“SCATTERED CEDARS IN A WESTERN TOWN”

Interviews with Lebanese Muslims on the family, ethnicity, gender and racism

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The Australian Centre
The University of Melbourne
DECLARATION

This is to certify that

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD,

(ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Mustafa Rostom

January, 2003
ABSTRACT

This study examines the views of twenty Sunni Muslim Lebanese families about issues of family, ethnicity, gender and racism. It provides insights into some of the complex ways these participants tend to define and experience ethnicity in Australia. This thesis also considers some of the ways Sunni Muslims narrate the ethnic self in regard to their social and cultural practices in contemporary Australia. It highlights the similarities and differences between the views of Sunni Muslim families from a community perspective. This study also made important connections between the notion of ethnicity and issues of class, gender and generation.

This thesis provides a seven part analysis. The first part of this study provides an outline of contemporary issues relating to the social network of the Islamic Lebanese community in Victoria. The next part is about applying the methodology of this thesis. The methodological themes of interview-narratives were explored in this chapter. In so doing, it outlines the advantages of family group interviews in ethnic community-based studies.

Having outlined some methodological issues, the next four chapters provide a discussion of thesis interviews. In particular, these chapters examine the similarities and differences between the views of members of the families. They also outline some theoretical analysis of themes relating to issues of family, ethnicity, gender and racism. The final part of this thesis provides an overview of earlier points raised in this study, with some future research implications about ethnic community studies.

The findings in this thesis indicate that concepts of class, gender and generation were significant factors in terms of how respondents perceived their ethnic identity and social experiences. It is also clear that ethnic identity is a complex process in which participants utilised social, cultural and religious factors all at the one time to discuss multiple identities. For many of the participants, religious identity was only one aspect of their narration of the self. Their differing interpretations of social practices within vast parameters of ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries indicates the need to re-address theoretical notions of ethnicity, in order to unveil the identity positions and social realities of members of Islamic families.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the views of Sunni Muslim Lebanese families in Melbourne about ethnicity and identity. The methodology of this study was based on in-depth interviews with families as a group. This particular approach was used to provide some insight in regard to their views as a community group. Four main themes were revealed in the interviews which were significant to respondents. These were: family, ethnic identity, gender and racism. These issues were used by respondents as significant points of reference in their everyday social, familial, communal and cultural way of life. These particular categories also provide an overall insight into the different ways family members tend to experience their social and cultural practices, and the way they represent their own self-identity.

In past decades, sociological literature has been engaged with critical dialogues of race, ethnicity and cultural difference. A number of theorists have used different research models to address these issues. Some researchers have examined definitions of race and ethnicity in regard to nationalist and biological models. Other writers have looked at the notion of cultural difference, and the various intersecting practices among minority groups centred on a pluralist model. There are also a number of theorists who have explored the construction of self-identity in terms of a culturalist model. A recurring theme evident in all these methodologies, is that the work of these researchers centres on identity frameworks in dealing with issues of race, ethnicity and culture.

More recently, in recognising the complexity of ethnic diversity, a new literature has emerged comprising theories centred on the notion of new ethnicities. The work of these theorists is centred on a critical analysis of discourses to do with race, culture and difference. The material in the literature is concerned with the social and cultural practices of different group identities, particularly as to how such practices are constructed in relation to politics and cultural representation. In thinking through some of the theoretical discussion on new ethnicities, it is apparent that the conceptions of researchers on issues of race and ethnicity are much more complex and problematic at a practical level.

It is also apparent that researchers in this area fail to outline particular strategies, which show how the notion of new ethnicities can be applied to different group identities. In examining some of the literature on new ethnicities, it became evident to this researcher that there were many concepts and definitions of race, ethnicity and identity which required further exploration in regard to the views of an ethnic minority group living in Australia. It is also evident that some of the earlier pieces
written on race and ethnicity do not correspond with the new and current ideas of researchers which attempt to reconcile the notion of universality with issues of ethnic identity and difference.

This research study focuses on Sunni Muslim families, because it is felt that it was important to study a group of people who shared similar views on Islam. Therefore, I felt it was necessary for me to address issues of cultural identity and individual rights on a broader basis, particularly to learn more about the views of Sunni Muslim families on the idea of family, ethnic identity, gender and race related issues. In sharing ethnic and religious practices with this selected community group, I felt I occupied a unique position as the researcher in terms of better understanding some of the ethnic and cultural issues raised in this study.

In having conducted research on Sunni Muslim Lebanese families in previous years, it was realised that there was little research done in the area of ethnicity and the actual perceptions and experiences of this particular religious group. This relates to some of my earlier research studies on the Sunni Muslim Lebanese community. These studies were academic-based case studies which also involved family group interviews from different sections of the broader Islamic Lebanese community. These case studies shared somewhat different themes to this thesis. They examined issues of education, employment, and citizenship in regard to the views of Sunni Muslim families. These studies helped to provide insights into the social and cultural lives of this particular ethnic community group. It was this constant interest and concern with the views of Sunni Muslim participants about notions of ethnicity and identity which have also led to this thesis.

In recognising the need to address issues of race and ethnic identities in Australia, it was a valuable exercise to look at how these respondents thought about their own identity positioning within the family and the broader Australian community. It is clear that previous studies on ethnic identity do not take into account how participants tend to narrate their own ethnic identity, and in what ways they perceive the self as being inextricably interrelated with their social and cultural practices. Also, previous studies on ethnic identity tend not to engage with some of the important and diverse issues associated with race, gender, class and the family. It can also be said that this study is unique in that there is little community-based material on issues of ethnicity and Lebanese Muslim groups. Moreover, this study takes an ethnic and religious minority group, which have always been stereotyped, and tries to provide a broader picture of the lived reality of this group.

There has been some broader research conducted on the Lebanese community, including some academic based case studies, (Stromback et al., 1992; Abu Duhou and Teese, 1992; McAllister and
Moore, 1991; Poynting et al., 1997). These studies have dealt with issues of ethnicity from different perspectives. They all tend to utilise ethnic, class and gender discourses within their analyses on Lebanese groups. Some of this broad material has looked at a social and historical profile of the Lebanese community in Australia, (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001), focusing on a much more descriptive analysis of the Lebanese community in relation to broader themes of immigration, politics and religion. It provides background information on the social and demographic patterns of both the Lebanese Muslim and Christian people. The article also outlines the various social networks available to the Lebanese community in Australia.

On the other hand, contemporary research seems to have taken a shift towards a popular cultural approach which tends to identify recent controversies about the Lebanese community. For instance, there has been a recent publication, *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime: Youth, Ethnicity, and Crime*, which deals with issues of ethnicity, crime and Lebanese youth, (Collins et al., 2002). This text critically engages with issues of ethnic crime and media stereotypes, with a particular reference to Lebanese gangs. It also outlines positive ways in which issues of ethnicity and crime can be better addressed in the Australian context.

*Arab-Australians Citizenship And Belonging Today*, (Hage, 2002), is another text based on a compilation of articles by different writers, which focus on the history and contemporary lives of Arabic people in Australia. These articles address important issues in regard to the social and economic situation of Arabs across Australia, including immigration, marginalisation, unemployment and youth. In particular, this text also focuses on the experiences of early Arab immigrants, and their political participation in Australia. Other publications have also considered Muslim communities in Australia, including the Lebanese, (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). This text, *Muslim Communities in Australia*, is compiled of chapters which deal with Muslims and issues of settlement, religious diversity and education. Within these broad discussions, the text also deals with issues of stereotypes, refugee women, Muslim students and diverse nationalities.

This thesis makes its contribution to the broader literature on Lebanese communities by providing detailed information about the views and self-narration of Sunni Muslim families in regard to issues of ethnic identity, gender, racism and the family. In particular, this study looks at the way a group of people interpret notions of ethnicity according to their lived experiences and realities. Although this thesis has only considered the views of twenty Sunni Muslim families, it provides insights into how members of this particular ethnic and religious minority group view their ethnic identity and their social situation in terms of the broader Australian community. Although it can be said that
family, gender, ethnicity and race are broad categories, these are issues integral to the notion of identity because they tend to intersect with some of the way people use them as points of reference in their everyday social, familial, communal and cultural way of life. These particular categories also provide an insight into some of the different ways people tend to experience their social and cultural practices, and the way they represent their own identity.

From this analysis, this study highlights the diverse and different patterns of social and cultural experiences among families from the Islamic Sunni Lebanese community. There are a number of gaps that exist between ethnicity theories and the social practices of respondents in this study. In examining the notion of family with Sunni Muslim families, class played a significant role in how respondents perceived their identity position and cultural experience in the family. There were different views among respondents across the families in terms of parenting, work and traditional issues. It was also apparent that the notion of family was integral to respondents’ notion of self-identity, informing their views of ethnicity, culture and subjectivity. This thesis also highlights that it is no longer possible to view issues of ethnic identity in terms of a unified and simplistic context. It outlines that ethnic identity is a complex process, which intersects issues of family, gender and race in a complex way. It is important to move beyond simplistic former versions of celebratory pluralism in which identity seems to be understood.

In the discussions, it was clear that social, cultural and religious factors were important in gaining better insights into gender issues in Islam. The different views shared by female participants in the families highlights the differing and diverse gender practices and realities of Muslim women. This study also highlights that the racial barriers experienced by members of Sunni Muslim families were a result of the misunderstandings of the social realities of Islam by non Muslim people in the media and other social services. From this analysis, it becomes apparent that there is a need for future social researchers and ethnic community networks to work closely together in providing detailed information about the social realities of Islam.

As stated earlier, the aim of this thesis is to provide a general analysis of the views of Sunni Muslim families on issues of family, ethnic identity, gender and racism. It is important to note that this thesis does not include a literature review chapter, because of the overall structure of this research study. After having mapped out the theoretical literature on ethnic identity, it was decided that the literature review will be addressed in the chapter on ethnic identity. This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter provides a descriptive analysis of the Lebanese community. This particular chapter is divided in itself into seven parts. Some of the information contained in
different sections of this chapter outline the history and socio-economic factors of Lebanese Muslim people. It also provides background information in regard to the broader social networks available to Lebanese Muslims in Victoria. The second chapter is about the methodology of this thesis, including the various stages of fieldwork. The methodological themes centred on interview-narratives are also discussed in this chapter. There is also background information about other case studies that have adopted family group interviews as part of their methodology.

The third chapter of this thesis is about the concept of ethnic identity. This chapter provides information about the views of participants on issues of dual identities, cultural plurality and language. In particular, this chapter outlines the importance of ethnic identity with key issues such as culture, religion and national identity. It indicates that members of the families shared strong views about their Islamic identity, but at the same time, these respondents made reference to multiple social positions in expressing their self identities. It also indicates that some participants interpreted the concept of culture in terms of broader social practices. This part of the thesis also highlights the notion of language as being an important ethnic value for Sunni Muslim families. In particular, respondents viewed language as a tool of practice that helped to educate Muslim generations about religious issues.

