

**Saudi Women's Understanding of the Stereotypes They Experience
at Flinders University**

By
Nouf Barasayn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Graduate Diploma in
Research Methods

College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Adelaide, Australia
July 2019

Dedication

To Mohammad,

My husband and my partner in this journey,

and

to my three little angels, Lamar, Yazan, and Rawad

who taught me how to love unconditionally.

Table of Contents

Dedication	2
Summary	6
Acknowledgments.....	7
List of Figures and Tables.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
CHAPTER ONE: Background	11
Purpose of the Study	13
Aims of the Study	13
Significance of the Study	14
Research questions.....	14
Theoretical Framework.....	14
Summary	15
CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature.....	16
Saudi Religion and Culture.....	16
Muslim Women	17
The Hijab and Religion.....	18
Perspectives on Identity and Stereotypes.....	20
Stereotypes Associated with Saudi Women at University.....	23
Impacts of the Stereotypes on Women	26
Summary	27
CHAPTER THREE: Methodology and Methods	28
Research Design.....	28
Study Setting and Sample Population.....	29
Inclusion Criteria	29

Recruitment of Participants.....	29
Data Collection	31
Ethical Considerations	32
Data Analysis	32
Summary	33
CHAPTER FOUR: Findings.....	34
Themes and Subthemes Identified from Participants' Comments.....	34
Illustrations and Amplification of the Themes	35
Theme 1: The hijab and its significance	35
Theme 2: Social experiences.	36
Theme 3: University and study life experiences.	38
Theme 4: Negotiating life in a western society and culture.....	41
Theme 5. Resulting emotions from the experiences of living in Australia.....	42
Theme 6: Impact of public events.....	43
Theme 7: Use of support services.	45
Theme 8: Coping strategies.	45
Theme 9: Perceived reasons for negative stereotyping.....	46
Summary	47
CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Conclusion	48
Interpretation of the Findings.....	48
Summary	50
Recommendations.....	51
Limitations of the Study.....	52
Future Research	52
References.....	54

APPENDICES	59
Appendix A: Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee ..	59
Appendix B: Flyer, Interview Questions, Consent Form	62
Appendix C: Information Letter	66

Summary

This study aims to explore Saudi women students' social experiences during their study at Flinders University and their understanding of those experiences. The study sought to determine the extent to which Saudi women experience stereotyping at Flinders University; how such stereotyping has influenced their social life and study; how they consider their experiences differ from those of other women students; and what resilience strategy they employ to respond to their experiences. The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological study design, where responses from seven Saudi women undertaking postgraduate or undergraduate programs at the university were analysed in order to contribute to the research on this subject. Eight themes emerged from the interviews with the women students, which were identified as relevant to the aims of the study. The study found that the majority of the subjects had largely positive experiences within the university, although there were a few times when they felt they were subject to stereotyping. In their social experiences the women all had some encounters with racism, discrimination, taunting, or Islamophobia, and several struggled with finding acceptable housing. Emotions of homesickness, loneliness, depression and feelings of being an outsider presented challenges to the participants in the research. All of the women interviewed had developed coping strategies to overcome obstacles, which included adopting a positive attitude, emphasising the positive, using their friendship networks, doing things with other international students, ignoring insults and keeping busy with their studies. All seven women expressed a strong identification with their religion, which gave them purpose and strength to focus on their academic goals. Recommendations are included, which may be useful to the university in increasing its support of international Muslim students.

Acknowledgments

This paper would have not been completed without the support and encouragement of a number of people. So, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who provided me the possibility to complete this thesis. First, I am extremely thankful to my research supervisor, Associate Professor Carol, Irizarry whose generously shared her time and knowledge with me and for her continues support and encouragement.

I would like to thank Dr. Keith Miller whose mentor and help me, I am grateful to his intellectual guidance.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my wonderful family for their unconditional love and support. I am truly grateful to my mum and dad who believed in me and never stopped encouraging me through my journey.

Finally, Special thanks to my husband who has unconditionally supported me at every step of my academic life.

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1 Number of Saudi students enrolled in the US and worldwide. The 2012-13 projections were based on 2012 fall semester enrolments (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p. 111). Page 11

Figure 2. Enrolment growth of Saudi students in US, UK (Britain), Canada and Australia (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p. 114)

Table 1 Demographic data on the study participants. Page 29

Table 2 Number of themes mentioned by each participant (pseudo names). Page 33

Definition of Terms

The following terms have been used throughout the thesis with the meaning that is given here.

Unless otherwise indicated the following definitions have been taken from the Oxford dictionary (2019).

Saudi women: females of Saudi Arabian origin

Stereotype: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Discrimination: The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Muslim: A follower of the religion of Islam.

Culture: The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

Islamophobia: term began to be used to signal rejection of and discrimination against the resident Muslim population in the 'West' (Allen, 2005).

Dislike of or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force.

Hijab or veil: A scarf or veil worn by some Muslim women over the head in public (Gole & Göle, 1996) and (T. F. Ruby, 2006).

The terms hijab and veil used are used in this study synonymously, as both referring to a length of material used by many Muslim women for covering their hair. In this study, the hijab is taken as the headscarf.

CHAPTER ONE: Background

There are a large number of students from Saudi Arabia joining international universities around the world (Taylor & Albasri, 2014) (Figure 1). With the establishment of the King Abdullah Scholarships Program in 2005, there has been a notable increase in the number of students from Saudi Arabia studying in Australia, including at Flinders University in South Australia (Alsahafi & Shin, 2017). This trend has also led to a substantial increase in the number of Saudi women (as well as men) enrolling in international universities for a range of study programs at undergraduate and graduate levels. The primary reason behind this increase has been due to the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which is aimed at ensuring that more Saudi women can access education in an international setting, (Macias, 2016).

According to (Binsahl & Chang, 2012) Australia has experienced a recent and rapid growth of International students from Saudi Arabia and according to these authors, a report from Australian Education International in 2012 ranked Saudi Arabia as one of the top ten countries sending students to Australia. “Of all the Saudi students in Australia, there are over 1,500 Saudi female students whose numbers are expected to increase due to the recent extension of King Abdullah’s scholarship program.” (Binsahl & Chang, p.1). (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Number of Saudi students enrolled in the US and worldwide. The 2012-13 projections were based on 2012 fall semester enrolments (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p. 111).

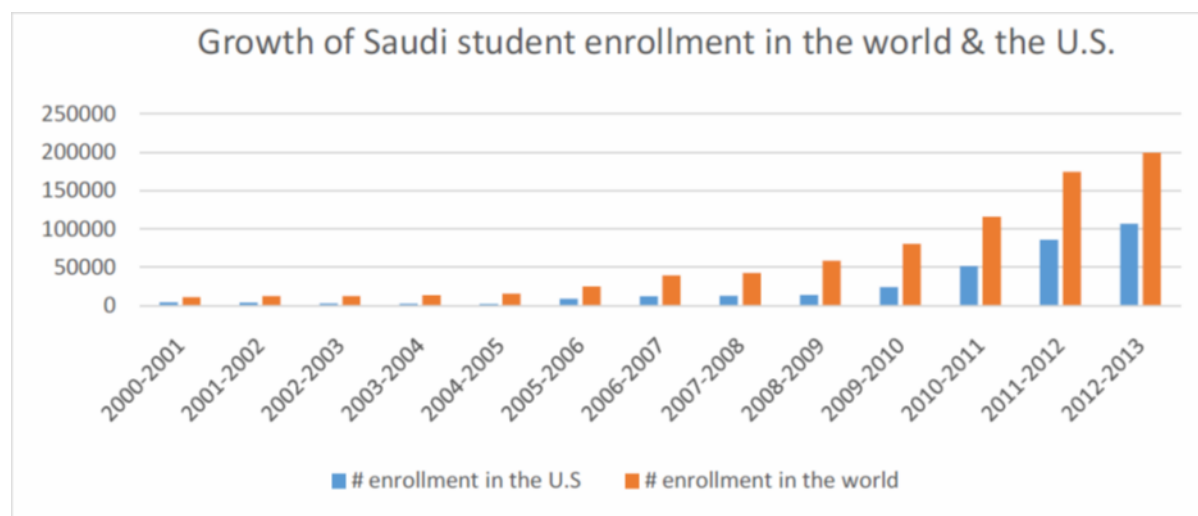
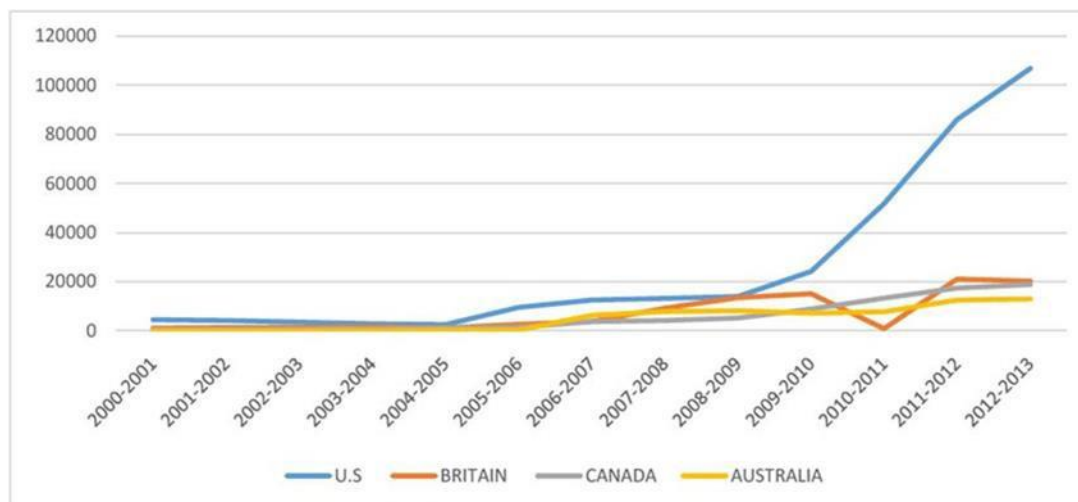


Figure 2. Enrolment growth of Saudi students in US, UK (Britain), Canada and Australia (Taylor & Albasri, 2014, p. 114)



In the past decade, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has encouraged the participation of both males and females in all sectors of the economy. Contrary to the traditional beliefs, which classed women as unsuitable for education, contemporary Saudi society is now doing much to ensure that women are included in educational programs and developmental ventures. The process famously known as, ‘Saudization’ has been instrumental in ensuring that both genders can access many of the jobs that have been in the past been filled by foreign workers, (Baki, 2004).

The trend has led to an interest in research to understand the academic and social experiences of female Saudi students in the university environment. This new environment presents a lot of challenges for Saudi women, both socially and culturally, since preconceived beliefs about Saudi women and their position in the society affects the way other students view them. These ingrained beliefs can lead to a stereotyped way of responding to Saudi women, which can negatively affect their academic progress and social life in general. Investigating how Saudi women interpret these stereotyped views about them is a useful way to help them to devise their coping strategies. With the availability of scholarship programs like the King Abdul-Aziz scholarship program, more and more Saudi students are expected to be joining Flinders University and other international universities.

My interest in this subject area has also stemmed from my own personal experiences while living and studying in Adelaide. I came to believe my experiences were related to aspects

of my dress, religion, culture, country of origin, or a combination of all of these factors. I wanted to explore the commonality of such experiences among other women students, to understand their impact and how to build resilience to deal with them.

Despite the significant increase in the number of Saudi women enrolled in Australian universities, very little research has been done to document their experiences and how they bridge cultural differences (Macias, 2016). Female Saudi students have particular needs that are best addressed by analysing their lived experiences. They hail from an Islamic background and one that has a unique culture and practices. The findings of this study will enhance the educational experiences of international students in general and Saudi women in particular. The findings may also assist educational providers in Australia to develop more relevant orientation programs and find other ways to deliver intercultural education programs.

