eg. Family or peer pressure, language difficulties, finances, dealing with Australian culture etc). You can choose more than one answer.

What do you like about Australian culture?

What do you dislike about Australian culture?

Do you feel safe being in Australia?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

End of questionnaire

APPENDIX H

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS PARTICIPANTS IN PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Is it OK that I record this conversation? I need to do this in case I don't get everything down when I make notes. We can stop and start at any time and of course, I would like to remind you that whatever you discuss with me today remains confidential. At no time will your true identity be revealed and when I mention you in my final thesis, I will chose a pseudo name to help keep your privacy even further.

1. Why did you decide to participate in my PhD research?

2. What exactly are you Studying?

3. You said this wasn't your first visit to Australia – can you explain a little more about your other visits.

4. What perceptions did you have about Australia before you came here to study?

5. I'm interested to know if you are the first women in your family to study overseas?

PORTRAITURE OF GULF LADIES

1. In order for me to get an understanding of your culture, I want to ask you if you could talk in general about ladies from the Middle Eastern Gulf. Could you give me your perceptions of what you believe a Gulf woman is like? (personality, religion, countries they come from etc). Which countries in fact?

2. Can you describe a Persian woman?

3. Now describe a Gulf Arab woman?

4. Can you give me an example of a typical portrait of a Gulf woman?

5. Can you tell the difference between a Gulf Arab woman and an Iranian woman?

6. What are the similarities between Iranian and Gulf Arab women?

PLAGIARISM

1. Are you away of the seriousness of plagiarism?

2. What happens in your country?

3. So, was it a big shock to you when you came here and learnt about that?

4. Have you ever plagiarised your work – or cheated (deliberately or unknowingly)?

5. What do you think the differences are between helping a friend with her study and plagiarism?

6. Have you seen people cheating since you've been here in Australia (or even during your study time in your own country) If you have, can you describe what you saw?

7. Is there any advice or what solution can you think of that will help the teachers understand Middle Eastern Gulf students more with regard to plagiarism?

TEACHING STAFF IN AUSTRALIA

1. Can you tell me about your favourite teacher in Australia – and why.

2. Do you have a 'worst' teacher?

3. What are the differences between teachers from your country and teachers in Australia

4. Can you provide any advice to teachers wanting to work in your country?

5. Do you think there are specific qualities a teacher must have in order to teach students from your country?

6. Do you think their own personal religious faith makes a difference to how they respond to Middle Eastern Gulf students? Would this make a difference do you think?

7. I notice in Islamic countries, there is a lot of flexibility during Ramadan. If you have been in Australia during this time, how did you cope?

8. Do you think the teachers are particularly understanding during this time

GENDERS

1. Do you think men from the Middle Eastern Gulf experience difficulties or problems when they study in Australia

2. Do you get to socialise more with the men from your country now that you are in Australia or is it no different to when you are at home?

CULTURAL CLUBS

1. Have you ever attend any social functions with the cultural club of your country?

2. How many students from your country are in this city in Australia?

POSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES (HURDLES) PROBLEMS

1. I've never studied overseas (I've been a teacher but not a student). I actually can't imagine how I would cope if I had to be an overseas student in a country that didn't

speak my native language. With this in mind, what motivated you to do this? Did you think it would be difficult?

2. Do you have any difficulties?

3. How do you get on with reading all the articles that are expected at postgraduate level? What assistance do you get with this?

4. What about language barriers? What happens if you don't understand all that the teacher says in your tutorials or lectures? Do you have a strategy in place?

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

1. Is it OK that I talk about your family? What type of living environment do you have in your country? i.e. do you live in the country or the city. Do you have an apartment or a house/villa. Do you have a nanny and/or a driver?

2. I'd like to talk about your friends in your country. Have you known these friends since you were little? Are they your close family or from separate families?

3. Do you miss your friends back home a lot?

4. In your country do the people see a great image of you because you are in this country.

5. Someone once said to me that the more education a girl has, the better the prospects of marriage? Is this really the case where you come from? If so, (or if it isn't), can you elaborate on this more (why would people think this?)

6. Does your husband support the things you want to do and does he help with the child?

7. How would you feel if your husband disagreed with your future plans (you know, because you have studied so hard to get this far)

8. Will you go to work once you complete your studies?

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES /DIVIDES

1. I know Australia is so different from your country, what are the things that make you notice the cultural divides the most?

2. How do you cope with the cultural divides?

3. In the news there has been lots of publicity about banning the burqa, shayler etc, has this affected you while you have been in Australia. What do you think about this?

4. Have you been effected by this?

5. What do your family think about the differences in culture

6. In your opinion, what is the worst thing about being here (try to think about the cultural differences if you can)

7. If someone was visiting your country, what would you tell them to look out for the most (I am thinking of cultural divides or shocks)

8. Can you provide any advice for Students from your country that might come to Australia

PLACE OF STUDY

1. Do you think you have chosen the right place in Australia to study? If so, why? If not, why?