The fourth chapter of this thesis provides information about the views of participants on the notion of family. It outlines a discussion of parental roles, ethnic identity and the traditional practices of Sunni Muslim families. This part highlights some of the similarities and differences between family theorists and respondents’ views about traditional family roles. It indicates participants’ definitions of family issues, and how factors of culture and religion are important in terms of family roles and the practices of members of the Islamic Sunni Lebanese community. It was apparent that class was an important factor in terms of the traditionalist and modern views of respondents about family issues. This part of the thesis also highlights the strong desire of first and second-generation Sunni Muslim respondents to maintain ethnic ties with their families in Australia. It also points out that issues of respect, education and safety were important family practices to participants in terms of maintaining good family structure.

The fifth chapter of this thesis is about issues of women and gender in Islam. It outlines the wide gaps that exist between gender theories and the social realities of Muslim women. This part of the thesis highlights the gender rights and the range of choices available to Muslim women within the realms of ethnicity, culture and religion. From the discussions, it was important for respondents to carefully ascertain their religious beliefs in terms of making direct links with their gender practices.
The views of female respondents in this study were different to the many widely-held theoretical misconceptions of gender issues and Islam.

The sixth chapter of this thesis is about the views of Sunni Muslim participants on issues of racism in the community. This chapter provides a discussion about issues of ethnicity, media stereotypes and employment with Sunni Muslim families. It outlines the social barriers confronting Sunni Muslim families in contemporary Australian society. Factors of ethnicity and religion are identified as major inhibitors to their full social participation in Australia. In particular, it identifies the racial experiences of Muslim participants in the workforce. This part of the thesis also outlines suggestions offered by social analysts and respondents about the need to offer detailed educational campaigns about racial stereotypes and Islam. The final chapter of this thesis provides an overview of some of the important points raised in previous discussions in this study. It outlines the wide gaps that exist between theories and the actual views of participants, with a view to further developing notions of ethnicity in future research.
CHAPTER ONE: THE LEBANESE COMMUNITY

Introduction:

In this chapter, my primary aim is to provide a descriptive analysis of the Lebanese community. The chapter is divided into seven parts. The first section provides a brief discussion of the effects of the Civil War on the Lebanese people. The second section is about the history of Lebanese immigrants in Australia. The settlement problems of the Lebanese are also discussed in this section. There is a profile of the socio-economic factors of the Lebanese community in the third section of the chapter. In this section attention is also given to the number of Lebanese Muslims in Victoria. The fourth section of the chapter provides statistical information about the employment and education of the Lebanese.

The fifth section of the chapter is about Muslim Mosques in Melbourne. This section provides background information about the distribution of Mosques in Melbourne. It states the number of Islamic schools in Victoria. It also outlines the newspapers and broadcasting services available to the Lebanese community in Melbourne. The sixth section of the chapter is about the social problems confronting Lebanese Muslims in Melbourne. This section provides a discussion about issues of immigration, employment and discrimination with three Arabic community representatives. The final section of the chapter outlines the problematics in terms of research on the Lebanese community.

History of Lebanese Settlement Prior to 1975:

It is important to note that this study is mainly concerned with Lebanese families who had emigrated to Australia around the time of the Civil War outbreak, (including the fact that this research proposes to study first and second generation Sunni Muslim families since three decades ago – 1970s-2000). However, it is also important to recognise that there has been a great history of Lebanese migration to Australia which dates back over 100 years ago.

Emigration from Lebanon began in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. This was attributed to Lebanese people experiencing social and economic hardships. Whilst a few individual Lebanese immigrants began to settle in Australia in the 1870s, it was not until the following decade that a larger cluster of Lebanese immigrant arrivals was noticeable. It is impossible to obtain precise figures of early Lebanese settlers because they were not identified separately within census
It is apparent that early Lebanese migrants were mainly males who wished to test their economic prosperity in Australia. Many of the early Lebanese immigrants settled in New South Wales, and had encountered few employment opportunities due to lack of skills and the English language barrier. There was no census data recorded in reference to Lebanese immigrant workers, however early naturalisation and marital records indicate that the Lebanese were mainly engaged in shopkeeping or hawking. By the early twentieth century there were over 80 per cent of Lebanese residents in New South Wales engaged in commercial occupations. Later censuses had indicated that there up to 60 per cent of Lebanese were employers and self-employed between the period 1921-1947. (Batrouney, in Jupp, 2001). According to Batrouney this suggests that Lebanese people were still engaged in some form of commercial work.

A social community network among Lebanese immigrant settlers was evident since the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, with the establishment of churches and businesses, including voluntary associations mainly in New South Wales and Victorian regions. Batrouney suggests that, ‘By the early 1890s several Lebanese entrepreneurs had established warehouses and manufacturing plants along Elizabeth Street in Redfern.’ (Batrouney, in Jupp, 2001:668). In the 1920s, many rural Lebanese immigrants moved from rural New South Wales areas and settled in Sydney metropolitan regions. Whilst the Lebanese population was considered less dispersed in Victoria, with many early Lebanese residents already having established themselves in inner-city areas. However, by the 1920s some affluent Lebanese had moved to more prestigious suburbs. (Batrouney, in Jupp, 2001:669).

It is important to note that there was a huge influx of Lebanese immigrants coming to Australia after the second world war. ‘From 1947 until 1976 some 43,000 Lebanese nationals came to
Australia, the bulk arriving after 1966; only about 2,500 were assisted.’ (McKay and Batrouney, in Jupp, 2001:670). These were mainly Lebanese Christians who possessed some formal level of education, mainly settling in New South Wales by the late 1970s. In this particular era (1947-76) there was a difference in the economic participation of Lebanese people than earlier immigrants, due to the development of manufacturing industries in Australia. Also during this period, there were some Lebanese Muslim immigrants (mainly Druse), who were coming to Australia, mainly settling in the eastern areas of the country. Lebanese immigrants settling in Australia after 1947 experienced greater support from various established Lebanese-Australian groups than earlier immigrants.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1975 led to a large influx of Lebanese immigrants (mainly Muslims), settling in Australia. Since then, the number of Lebanese-born persons in Australia has greatly increased. For instance, census population data released in June 2002, indicates that in 1981 there were over 49,000 Lebanese-born persons in Australia, and also shows how the Lebanese population has increased – stating that there were over 70,000 Lebanese-born persons in 1996. (Australian Immigration Consolidated Statistics, Number 21, 1999-00, June 2002). However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census indicates that overall there are a total of 71,349 individuals identified as Lebanese living in Australia.

Civil War in Lebanon: causes of emigration:

In this section, I do not seek to provide a detailed analysis of the Civil War. (For a comprehensive analysis of the Civil War, see Ata, 1979; Batrouney and Batrouney, 1985; Drury, 1981; Hassan et al., 1985; Abul-Husn, 1998; and O’Balance, 1998). Instead, I wish to outline the effects of the war on Lebanese civilians. Although it can be said that reasons for participants’ emigration to Australia was not relevant to the interview material, this particular section provides brief detail about the history of Sunni Muslim families, as the majority of them emigrated to Australia around this particular period of time.

A number of conflicts had been slowly emerging in Lebanon, leading to the outbreak of the Civil War on 13 April 1975. Prior to the war, there had been ongoing feuds between a number of different groups with different socio-political, religious and ideological interests. The cause of the Civil War was a result of unstable socio-political institutions, conflicting groups and external
influence on Lebanon. (Batrouney and Batrouney, 1985). The outbreak of the Civil War caused an increase in crimes, such as drug smuggling, robbery and other illegal activities within Lebanese cities, such as Beirut. (O'Ballance, 1998:17). It had a great effect on the social and economic conditions of Lebanon. There were constant killings and kidnapping of people by street gunmen in Lebanon. The war instilled feelings of insecurity and fear in the hearts of Lebanese individuals. Many felt disturbed by these massacres, claiming that it was no longer possible to live in safe conditions. These individuals felt that the war created little employment opportunities for them within their homeland. Other Lebanese people felt that there were poor educational opportunities for their children in Lebanon. Many Lebanese individuals shared similar desires to improve their socio-economic conditions. Consequently, their desire was to emigrate to other countries.

Immigration and Settlement of Lebanese:

In this section I seek to provide a brief review of the immigration and settlement experiences of Lebanese people, in the past three decades.

The political pressures of the Civil War in 1975 led to the emigration of many Lebanese people to Cyprus. In considering the fact that Cyprus was overcrowded with ethnic immigrants, the Australian government commenced accepting Lebanese immigrants from this country. Many Lebanese individuals emigrated as refugees sponsored by Australian relatives. According to Humphrey, there was an increase of 44 per cent of Lebanese-born immigrants post 1975, as opposed to the pattern of immigration in the previous decade, (1965-75). For instance, this writer claims that, ‘Between 1976-78 the Australian government accepted just over 20,000 Lebanese under relaxed immigration criteria.’ (p.27). However, there remained an irregular pattern of immigration among the Lebanese in Australia post 1975. For instance, prior to 1978, the Australian immigration department expressed a more lenient attitude towards Lebanese-born immigrants. For example, some Lebanese individuals were granted extensions on their tourist visas. Also, the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs were more flexible in converting temporary rights of residency to permanent ones.

After 1978, immigration from Lebanon was more carefully controlled by the Australian government by placing some restrictions on visas. The average number of Lebanese immigrants being accepted into Australia decreased to 1,261 immigrant arrivals between 1978-90. (Humphrey, 1998:27-28). Many Lebanese refugees came to Australia as a result of the ‘chain migration’ process. This large number of Lebanese immigrants who came as a result of family sponsorship were approved through
mutual consultation between the immigration department and community representatives in Sydney. The result of Lebanese migration had led to an increase of over half the number of Lebanese-born in Australia to around 52,000. (Humphrey, 1998:28). This also had an effect on the composition of Lebanese communities, particularly Sydney regions. The dramatic change in the concentration of Lebanese settlement was also a result of the large number of Muslim migrants. The majority of Lebanese-born immigrants mainly settled in Sydney, whilst others in Melbourne regions. For instance, Drury (1981:32) comments that 70,000 Lebanese people had settled in Sydney by the early 1980s, whilst Melbourne was estimated to house 30,000 Lebanese immigrants.