Since this research focuses on Saudi women studying at Flinders University, it is important that relevant background information of Saudi Arabia regarding its religion, culture, and the role of the women in the Saudi Arabian context be included. (Lippman, 2004). It is crucial to note that Saudi as a nation claims Islam as its main religion (Hofer, 2009). According to Hofer (2009) “The Islamic religion is firmly rooted in Saudi Arabia, and the Quran serves as the unifying force in the country and is therefore, designated as its constitution” (p,18).

Purpose of the Study

There is little research on the experiences that female students of Saudi nationality go through when studying abroad. By the same token, there are no studies on the experiences of female Saudi students studying at Flinders University. Given the fact that contemporary policy has led to an increase in the number of female Saudi students studying at Flinders University, it is of interest to study their experiences of stereotyping, and their general experiences of studying in the host institution. There is also a need to determine if the trend of stereotyping is increasing with rising numbers of female Saudi students enrolled at Flinders University.

Aims of the Study

1. To investigate the degree to which Saudi women feel that they experience stereotyping at Flinders University.
2. To determine how these women feel that stereotypical experiences have influenced their social and study life.

3. To determine to what degree these women consider their experiences different from the experiences of other women students.

Significance of the Study

Australia has the highest population per capita of students from other nations in the world. Approximately 29% of Australian students in universities are international students. Despite the financial crisis of 2008–2009, international students have continually chosen Australia over other countries as their study destination of choice (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010). Challenges facing Saudi women arise from certain views commonly associated with the Islamic religion, to which they are affiliated. Specifically, the international phenomenon of terrorism has worsened the experiences of Saudi women choosing to study at Flinders University. Typically, the Muslim community is perceived as synonymous with terror and war: ‘Muslims are terrorists, especially girls with scarves’ (quoted by Mansouri & Trembath, 2005).

Research questions

This qualitative study aims at documenting and analysing the perceptions of Saudi women students living and studying at Flinders university.

The study will seek answers to the following research questions;

1. To what extent do Saudi women studying at Flinders University experience stereotyping?
2. How have the stereotypical experienced by Saudi women affected their social and study life?
3. To what extent do the Saudi women consider their experiences different from the experiences of other women students studying at Flinders University?

Theoretical Framework

The lens through which this research was viewed and conducted relates to several concepts. Identify formation and development is important in terms of the population that was studied and their life stage. Considering religion and culture, especially as it pertains to Saudi Arabia is central to understanding the context of the participant university students. Stereotyping, discrimination and Islamophobia are core framework concepts by which the lived experiences of the participants were understood and interpreted.

Summary

Chapter One introduces the study by discussing its purpose and what makes it significant. The research questions are determined, and an overview of the theoretical framework that influenced the study is presented.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature

This literature review has been conducted to identify key research studies on the stereotyped views facing Muslim women globally and in Australian universities. This will support the present study's exploration of the experiences of Saudi women studying in Australia and will highlight key gaps in knowledge. This review includes background information on the culture and religion of Saudi Arabia, theoretical perspectives on the issue of stereotyping, especially in the context of Saudi women studying in international locations.

Saudi Religion and Culture

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic nation. As noted by the study of Gannon & Pillai (2013), the nation is considered to be the birthplace of Islam and as such, the practice of any faith other than Islam is prohibited. Islamic beliefs also play a major role in defining how politics and gender roles in the country are enacted. According to Pharaon (2004), Islam underpins all aspects and factors of life in the entire country. The king serves as both the political and religious leader in the country. This fact is extremely important to understanding that when talking about Saudi female students, religion serves as the main essence of their culture and driver of their daily lifestyles.

Culture is a concept with many definitions as seen by many different scholars. As defined by "Sir Edward Burnett Tylor" (2000) culture is a complex whole that entails knowledge, art, morals, belief and customs among other human endeavours (Marsella, Dubanoski, Hamada, & Morse, 2000)

Another definition of culture is by Avrush states that cultures consist of patterns, which may be explicit or implicit, and that represent behaviour acquired and passed on through symbols, all of which add up to the achievements of human beings throughout history (Murray, 2000). He added that culture consists of both traditional ideas and the values attached to them. Other scholars have argued that culture is partly a product of action and partly a conditional element of future action (Bram, 1953). According to Alder, (1997), culture is a derivative of experiences, which are devised, organised learned by members of a community (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2012) . Also, culture is a programming structuring of the mind that differentiates one group from another (Hofstede & culture, 2011).

Yet another definition says that culture is a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour common to a group of individuals, but unique to each person and communicated from generation

to generation (Matsumoto et al., 1996). According to Hong (2009), culture is the network of knowledge that consists of learned routines of thinking, feeling, and interacting with others, in addition to substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world. This last definition relates closely to the culture of Saudi Arabia, where the common value of Islam, that all knowledge stems from religion, is shared because of the collectivist nature of the culture.

The Islamic faith values knowledge as an extremely important value in everyday life. Islamic teachings instruct that knowledge is a gift given by Allah, which leads humans towards humility and peace. On the other hand, ignorance and lack of education lead to extremism. The concept of culture will act as an essential part of this research study because the study aims at identifying and assessing the cultural shocks that Saudi female university students experience while living and studying in Australia.

The Saudi Arabian culture is derived from ancient traditions and customs. It is socially and legally allowed to enforce certain restrictions regarding the dress code and general behaviour of women in public. For instance, until recently women were not allowed by law to drive in Saudi Arabia. Gender segregation is also practised and remains a common feature of present day Saudi culture (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013).

Muslim Women

When looking at Muslim women in general, their role in society is mainly dictated by religion. Outsiders may see Saudi women as oppressed because of the religious requirements that women must follow, in contrast with the comparative freedom allowed to their male counterparts. However, Gannon and Pillai (2013), point out that Saudi women do not perceive their role in society as oppressed or negative in any way; rather, they see restrictions as a way to give them greater security. To them, the act of being covered and being separated from men reduces the probability of physical harm and harassment and helps them to maintain their piety. It is possible that the role of Muslim women in society has been misinterpreted over the years by observers in western society. A study by Spencer (2002) points out that Muhammad did create areas of women's rights; for example, passages in the Quran gave women rights to inheritance and divorce long before western cultures did the same.

And yet it is still possible to argue against the treatment that Saudi women receive based on how they themselves interpret situations. Macias argued that some people have understood the Quran in a literal manner, to be marginalising women, although that was not the case

(Macias, 2016). Over the years education has been regarded as a corrective factor that may slowly change how Saudi society understands the role of women. A better understanding of the experiences of women Saudi students who are passing through Flinders University may contribute to a broader discussion around international educational opportunities and encounters.

One of the major contemporary contributors to negative impressions of Muslims and Islam is the media (Navarro, 2010). Normally, the press undermines Islam and Muslims by presenting Islamic culture as regressive. In particular, the headscarf, or hijab, donned by Muslim women has perhaps come to symbolise repression (Meer & Modood, 2009). Over the past decade, the coverage of Muslims in western media has increased, despite their still being a minority group. This change has been attributed to the growth of the Muslim population in the US and the association of terrorism with the Islamic religion (Haddad and Smith (2002).

According to a study by Selod (2015), Muslims face pervasive racism. He found that Americans are discriminated against and scrutinised at a greater degree if they are identified as Muslims. Without religious markers, it is easier for Muslim Americans to pass as a non-Muslim and hence avoid heightened scrutiny or discrimination (Selod, 2015). Thus, women wearing the hijab experience negative scrutiny and association with terrorism due to the visibility of the scarf (Badr, 2004). When compared to women not wearing it, Muslim women wearing the hijab were more likely to be questioned by random strangers about their American values (Selod, 2015). A woman wearing a hijab faces more prejudice than a man with a beard, leading to a rise in discrimination cases, especially after September 11 (Sekhon, 2003). Women wearing a hijab are targets for verbal as well as physical assaults by mere association of the hijab with terrorism. A study by Navarro Cankar (2002) found that the media plays a vital role in the racial profiling of Muslim women, as it reinforces the generalisation of the Muslim woman to a stereotyped image.

The Hijab and Religion

This section deals specifically with studies on Muslim women and the veil. Women's rights and freedoms vary among Arab countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia when women are in public they are required to cover their entire bodies (with a long robe (abaya)) and to wear headscarves to cover their hair (Al-Ma'Seb, 2006). By providing nuanced analyses of Muslim women's experiences of the veil, several studies (Hoodfar, 1992, 2003; McDonough, Ruby, 2006) have challenged the western colonialist construction of veiled women as oppressed and subjugated by

Islamic patriarchy. As such, these studies have highlighted the significance of women's resistance and agency by calling into question the one-dimensional treatment of veiling as a symbol of Islamic oppression. Hoodfar (2003) has suggested examining veiling in a broader framework that considers individual freedom of choice. In her opinion, considering such a framework enables one to view a veiled Muslim woman as an active agent, rather than a passive subject. In fact, in her study, Hoodfar emphasised the voluntary nature of the veiling practice, as well as its multiple meanings, from the varied perspectives of Muslim women who have voiced their narratives in the study.

Abu-Lughod (1998) discusses the practice of veiling among many Muslim women in the Middle East and believes that the trend toward veiling among these women is as much a symbol of modernity as demonstrated by the upper- and middle-class Muslim women who took off their veil in the name of modernity about a century ago. In addition, Hoodfar (1992) highlighted the Oriental and colonial image of veiled Muslim women commonly presented in western societies, emphasising the need to seriously consider the actual lived experiences of Muslim women. She discussed veiling as a 'complex, dynamic, and changing cultural practice' and also argued that the "assumption that veiling is a static practice which symbolises the oppressive nature of patriarchy in Muslim societies has prevented social scientists and western feminists from examining Muslim women's accounts of their lives, hence perpetuating the racist stereotypes which are ultimately in the service of patriarchy in both societies" (p. 5).

A study by Bullock (2002) highlighted the discrimination that many veiled Muslim women experience in Toronto 'based upon the way they dress' (p. 84). She believed that erasing the voices of Muslim women from the dominant discourses about the meaning of the hijab is similar to excluding women's perspectives and voices from the mainstream discourses — the same factor that has stimulated the emergence of different waves of feminism. Bullock discusses the oppressive nature of the veil in the eyes of many non-Muslim people. According to Bullock, there are three different approaches to the study of veiled Muslim women. She believes that the first approach, which is 'the most simplistic and unsophisticated view of the veil is "the pop-culture view"'. The underlying assumption of this view is that Muslim women are oppressed by Islamic patriarchy, and the veil is a symbol of that. Bullock (2002) argues that this view has 'an unconscious adherence to liberalism and modernization theory'. The second view, which is more sophisticated, is the liberal feminists' view of the veil. Some feminists in this group try to listen

to the voices of veiled Muslim women, while others do not. Nonetheless, all feminists firmly believe in the oppressive nature of the veil (Bullock, 2002).

Bullock's third approach to the study of the veil is the 'contextual approach'. This approach considers the influence of popular media in shaping public opinions about Muslims. The politics surrounding the construction of Muslim women's identities in western societies has been the subject of several studies. Such studies have discussed the effects of popular media in building and shaping public opinion about Muslim women and their identity in western societies (Khosrojerdi, 2015). These studies discussed how the popular media projects a distorted picture of veiled Muslim women as oppressed and passive (Bilge, 2010; Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Khiabany & Williamson, 2008). In their study of some novels on Muslim girls and their lives in the Middle East, Sensoy and Marshal (2010) pointed out that they were mostly written by non-Muslim women after the events of September 11. The authors argued that these young adult novels serve as de facto legitimisation for the US-led incursions in the region as a project of women's emancipation. According to Sensoy and Marshal (2010), negative, reductive stereotypes about Muslim women are prevalent in western societies. These include stereotypes that see Muslim women as veiled, nameless, silent, and in need of rescue by the West. Another study was conducted by Horwedel (2006) to discuss the American media and the role it plays in portraying a distorted picture of Islam and Muslims and perpetuating misconceptions about them. The foregoing literature suggests that the hijab has been the major discriminating factor for Muslim women in the international context because to many western people, the veil is a potent symbol of oppression.

Perspectives on Identity and Stereotypes

In a survey conducted by Kassissieh (2005), findings indicated that identity formation is one of the major tasks of adolescence. Recently, the ways in which migration affects the process of identity formation has attracted substantial research (Kassissieh, 2005). The new era youth of Muslim-American origins are coming of age in the context of ongoing social and political tensions as the Muslim population grows in the US. According to Kassissieh (2005), the hijab is identified as a powerful visual symbol for identifying Muslims; it thus holds very different meanings for Muslims and non-Muslims.

Different trends have been recorded, where some women are fighting for their right to wear the hijab, whereas others are fighting for their right not to wear the hijab — all depending

on the political climate in the places they live. Kassissieh (2005) notes that Muslim-American women's decision making concerning the veil is a journey towards the experience of being a Muslim woman in America. The study goes on to examine the ways through which adolescent Muslim-American girls born of immigrant parents perceive the role of the hijab in their lives and how this also affects their attitudes towards a Muslim identity. The study notes that these adolescent Muslim-American women have developed their identity uniquely, dynamically, personally, and distinctly, based on both individual and community contexts.

Saudi women have developed effective methods for maintaining their strengths even as they regularly experience Islamophobia living in American society Kassissieh (2005). As Kassissieh notes in her study, the responses and life stories reflect a process of exclusive self-definition that is described by the current theories of identity development. Her study concludes by identifying the ways in which minority youth employ the use of peers, cultural symbols and individual creativity in growing and developing within a society characterised by discrimination and racism.

Similarly, a study by Dimandja (2017), indicated that Muslim international students studying in American universities are constantly experiencing personal growth. This is despite the fact that these students face serious challenges related to their race, religion and gender identity. The study goes to note that how they meet these challenges influences the academic and social experiences of these students and their overall integration on campus. Dimandja (2017) indicates that despite the uniqueness of their experiences, there has been little research focused on Muslim students. Her study focused on understanding the lived experiences of Muslim international students studying on American campuses. She explores the ethnic, religious and gender experiences of these students and also the influences impacting their academic and social integration. She examines the concept of Islamophobia to deconstruct how the Muslim students perceived and experienced their lives on university campuses (Dimandja, 2017),

Dimandja found that the students experienced a range of problems. The major ones were classroom challenges related to linguistic limitations and their evaluation by other students based on their academic performance or racial identity. As noted in the study, the expression of Muslim identity via wearing of the hijab often resulted in exclusion and a feeling of resistance. Micro-aggressions, partiality, or resentment (of others) if absent from campus for religious obligations

were everyday experiences for these students. Across the board, the students felt intimidated, discriminated against, marginalised and fearful.

On a similar note, Cole and Ahmadi, (2003) explored the perceptions and experiences of women who veiled on campuses in the Midwest of the US. That study indicated that, although there was an increase recorded in the number of international students, few studies had been carried out to examine the experiences of Muslim students — specifically Muslim women who wear the hijab — studying within university settings and how this may influence their development, both academically and socially. Therefore Cole and Ahmadi, (2003), carried out their study to provide an understanding of the college experience and perceptions of Muslim women wearing the hijab. In the process they sought to understand the reasons for wearing the veil, to document the women's views on the college environment and whether or not their experiences on campus influenced any decision to continue wearing the hijab.

The findings from that study suggest that the wearing of the hijab is influenced by parental expectations, peer pressure, and religious obligations. However, it is also noted that the wearing of the hijab acts as an outward sign of Muslim identity. In the Muslim context, the veil signifies modesty and pure interpersonal behaviour. Cole and Ahmadi (2003) note that misconceptions about Muslim women are prevalent in the US campus community. Most people greatly misunderstand the hijab and tend to perceive it as a symbol of women's inferiority to men. This is primarily due to a lack of information and understanding by the general population.

The gender gap index is a measure of disparity between men and women in four areas: health, economy, politics, and education. If a gender imbalance favours women, it is taken to not affect this index. In a study conducted by Omair (2017) the nature of stereotypes regarding Saudi women in contemporary Saudi Arabia was investigated. The study noted that the Global Gender Gap has recorded extremely high levels of inequality between women and men in Saudi Arabia. However there exists little knowledge about how women within Saudi Arabian society regard this perceived inequality. As indicated by Omair (2017) there are numerous factors in the history of Saudi Arabia which has led Saudi society towards the formation of restrictive gender stereotypes that are at times harmful to women but there is a shortage of research discussing gender stereotypes within Saudi Arabian society (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2010). Consequently, there is limited data regarding the views held by men and women in Saudi Arabia about the relative social position of women in the country. The study goes on to indicate that there are numerous

stereotyped associations linked with Saudi women: for example, they are thought to be virtuous, submissive, isolated and less competent.

Also, Omair (2017) notes that there have been many studies by western scholars on the gender stereotypes held about Saudi women and effects of these on them. However, the findings of these studies tend to be very different from how Saudi society thinks of women. From a global perspective, the Saudi culture and religion may appear to privilege men over women. As the Islamic religion is considered the backbone of Saudi Arabia's culture, it is naturally seen to contribute to the stereotyped image that Saudi women may be facing. One debate behind this has been the issue of the veil, which Saudi women are required to adopt. However, as Omair (2017) notes, the other side of the coin is that religion in Saudi culture has always worked in the interests of women by ensuring that they are protected at all times against physical threats and attacks from men.

From a global perspective, Omair (2017) also refers to a common belief that all Saudi women in foreign countries, Australia included, must be 'refugees' fleeing oppression. Omair refutes this notion, pointing out that many Saudi women have gone to foreign countries for educational purposes and through scholarship programs provided by the Saudi government. Other concerns have been raised about the possibility that Saudi women could be terrorists, basing this belief on the fact that they are Muslim and Muslims have been significantly linked to terrorist attacks. Omair feels this argument is entirely false because many Muslims are not terrorists at all and it is unfair to accuse all people from a given society based on the wrongs done by a few people.

Stereotypes Associated with Saudi Women at University

According to Dey (2012), even though studies on the experiences of college students have progressed in the last few years — studies that address identity development in a range of different populations — a gap still exists in studies about Muslim-American college students and how their experiences in university influence their development as young adults. It was noted that the number of Muslim students studying abroad is increasing. However, there still seems to be a level of hostility, stereotyping, and prejudice against the Muslim population in America and around the world, which has created a negative atmosphere in higher education institutions and hinders the ability of universities to fully meet the needs of Muslim-American students. (Taylor et al., 2014).

One study (Dey, 2012) was conducted to determine how Muslim-American college students construct their identity in the context of their lives at college in America. The study found that there are four major identity dimensions for Muslim-American college students: religion, citizenship, culture, and gender.

A study by Stubbs & Sallee (2013) found that even though Muslim students are a large presence in American universities, they are largely ignored by campus policies and resources. This has led to them finding it very challenging to reconcile the experiences they have in universities with their religious values and practices. The study also found, however, that many students have acquired the necessary tools for successfully navigating membership of both American and Muslim cultural groups. These students usually evaluate each cultural setting before invoking a particular identity. Nevertheless, as indicated by the study, the Muslim students learn never to expect special treatment from the university or their peers even as they struggle to fit into their various settings at university or in the wider community.

Similarly, Alandejani (2013) points out that scholars are exposed to new cultures, knowledge, opportunities, and ideas about reforming systems in their home countries when they study in other countries. When these scholars finally return to their home country after completing their education, it is expected that they will use whatever they learned in the host countries through the implementation of their new skills in employment. Alandejani (2013) notes that these repatriated scholars sometimes face colleagues that resist changes they may want to implement, or the institutions often fail to provide a favourable environment or tools that would be useful to them in transferring their newly acquired knowledge. Alandejani's research (2013) discussed the experiences of female assistant professors from Saudi Arabia who travelled to the United States to further their education. Analysis of the data collected from this study indicated that Saudi female academics went through a kind of reverse culture shock when they returned home. As parents, they also expressed deep concern for their children's welfare as they struggled to readjust.

Aziz (2017) sought to gain an understanding of the religious development and sense of belonging of Muslim-American students at Rowan University in the US. That study indicated that the students felt a high level of marginalisation and discrimination, with their physical appearance of looking Muslim given as the primary reason.

Currently Saudi Arabian women are being recognised for their achievements in roles not usually associated with women. For instance, studies have acknowledged recent developments by women such as Dr. Thoraya Ahmed for being the very first woman to chair a mainstream United Nations organisation, and another respected woman is Hayat Sindi, who invented a multipurpose probe referred to as 'Mars'. Hanley (2001) acknowledges that there is a popular and widely embraced stereotype of Saudi women as being invisible members of their society, due to limitation of mobility or being unable to have dealings with men outside their family. The study reports that it is felt that the Saudi Arabian society attempts to impede the development of women in a society highly dominated by men. However Hanley (2001) pointed out that Dr. Thoraya Ahmed refutes this view of Saudi Arabian women, claiming that the personalities of Saudi women are as varied as their families. Hanley (2001) conducted a visit to two schools, where she explored the issue of whether Saudi women had the capacity to attain any goal they desired. Hanley (2001) visited Riyadh's Institute of Public Administration where Dr. Hanan is the general director of the women's department. The researchers observed that the women's department shares a single auditorium with the men at the institute. It is evident that the IPA is a nurturing ground for future managers and leaders. Throughout this study, the author is quite clear that indeed women play a significant role and do not fit the usual stereotypes associated with them.

Other similar studies have been carried out to deconstruct the stereotypes that Saudi women have been subjected to in western discourse. A survey by Alwazzan and Rees, (2016), indicated that research from within western contexts suggests that there are considerable inequalities amongst men and women medical educators in the workplace. Alwazzan and Rees (2016) performed individual interviews, however, where the participants expressed their positive views and experiences around career progression, leadership, and non-gendered workplace cultures. A study performed by Yakaboski, Perez-Velez and Almutairi (2018) explored the experiences and interactions of Saudi graduate students with American faculty, staff and students. Despite the positive experiences noted from the responses recorded, there were still some negative interactions, including incidents related to direct and indirect discrimination, the lack of cultural and religious understanding, and pervasive gender stereotypes for Muslim women who veil.

Impacts of the Stereotypes on Women

Different studies have been carried out to explore the impact Muslim women experience when they face prejudice based on stereotypes. A study by Razek and Coyner (2013) indicates that the number of Saudi students studying in the United States has greatly risen during the past decade. Saudi Arabia is a nation whose cultural background is at odds with the contemporary principles of US higher education institutions, and this has led to Saudi students facing several challenges in their international study placements. As indicated in the study, cultural challenges are the greatest and most frequent of the challenges. Razek and Coyner (2013) conducted a study to explore the relationship between the cultural beliefs and the academic achievement of the students, with particular focus on the cultural aspects of Saudi students at Mid-Western universities. The findings of the study suggest that there exist various cultural implications that arise from the rising number of Saudi students in the American higher education institutions. Razek and Coyner (2013) examined this situation and reported the existence of a cultural construct that had serious effects on the students' ability to transition to the new society, academic life, and social life.

In their paper, McGuire, Casanova and Davis (2016), indicated that often religious scholarships and spirituality studies are slanted towards Christian students' perspectives and fail to engage with the complex cultural, gendered and racial dynamics that exist within these faculties. There are also few studies that examine the experiences of people who occupy more than one marginalised social environment. The authors carried out a study to explore how a black, Muslim, immigrant, female college student from Saudi Arabia interacted across multiple communities; the study showed how she was influenced by her gender, religion, immigration, racial and ethnic identity, and how she employed different strategies to navigate the diverse educational spaces in which she interacted (McGuire, Casanova & Davis, 2016).

A recent article by Abedalthagafi (2018) discusses the great attention that has been paid to Saudi women regarding their lifestyles. Despite this evident interest, the writer suggests that there are some realities that the world has failed to understand about Saudi women. The reality today is that Saudi Arabian women have been involved with and openly recognised for conducting real science (Abedalthagafi, 2018). The fact that female Saudi students in the international setting are made to feel the stigma of being from a developing country is inescapable. There are a lot of mixed opinions regarding whether Saudi women can work

alongside men. The general community regards Saudi women as being very unusual, as the article indicates. In general, Abedalthagafi suggests that Saudi women are made to feel left out and are often subjected to gender-based stereotypes from staff and other students in international education environments. The author concludes that stereotyping occurs unconsciously, and that women from Saudi Arabia need to ready themselves to face it.