Many Lebanese immigrants in the late 1970s experienced settlement problems in Sydney and Melbourne. The main problem experienced by Lebanese individuals, including Muslims, was unemployment. According to Batrouney and Batrouney (1985:83-85), the arrival of the Lebanese in the late 1970s coincided with Australia’s period of economic change. At this time, Australian industries were undergoing changes due to the introduction of new technology to business. There were increasing expenses due to inflation. The latter changes created less employment opportunities for both the Lebanese and other Australians. For example, new business technology required prospective workers with specialised skills. As stated earlier, many Lebanese immigrants possessed low levels of formal education, as well as poor work skills. Consequently, this meant many Lebanese people experienced economic insecurity. Other burdens experienced by Lebanese immigrants were financial debts owed to sponsors for airfares, renting houses and buying furniture. Furthermore, many Lebanese settlers in the late 1970s also experienced family problems; in particular individuals who shared accommodation with relatives experienced emotional strains within the family.

Many Lebanese parents also found it difficult to raise their children within parental-child guidelines. For example, many Lebanese parents did not relate to the extended freedom provided to Australian adolescents. The latter problem created domestic disputes between parents and their children. Lebanese parents and their children found it confusing to adopt two different sets of cultures. Furthermore, the latter problems were exacerbated by the lack of Arabic information offered to Lebanese parents about counselling services in the community. (Batrouney and Batrouney, 1985:99-100). The language barrier was another settlement problem experienced by Lebanese people. Their inability to speak English made it difficult for them to communicate with others. The latter factor caused feelings of anxiety and frustration among Lebanese families, particularly male members. They felt helpless in supporting basic household needs, (i.e. buying groceries). Furthermore, Lebanese immigrants felt disorientated in terms of their social
participation within the broader Australian community. This was due to the limited interpreting services available to Arabic-speaking communities.

From late 1976 to early 1977, large numbers of Lebanese immigrants were admitted as ‘humanitarian entrants’ – coming under relaxed entry provisions requiring sponsorship. For instance, Lebanese immigrants were no longer required to provide evidence of political hostilities in their country. In fact, immigration policies ensured rapid processing of Lebanese applicants – giving them the choice to change their visitor status to one of permanent residence. Once again, many low to semi-skilled Lebanese individuals, with low levels of formal education, were settling in Australia in the early 1980s. This contributed further to the high unemployment rate of Lebanese communities. According to the Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW newsletter (1984:8-9), ‘the unemployment rate for Lebanese Australians was three times the national average.’ Consequently, many Lebanese immigrants, including Muslims, found it difficult to find work. This provoked feelings of frustration among male members of Islamic Lebanese communities. Moreover, unemployment had an affect on the self-identity of male Muslims. They felt frustrated about their inability to fulfill their role as the family provider.

Despite high unemployment rates among the Lebanese, many men and women remained working in manufacturing industries, milkbars and coffee lounges. (Batrouney, 1995:193). In the late 1980s, the Australian government recognised that there were further political hostilities in Lebanon. Consequently, the immigration department allowed Australian Lebanese residents to lodge applications for relatives and fiancées, whose lives had been seriously affected by this conflict. (Robert, 1989:2116-2117). In the late 1980s, Lebanese immigrants settling in Australia were highly educated. For instance, sixty per cent participated in the workforce, and fourteen per cent were unemployed. But, according to the Lebanese Community Council of New South Wales (1989:45), there were many Lebanese female Muslims unemployed due to discrimination against the ‘hijab’ (wearing the veil).

Immigration policies in the 1990s comprised of two major immigration streams - ‘Skilled’ and ‘Family’ streams – available to overseas applicants, including Lebanese individuals. There are general rules under both streams, which require migrants to satisfy certain criteria and a “points test”. Many Lebanese settlers in the late 1990s fell under the ‘Family’ stream. This was mainly due to Australian Lebanese citizens applying to have their parents or spouses/fiancés immigrating to Australia for permanent residency. There were fewer Lebanese ‘Skilled’ migrants coming to Australia in the late 1990s.
Muslim Immigrants and Multiculturalism:

Humphrey (1998), for instance, identifies the family as being an important factor in sustaining the history and ethnic cultures of Lebanese communities in Australia. In particular, he recognises the family as providing its members with cultural knowledge, skills and memories. He also identifies the importance of social community networks (Arabic schools, Mosques and the Arabic Press), as contributing to the cultural reproduction of language and history among the Lebanese. This particular writer further comments that western stereotypes of Islam contribute to the process of change and formation of the cultural identity of Lebanese people. Humphrey (1998), for example suggests that Islamic practices are constantly criticised by the Australian mainstream media. He further comments that the misinterpretations of Muslim cultural practices arise from a long history of the racial and prejudice attitudes of the dominant culture towards immigrants and their cultural differences.

This particular writer suggests that global media services tend to portray Islamic practices in a homogeneous context, which as a result, causes local Muslim immigrant groups to constantly defend the authenticity of their culture. For instance, he comments that local Muslim immigrants resist the global homogenisation of Islam by demanding equal cultural rights and recognition of their cultural practices in Australian laws. (Humphrey, 1998:165). In response to media misrepresentation, Humphrey (1998) suggests that there are pro-active Muslim organisations which tend to monitor and react impulsively to media stereotypes in Australia.

He also suggests that the resistance of Muslim groups towards Islamic stereotypes is reinforced through the social activities of the global Muslim community, which tends to provide its members with a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic and religious group. To him, this sense of ethnic unity among Muslim immigrants is identified through ‘pilgrimage to Mecca, the appointment of overseas imams as religious leaders, visits by emigrant overseas clerics, Arabic radio broadcasts of religious sermons and the circulation of the sermons of popular Cairene imams on cassette tapes in the community…’(Humphrey, 1998:166).

It is important to note that there is current Arabic organisations such as the Australian Arabic Council and the Victorian Arabic Social Services that specifically address social issues to do with Arabic-speaking communities in Melbourne. The aims and objectives of these organisations are to address the needs and interests of Arabic-speaking groups. Furthermore, these Arabic organisations
organise social projects to promote better understanding of Arabic cultures in Australia (for example media and employment workshops, cultural and educational seminars, Arabic festivals and learning programmes, the production of informative pamphlets, videos and conferences, etc).

At times, Arabic organisations liaise with each other in terms of joint projects. Their aim is to produce festivities and other social functions for Arabic-speaking communities. For instance, during the 1990s, Arabic organisations worked together to produce educational plays. These plays address aspects of culture, heritage and communal way of life. Furthermore, some Arabic organisations also assist Arabic individuals with issues of interpretation, discrimination and other communal problems.

Humphrey (1998) also points out that the Arabic language is an important cultural attribute for Lebanese immigrants. In his view, the Arabic language is a useful skill which assists Lebanese Muslims in terms of educational and vocational propositions in the broad Australian community. For example, this writer comments that the bilingual skills of Arabic immigrants are not only an advantage in terms of global literature, trade and religious knowledge, but also in terms of interpretation and translation. In that, Humphrey (1998) suggests that bilingual Arabic people are able to assist their national in better communicating with westerners in broader social networks.

Furthermore, Humphrey (1998) suggests that international studies tend to depict Muslim immigrant communities as each having its own distinct social, ethnic and linguistic origins. In particular, he suggests that such studies claim that Muslim immigrant communities have specific sectarian and regional origin. (Humphrey, 1998:163). This writer also points out that Lebanese Muslim groups tend to have a more local ‘close-knit’ community network than other Lebanese religious communities. In his opinion, the local cultural practices of Lebanese Muslims provides them with a stronger position in terms of international religious representation.

Also, Humphrey (1998) suggests that global technology has improved the level of communication between Lebanese immigrants and their former homeland, as opposed to the earlier experiences of Lebanese emigrants. For instance, this writer claims that direct contacts is possible between Lebanese families through improved telephone facilities and computer networks. In particular, Humphrey (1998) identifies the link between Lebanese people through electronic bulletin boards (e.g. LEBNET) which engages ‘on-line’ users with overseas information relating to daily news, literature, travel fares and social events in Lebanon.
Socio-Economic Profile:

This section outlines the socio-demographic factors of Lebanese Muslims in Melbourne.

In his article on Muslims in Australia, Kandil (1994-95) comments that the population of Muslims in Australia has been increasing since 1976. For example, in 1976 – the population of Muslims was 45,200; then in 1986 – it was 109,521; and further increasing to 147,487 in 1991. Furthermore, he states that the number of Lebanese-Muslim people in Victoria has also increased to 49,617. (Kandil, 1994-95: 1-2). The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 1996 census also states there were a total of 33,424 Lebanese-born immigrants in Australia in 1976. Later on, there were 70,224 Lebanese-born immigrants (51% males and 49% females), in Australia in 1996.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census indicates that there are a total of 71,349 males and females identified as Lebanese living in Australia; (specific census data pertaining to Muslims was not available). The 2001 Census also indicates that there are 127,253 Lebanese individuals with both of their parents being born overseas. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). The Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census also states that there are 70,200 overseas-born first generation Lebanese individuals, and 82,600 second generation Lebanese Australians. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Year Book Australia, 2003 Population International Migration).

Lebanese people (including Muslims) are spread all over Melbourne. However, I am particularly concerned with the areas of high concentration of Muslims. For instance, according to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, their 1996 census matrix table (CS080) indicates the following statistics in regards to Islamic Lebanese-born people in Victoria:

**Table 1: Islamic Lebanese-born people in Victoria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brimbank</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darebin</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobson’s Bay</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>293</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regions</td>
<td>Hume</td>
<td>Moreland</td>
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<td>458</td>
<td>827</td>
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<td></td>
<td>459</td>
<td>778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4,318</td>
<td>2,215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1996 Census Matrix Table (CS080).

Note: The researcher of this study accessed the Australian Bureau of Statistics website on the 15th of July 2003, and found that they had also used 1996 Census.

**Employment:**

This section outlines current statistical data about Lebanese people in the workforce.

According to Batrouney the unemployment rate for Lebanese-born in Melbourne, in the late 1990s, is as high as 28 per cent. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001). Moreover, the high rate of unemployment among the Lebanese-born is indicated in the northern municipalities of Melbourne: Moreland (39.1%), Hume (35.1%) and Darebin (30.5%). There is also a high concentration of unemployed Lebanese-born in both the Maribyrnong (45.7%) and Hobson’s Bay (34.3%) municipalities. Furthermore, the Immigration Update Report (1998/99) indicates that the estimated unemployment rates for Lebanese people indicates that there are more Lebanese females unemployed (33.0%), than Lebanese males (20.2%). Batrouney suggests two reasons which explain the high unemployment rate in regards to the Lebanese community. One is the decline in manufacturing jobs available to non – skilled Lebanese migrants. The second reason has to do with the Civil War back in 1976. Batrouney believes the Civil War caused disruptions in the education and employment status of many Lebanese people emigrating to Australia. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001).