Reviewing the studies discussed, the available literature generally points to the experiences of Muslim women in international university settings but there is a literature gap in the area of documenting the experiences and stereotypes that Saudi women face in Australian universities. As mentioned earlier, Saudi as a nation is substantially identified by its adherence to the religion of Islam: its tenets form the country's supporting structure and its teachings inform all significant national decisions. The available literature suggests that the hijab has been the most overt driver of discrimination for Muslim women in the international context, because to many western people, the veil is a tangible symbol of oppression. There is a need for more literature and research to provide deeper insights around the use of the veil and its connection with Islamophobia. Ultimately, we need to eliminate the stereotypes associated with Saudi women studying in Australia.

Summary

Chapter Two examined the literature that provided relevant background to this research, especially as it relates to current Saudi culture the Islamic faith, female Muslim women and international students in Australia.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology and Methods

Chapter Three addresses the methodology and methods used for this study. A qualitative design approach was adopted for the collection and analysis of the data. This chapter describes and discusses the recruitment of participants, the sample population, and ethical considerations.

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological research approach to answer the three questions posed at the outset of the study:

- To what degree do Saudi women feel that they experience stereotyping at Flinders University?
- In what ways do these women feel that stereotypical experiences have influenced their social and study life?
- How do these women believe their experiences compare with the experiences of other women students?

It is important to note that this research investigates the experiences recorded by women about their perceptions and personal experiences. As such, a qualitative design approach was used in the collection and the analysis of the data of the research to capture the essence and detail of these accounts and to help the voices of particular women to be heard. The rest of this chapter will outline the qualitative research design used in the study. This will include describing the sample population for the study, the recruitment of participants, how the data was collected and analysed, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological design. A major strength that is noted with the use of qualitative studies is that they are able to capture feelings shared by people in complex situations. Creswell (1998) Posits that the best situation to choose the use of phenomenology is when the research problem requires a profound understanding of human experiences common to a group of people (Padilla-Díaz, 2015).

As indicated by (Donalek, 2004), phenomenology is able to identify meanings from the perceptions provided by the research subjects and which can then be modified and interpreted in the analysis. Donalek (2004), further explains that phenomenology is based on assumptions that there is an ‘essence’ within experiences which is shared in the telling. These experiences can be bracketed, analysed, and compared to identify their significance.

A phenomenological study follows the process of first addressing the current phenomenon, selecting participants willing to be part of the study, collecting data for the study through observation and interviews, and then analysing the collected data to identify the themes that bring meaning to the phenomenon (Donalek, 2004). This particular study takes the form of ‘descriptive phenomenology’, which Creswell defines as ‘the study of personal experience’, being an investigation that requires a ‘description or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation’ (Creswell, 1998).

Study Setting and Sample Population

The study was carried out at Flinders University in South Australia. The samples were selected through purposeful sampling techniques. The target population for the study included seven postgraduate or undergraduate Saudi women students studying at Flinders University. These students were required to narrate in great detail their experiences at the university. The women were all followers of the Islamic faith. Six of the seven habitually wore the hijab.

Inclusion Criteria

The researcher interviewed seven participants who were selected based on the criteria sampling approach. The criteria that were used in the selection of the participants was as follows:

- The participant had to be a female Muslim student from Saudi Arabia.
- She must be taking an undergraduate or graduate program at Flinders University.
- She must be over 18 years old.
- She must have good comprehension of the English language and be willing to answer the posed questions in English.
- She should agree to participate in the study by sharing her experiences.

Recruitment of Participants

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A). To recruit seven participants, a flyer was placed around the university asking for participants and explaining eligibility requirements to participate in the study (Appendix B). The flyers were posted after ethics approval had been obtained. On responding to the flyer, students were sent an information sheet about the research project and invited to an interview.

Seven female Islamic students responded to the flyers about the project and agreed to be participants in this study. The seven students have been given pseudo names and are described in the following table.

Table 1: Demographic Data on the Study Participants

Participant	Name	Level of study	Marital status	Time in Australia	Wearing the hijab
1	Rana	PhD	Married	9 months	No
2	Maha	Masters	Single	Since 2015	Yes
3	Hana	PhD	Married	Nearly 3 years	Yes
4	Yasmeen	Masters	Married	2 years	Yes
5	Mariam	Masters	Married	2 years	Yes
6	Ola	Undergraduate	Single	6 years	Yes
7	Renad	Undergraduate	Single	4 years	Yes

Each of the seven participants signed a consent form (Appendix C), completed the whole interview, and none asked to end the conversation, to terminate early or appeared to be disturbed by the discussion. Initially, all participants were hesitant to report unpleasant experiences and they all began the interview by stating that they were happy and that everything was fine. Gradually, as the questions became more specific in terms of asking about negative experiences, other perspectives started to emerge. Of the seven study participants, five of them only described negative experiences after I had asked more general questions about their lives.

In the course of the interview, it was emphasised that their identity would be confidential and their privacy would not be violated; nor would any of the information collected via audio tape be disseminated to the general public. This assurance was also outlined on the information sheet they all received (Appendix D). The interviewer needed to gain the women's confidence and support each woman as she discussed more personal and emotional experiences. Only one woman was on the verge of tears but several women showed strong feelings. The researcher responded empathetically, maintaining eye contact, and she provided opportunities for each

woman to pause or take a break if necessary. Every one of the seven women asked to continue because they wanted to tell their story and have it documented. All of the participants seemed appreciative of the chance to be interviewed and share their experiences of their lives in Australia — both positive and negative. Several wanted to be informed about the results of the study and several continued talking after the tape recorder was switched off.

Data Collection

While collecting data for this study, a semi-structured interview guide was used. As noted by Moustakas, (1994), it is imperative to begin phenomenological interviews with conversations that will help create a comfortable atmosphere for the participants to express their experiences completely. The researcher took at least ten minutes at the beginning of the interview to engage with the respondents to help gain their confidence. This was also important in determining whether some of the sensitive questions might not be appropriate for some respondents. The interviews were carried out privately in a quiet room at the Oasis Centre or a study room at the university to ensure the anonymity of the participants and so that they felt as comfortable as possible when responding to the questions.

After ensuring the participant felt comfortable, the following questions were introduced into the conversation and the interviewees were given time to think and respond. The questions that were asked were as follows:

- Tell me about your experience here as a student? What it is like to be a student here?
- Do you enjoy your classes? How accommodating are the facilities at Flinders University for you as a Muslim woman?
- Have you had any experiences that have influenced your ability to study or have impacted your social life?
- Tell me about the experiences that have influenced your study and social life?
- What do you think about your study experiences whilst at Flinders University?
- Is there anything that would make it different for you compared to other female students?
- How do you feel about wearing religious coverings in Australia?
- Did wearing the hijab affect your ability to study or feel welcome at university?
- Did you find it easy to make friends at university?

- How would you describe interactions with people you encounter in public spaces i.e. shops, banks, doctors?
- Have you ever had or felt any negative experiences as a Muslim woman?
- Have you had any good experiences?
- As a Muslim woman have you ever felt uncomfortable whilst on campus?
- Have you ever felt invisible?

The interviews took approximately one hour and were recorded and then transcribed for analysis using the verbatim format (Appendix D). The researcher also collected further data through observation and note-taking during the interview. Secondary data obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics was useful in forming a template for the study. Data from the university database helped in verifying the demographics of the study participants.

Ethical Considerations

To avoid subjective bias, the researcher was careful to adopt an objective approach to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. This precaution was important considering that the researcher herself is a Saudi woman and therefore could fit in to either role: the researcher or the researched.

Ethical approval was granted for this study by Flinders University Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Participants were well informed about the study prior to taking part by filling out the participant information sheet (Appendix C) and providing consent (Appendix B). The participants were assured that their anonymity would be protected by giving each of them a pseudonym. There was no conflict of interest between the researcher and the participants.

Data Analysis

As indicated by (Merriam, Kim, & practice, 2012), a phenomenological study provides three processes for analysing data: reduction, horizontal variation and imaginative variation. Merriam et al. (2012) further indicates that use of reduction in a phenomenological study mainly involves going back to the essence of the experience to create an understanding of the structure or meaning. Moustakas (1994) also defines this process by indicating that phenomenological reduction is a process where each recorded experience is taken to be its own identity, allowing for the description of the underlying meanings and essences textually. Horizontal variation assigns all the data with equal value during the primary analysis phase. Moustakas (1994) adds

that imaginative variation involves the analysing of data through different perspectives to create new structural meaning.

This study used three levels of phenomenological analysis. The researcher first transcribed the recorded interviews to identify important information and exclude any verbal pauses. Then the researcher created axial themes, which, as noted by Ryan and Bernard (2003), are the most crucial part of the qualitative analysis. The themes were developed by first identifying the main themes and subsequently narrowing them down to those regarded as the most important and those that were supported by relevant data.

In the reduction phase, the researcher reviewed the responses provided by each participant separately and determined how these responses were related to stereotypes that female Saudi international students face in the global setting, as reported in previous literature. This phase was instrumental in extracting the essential qualities of the experience and in including the researcher's observations. In the horizontal stage, the responses of the participants were categorised and coded to relate to each participant. In the imaginative phase, meanings were suggested through the use of imagination, literature references and interpretation.

In analysing the recording of each participant it became clear that the comments included many aspects. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and considered carefully in its own right. Gradually, after all the interviews had been examined, it was possible to extract subject matter or themes that were recurrent across the interviews. In some cases, everyone mentioned a specific theme and in other cases themes were discussed by some but not all of the women. However, the themes that were identified were mentioned by at least four of the seven women. In this way, the possible themes were narrowed down to those considered most important (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The themes will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Summary

Chapter Three discussed the methodology and methods used for this study. A qualitative design approach was adopted in the collection and the analysis of the data. This chapter described and discussed the recruitment of participants, the sample population, and ethical considerations.

.CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of this study. Following a thorough analysis of the interviews and the participants' comments, eight themes were identified which had been mentioned by at least four participants with the exception of theme seven, the use of university support services. The eight themes are amplified and illustrated in this chapter.

Themes and Subthemes Identified from Participants' Comments

Theme 1: The hijab and its significance

Theme 2: Social experiences

a) Positive experiences

b) Negative experiences

Theme 3: University and study life experiences

a) Positive experiences

b) Negative experiences

Theme 4: Negotiating life in a western society and culture

Theme 5: Resulting emotions from experiences of living in Australia

Theme 6: Impact of public events:

a) Positive experiences

b) Negative experiences

Theme 7: Use of support services

Theme 8: Coping strategies

Table 2: Number of themes mentioned by each participant (pseudo names)

Theme number	1 Rana	2 Maha	3 Hana	4 Yasmeen	5 Mariam	6 Ola	7 Renad
1 The Hijab and its significance	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2. Social experiences (Positive experiences & Negative experiences)	x	x	x	x	x	x	
3. University & study life (Positive experiences & Negative experiences)	x	x	x	x	x	x	

4. Negotiating life in a Western society & culture	X	X	X	X			
5. Resulting emotions from living in Australia	X	X		X		X	X
6. Impact of public events (Positive experiences & Negative experiences)		X	X		X	X	X
7. Use of support services (At least one)	X						
8. Coping strategies	X			X		X	X
9. Perceived reasons for negative stereotyping	X	X		X	X	X	

Illustrations and Amplification of the Themes

Theme 1: The hijab and its significance.

All of the participants mentioned the hijab as a major factor in their social encounters. Three participants noted public reactions when wearing the hijab in different ways — either covering the whole face except the eyes (called the niqab) — or the more common way to wear it, which is just to cover the head, but leaving the face exposed. Participant 2 (Maha) told of her experiences when she first arrived in Australia and she was covering her face, specifically her mouth and nose. ‘I encountered some problem because I covered my face, especially when in a restaurant. They were just staring at me’. (Maha). She experienced more negative reactions compared to when she started covering her head only.