In the late 1990s, the Lebanese in Melbourne are widespread in terms of job categories. According to Batrouney there is a high percentage of Lebanese individuals participating in professional and managerial groups. On this matter, he comments that the occupations of Lebanese-born persons in Melbourne reveal a spread across all occupational groups. The professional and managerial groups account for some 35.2 per cent of the occupations of all Lebanese-born (managers and
administrators 3.5 per cent, professionals 7.7 per cent and associate professionals 24 per cent). The other groups include clerical, sales and service workers at all levels (19.1 per cent); tradespersons and related workers (11.1 per cent); and labourers and related workers (11.9 per cent). (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001).

According to Batrouney, the pattern of Lebanese percentages in occupational groups, indicates there are more Lebanese individuals participating in service industries and professional jobs. He suggests that there seem to be fewer Lebanese people engaged in manufacturing industries. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001). Furthermore, in verifying the latter statement, Batrouney comments there is an increase in the educational qualifications and professional occupations attained by both first and second Lebanese generations since the 1970s. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001).

Family Profiles:

The following is a brief description of the twenty families that participated in the interviews of this thesis: (Fictitious names were given to the families to protect the identities of participants).

The Zaki family: There were five members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their younger son and daughter did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1976. They lived in a northwestern suburb of Melbourne. All members of this family enjoyed living in what they considered as a modern and reputable environment. The Zaki family had lived in this area for eight years. The father, Kaled Zaki, was forty three years of age. He had worked as a doctor for sixteen years, and was still working in this profession. His partner, Hajar Zaki, was thirty-eight years of age. She worked as an acupuncture therapist. She was currently practising her work at her partner’s clinic. Their son, Walid Zaki, was eighteen years of age. He was a full-time first year tertiary student in Arts and Law, and worked part-time as an assistant at his parents’ clinic. He enjoyed working at the clinic.

The Spee family: This family included five members. It was only both parents and their teenage daughter that participated in the interviews. Their two younger daughters did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1978. They had lived in a western suburb of Melbourne for the past eight years. The father, Nazih Spee, was forty-five years of age. He had worked as an accountant in a Melbourne business practice for nine years, and was still working in this profession. He was also a member of a tutoring organisation in business and commerce studies. He assisted students who had experienced difficulties in areas of economics, accountancy and business law.
His partner, Hiba Spee was thirty-seven years of age. She worked as a nurse for a private Melbourne hospital for the past eight years. She also worked at an elderly nursing home during the weekend. She enjoyed taking care of elderly patients. Their daughter, Manar Spee, was nineteen years of age. She was a full-time business student at a Melbourne college, and worked part-time as a receptionist at an Islamic organisation.

The Yessi family: There were four members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their younger daughter did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1980. They lived in an eastern suburb of Melbourne. All family members enjoyed living in their modern two-storey house. They had been living in this house for the past seven years. The father, Sami Yessi, was forty-four years of age. He had worked as a university lecturer for ten years. He also worked as a researcher for a business agency in Melbourne. His partner, Noura Yessi, was thirty-nine years of age. She worked as a multicultural aide teacher for the past eight years. Their son, Yusuf Yessi was seventeen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year twelve, and worked part-time as a kitchen hand in a café.

The Sabah family: There were five members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their younger son and daughter did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1985. They lived in a northeastern suburb of Melbourne. The father, Kazi Sabah, was forty-one years of age. He had worked as a geologist for the past thirteen years. His partner, Ayda Sabah, was thirty-five years of age and worked as an Arabic secondary school teacher for the past ten years. She also enjoyed teaching the Arabic language to Islamic students during the weekend. Their son, Hisham Sabah, was seventeen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year eleven. His favourite subjects were Arabic and mathematics. Hisham Sabah also worked part-time as a grocery sales assistant.

The Mai family: There were three members in this family. Both parents and their teenage daughter participated in the interviews. The family had migrated to Australia in 1986. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne. All family members had been living there for the past ten years. The father, Khozi Mai, was forty-one years of age. He had worked as an Arabic and science teacher for the past six years. Khozi Mai also worked as a voluntary Arabic and Islamic tutor during the weekend. He was also a member of an Islamic organisation in Victoria. He assisted in organising regular Arabic and Islamic meetings for the Muslim community in Victoria. His partner, Mouna Mai, was thirty-four years of age. She also worked as an Arabic teacher for the past six years. Their daughter, Maha Mai, was seventeen years of age. She was a full-time business and marketing
student in university. Her favourite subject was economics. Maha Mai also worked part-time as a medical receptionist at a Melbourne clinic.

The Merhi family: There were six members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their younger son and two daughters did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1976. They lived in a southern suburb of Melbourne. All members had been living there for the past ten years. The father, Sayed Merhi, was forty-four years of age. He had worked as a social worker for the past ten years. He was also a member of an ethnic Arabic organisation in Victoria. His partner, Souha Merhi, was thirty-six years of age. She had worked as an Arabic teacher for the past ten years. Their son, Ayad Merhi, was sixteen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year ten. He enjoyed learning Arabic and English.

The Lail family: There were five members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son and daughter that participated in the interviews. Their younger son did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1979. They lived in a northwestern suburb of Melbourne. The father, Ziad Lail, was forty-seven years of age. He had worked as an engineer in a Melbourne construction company for the past fifteen years. His partner, Leila Lail, was thirty-six years of age and worked as a social worker for the past eleven years. She enjoyed promoting Arabic social projects with the assistance of ethnic and multicultural organisations in both Sydney and Melbourne. Their son, Nader Lail, was nineteen years of age. He was a full-time university student in fine arts and graphics. Nader Lail also worked part-time as a store salesman at a shopping mall in Melbourne. Their daughter, Fida Lail, was seventeen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year eleven. Her ambition was to become a primary school teacher.

The Salah family: There were seven members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son and daughter that participated in the interviews. Their three younger daughters did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1977. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne for the past fifteen years. The father, Yehya Salah, was forty-nine years of age. He had worked as an Arabic community worker for the past thirteen years. He enjoyed assisting Arabic speaking families with social, legal and welfare crises. His partner, Nadia Salah, was forty-five years of age. She had worked as a dental nurse for a Muslim dentist for the past eight years. Their son, Bader Salah, was nineteen years of age. He was a full-time Arts student at a university in Melbourne. He enjoyed learning psychology and sociology. Bader Salah also worked part-time as a customer assistant at a fast food restaurant in Melbourne. Their daughter, Nadra Salah, was
seventeen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year twelve. Her favourite subject was English.

The Houri family: There were six members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their younger daughter and two sons did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1980. They lived in an eastern suburb of Melbourne. All family members had been living there for the past eleven years. The father, Talal Houri, was thirty-nine years of age. He had worked as an aero-technician for five years, and was still working in this profession. He was also tutoring in an engineering course at a Melbourne college. His partner, Fadwa Houri, was thirty-six years of age. She worked as a science teacher at an Islamic secondary college in Victoria. Their son, Mounzar Houri, was sixteen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year ten. His favourite subjects were mathematics and science.

The Zeydi family: The family included three members. Both parents and their teenage son participated in the interviews. The family had migrated to Australia in 1976. They had lived in a northern suburb of Melbourne for the past twelve years. The father, Azam Zeydi, was thirty-nine years of age. He had worked as a university lecturer for the past nine years, and was still working in this profession. He was also a member of a research and graduates university committee in Victoria. His partner, Roula Zeydi, was thirty-six years of age. She worked as a secondary school teacher for the past nine years. She enjoyed teaching typing and legal studies. She also worked as a voluntary Arabic tutor during the weekend. Their son, Mohamad Zeydi, was seventeen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year eleven. His ambition was to become a medical doctor.

The Yegli family: There were six members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage son and daughter that participated in the interviews. Their two younger sons did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1975. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne. All family members have been living near relatives for the past twenty years. The father, Fadi Yegli, was forty-four years of age. He was a former Dunlop employee. His partner, Souad Yegli, was thirty-nine years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. She was a former factory tailor. Both Fadi Yegli and Souad Yegli were unemployed. These parents depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their son, Nour Yegli, was nineteen years of age. He was a full-time computer-programming student in a Melbourne tafe. He enjoyed learning about computer software systems. Nour Yegli also worked in
an auto workshop as a mechanical assistant. Their daughter, Nina Yegli, was seventeen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year twelve, and hoped to become a lawyer in the future.

**The Mohamad family:** The family included six members. It was only both parents and their teenage son that participated in the interviews. Their three younger sons did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1976. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne. All three members enjoyed living in a suburb with many residents from an Islamic background. The father, Hilal Mohamad, was forty-six years of age. He had been a self-employed business owner. His partner, Iman Mohamad, was thirty-eight years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Hilal Mohamad and Iman Mohamad were unemployed. These parents depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their son, Rabih Mohamad, was nineteen years of age. He was a full-time first year science student at university. His ambition was to further his academic studies in optometry.

**The Nahli family:** This family included five members. It was only both parents and their teenage son and daughter that participated in the interviews. Their younger son did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1977. They lived in a southern suburb of Melbourne. They had enjoyed living in this suburb for the past twenty-one years. The father, Hisam Nahli, was forty-six years of age. He was a former factory worker. His partner, Samya Nahli, was forty-one years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Hisam Nahli and Samya Nahli were unemployed. These parents, as with parents in a number of other families, depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their son, Basem Nahli, was sixteen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year ten, and hoped to study medicine at university. Their daughter, Houda Nahli, was nineteen years of age. She was a full-time art and design student at Tafe. Houda Nahli also worked in a Melbourne boutique store as a dress shop assistant.

**The Hani family:** There were six members in this family. It was only both parents and their two teenage daughters that participated in the interviews. Their two younger daughters did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1980. They lived in a southern suburb of Melbourne. The family enjoyed living in this area because it was accessible to local shops and the city. The father, Fawaze Hani, was forty-four years of age. He was a former factory worker. His partner, Hayfa Hani, was thirty-nine years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Fawaze Hani and Hayfa Hani were unemployed. These parents also depended on the
Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their first daughter, Sana Hani, was nineteen years of age. She was a full-time business-marketing student at university. She enjoyed learning about marketing issues and wished to pursue this interest at an honours level. Sana Hani also worked part-time as a store assistant in a large Melbourne shopping complex. Their second daughter, Nahed Hani, was seventeen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year eleven. Nahed Hani also worked as a cashier assistant in a supermarket.

**The Amar family:** There were three members in this family. Both parents and their teenage son participated in the interviews. The family had migrated to Australia in 1979. They lived in a north eastern suburb of Melbourne. All family members had enjoyed living in this suburb for the past ten years. The father, Adham Amar, was forty seven years of age. He was a former car salesman. His partner, Mayada Amar, was thirty five years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Adham Amar and Mayada Amar were unemployed. These parents also depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their son, Samir Amar, was seventeen years of age. He was a full-time secondary school student in year eleven. He enjoyed learning French and mathematics.