Participant 1 (Rana) gave several examples of her encounters.

‘I remember one of my friends got on the bus and people were making fun of her because she was wearing her hijab and because she was sitting in the area reserved for elderly people because she was getting off just two stops later. They were making fun of her saying “Are you old?” “Are you disabled?” stuff like that, so I think yeah, she felt very offended. She didn’t unfortunately do anything; she just felt that it wasn’t worth complaining about it’. (Rana)

‘If you’re just wearing normal jeans and a t-shirt you’ll probably fit in with everyone and nobody will actually give you even a second look but if you’re looking different in your hijab, I’d say people actually look at you differently as though you are invisible.

Nobody's going to interact with you even though you are still visible because everybody can see that you're different'. (Rana)

'If we wear a hijab or you wear an abaya or you wear a niqab people look at you differently'. (Rana)

Another participant added, 'And he didn't tell her anything, and I was the only one who wore a hijab. I didn't like his reaction with me and immediately I thought it was because of, you know, my hijab'. (Mariam)

Theme 2: Social experiences.

Participants reported positive and negative experiences from within their social contexts and their interactions within a community in daily life. The activities for interaction therefore include such things as shopping, transportation, leisure walks, going to community centres. Following are examples of some of the comments made by the participants, which reflected their positive and negative experiences. The positive experiences were greatly valued by the participants and highly appreciated. The negative experiences were remembered with pain and anxiety.

Positive experiences in social contexts.

'I liked how people looked out for me even though they were not the same religion or the same country'. (Renad)

'I've noticed here in Adelaide especially people are very friendly and if I walk into shops whoever will see me will be like "Hi, hello, could I help you with anything?" I feel that people here are always used to people from different nationalities and different cultures and it's not difficult for them to accommodate and be just very welcoming. (Rana)

'Some staff in the hospital, just came and said they were sorry for what happened in New Zealand'. (Maha)

'Most of my relationships with the people or interaction with the people are positive. I didn't encounter anything I could call a negative situation with them'. (Mariam)

'People here in Adelaide are very nice, not just in uni but also generally. People are very friendly and those people being racist I would say they are uneducated people or homeless people. But generally, I like people here, and they are very friendly'. (Ola)

Negative experiences in social contexts.

Almost all of the participants in this study reported being treated and perceived differently by many non-Muslim people while engaging in social interactions within their community. They pointed out that restaurant workers, doctors or store assistants showed hesitancy when responding to Muslim women or treating them. This made them feel stressed in social situations and feeling that the reactions they received were based on people's negative stereotypes about Muslim women.

Yasmeen narrated the story of her friend who experienced negative stereotypes at the shopping mall, saying, 'Last month we went shopping at the mall and there was a guy following us and he was saying bad words like, "You don't have to wear this" and "Why she is wearing a niqab?" He was like not happy!'

She also said that her friend experienced that several times and that people kept saying things like 'Why do you wear it? You don't have to. You're in Australia now and it's not Saudi Arabia and it's not your country'. Yasmeen said that they would keep repeating things like that to her friend.

Other participants added the following comments:

'Some of my friends do feel that they get discriminated or not favoured in certain circumstances. Like sometimes they experience that white people are privileged or preferred over them, so you feel like there's a bit of unfairness by the Australians. I don't mean it in a bad way but Australians are favoured in placements, in jobs, in doing specific tasks while maybe the others who are covered or who are Muslims may feel that they are not trusted well enough or someone thinks they don't have the capability to do such a task or job'. (Rana)

'They say, "Disgusting" or they are just staring at me'. (Maha)

'I was standing up as you know on the tram. She pulled down my cover and just she started laughing. I just ignored her. I don't know why she did that. Then I fixed my cover and I looked at her and just ignored her'. (Maha)

'When I go to some place, especially at night time, I feel that I'm not in a good place because of all of the people start looking at me'. (Hana)

‘He just spat on me so but yeah, I didn’t do anything’. (Ola)

‘In the first year, especially when I just arrived in Adelaide, I faced many problems because I was covered. I covered because, as I told you, it’s just [covering] part of my nose and mouth. I didn’t wear burka. (Maha)

‘I was with my friend at a coffee shop and we noticed that one of the workers there didn’t welcome us and every time we went there she didn’t welcome us’. (Yasmeen)

‘There are many experiences. Yesterday I went to a restaurant with my friend and we were all Muslim girls or women, and when we got inside the restaurant the manager was not happy. I saw his face and he is not like happy — like he is saying something without saying it. He is showing us a face like he’s angry but when he turned his face to an Australian girl he smiled’. (Yasmeen)

‘At Flinders hospital, I was tired and I was waiting for my turn and there was a woman... I think her age was about sixty. She started looking at me and she said that “oh f*** you!” Sorry for saying this bad word, but really she just said that, and then she said, “You are a Muslim’. (Maha)

Theme 3: University and study life experiences.

The participant responses about university life and study were mostly positive, as they experienced friendliness from students and staff most of the time, accommodating facilities and friendliness from other international students from various backgrounds. They especially identified how the university environment felt safe and in general welcomed diversity and difference. There were, however, some negative experiences on campus although to a lesser extent. The quotations below illustrate both positive and negative reactions.

a) Positive experiences in university life.

‘All the workshops that are provided by the university are amazingly positive. I feel like the university gives a lot of support for students who either wear the hijab or niqab because some people have done well and not encountered anything [bad]’. (Rana)

‘Actually I’m very happy in the uni’. (Yasmeen)

‘They provide prayers room especially for Muslim people’. (Maha)

‘We have the Oasis as an area for us to pray and there’s also a club here at the university which is the Islamic Society. There’s also a Saudi Club, so all these things the university is providing support us because they have offered us these activities and places to actually go. The facilities are pretty great. There is also discrimination and, well, yeah, if you feel discriminated by someone because of your ethnic or religion or something you can actually report it and there will an investigation’. (Rana)

‘There are lots of faculties like if there was a big mosque, so when I want to pray I can find a very comfortable place and quiet’. (Yasmeen)

‘Study at Flinders University? My experience is good’. (Hana)

‘I think my experience here at Flinders so far has been really good. I’ve enjoyed a good nine months that I’ve spent here so far and I’ve seen that the university really cares about the students and they provide us all with help, guidance and any type of professional development as well’. (Rana)

‘Everything was good at Flinders University and there was no difference. There was no comparison between us as a Muslims and the other people’. (Maha)

‘I just want to add another thing. There is a gym only for females, which is very comfortable for us as Muslim women. So I can go there any, any time and it’s very cheap. As a student I find it good for us’. (Yasmeen)

‘They provide us a lot of services just as for the Australian people here. There is no difference between us’. (Maha)

‘I’m expecting a baby so my supervisors were very helpful to me. At first, no, I was very scared that they wouldn’t help me somehow but they are very nice at accommodating my placements and stuff like that to suit me’. (Ola)

‘As other students, I mean non-Muslim. There are many students from different cultures and different religions, so we’ve been treated the same’. (Yasmeen)

Negative experiences in university life.

Some participants felt that lecturers interacted with prejudice towards them. Participant 4 (Yasmeen) told of an incident between her and her lecturer where he refused to accept her enrolment in his class because the class has already started one week ago. This affected her

because it meant she had to take an extra semester. But then he accepted an Australian student even that though the class had started three weeks earlier. She explained her concerns, saying, 'So I am thinking is that because I'm Muslim or is that because I'm wearing hijab?'

Participant 5, Mariam, reported a similar episode.

'I used to come to my classes early, ten minutes early all the time. But one time I got confused with other classes so I was late about twenty minutes and as I went to the class the lecturer told me "You are late and you shouldn't be late so I will mark you absent". I said, "I'm sorry but I was confused with my other classes and this was my first time to be late"'.

The professor still marked her absent for coming 20 minutes late to class but then in contrast said nothing to an Australian student who came 45 minutes late to the same lecture on the same day.

She described her concern:

'It made me worry because if he treated me like this and its an easy thing to be late, how about giving me grades or how about, you know, evaluating me in my presentation or my assignments'. (Mariam)

'Maybe the only problem that I faced was when I started because as an international student or an Arabic student, I wasn't sure if I could participate in teaching some classes. One of my problems was that I was planning to attend one course to develop teachers. And one requirement for this course was to be offered some lectures or some lessons to teach. But I couldn't [do it] because nobody offered me any. It's part of the requirement for this course so I think it's because I'm international, but I don't know. I'm not sure if it's because I'm international because there is another international student and they were offered [lectures]. Yeah, but they already have some experience teaching classes but for me I don't have any experience. So what's the reason exactly? So, this is the only problem that I faced since I started studying here'. (Hana)

'The most recent experience was because I am a medical student and I see patients. One of the patients was racist about me wearing the hijab but I don't care about these situations or these experiences. I don't know, they don't affect me in a way. But I had to tell that patient that if he wouldn't stop I would stop treating him, so yeah'. (Ola)

Theme 4: Negotiating life in a western society and culture.

All the participants had to adjust to an unfamiliar environment, to adapt to different ways of responding to people they met and locating themselves in a new space and settling in. There was uncertainty and stress, especially around finding housing, because it was often challenging to find housing when there was sometimes a distrust of renting to Muslims. Participants met this challenge in various ways as illustrated by the following remarks.

‘Definitely, the first challenge is cultural. I’m adapting to a new culture, to a different place. The people here are different, the culture here is different, the atmosphere, the environment, all these things are different so it does take a bit of time for you to observe and then adapt’. (Rana)

‘Other challenges are that when you just want to settle in you need first to find a place and you need to open a bank account and you need to find a phone or a sim card’. (Rana)

‘I just remembered that one time, when I was in the second year here in Australia, I started to look for a house with my husband and some of the owners or the agents refused my applications because we are Muslim. We met all of the requirements they asked for but because we are Muslim — I think — they said they wouldn’t accept our application. We want to move to some place and not just any place, so we start to look at the places where most of the neighbours are Australian. They didn’t accept us because we are strangers. But [when we looked] in the places and areas that have people from other countries and other nationalities, they accepted our application straight away. But in the places where there are just Australian people living, they didn’t accept us’. (Hana)

‘Before we started to look in these areas, some friends told us that we wouldn’t find anything there but we thought at that time they are wrong and that we could find a place because Australian is a multicultural country. Australia is a multicultural country but the friends were right’. (Hana)

‘Where I live my neighbours have a dog that barks a lot and that’s something that I find kind of weird and disturbing coming from a country that doesn’t really have dogs as pets. The other thing is that a good friend of mine who I drive with on a weekly basis always

has her dog with her in the car and that kind of makes me worry and [feel] anxious'.
(Rana)

Theme 5. Resulting emotions from the experiences of living in Australia

A range of emotions stemmed from the divergent experiences participants faced in Australia. They described such emotions as depression, loneliness, fright, isolation, homesickness, sadness, and not feeling welcome in Australia. When asked how they felt whenever they had experienced reactions of prejudice, participants responded by saying they felt bad emotionally. The range of emotions is described in their statements below.

'When I arrived here in Adelaide, well I came with my husband but when he went back I think I was a little bit depressed. One useful thing from the university was the counselling services so I did go book an appointment and have a chat with some people there and they actually give me some kind of motivation and they made me at ease saying that things were going to get better'. (Rana)

I was like so insulted... I tried to contain myself but then I couldn't... then I started crying'. (Renad)

'I feel depressed when I see the way they're looking at me. I faced a lot of problems. I saw a lot of old people just staring at me. This broke my heart'. (Maha)

'We felt sad at that time because we couldn't find a house'. (Hana)

'This hurt me a little bit. I was depressed'. (Rana)

'The one time, I didn't feel invisible was when someone said that to me'. (Renad)

'I don't want to stay anymore here. Like if I see these things. I think it's not acceptable'.
(Yasmeen)

'I felt stressed about that. I couldn't feel comfortable when I went outside'. (Maha)

'We need to change this view and try to let people see us as we are normal people'.
(Rana)

‘But when I hear something negative like some people do something wrong I’m afraid people judge me based on what they see’. (Ola)

‘I can make friends easily with Asian people and other international students but with locals. I can even go out with other international students but not with locals, maybe because being a Muslim, when they go out they generally go out to clubs, pubs things like that and they go to drink. I don’t do that so yeah’. (Ola)

‘I liked how people looked out for me even though they were not the same religion or the same country’. (Renad)

‘Different in public spaces. I don’t feel like an outsider especially in Adelaide they are friendlier. I’ve been to Melbourne and I’ve been to Sydney and I feel like they are too fed up with Muslims so when they see another Muslim they are like, ‘Oh, another Muslim’ and that one time, I didn’t feel invisible when someone said that to me. I was like so insulted... I tried to contain myself but then I couldn’t... then I started crying. But you know but here in Adelaide I feel like they are friendlier. They say hi and they smile you know’. (Renad)

Theme 6: Impact of public events.

In recent years there have been highly publicised public events involving Muslim people, bringing them into the media in a very dynamic manner. The attack on mosques in New Zealand had taken place only months before this research project was undertaken and it was very much in the mind of some of the participants.

a) Positive experiences after public events.

‘I’m really sorry about what’s happened to the Muslims at the mosque in New Zealand. I’m sorry. I feel really happy though about the support that the people feel about us’. (Maha)

‘Last time when the crisis happened in New Zealand, they came and apologised to me and they didn’t need to apologise to me because it’s not their problem but because I’m a

Muslim and they didn't want me to feel sad for what happened. So they came and apologised to me so they were very nice really'. (Hana)

'You know what the prime minister did — I forgot her name — the prime minister there came and made claims and she was making a speech to calm the people and she said everything will be corrected. They took the man which was a very good reaction and actually I admire her for what she did and it's a good way to handle the distortion'. (Mariam)

b) Negative experiences after public events.

'We were all sad you know. It's not about religion or not about a race or some people or a country but it's about, you know, humanity. It's not good to attack kids which you know is not about religion but they are only with their parents so why you attack them? So this is a really bad thing'. (Mariam)

'I feel bad cause some people would think I'm one of them when I'm not'. (Ola)

'Sometimes I feel weird because during the accidents and incidents that happen like the one that happened in New Zealand and a few years ago what happened in Sydney there was a hostage taken in a café. I need to tell you about this event in Sydney in 2014 when a Muslim — I'm not sure he was Muslim — but he took hostages in a café for the whole day so after that I was really scared to go out and be in cinemas or something because I was worried that someone might take me as a hostage in closed spaces so I didn't go in closed spaces for like a couple of months I only go to school and come back home, so that affected me. When incidents like these happen I feel weird wearing my hijab because I feel like everyone's staring at me and thinking that I'm a terrorist but then like after a couple of months then I felt okay.' (Renad)

'Outside of campus, there are some times after an attack or something that happened either in Australia or internationally which was done by IS [Islamic State] or something like that. So I wouldn't say uncomfortable but I would feel like sad or bad sometimes.' (Ola)

I'm a shy person so sometimes it's very difficult for me to make friends with new people especially when I feel I'm not welcome but how can I say that sometimes I feel different but not unwelcome you know what I mean'. (Ola)

Theme 7: Use of support services.

Most of the students who were interviewed did not use the campus support services, which were defined as, Flinders Counselling Services, Oasis, the female gym and the Saudi Club.

Interestingly, all participants mentioned that they were aware of these services on campus. One participant, (Rana) knew about all these services and used three of them.

'One useful thing from the university was the counselling services so I did go and book an appointment and have a chat with some people there. They actually give you some kind of motivation and they make you at ease feeling that things are going to get better and actually they did get better'. (Rana)

Theme 8: Coping strategies.

Much of international study can be an exciting experience but the inability to cope with the new environment can also be very difficult for some students. Common challenges that international participants said they faced included language barriers, problems with finances, a new learning environment as well as accommodation rejections. When the student's culture is completely different from that of the host environment, these problems can easily be magnified. Many participants adopted a positive attitude to overcome these challenges and their responses indicated various coping strategies for dealing with negative stereotypes as seen in the following comments.

'To keep myself really busy with uni from the time I enter until I leave — I come in the morning at ten and I leave by five or six so most of my time is occupied here at uni. I feel when I go home — I feel yeah, it was a positive day'. (Rana)

'It's very comfortable for me, yeah, it's very comfortable [the hijab]. Yeah, there are some people who don't accept that, but it doesn't matter. This is my religion and they have to accept it'. (Yasmeen)

‘I have a bad habit of actually ignoring stuff like this — more so during exam time, so I ignored that and took the test, after which I went to discuss it with our international counsellor, who told me to not take it too seriously, that he was probably just joking. So yeah’. (Renad)

‘I always try to take the negative things positively.’ (Rana)

‘I always think about positive things and I’m not going to stay here anymore. I’ll go back to my country. I’ll have the other respect, the love from my country, from my people in my country. So I always think in positive terms, of positive things, in a positive way’. (Yasmeen)

I would like to add that if someone is going to read about my experiences, then be open and not restrict themselves to only international students. Some Australians are really nice and they are not all mean. If you see someone mean just ignore them, they are uneducated and they don’t know anything about Islam, so maybe you can educate them. But don’t let it bother you — know what I mean?’ (Renad)

‘I ignored them!’ (Rana)

‘No actually we just keep looking at each other for about half an hour’. (Yasmeen)

‘I talked to my friend. I told her about the situation and how he did that and she said like some people may do that, a situation like where they judge you based on your hijab or your look. I thought it’s too much for me when he does that. He just spits on me so but yeah, I didn’t do anything’. (Ola)

‘Always when this happened, I just had one semester left so I always think about this, things to make me happy. It’s almost done’. (Yasmeen)

Theme 9: Perceived reasons for negative stereotyping.

The participants raised some indicators that they perceived as the reasons for negative stereotyping experiences. They developed explanations for what had happened to them.

‘I faced a lot of problems I think because of my religion.’ (Maha)

‘Older people, I think were different from young people because I think the older people don’t think, but they use social media. They don’t know more about society now. That’s going to be different from younger people who know about everything; they’re open-minded and different from older people.’ (Maha)

‘So, I am thinking, Is that because I’m Muslim? Is that because I’m wearing a hijab? We were surprised, we were surprised by this action’ (Yasmeen)

‘This is what I thought about. He makes me think like this because me and my friends are girls and the others were girls so the difference between us and the other group was that we were wearing the hijab and they are not, so that’s made me think like that.’
(Yasmeen)

Summary

Chapter 4 focused on the findings of the study. The data and the interview contents were analysed and nine themes were identified. The themes included (1) The Hijab and Its Significance; (2) Social Experiences; (3) University and Study Life Experiences; (4) Negotiating life in a Western Society and Culture; (5) Resulting Emotions from the Experiences of Living in Australia; (6) Impact of public events; (7) Use of Support Services; (9) Perceived Reasons for Negative Stereotyping; (8) Coping Strategies. The nine themes were illustrated by examples from the participants’ comments.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Conclusion

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this study offer a window into the lives of a small group of Saudi Arabian Muslim women studying in Australia. The themes that emerged from their comments were identified by at least four of the women, with the exception of theme seven, and reflected a commonality about their lives and experiences. Although studying in different fields, they were all dedicated students and committed to obtaining their degrees and returning home to share their knowledge. This study found that Saudi women students reported relatively high levels of satisfaction in their experience as international students living and studying at Flinders University. Some of the challenges and uncomfortable moments they faced included incidents of racism, discrimination, lack of scaffolding support from their lecturers, taunting or Islamophobia, usually but not always, in the broader community rather than in the university. This finding is similar to other studies that have also shown that despite the challenges faced abroad, Saudi women students report a high level of satisfaction when living and studying as international students in Australia (Orth, 2015). Several studies have also illustrated that the academic success of minority students is greatly influenced by satisfaction with their educational institutions (Montelongo (2003); Jenkins (2001)).

The women struggled to find explanations for negative reactions that they received and the major reason they identified for negative reactions was antipathy towards their religion and especially their wearing of the hijab.

‘I faced a lot of problems I think because of my religion’.

‘I am thinking, is that because I’m Muslim; is it because I’m wearing the hijab?’

‘I remember one of my friends got on the bus and people were making fun of her because she was wearing her hijab.’

‘I’d say people actually look at you differently (wearing the hijab) so as though you are invisible’.

‘If we wear a hijab or you wear an abaya or you wear the niqab, people look at you differently’.

The reactions they encountered are not surprising, as much of the literature has indicated women who wear the veil are subject to hostility and negative reactions. Perez-Velez and Almutairi (2018) noted a lack of cultural and religious understanding and pervasive gender

stereotypes aimed at Muslim women who veil, and Abedalthagafi (2018) suggests that they are often subjected to gender stereotyping from others in international schools while Bullock (2002) in his book exposed the discrimination that many veiled Muslim women experience in Toronto 'based upon the way they dress' (p. 84).

It was salient how the participants also reflected on the impact of major political events involving Muslim people, such as the New Zealand attacks. Many positive expressions of support were received from the broader community, which were greatly appreciated, ('So they came and apologised to me so they were very nice really'.) At the same time it was inevitable that anxiety was generated which did affect the women. ('I was worried that someone might take me as a hostage in closed spaces, so I didn't go into enclosed spaces for like a couple of months — I only go to school'.)

What is happening in society generally has implications for the wellbeing and security of those students from other countries studying in Australia. In terms of what else emerged as a source of stress for many of the women, it was finding housing and adjusting to living in a non-western society, which they again had all managed to do successfully. This adjustment period included bouts of homesickness, loneliness, feelings of being an outsider and at times depression for some. These emotions did not deter the women from their studies and coping strategies were utilised, such as keeping busy with study ('I keep myself really busy with uni from the time I enter until I leave'); ignoring their feelings ('I ignored them'); adopting a positive attitude, ('I always try to take the negative things positively'); emphasising the positive ('Some Australians are really nice and they are not all mean'); utilising their friendship networks ('I talked to my friend'); doing things with other international students ('I can make friends easily with Asian people and other international students.')

This group of women showed resilience in the face of derogatory remarks or treatment and had developed the skill of coping with negative experiences in order to meet their larger goal of obtaining a degree while living in a western country. None of them took any actions when they were treated negatively, due to feeling vulnerable as an international student and an outsider in Australian society. They responded by ignoring what had happened or placing the experience within a larger context, such as seeking an explanation for the behaviour, reminding themselves that the stay in Australia was temporary, or by seeking comfort from a friend. The women did know about campus support services but only one had made use of their help. Most importantly

the women reported gaining strength from their religion ('This is my religion and they have to accept it'). ('There are lots of faculties, just as if there was a big mosque; so when I want to pray I can find a very comfortable place and quiet.')

The strong support that all the women found in their religious beliefs was an obvious source of strength and frequently emerged as a central pillar to get them through their studies, as also noted by Nasir and Al-Amin (2006). Concentrating on the central role that religion plays in students' identities, in their study, Nasir and Al-Amin called for college administrators to acquire sensitivity to this important aspect of Muslim students' identities and to create more welcoming learning environments for them (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006).

This is perhaps one of the major implications of the findings from this study. The academic aspiration of the women students was the primary driving force in their lives and they faced adversity with a quiet determination to stay focused on completing their studies and not to be overcome with emotions that might side-track them from achieving academic success. Their identity as devout Muslim women gave them an added strength and purpose to overcome any challenges that might affect them or prevent them from achieving their goals. Kassissieh (2005) noted that Saudi women had developed effective methods for maintaining their strengths, even as they might more than likely experience Islamophobia in American society. The respondents' life stories in her study reflected a process of exclusive self-definition that is described by the current theories of identity development. She describes the way friends, cultural symbols and individual creativity contribute to growing and developing amidst discrimination and racism from society. Similarly, a study by (Dimandja, 2017) suggested that Muslim international students studying in American universities are constantly experiencing growth, despite the fact that they faced several serious challenges related to their race, religion and gender identity. The study recognised the religious and gendered prejudice these students faced as a significant influence that impacted on their academic and social integration.