**The Oula family:** This family included three members. Both parents and their teenage daughter participated in the interviews. The family had migrated to Australia in 1975. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne. They had enjoyed living in this quiet and peaceful environment for the past twenty years. The father, Wissam Oula, was forty-nine years of age. He was a former employed butcher. His partner, Nada Oula, was forty years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Wissam Oula and Nada Oula were unemployed. These parents depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their daughter, Farah Oula, was nineteen years of age. She was a full-time science student at university, and hoped to become a pharmacist in the future.

**The Deib family:** There were four members in this family. Both parents and their two teenage daughters participated in the interviews. The family had migrated to Australia in 1978. They lived in a northern suburb of Melbourne. All family members have been happily living in this area for the past fourteen years. The father, Ahmed Deib, was forty-eight years of age. He was a former factory worker. His partner, Najah Deib, was thirty-eight years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Ahmed Deib and Najah Deib were unemployed. These parents depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their first daughter, Fatima Deib, was nineteen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year
twelve, and hoped to study nursing at university. Fatima Deib also worked as a hospitality assistant. Their second daughter, Sonya Deib, was seventeen years of age. She was also a full-time secondary school student in year eleven, and hoped to become a hair and make-up artist in the future.

The Bassam family: This family included five members. It was only both parents and their teenage daughter that participated in the interviews. Their two younger sons did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1976. They lived in an eastern suburb of Melbourne. All three members enjoyed their neighbours company who were also of an Islamic background. The father, Farouk Bassam, was forty-six years old. He was a former factory worker. His partner, Salimi Bassam, was forty-two years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Farouk Bassam and Salimi Bassam were unemployed. These parents, as with parents in a number of other families, depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their daughter, Ghada Bassam, was eighteen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year twelve. She enjoyed learning Arabic and Islamic studies.

The Khandi family: There were six members in this family. It was only both parents and their teenage daughter that participated in the interviews. Their two younger sons and daughter did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1979. They lived in a northwestern suburb of Melbourne. The family had enjoyed where they lived because it was close to other relatives. The father, Mustafa Khandi, was thirty-eight years of age. He was a former taxi driver. His partner, Ronya Khandi, was thirty-five years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Mustafa Khandi and Ronya Khandi were unemployed. These parents also depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their daughter, Jenan Khandi, was sixteen years of age. She was a full-time secondary school student in year ten, and hoped to become a teacher in the future.

The Bilal family: The family included six members. It was only both parents and their two teenage sons that participated in the interviews. Their two younger daughters did not participate. The family had migrated to Australia in 1981. They lived in a western suburb of Melbourne. They had enjoyed living in this area for the past eighteen years. The father, Asad Bilal, was forty-five years of age. He was a former factory worker. His partner, Suraya Bilal, was thirty-seven years of age. She worked at home taking care of the children. Both Asad Bilal and Suraya Bilal were unemployed. These parents depended on the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency as a source of income. Their first son, Jalal Bilal, was eighteen years of age. He was a full-time secondary
school student in year twelve, and hoped to become a pilot in the future. Jalal Bilal also worked as a travel agent assistant. Their second son, Jamal Bilal, was sixteen years of age. He was also a full-time secondary school student in year ten, and hoped to study politics at university.

It is important to note that the twenty Sunni Muslim families who participated in this thesis do not represent the views of all members from the broad Islamic Lebanese community. The participants in this study have been randomly selected from different suburbs across Melbourne to provide insights into some of the ways members from a Muslim background view their own ethnicity in Australia. However, it can be said that the families in this thesis share similar historical circumstances to members of the broader Lebanese community who also emigrated to Australia in the late 1970s, due to the outbreak of the Civil War in Lebanon. This also means that many respondents would belong to first and second generation Lebanese immigrants since the 1970s – in the past three decades.

It is also apparent that many second generation respondents in this thesis come from high concentrated areas of Islamic Lebanese-born people in Victoria. The families in this thesis who came from low socio-economic backgrounds reflect upon the high unemployment rate of Lebanese people in northern and southern municipalities of Melbourne. The reasons for the unemployment status of some families in this study were commonly shared by the majority of members from the broad Lebanese community. This mainly had to do with the disruption of employment of respondents in terms of their decision to emigrate to Australia. Other participants also experienced economic hardship with the decline in manufacturing jobs. For many participants from a low socio-economic background, it was difficult for them to participate in skilled sectors of the workforce. It is apparent that in some instances of the thesis, some of these participants were referred to as ‘former workers’, as opposed to unemployed males or females, because it was important to acknowledge the past work experiences of some respondents in semi-skilled jobs.

It was apparent that families from a middle socio-economic background also reflected the high percentage rate of Lebanese individuals participating in professional and managerial groups. It is evident from this thesis that many of the parents were qualified teachers, whilst others worked in a range of highly skilled professions. It is also important to note that many second-generation respondents in this thesis were also currently employed in part-time jobs. These respondents shared strong views in terms of completing higher education courses.

Mosques, Schools, Newspapers and Broadcasting Services:

Mosques, Schools, Newspapers and Broadcasting Services:
In this section, I provide information about Muslim Mosques in Melbourne. It also outlines the newspapers and broadcasting services available to the Lebanese community in Melbourne. It is important to note that the following information relating to Mosques, Schools, Newspapers and Broadcasting Services where obtained from both secondary sources and brief contacts and interviews with key persons in the broad Arabic community. For instance, brief interviews were conducted with a work representative from the King Khalid Islamic Secondary College, and the Preston Mosque in Victoria in 1999. Also, brief contact via telephone was made with work representative from An Nahar Arabic Newspaper in Victoria in 1999. It is evident that there were these services offered to families which meant that the Lebanese community had established its own social network within the broad Australian community.

There are fifty seven Mosques in Australia. They are mainly located in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne. For instance, the first Mosque to ever be established in Australia was in Adelaide. This Mosque was built by Afghan camel drivers in 1890 (Bouma, 1994:56). For many Muslim communities settling in Australia, it was important for that community to establish a Mosque for purpose of worship, schooling and culture. It is important for many Lebanese Muslims to attend their local Mosque, as religion is integral to the self-identities of Muslim individuals. Prior to the 1970s, early immigrants struggled to erect Mosques across Australia. The huge influx of Muslim migrants to Australia in the late 1970s, led to further developments of Mosques in Australia. According to Batrouney, there have been many Mosques and Islamic societies established in the past ten years. He comments that by 1998, there were 35 Islamic societies established in Melbourne (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001).

All Mosques in Australia are financed by their local Muslim communities. Some also receive financial assistance from Muslims overseas. Each Australian State has an Islamic Council formed by members from several Islamic societies within that particular State. Bouma (1994:57) states, ‘These State Islamic Councils co ordinate the interests and activities of Muslim organisation within each State.’ The Federation of Islamic Councils deals with both the international and national affairs of all Australian Muslims. It also deals with the Federal government and contributes to the salaries of the “imams”. The imams are leaders of the Mosques. Their main duties are to lead Mosque prayers, deliver sermons teach religion, conduct marriages and funerals, assist with individual and communal crises. (Bouma, 1994:58).
Mosques are located in Melbourne regions such as Fitzroy, Footscray, Heidelberg, keysborough, Maidstone, Newport, Noble Park, Prahran, Preston, Shepparton, North Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Brunswick, Carlton, Fawkner, West Melbourne, Coburg, Doncaster and Hysterfield. These Mosques belong to Lebanese, Turkish, Bosnian and other Islamic communities. All Mosques allow the entry of Muslims who believe in the ‘oneness’ of God. Other non-Muslim individuals are invited to attend these Mosques to learn about Islam. Many Lebanese Muslim families attend the nearest Mosque to their property. (Islamic Society of Victoria, 1999). Large concentrations of Lebanese Muslims attend the following Mosques in Melbourne: ‘Omar Bin Al-Khattab Mosque or Preston (80 per cent Lebanese); Newport Mosque (all Lebanese); Maidstone Mosque (majority Lebanese); Fawkner Mosque (majority Lebanese) and Dandenong Mosque (around 40 per cent Lebanese).’ (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001:568). The largest Mosques are located in Preston and Broadmeadows.

There are six Islamic primary and secondary schools in Melbourne. Two of these schools are located in the northern municipalities in Melbourne – King Khalid Islamic College of Victoria, (Coburg), and Al-Kamal Arabic school, (Preston). There is also the Minaret Islamic College of Melbourne South and East; and Werribee Islamic College in the southern areas of Melbourne.

There are four Lebanese newspapers in Melbourne available to Arabic-speaking groups. These are: El Telegraph, Al Mustakbal, An Nahar and El Herald. According to Batrouney, the oldest Arabic newspaper is El Telegraph. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001). These newspapers offer international and local community news, and information on politics. They also contain business and commercial advertisements. Their format may vary, but all Arabic newspapers are independent commercial businesses run by Arabic-speaking workers.

It is important to note that the Arabic press tends to strongly identify with its own political position and interests, thereby offering its readers differing perspectives of politics in the media. For instance, some of these newspapers tend to focus on both local and international political issues, offering an in-depth analysis of both political studies and stories. While other Arabic newspapers may also address issues to do with global politics, however, this reportage is dealt with in a broader context based on information gathered from wide community sources. It is also apparent that some members of the Arabic press tend to discuss politics from a right-wing perspective which may include some views about the political regime of the Lebanese government.
There are a number of radio programmes offered to the Lebanese community in Melbourne. There is the *Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)* Arabic radio programme on 3EA. According to Batrouney, there are a number of Arabic programmes available on community radio 3CR, such as *Saut El Shaab (Voices of the Masses)* and *Voice of Arab Women*. (Batrouney in Jupp, 2001). Other radio programmes available, include: *Iman Voice/Arabic programme, Middle East Arabic Radio programme, Lebanese programme, and Arabic radio 2ME 1638 AM*. Other forms of electronic media available to the Lebanese community are Arabic programmes offered on *TV Channels 31 and SBS*. There is also the *Arab Radio and TV (ART)* international programme which is available on cable television to Lebanese Muslims and other Arabic-speaking groups.

**Social Problems of Community – (1999):**

My intention in this section is to seek background information about the social problems confronting Lebanese Muslims in Melbourne. It is important to note that these interviews were based on brief preliminary research interviews with three key persons from the Lebanese community to seek a general idea of some of the problems confronting Lebanese Muslims. These short interviews took place prior to formal discussions with the twenty families in this study. Therefore, although themes of employment, immigration and discrimination emerged from these ten to fifteen minute conversations with three Lebanese representatives, the point of this exercise was not to engage with these themes in terms of a detailed analysis, but rather the main intention was to get community representatives to identify key problems. Therefore, this study used this material as a basis to identifying key issues to be further explored with the families during interview discussions, as opposed to using this material to guide my overall research.

Two community representatives, Sami Zayed and Nadia Bayni were selected from migrant resource centres in Melbourne, whilst Hani Mulla was an imam from a Muslim Mosque in Melbourne. He was particularly chosen to ascertain his views on issues confronting Muslims in Australia. All three community representatives were full-time workers. They were also members of Islamic and Arabic organisations. These representatives have had over ten years experience in dealing with the social concerns of Lebanese people, including immigration cases, employment barriers, housing and settlement problems, refugees, ethnic prejudice, legal and family affairs, as well as, personal conflicts. At this stage, it is important to note that Sami Zayed felt that a community representative can not represent the entire views of an ethnic community. Rather, he points out that they act as a voice to the social concerns of Lebanese families. There were three main themes that emerged from these interviews: employment, immigration, discrimination.
The issue of unemployment was viewed by representatives as a major problem in the Islamic Lebanese community. Sami Zayed also comments that there are many unskilled migrants among Arabic groups. For example, he states that the Lebanese were the second highest unemployed Arabic group. Sami Zayed also points out that there were 30% of Lebanese people unemployed. He further suggests that many Lebanese individuals suffer from long term unemployment in Melbourne. Nadia Bayni also commented about the issue of unemployment. She claims that the problem of unemployment tended to create subsequent problems for many Lebanese Muslims in Melbourne. Nadia Bayni spoke about the effects of unemployment on the self-identity of Lebanese individuals. She suggested that Lebanese individuals experienced a number of psychological problems, such as depression, anger/anxiety and low self-esteem. Nadia Bayni also commented that unemployment led to family problems. For example, she points out that some males resorted to domestic violence, as a result of boredom and frustration. Furthermore, she also felt that non-recognition of overseas qualifications by the government, contributed to the high rates of unemployment among the Lebanese.

In commenting on similar issues of unemployment, Hani Mulla felt that the introduction of modern technology into Australian industries tended to supercede the work skills of Lebanese Muslims. He points out that modern facilities required new sets of skills to access them. Hani Mulla commented that the function of modern equipment became a prerequisite in many work industries. Consequently, Hani Mulla felt the latter issue became a problem for many semi-skilled Lebanese Muslims. He suggests that the government needs to implement new work strategies to meet the special work needs of Lebanese individuals. Both Sami Zayed and Hani Mulla suggest that there aren’t any employment training programmes which address the different levels of work skills of Lebanese groups. Moreover, Hani Mulla suggests that Australian industries need to implement employment courses, which meet the needs of Lebanese immigrants. Other problems experienced by the Lebanese relate to issues of immigration and settlement.

Nadia Bayni suggests that many Lebanese Muslims tend to settle in similar regions, close to their family members and other relatives. Consequently, she commented that it took several years before Lebanese individuals were willing to re-settle to other parts of Melbourne. Hani Mulla and Sami Zayed commented about the experiences of Lebanese Muslim families in relation to government welfare benefits and real-estate services. For instance, Sami Zayed commented about the problems faced by “newly-arrived” Lebanese Muslim immigrants in Australia. He suggests that these immigrants faced problems of restriction and access to many government welfare benefits. Bearing
this issue in mind, he believed that in certain cases it is applicable to provide Lebanese Muslim migrants with access to welfare benefits. Sami Zayed points out that this will help to support and improve their social conditions in Melbourne. Hani Mulla spoke about a number of Lebanese Muslim families experiencing difficulty in renting a house in Melbourne. He believes that many Australians were reluctant to rent their house to parents with many children. They fear that children will ruin their homes. The issue of ethnic discrimination was also raised in the interviews.

Sami Zayed, Nadia Bayni and Hani Mulla felt the issue of racism was no longer a common one among the Islamic Lebanese community. For instance, Sami Zayed comments that there were many social projects initiated by Arabic organisations to combat racism in recent years. He felt this was one factor which contributed to less racial incidents in the community. Sami Zayed, for example, commented that the Australian Arabic Council held media seminars and workshops in the community. The aim of the Council was to promote positive aspects of Arabic and Islamic cultures in Australia. Furthermore, Sami Zayed commented that the council was also very active in monitoring media stories which tended to depict a negative image of Arab-Australians. On the other hand, Hani Mulla commented about stereotypes in the Australian mainstream media. In his opinion, media stereotypes continue to portray Lebanese Muslims as violent villains and outcasts. Sharing similar views on this issue, Nadia Bayni points out that the government needs to implement educational seminars which address issues of stereotypes and social prejudice.

Limitations:

In this section, I shall discuss the limitations of research on the Lebanese Muslim community. There were a number of methodological problems identified in constructing this chapter on the Lebanese. For instance, in comparison to this particular chapter on Lebanese Muslims, other studies fail to include an up-to-date history on the social and community structures of the Lebanese. Consequently, the little information available on the Lebanese community (particularly Islamic groups), required me to set-up interviews with key members of the community. Here, my intention was to gain background information about current social organisations and other related information on the Lebanese. (For example, year of establishment and community service.). Furthermore, the little amount of literature on the Lebanese made it difficult for me to gather statistical data on this community. For example, it was only possible to obtain 1996 Census Statistics on the Lebanese.

Other latest statistics were not available at the time of research – with the exception of an Immigration Update Report which indicates latest estimates of unemployment rates in regard to the
Lebanese community (For example, years 1998-99). Other problems arise from the broad categories outlined in statistical tables on the Lebanese. Firstly, research material fails to indicate that there are minority religious groups within Islam. Secondly, research material fails to make distinctions between the differing social needs of both Islamic and Christian Lebanese communities. For instance, there are differences in cultures, customs, religious sects, village affiliations, and other political interests.
CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this thesis is interesting because it generates important issues in terms of how Sunni Muslim participants narrate notions of ethnicity in the Australian context. The methodology chapter is divided into three parts. The first section provides a brief discussion of the methodological themes centred on interview-narratives. Whilst aware of the broad conceptual analysis on narratology including textual methods of narrative analysis, this study focused on models of content, as the aim of the research specifically sought qualitative data for its analysis. The second section of the chapter provides some information about case studies conducted by other researchers in which family group interviews formed the main basis of their methodology. The purpose of this section is to outline some of the positive aspects that were reaped from family group discussions. The third section of the chapter provides general information about the steps taken in applying the overall methodology of this thesis. It outlines the various stages of fieldwork, including preliminary research, participants’ backgrounds and data tabulations.

Narrative Analysis:

In recent decades, a number of writers have discussed literary theories of interview narratives. It seems there are two main streams of practice in the methodology of narratology. Some theorists have adopted a traditional view of narratology (see Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Scholes and Kellogg, 1966; Halliday, 1970; Stivers, 1993). These analysts have focused on interview narratives from a linguistic perspective – focusing on issues of language and sentence grammar. Other groups of analysts have adopted a much more practical approach to interview methods (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Paget, 1983; Cortazzi, 1993). The work of these analysts deals more with the interpretation of speech in in-depth interviews. It is important to note that the methodology of this thesis is much more concerned with the second option of narratology which concerns models of content.

This thesis also approached its family interviews in a non-formal way. It is clear that Open-ended questions were used to engage in dialogues with respondents. These have been some of the unstructured interview conventions used in this methodology to encourage respondents to have more control over their response towards particular topics. It was also felt that uninterrupted discussions with respondents would help them to provide detailed stories in response to direct questions about their social and cultural experiences. This method of analysis was also foreseen as
being useful in empowering respondents to carefully think about their response to questions in the interview. In some instances, these interview techniques helped to elicit personal case experiences from respondents in regard to a particular topic. Whilst it is clear that some limitations exist within models of narrative analysis, however, the use of in-depth interviews has generated positive dialogues for this thesis. In particular, the use of open-ended questions helped to enhance the interview material by generating important issues in some of the discussions with Sunni Muslim respondents.

Narrative analysts such as Riessman (1993), Cortazzi (1993), Mishler (1986), Paget (1983) are more concerned with the structural analysis of in-depth interviews. To these analysts, it is important to have unstructured interviews, in which respondents can freely speak in response to open-ended questions. Mishler (1986), for instance, argues that it is important to approach interviews in a non-formal way. He adopts two approaches in terms of his position as the researcher. Firstly, he allows respondents to provide lengthy answers without any interruptions. Secondly, he argues that he allows the respondent to view him as the audience, in which he believes, the respondent is then encouraged to take control of his or her response over a particular topic. Consequently, he suggests the latter methods encourage respondents to extend their responses, creating stories about their actual life experiences. On this point Mishler says:

We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses. Nonetheless respondents may also tell stories in response to direct, specific questions if they are not interrupted by interviewers trying to keep them to the “point”. (1986, p.69).

Likewise, Riessman (1993) makes a similar point when she argues that it is important not to interrupt respondents with standardized questions. Rather, she suggests the use of broad open-ended questions in interviews. Furthermore, Riessman also says that by allowing respondents to speak freely, she believes respondents will tend to organise their replies into long stories. Cortazzi (1993), following a similar line of thought, suggests that narratives should not be interrupted, except when the listener asks for minor clarifications. In his view, these brief interruptions ‘do not take the main turn away from the teller’. (1993:28). Instead, he believes that brief interruptions assist the respondent to ‘design the narrative to meet the knowledge and interest of listeners.’ (Cortazzi, 1993:28).
It is also important to note that both Mishler and Riessman share similar positions about using closed questions in interviews. Both narrative analysts suggest that yes or no questions can also generate stories. For instance, in her work, Riessman provides an example on this matter, when she comments: ‘But even questions that could be answered by a yes or no can generate extended accounts: Studying racism in the everyday lives of black women, Essed (1988) asked, “Have you ever experienced discrimination when you applied for a job?”, many women responded with stories’ (Riessman, 1993:54). Furthermore, Mishler (1986) is also in agreement with Riessman’s view about extended narratives in response to closed questions. He argues that respondents may provide detailed stories in response to direct questions about ‘experiences assumed to be common if not universal’ (Mishler, 1986:98). Mishler further comments on this matter; suggesting that a direct question about a “fight or a violent confrontation with death” is likely to cause respondents to provide a story on this particular issue (1986:99).