Summary

This study paid special attention to the stereotypes faced by Saudi women students at Flinders University; how these students perceived these stereotypes, as well as the strategies that they employed to survive and thrive in an Australian university. It has highlighted the stereotypes associated with Islamic culture, and the norm of marginalising Saudi women by virtue of their religion and culture, especially in the wearing of a hijab. By exploring social issues faced by

Saudi women students studying in Flinders University, this study aimed at providing insight into the unique social experiences of a group of Saudi women students. These experiences reflected considerable discrimination and prejudice incurred by the visibility of women wearing cultural and religious dress.

The theoretical lens for understanding and interpreting the responses and comments of the participants in this study were helpful in several ways. Firstly, the life stage of the women participants was important since they were all in the process of gaining the knowledge that would shape their future careers through a university education. They faced experiences linked to stereotyping, discrimination and Islamophobia, but due to their steady focus on their studies at this stage of life they were able to overcome their feelings of hurt and humiliation. Religion and culture, especially as it pertains to Saudi Arabia, were central in providing the strength and strategies that were used to deal with their negative social experiences. This was especially reinforced by each woman's strong identity as a Muslim woman.

By understanding the experiences of these Saudi women students, host institutions can make informed decisions on where to make improvements to provide a better campus experience for international students. These improvements need to be not only to improve infrastructure but also to facilitate intercultural acceptance, thereby creating a positive climate for the sharing of cultural knowledge. As Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, and Dedios-Sanguinetti (2013) have argued, a positive climate on campus is vital for all marginalised groups because as much as students' experiences have to do with their academic engagement, other external factors, such as having supportive staff, were crucial in each student's perception of the university experience (Housee, 2011).

Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendations to counter the harmful effects of stereotyped views on Muslim women studying at Flinders University.

- The university might consider offering information and awareness sessions for their general student population to educate them towards treating women wearing the hijab respectfully. This could dilute any possibility that merely by wearing a hijab, Saudi women might be tagged as 'terrorists' by others in the academic community.

- Flinders University could create ‘culturally safe zones’ where Saudi women students can feel protected from discrimination while still experiencing the overall campus culture.
- Special orientation workshops could be offered early in the first semester of study to help Saudi women students adjust to their new learning environment.
- Saudi women students themselves (those more advanced in their courses and established in Australia) could assist with these workshops.
- In preparing Saudi women to attend university in Australia, more attention could be paid to the potential negative experiences they might have to face during their time in this country.
- The Saudi Club could be encouraged to disseminate information about the support services at the university and how helpful they can be when students are in need of support.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted on one campus at one university in Australia and included a small number of women students who were from Saudi Arabia. Although the responses of the participants were extremely interesting and valid in their own right, it is not possible to generalise from this small group of women to a broader population. The study did allow for an in-depth and personal exchange between the researcher and each participant, which the researcher was able to report and share. This exploratory study contributed to an understanding of some Muslim women’s experiences while studying in Australia, but the findings relate only to this population and not to the whole population of Muslim women students in Australia.

Future Research

This preliminary study could be used as a basis for further inquiry into stereotyping of Muslims who are living and studying in Australia. Since the participant population in this study was small, expanding the scope of the research would provide an opportunity to see if the results would be similar when conducted with a greater number of participants. Male students could also be included in continuing research so that their experiences could be compared to the women who were interviewed, to see if the less visible identification of males (as Muslims) by their dress would make a difference to how they were treated. The strategies that males used to deal with

and respond to stereotypes directed at them could also be compared to those of women. Future research could focus on investigating the long-term effects of experiencing stereotyped assumptions and could evaluate the success of coping strategies over the longer term.

References

- Abedalthagafi., M. (2018, February 22). Ask me about my science, not your stereotypes. *WORLD VIEW A personal take on events*, 544(405).
- Alandejani, J. (2013). *Coming home after studying abroad: How Saudi female scholars re-adapt, readjust, and transfer their knowledge* (Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University Libraries).
- Alhazmi, A., & Nyland, B. (2010). *Saudi international students in Australia and intercultural engagement: A study of transitioning from a gender segregated culture to a mixed gender environment*. Paper presented at the International Education Conference of the ISANA: International Education Association, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.
- Allen, C. (2005). *Islamophobia: contested concept in the public space*. Doctoral dissertation: University of Birmingham, England.
- Al-Ma'Seb, H. (2006). Acculturation factors among Arab/Moslem women who live in the western culture. In M. Julia (Ed.): ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Alsehafi, N. and S.-C. Shin (2017). 'Factors affecting the academic and cultural adjustment of Saudi international students in Australian universities'. *Journal of International Students* 7(1): 53-72.
- Alvi, M., Hoodfar, H., & McDonough, S. (2003). *The Muslim Veil in North America*. Canadian Scholars' Press and Women's Press.
- Alwazzan, L., & Rees, C. E. (2016). Women in medical education: views and experiences from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Medical education*, 50(8), 852-865.
- Aston, H. (2014). Dozens of anti-Muslim attacks as Islamic leaders warn of community fear. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9.
- Aziz, O. (2018). Religious identity and sense of belonging among Rowan University Muslim students. Doctoral dissertation:). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (10750168).
- Badr, H. (2004). 'Coping in marital dyads: A contextual perspective on the role of gender and health.' *Personal Relationships* 11(2): 197-211.
- Baki, R. (2004). Gender-segregated education in Saudi Arabia: Its impact on social norms and the Saudi labor market. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12.
- Bilge, S. (2010). Beyond subordination vs. resistance: An intersectional approach to the agency of veiled Muslim women. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 31(1), 9-28.
- Bram, J. (1953). Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions. (Book Review). In (Vol. 18, pp. 442-443).
- Bullock, K. H., & Jafri, G. J. (2002). Media (mis) representations: Muslim women in the Canadian nation. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 20(2).

- Cainkar, L. (2002). Special registration: A fervor for Muslims. *J. Islamic L. & Culture*, 7, 73.
- Chomczynski, P. (2011). Book Review: Designing social research. The Logic of Anticipation by Norman Blaikie. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 7(1).
- Clerehan, R., McCall, L., McKenna, L., & Alshahrani, K. (2012). Saudi Arabian nurses' experiences of studying Masters degrees in Australia. *International Nursing Review*, 59(2), 215-221.
- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2003). Perspectives and experiences of Muslim women who veil on college campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(1), 47-66.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.
- CultureGrams World Edition (2009). The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2008 Proquest LLC and Brigham Young University.
- Dey, F. (2012). *Islam on campus: Identity development of Muslim-American college students*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Florida). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (3569431).
- Dimandja, O. O. (2017). *'We are not that different from you': A phenomenological study of undergraduate Muslim international student campus experiences* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado Colorado Springs. Kraemer Family Library).
- Donalek, J. G. J. U. n. (2004). Phenomenology as a qualitative research method. 24(6), 516-517.
- Elnour, A. M. (2012). *Learning in the company of women: the intersection of race, gender, and religion in the educational and career experience of immigrant professional Sudanese Muslim women in the United States* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).
- Gannon, M., & Pillai, R. (2013). Bedouin jewelry and Saudi Arabia. Understanding global cultures: Metaphorical journeys through 29 nations, clusters of nations, continents, and diversity, 59-72.
- Göle, N., & Göle, N. (1996). *The forbidden modern: Civilization and veiling*. Chicago: University of Michigan Press.
- Gonzales, R. G., Suárez-Orozco, C., & Dedios-Sanguinetti, M. C. (2013). No place to belong: Contextualizing concepts of mental health among undocumented immigrant youth in the United States. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 57(8), 1174-1199.
- Haddad, Y. Y., & Smith, J. I. (Eds.). (2002). *Muslim minorities in the West: Visible and invisible*. Rowman Altamira.
- Hanley, D. C. (2001). Saudi Arabian women dispel myths and stereotypes. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, 20(4), 35-37. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/218815390?accountid=10910>

- Hend, A. (2006). *Acculturation factors among Arab/Moslem women who live in the western culture* (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).
- Hofer, V. J. (2009). The identification of issues serving as barriers to positive educational experiences for Saudi Arabian students studying in the state of Missouri. University of Missouri-Saint Louis.
- Hofstede, G. J. O. r. i. p., & culture. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. 2(1), 8.
- Hoodfar, H. (1992). The veil in their minds and on our heads: The persistence of colonial images of Muslim women. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 22(3/4), 5.
- Horwedel, D. M. (2006, May 18). OPENING EYES AND MINDS. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 23, 14-19. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/194235336?accountid=10910>
- Hong, Y. (2009). A dynamic constructivist approach to culture: Moving from describing culture to explaining culture. In R.S. Wyer, C. Chiu, & Y. Hong (Eds.), *Understanding Culture: Theory, Research, and Application* (3-24). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Housee, S. (2011). What difference does 'difference' make? A discussion with ethnic minority students about their learning experience in higher education. Research report. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED462040.pdf>
- Jenkins, S. (2001). Ethnic Identification, Racial Climate and African American Undergraduate Educational Outcomes in a Predominantly White University.
- Kassissieh, N. N. (2005). "And say to the believing women...": The multiple meanings of the hijab as a window into Muslim-American women's identity. Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology.
- Khiabany, G., & Williamson, M. (2008). Veiled bodies—naked racism: culture, politics and race in the Sun. *Race & class*, 50(2), 69-88.
- Khosrojerdi, F. (2015). *Muslim female students and their experiences of Higher Education in Canada*. Doctoral thesis: Western University. <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4462&context=etd>
- Kift, S. M., Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J. A. (2010). Transition pedagogy: a third generation approach to FYE: a case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 1(1), 1-20.
- Lippman, T. W. (2004). *Inside the mirage: America's fragile partnership with Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge MA: Westview Press.
- Macias, T. (2016). *Saudi women studying in the United States: Understanding their experiences*. Proquest Dissertations Publishing.

- Mansouri, F., & Trembath, A. (2005). Multicultural education and racism: The case of Arab-Australian students in contemporary Australia. *International Education Journal*, 6(4), 516-529.
- Marsella, A. J., Dubanoski, J., Hamada, W. C., & Morse, H. J. A. B. S. (2000). The measurement of personality across cultures: Historical, conceptual, and methodological issues and considerations. *44(1)*, 41-62.
- Matsumoto, T., Inoue, J., Ichimura, T., Murata, Y., Watanabe, J., Nagahiro, Y., . . . Okabe, M. (1996). Method for forming a film and method for manufacturing a thin film transistor. In: Google Patents.
- McGuire, K. M., Casanova, S., & Davis III, C. H. (2016). 'I'm a black female who happens to be Muslim': Multiple marginalities of an immigrant black Muslim woman on a predominantly white campus. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 316-329.
doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.3.0316
- Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2009). Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'. *Patterns of prejudice*, 43(3-4), 335-354.
- Merriam, S. B., Kim, S. J. T. h. o. t. l. T., research,, & practice. (2012). Studying transformative learning: What methodology. 56-72.
- Montelongo, R. (2003). Latina/o Undergraduate Involvement with College Student Organizations and Its Effects on Specific Student Outcomes at Two, Large, Predominately White, Midwestern Universities.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Thousand Oaks, Calif. : Sage.
- Murray, J. (2000). Kevin Avruch: Culture and Conflict Resolution. (Book Review). Washington, DC, American Sociological Association. **29**: 643.
- Naji Amrani, I. (2017). *Racialization: The experiences of Muslim graduate students in higher education after September 11*. R. Brown, C. Bair and R. Naughton, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing
- Nasir, N. I. S., & Al-Amin, J. (2006). Creating Identity-Safe Spaces on College Campuses for Muslim Students. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 38(2), 22-27.
doi:10.3200/CHNG.38.2.22-27
- Navarro, L. (2010). Islamophobia and Sexism: Muslim Women in the Western Mass Media. *Human Architecture* 8(2): 95-114.
- Omair, A. H. (2017). *Stereotypes of Saudi Women among Saudi College Students*. Doctoral dissertation: Chicago, IL: DePaul University). Retrieved from https://via.library.depaul.edu/csh_etd/226