Central to the work of narrative discourse theorists is the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee in regards to in-depth interviews. For a number of these theorists, the issue of power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee is a problematic one. Theorists such as Mishler and Riessman (1993), suggest it is important to allow respondents the freedom to think about their response to interview questions. (also see Paget, 1983). Mishler, for instance, argues that ‘the effort to empower respondents and the study of their responses as narratives are closely linked.’ (1986:118). He argues it is important to ensure respondents do not feel a sense of alienation during the interview process, but ‘to encourage them to find and speak in their own “voices”.’ (p.118). In his view, this allows respondents to make coherent sense of their interpretations of life events and experiences.

Likewise, Riessman (1993) argues that interviews are based on conversations between the interviewer and interviewee, in which, she believes that both participants should be given considerable freedom to talk. Moreover, Riessman points out that it is important to ensure that respondents are given greater control to narrate their own views on certain topics. Furthermore, she argues that the practice of interview is about the teller and the listener engaging in a discussion, where both participants develop meaning together.

Paget (1983) also argues it is important to encourage respondents to take control of their own speech. She believes this approach tends to provide respondents with ample time to enhance and develop the structural content of their narration. In her view, an in-depth interview is a learning process for both the listener and teller to question each other’s replies during the interview.
Consequently, she believes, the latter process enables both the listener and the teller to gain a better understanding of their conversation.

Other narrative analysts have looked at the issue of truth and validation in the discussion of narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1986; also see Stivers, 1993). All analysts vary in their approach to the issue of truth. Riessman (1993), for instance, argues that the verification of how truthful a story might be is irrelevant to narrative studies. Instead, she suggests that narrativization is an interpretative process, where emphasis is placed on the evaluation of meanings within narrative contents. For example, Riessman points out that people tend to narrate similar events in different ways, depending on the values and interests of the individual. Furthermore, she points out that narrative analysts should trust their own interpretations and meanings which they derive from personal narratives.

In thinking through issues of reliability and validity, Mishler (1986) also agrees it is important to shift our attention away from scientific and technical issues of reliability and validity. Instead, he argues it is important to focus on the different forms of practice that individuals adopt in narrating their own positioning in the real world. Moreover, Mishler is specifically interested in how individuals construct a coherent narration of their personal experiences, and their efforts to make sense of these experiences.

This thesis has taken the thoughts of narrative analysts into account in terms of further developing its own methodological model. As stated, this study used open-ended interview questions to allow respondents to discuss their own ideas about certain issues. It also relied on informal interview techniques, which helped to capture spontaneous responses of participants in a much more naturalistic setting. As the researcher, I also adopted the role of the listener and contributor during the interview process. Whilst there was little focus on the contributor role during the interviews, however, this method of approach helped to elicit important discussions from respondents about their personal life experiences. In contrast to the idea of respondents gaining control in providing lengthy answers during the interviews, the thesis tended not to draw heavily on this method of approach.

There were two problems foreseen in this method of interview practice. Firstly, this approach might cause respondents to steer their ideas about specific issues in different directions, therefore, making it difficult to assess their views on a particular topic. Secondly, this method allows the task of data analysis to become a tedious and time-consuming process on completion of the interviews.
With this in mind, I played the role as both the listener and contributor (at particular moments in the interviews), to provide an overall summary to respondents’ ideas, and in order to overcome lengthy discussions.

**Family Group Interviews:**

It is important to note that there are three distinct types of methodologies in regard to family studies. Some studies focus on the notion of family as their subject of study (Storer, 1985; Hartley, 1995); while others employ the methodology of separate interviews with family members (Hawthorne, 1988). However, there are also case studies, such as this study, which involve interviewing each individual family as a group.

The following family case studies have used in-depth interviews as part of their methodology. Hawthorne (1988), for instance, provided an interpretative oral history of ten migrant families from different ethnic backgrounds. In contrast to broader studies about migrants in Australia, in-depth family interviews formed the basis of Hawthorne’s methodology. Her research on ethnic families also included secondary-based data such as, newspapers, letters, scrapbooks, photos and other historical accounts of the families. She explored the historical experiences and realities of these families, in particular, allowing members of the families to express their own thoughts and interpretations about their personal and social experiences as migrants in Australia.

There were a number of issues identified in Hawthorne’s work which indicated some of the advantages sought from intensive interviewing of family groups. Firstly, family group interviews were perceived by Hawthorne as a useful way of generating additional information to other secondary data collated such as newspapers and letters. This method of approach helped her to engage in discussions with families, reflecting on the personal and social experiences of members. This focus provided valuable insights into the differing patterns of migration and the economic histories of members across the families. Secondly, Hawthorne perceived family research as an important technique which captured different forms of discussions based on factors of age, gender and generation. To Hawthorne, this technique identified differing opinions among family members, and helped to provide insights into various family conceptions and backgrounds.

Storer’s (1985) text, a compilation of articles by different authors, focused on family groups to provide information on the differing ethnic family values between people who belonged to nine different nationalities. These were Vietnamese, Lebanese, Turkish, Yugoslavian and Greek
families. In particular, this review of ethnic families focused on four broad areas. These related to aspects of traditional values; changes to these values in the countries of origin of migrants; and the effects of the migration experience, and how these experiences affect the migrants’ values in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s (Storer, 1985:4). In particular, some of the common topics discussed in each of these articles related to issues of family structure and family values, etc.

Storer in his editorial overview commented that a common methodology based on particular themes was used among writers in the text. He suggested that extensive background research was applied to collate both Australian and overseas material on each of the ethnic groups. Storer (1985) also suggested that the latter information received careful examination from a number of ethnic and educational sources. To him, this helped to reinforce the accuracy of the text’s material and to overcome indirect misrepresentation of ethnic minority groups. He also believed this review formed an important basis of the methodology. Furthermore, he suggested that this background information was later incorporated into final drafts of the study.

From this methodology, he highlighted the importance of family studies in gaining valuable information about the cultural experiences of ethnic groups concerning different aspects of family life. (i.e. marriage, inheritance, divorce, etc.). His work indicated how family methodology also helped to explain broader social changes and their effects on the family situation. Moreover, he believed that family studies provide significant information in regards to shifts in family attitudes. Also, Storer felt that the study of family groups was an important focus to better understand family dynamics through different periods of migration.

Overall, he concluded by stating that it was a difficult task to analyse culturally diverse groups, because of the range of social factors which tend to influence everyday family dynamics. However, he suggested that his research study provided some insights into the complex nature of cultural diversity and family differences. The significance of cultural pluralism was highlighted in Storer’s text, through some of the discussions pertaining to the complex range of social factors and characteristics of ethnic groups. These discussions provided background information about the social and economic changes experienced by ethnic families, as a result of migration.

Hartley’s (1995) text was also a collection of articles by different authors, focusing on the idea of cultural difference among diverse family backgrounds. She comments that the text highlights the broad commonalities and differences between cultural groups as they relate to the idea of family. The chapters in this book shared common interests in exploring the migration and settlement
experiences of immigrant families, and the effects of these processes on family values. It also considered the cultural and socio-demographic differences between families. This book also indicates some of the difficulties experienced by the families in regards to social change effecting family roles, values and relationships. The aim of this methodology was to produce detailed information reflecting the cultural diversity of families in Australia.

She felt family methodology provided an important account of the diversity and differences between families in Australia. She pointed out that an examination of the family indicated the diverse values, structures and cultural backgrounds of families in Australia. To Hartley (1995), it was important to examine family groups to gain insights into new changes and different challenges of family life. She felt that studying different family groups was a useful way of indicating some of the contemporary notions and definitions of the family which have emerged, as opposed to family studies in the past.

Hartley, for instance, commented that reassertions of family traditions among later generations are best understood within a contemporary family context. Furthermore, Hartley believed that research-based studies on the family created significant knowledge of cultural values that affected the lives of diverse families in different ways. According to Hartley the general findings which emerge from this research relate to the consistency of some general, family-related values across cultural groups. Issues of family support, attachment, and cohesiveness, for example, were common expectations among families. She also suggested that community networks were highly valued across the various groups.

The study by Hartley and Maas (1987) examined factors which influenced the decisions of ethnic minority families about their children’s schooling and careers. In particular, these researchers focused on the family’s influence and interaction in regard to students and their schooling. They felt that the educational outcomes of ethnic students were influenced by factors such as student’s background, home and school environments, and the interaction between home and school (1987:7). Hartley and Maas’ methodology was based on a model of family frameworks to gather important information around complex family issues. To achieve this, they conducted three different sets of interviews based on both group and individual participation. These series of discussions involved both non-English and English speaking parents, secondary school students and early school leavers. Other set interviews involved a discussion between the researchers and individuals who had background knowledge about particular issues of the study.
Hartley and Maas (1987) adopted the use of family groups in terms of their methodology. They saw family as being an integral component in the lives of young (ethnic) students. Consequently, the latter researchers viewed the study of families as a useful way of organising their qualitative data. Hartley and Maas felt the family was important to reflect upon in discussions about schooling and younger generations. They also felt that family methodologies helped to engage in discussions with broader issues such as age, class, gender and educational background. With this in mind, these researchers felt that families were a useful way of assessing differing views and experiences across generations. Furthermore, they suggest that family groups were important research tools, because they provided a variety of individual backgrounds and experiences within a particular ethnic group. Hartley and Maas also saw a discussion group approach as an appropriate means to collating data around complex family issues. To them, this method helped to generate mass information through the exchange of individual views in the group.

In conclusion, the study by Hartley and Maas aimed to raise important issues, rather than solutions to the complex problems associated with the transition of ethnic minority students from school to work life. This study suggests that the family had both a positive and negative influence on the schooling of ethnic minority students. For instance, it identified factors of family support, encouragement and motivation as positive influences on children’s education, whereas, the lack of understanding and communication of ethnic minority families were viewed by researchers as negative influences. However, Hartley and Maas emphasised that the greater understanding of schools and other related bodies about the latter influences of the family is significant to the future educational outcomes of ethnic minority students.

Similarly, the study by Bullivant (1986) provided an analysis of the occupational socialization of high school students in Melbourne. In particular, the study focused on whether or not barriers of discrimination exist within schools and the wider community, which might be affecting the future employment opportunities of ethnic students. Bullivant was also interested in whether ethnic students perceived themselves as being disadvantaged, both in terms of educational and work prospects. Relying on a multi-site case study approach, the research aimed to gather information based on a qualitative methodology. In so doing, it used both a pilot study (questionnaire) approach, and had also conducted interviews with various groups of school teachers, students and parents.

A review of Bullivant’s case study methodology indicated that a group discussion approach is important for seeking detailed information. To him, this method provided greater understanding of
the complexity and uniqueness of individual cases. He also felt that group methodology allowed some commonalities to emerge from the discussions. These commonalities were viewed by Bullivant as forming a useful summary to the overall conclusion of the study. He also felt that group interviews provided a broader scope of discussion among interviewees. Bullivant, for instance, suggested that group interview settings created a much wider and more intense discussions among participants on particular issues. He further pointed out that informal group interviews created more spontaneous responses from participants in this particular setting.