- Orth, A. M. (2015). *International students' perceptions of their experience of higher education in Australia: A focus on Saudi Arabian students in their first year of a business course in a major Australian university*. Doctoral thesis, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia.
- Padilla-Díaz, M. (2015). Phenomenology in Educational Qualitative Research: Philosophy as Science or Philosophical Science? *International Journal of Educational Excellence*, 1(2), 101-110.
doi:10.18562/IJEE.2015.0009
- Pharaon, N. (2004). Saudi Women and the Muslim State in the Twenty-First Century. *A Journal of Research*, 51(5), 349-366.
- Razek, N., & Coyner, S. C. (2013). Cultural impacts on Saudi students at a mid-western American university. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 17(1).
- Ruby, T. F. (2006, January). Listening to the voices of hijab. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 54-66). Pergamon.
- Ryan, B. (2003). The Ian Paisley question: Irish citizenship and Northern Ireland. *Dublin University Law Journal*, 25, 145-176.
- Sekhon, V. (2003). The civil rights of others: Antiterrorism, the Patriot Act, and Arab and South Asian American rights in post-9/11 American society. *Tex. F. on CL & CR*, 8, 117.
- Selod, S. (2015). Citizenship denied: The racialization of Muslim American men and women post-9/11. *Critical Sociology*, 41(1), 77-95.
- Sensoy, Ö., & Marshall, E. (2010). Missionary girl power: Saving the 'Third World' one girl at a time. *Gender and Education*, 22(3), 295-311.
- Spencer, R. (2002). *Islam unveiled: Disturbing questions about the world's fastest-growing faith*. San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books.
- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. J. A. c. o. q. G. C. C. (2012). What is culture. 1-22.
- Stubbs, B. B., & Sallee, M. W. (2013). Muslim, too: Navigating multiple identities at an American university. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 46(4), 451-467.
doi:10.1080/10665684.2013.838129
- Taylor, C., & Albasri, W. (2014). The impact of Saudi Arabia King Abdullah's scholarship program in the US. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(10), 109.
- Yakaboski, T., Perez-Velez, K., & Almutairi, Y. (2018). Breaking the Silence: Saudi Graduate Student Experiences on a U.S. Campus. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(2), 221-238. .
doi:10.1037/dhe0000059

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

APPROVAL NOTICE

No.:	Project	8202	
Title:	Project	Saudi women's understanding of stereotypes they experience at Flinders University	
	Principal Researcher:	Mrs Nouf Barasayn	
	Email:	bara0056@flinders.edu.au	
Date:	Approval	15 March 2019	Ethics Approval Expiry Date: 31 July 2020

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS

1. Participant Documentation

Please note that it is the responsibility of researchers and supervisors, in the case of student projects, to ensure that:

- all participant documents are checked for spelling, grammatical, numbering and formatting errors. The Committee does not accept any responsibility for the above mentioned errors.
- the Flinders University logo is included on all participant documentation (e.g., letters of Introduction, information Sheets, consent forms, debriefing information and questionnaires – with the exception of purchased research tools) and the current Flinders University letterhead is included in the header of all letters of introduction. The Flinders University international logo/letterhead should be used and documentation should contain international dialling codes for all telephone and fax numbers listed for all research to be conducted overseas.
- the SBREC contact details, listed below, are included in the footer of all letters of introduction and information sheets.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 'INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval'). For more information

regarding ethics approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human_researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

2. Annual Progress / Final Reports

In order to comply with the monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007-Updated 2018)* an annual progress report must be submitted each year on the **15 March** (approval anniversary date) for the duration of the ethics approval using the report template available from the [Managing Your Ethics Approval](#) SBREC web page. *Please retain this notice for reference when completing annual progress or final reports.*

If the project is completed *before* ethics approval has expired please ensure a final report is submitted immediately. If ethics approval for your project expires please submit either (1) a final report; or (2) an extension of time request and an annual report.

Student Projects

The SBREC recommends that current ethics approval is maintained until a student's thesis has been submitted, reviewed and approved. This is to protect the student in the event that reviewers recommend some changes that may include the collection of additional participant data.

Your first report is due on **15 March 2020** or on completion of the project, whichever is the earliest.

3. Modifications to Project

Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval has been obtained from the Ethics Committee. Such proposed changes / modifications include:

- change of project title;
- change to **research** team (e.g., additions, removals, principal **researcher** or supervisor change);
 - changes to **research** objectives;
 - changes to **research** protocol;
 - changes to participant recruitment methods;
 - changes / additions to source(s) of participants;
 - changes of procedures used to seek informed consent;
 - changes to reimbursements provided to participants;
- changes / additions to information and/or documentation to be provided to potential participants;
- changes to **research** tools (e.g., questionnaire, interview questions, focus group questions);
- extensions of time.

To notify the Committee of any proposed modifications to the project please submit a Modification Request Form available from the [Managing Your Ethics Approval](#) SBREC web page. Download the form from the website every time a new modification request is submitted to ensure that the most recent form is used. Please

note that extension of time requests should be submitted prior to the Ethics Approval Expiry Date listed on this notice.

Change of Contact Details

Please ensure that you notify the Committee if either your mailing or email address changes to ensure that correspondence relating to this project can be sent to you. A modification request is not required to change your contact details.

4. Adverse Events and/or Complaints

Researchers should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 08 8201-3116 or human_researchethics@flinders.edu.au immediately if:

- any complaints regarding the research are received;
- a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs that effects participants;
- an unforeseen event occurs that may affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

Kind regards
Wendy Green

On behalf of Andrea Mather

Ms Andrea Mather (formerly Fiegert) and Ms Rae Tyler

Ethics Officers and Executive Officers, Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

Ms Andrea Mather Monday - Friday	T: +61 8201-3116 E: humar_researchethics@flinders.edu.au
Ms Rae Tyler Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings	T: +61 8201-7938 E: humar_researchethics@flinders.edu.au
A/Prof David Hunter SBREC Chairperson	T: +61 7221-8477 E: david.hunter@flinders.edu.au
Dr Deb Agnew SBREC Deputy Chairperson	T: +61 8201-3456 E: deb.agnew@flinders.edu.au
SBREC Website	Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (SBREC)

Research [Development and Support](#) | Union Building Basement

Flinders University

Sturt Road, Bedford Park | South Australia | 5042

GPO Box 2100 | Adelaide SA 5001

CRICOS Registered Provider: The Flinders University of South Australia | CRICOS Provider Number 00114A

This email and attachments may be confidential. If you are not the intended recipient, please inform the sender by reply email and delete all copies of this message.

Appendix B: Flyer, Interview Questions, Consent Form

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN

(Saudi women's understanding of stereotypes they experience at Flinders University)

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of
Saudi women's perception of stereotypes

As a participant in this study, you are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with the researcher who will ask you a few questions regarding your views about stereotypical experiences as a Saudi woman at Flinders University

Your participation is **entirely voluntary, confidential** and it would take an hour of your time on occasion. By participating in this study you will help us to understand the experiences of Muslim women



To learn more about this study, or to participate in this study, please contact:

Principal Investigator: *Nouf Barasayn*
E-mail (bara0056@flinders.edu.au)

This study is supervised by

Keith Miller PhD
Senior Lecturer
Flinders Social Work
College of Education, Psychology &
Social Work
M: +61 414 190 064 I P: +61 8 8201
5619
E: keith.miller@flinders.edu.au

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
Dean (Education)
College of Education, Psychology and
Social Work
Flinders University
E: carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au
M: (08) 8201 2452

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number **INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval**). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

Interview Questions

- Tell me about your experience here as a student? Or what it is like to be a student here?
- Do you enjoy your classes?
- How accommodating are the facilities at Flinders University for you as a Muslim woman?
- Have you had any experiences that have influenced your ability to study or have impacted your social life?

Tell me about those

Experiences that have influenced your study and social life?

- What do you think about your study experiences whilst at Flinders University?
- Is there anything that would make it different for you compared to other female students?
- How do you feel about wearing religious coverings in Australia?
- Did wearing the hijab affect your ability to study or feel welcome at university?
- Did you find it easy to make friends at university?
- How would you describe interactions with people you encounter in public spaces i.e. shops, banks, doctors?

Have you ever had or felt any negative experiences as a Muslim woman?

Have you had good experiences?

As a Muslim women have you ever felt uncomfortable whilst on campus?

Have you ever felt invisible?

Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
(Interview)**

Saudi women's understanding of stereotypes they experience at
Flinders University

I

.....

being over the age of 18 years, hereby consent to participate as requested in the interview for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my progress in my course of study, or results gained.
 - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
6. I understand that only the researchers on this project will have access to my research data and raw results; unless I explicitly provide consent for it to be shared with other parties.

Participant's
name.....

Participant's
signature.....**Date**.....

I, the researcher certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's
name.....

Researcher's
signature.....**Date**.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number **INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval**). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project please contact the Executive Officer on (08) 8201 3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

Appendix C: Information Letter



Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
College of Education, Psychology and
Social Work

Sturt Road
Bedford Park SA 5042
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +61 8 8201 5619
Carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au
Web: www.flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

INFORMATION SHEET (Saudi women students)

Title: Saudi women's understanding of the stereotypes they experience at Flinders University

Researcher

Mrs Nouf Barasayn
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University

Email: bara0056@flinders.edu.au

Supervisor(s)

Associate Professor Carol Irizarry
Dean (Education)
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
Email: carol.irizarry@flinders.edu.au
ph.: (08) 8201 2452

Dr Keith Miller
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work
Flinders University
P: +61 8 8201 5619
Email: keith.miller@flinders.edu.au

Description of the Study

This study is part of the project titled “Saudi women’s understanding of the stereotypes they experience at Flinders University”. This project will investigate the perceptions held by Saudi female students of Flinders University regarding any social and study problems due to stereotypical images and assumptions about them and their religion or appearance.

This project is supported by Flinders University, College of Education, Psychology and Social Work.

Purpose of the Study

This project aims to:

- Find out if and to what degree Saudi women experience stereotyping at Flinders University;
- Determine how stereotypical experiences have influenced Saudi women’s social and study life;
- Determine to what degree these women consider their experiences different from the experiences of other women students.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a one-on-one interview with a researcher who will ask you a few questions regarding your views about stereotypical experiences of Saudi women at Flinders University. Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview will take about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file, and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your experiences will enable you to express both positive and negative experiences you have encountered during your time as a student at Flinders University.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We do not need your name and your identity will remain confidential. Any identifying information will be removed from the final report and any other publications, and your

comments will not be linked directly to you. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to relevant researchers.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced, please contact Health, Counselling and Disability Services, Flinders University Student Association (FUSA), International Student Services or Lifeline for support/ counselling that can be accessed free of charge by all participants. If cultural support is preferred, please contact the ‘Muslim Women’s Association of SA’ program under Multicultural Affairs SA for further assistance.

Health, Counselling and Disability Services

Level 3, Student Services Centre next to the Sports Centre.

Open: 8:45am - 5pm, Monday - Friday

Tel: (08) 8201 2118

Flinders University Student Association (FUSA)

Address: Level 1, Student Hub

Flinders University

Bedford Park 5042

Open Hours: 9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday,

Phone: [\(08\) 8201 2371](tel:(08)82012371)

Email: fusa@flinders.edu.au

International student services

Location and contact details

Location: Basement (B 10), Union Building.

Refer to the Flinders [Campus map with ISS location](#) for directions.

Postal address: Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide, South Australia, 5001

Telephone: +61 8 8201 2717

email: iss@flinders.edu.au

Lifeline 13 11 14

Muslim Women’s Association of SA

Phone: (08) 8212 0800

email: admin@mwasa.org.au

If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher. There will be no effect of either participation or non-participation in this study on any aspect of your academic lives.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer ‘no comment’ or refuse to answer any questions, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at bara0056@flinders.edu.au or bring it with you to the interview.

Recognition of contribution time costs

Monetary compensation of any sort (direct or indirect) is not going to be provided in exchange of your participation or time.

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, the final report of the project will be given to all participants via email.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: INSERT PROJECT No. here following approval). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on (08) 8201 2035, or by email to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au