He also argued that this form of methodology offers raw data which often portrays the ‘authenticity of subjects’ responses’ (Bullivant, 1986:70). Bullivant suggested that data obtained from group discussions can also be utilised in addition to secondary sources, such as personal diaries and other materials. He also commented that this form of research tends to enrich data collated from group discussions through some of the direct and indirect contrasts made between factors of socio-economic and regional contexts, and the actual sample studied.

Some of the overall findings in Bullivant’s study suggested that there was little evidence that teachers tended to discriminate against ethnic students in regards to education and career guidance. However, he claimed that there were scarce career resources available within school systems. Bullivant also felt that there was little evidence to suggest a direct link between sexual discrimination and its effects on career aspirations, in that, he felt there were too many variables involved in this particular matter. However, Bullivant did suggest that prejudice was mainly evident in terms of ‘name-calling’ and some physical violence between students. (p.248).

Whilst it was evident that these various studies offered different contents and perspectives, however, all of them adopted a case study approach on family issues. Similarly, my research on Sunni Muslim Lebanese families has also adopted a case study method to investigate participants’ views on issues of ethnicity, gender, racism and the family. There were similarities and differences between the case studies discussed on the idea of family group interviews, and the methodology of the thesis. For a number of these ethnic researchers, group discussions were a useful technique of generating additional information, thereby gaining different views and perspectives across the families (Hawthorne, 1988; Hartley, 1995; Storer, 1985; Hartley and Maas, 1987; Bullivant, 1986). To some of these writers, family groups also tended to indicate the different patterns of social, economic and cultural diversity of families in Australia (Hawthorne, 1988; Hartley, 1995; Storer, 1985). Whilst this thesis draws on similar ideas for its own methodological purpose, it also found family groups as a useful way of assessing different views and experiences across generations.
Also, the technique of group interviews was seen by the case studies as a basis for forming important discussions based on the differing geographical, socio-economic and demographic background of respondents (Bullivant, 1986; Hartley and Maas, 1987; Hawthorne, 1988). With this in mind, writers such as Bullivant and others argued that informal group interviews captured spontaneous responses from participants in the study. To these ethnic researchers, this sort of methodological frameworks offered raw and rich material based on the authentic responses of participants. The case studies indicates that some writers also viewed family group discussions as a useful way of gaining insights into the effects of social change on the contemporary family (Hartley, 1995; Storer, 1985). This thesis also shows family change through the study of a particular ethnic group and its views on social and cultural values in the Australian context.

Other ethnic researchers such as Storer (1985) and Bullivant (1986) suggested that group discussions also offered other information about family life which was useful to utilise and incorporate at a later stage of the study. For instance, Bullivant commented that group methodologies allowed some commonalities to emerge from the discussions and were useful in forming an overall summary to the study. In using a similar methodological model, this thesis was able to make contrasts and comparisons across the families based on factors of age, generation, gender and socio-economic background.

**Applying the Methodology:**

Whilst the case studies examined the views and perspectives of different ethnic family groups, this thesis focuses on the views of a particular ethnic and religious community group in Australia, namely the Sunni Muslim Lebanese families. In having established a review of other family research, the next stage of the study was also important in applying the methodology of this thesis.

The general aim of this research study was to examine how Islamic Sunni Lebanese families narrate their social and cultural experiences within the family and the broader Australian context. Moreover, this method of analysis was modelled around concepts of family, race, gender and ethnicity. Also, the aim of this study was to highlight some of the similarities and differences between the views of participants across the families. To do this, a case study approach involving twenty families was taken.
The initial contact with Lebanese social workers provided a significant basis for the construction of interview questions which were modelled around issues of family, ethnic identity, gender, racism and the general social and cultural practices of participants. A series of open-ended questions were constructed in relation to the latter themes. These themes were divided into five separate headings. The first set of questions focused on issues of the family. These particular questions examined the general views of respondents about their position and cultural practices within the family. Also, questions posed to the participants in this section reflected the sort of contact these participants had with family members overseas. The second set of questions examined how respondents tended to narrate their own ethnic identities. These questions also looked at the experiences of respondents as an ethnic minority group in Australia. There was also a focus on the views of participants about other non-Islamic cultural practices.

The third set of questions dealt specifically with the gender roles and practices of both Muslim men and women. Some of these questions also relate to issues of gender in regard to marriage and work practices. The fourth set of questions examined the issue of racism with participants. Some of these questions also explored the experiences of respondents in terms of their social participation within the broad Australian community. The fifth set of questions related to the general social and cultural practices of the participants. In particular, these questions related to issues of television viewing, friendship, and the attendance of participants at ethnic organisations.

These fifth set of questions were also issued to respondents in terms of a survey format. The surveys helped to save interview time with family members, and sought to collect an extended view of the general social and cultural practices of each family member. These surveys were collected two weeks later from respondents’ homes, after having completed the interviews with each family group. The latter set of questions were not treated as a separate analytical chapter at a later stage in the thesis. Instead, the general discussions raised in this particular section of the interviews were utilised in different sections of the thesis as extended analysis of the interview material.

In order to trial the interview questions, I conducted informal interviews with fifteen individuals from a Lebanese Sunni Muslim background. Based on this trial, some sections of the interview questions were altered for the purpose of clarity for the subsequent formal interviews. Next, with the assistance of a colleague from the Australian Arabic Council, five families were selected to participate in these interviews. The involvement of other families in the study occurred through ‘snowballing’ methods where I was put in contact from one family to another. However, these
families were carefully selected in order to obtain a wider sample distribution of Sunni Muslim families across Melbourne.

It is important to recognise that the study generally considered Islamic Sunni Lebanese families from both low and middle socio-economic backgrounds across Melbourne. This study does not claim to make any comparisons between these families based on specific background factors such as class and occupational status, and the community as a whole. For example, the study does not claim to make statistical comparisons between the overall percentage of Lebanese Muslim men and the socio-economic background of male participants in the study.

With this in mind, it was important to achieve a social and demographic balance between these participants. Therefore, issues of age, generation, gender, socio-economic status, and location were important to consider in pre-selecting the families. Some of the positive side to the methodology is that this study employed different sorts of methodological frameworks such as in-depth interviews, family groups and a survey. Within this particular standard research convention, the study considered the views of participants on issues of ethnicity, family, gender and racism, and has allowed the participants to define and express their own thoughts on the latter issues.

Overall, twenty families were selected to participate in the interviews. There were some characteristics shared by the twenty families in the study. Many of the families had migrated to Australia after the Lebanese civil war in 1976. This was with the exception of the Yegli and Oula families who had emigrated to Australia prior to the civil war. The twenty families had all been living in Australia for over fifteen years. Many of the families formed part of a chain-migration process, which meant that they had migrated to be with family members and relatives in Australia. Other participants from middle socio-economic families were qualified immigrants who wanted to better their economic circumstances in Australia. Two first generation male respondents emigrated as overseas students, in order to complete their tertiary studies in Australia.

In transcribing the interview material, there were slight alterations made to some Arabic quotes in order to clearly convey their translation into English. Clearly, the term first generation participants was used to refer to the parents in the families, and second generation participants referred to the teenagers who had participated in this study. The sample of families in this study came from different suburbs in Melbourne (North Eastern, Western, Southern suburban areas). Ten of the families in this study came from a middle socio-economic background. The parents in these families came from skilled sectors of the workforce. The other ten families in the study came from
a low socio-economic background. The parents in these families had low levels of formal education.

The emergence of this family sample occurred through carefully selecting families to suit the methodological design of this study (for example, ten educated and ten non-educated families). For instance, some of the families nominated to participate in the interviews were dismissed, because there was a need for more families from a middle socio-economic background. Therefore, the process of one family referring me (as the researcher), to another family continued until all twenty families were selected to participate in the interviews. All families were gender mixed. Thirty-three female participants and thirty-four male participants were involved in this study. The age of participants ranged from sixteen years to forty-nine years.

The interview discussions with family groups were taped. Each family involved three to four participants. Each interview took about one and a half to two hours. Both the English and Arabic languages were utilised in the interviews to ensure that interviewees understood all questions and had provided adequate responses. Fictitious names were given to the participants in this study to protect the confidentiality of the families. It is important to acknowledge that the fieldwork of this thesis, including major analytical sections of this study were established prior to the terrorists attacks on America in September, 2001. Therefore, this significant event seemed inappropriate to include in broader discussions of racism in this thesis.

This methodology recognises some of the strengths and weaknesses in adopting family interviews. For instance, the interviews with these twenty families had proved to be a time consuming procedure than anticipated. A number of meetings had to be arranged at different times to ensure that all family members were able to participate in formal interviews. Whilst the families shared a general view on certain issues in the discussions, it was important for me to differentiate between individual views. This helped to carefully ascertain individual views in regards to notions of age, gender and socio-economic status. Also, it was important to recognise that there were different experiences across families such as differences in the geographical distribution of participants.

As stated, Arabic and English were utilised to communicate effectively with the participants. In some instances, Arabic was solely used to engage in discussions with some parents who lacked proficiency in English, whereas many of the teenagers felt comfortable communicating in English during the course of the interviews. My bilingual skills in both the Arabic and English languages was also useful in the transcription of the interviews. Prior to engaging in formal interviews with
participants, contact was established with the families to discuss the nature of the research study. This initial consultation with families was also important in gaining self confidence with participants, and vice-versa. The formal interviews took place within the homes of families at a later stage. Members of the families were interviewed together as one group. Initially, each respondent spent time carefully reading their consent letter prior to their agreement to participate in the interviews. Each member of the family was requested to state their name at the beginning of the interview sessions. Each participant was also requested to provide a response to the interview questions.

The discussions with family members involved taking notes, and also recording these responses on tape. As stated, open-ended questions were used in the interviews to allow participants to freely engage in a dialogue which offered spontaneous and personal views about broader aspects of ethnic, family, gender and racial issues. Some of the participants provided a much more detailed response than others to the questions posed in the interviews. Some of the other limitations resulting from this methodology, relates to the fact that some family members might have felt inhibited from speaking freely about particular issues (for example ethnic and gender issues), in the presence of other family members. This might in fact have been an important issue that did not come across as being visibly significant at the time these interviews were conducted. This was mainly evident among parents from a middle socio-economic background. Whilst other family members had also provided a personal reflection of their own ethnic and social experiences in the broad Australian community.

These interviews had provided valuable discussions that were later utilised effectively in the analytical material of the study. In completing the interview sessions with each family, the participants were each requested to fill out a personal profile form. This greatly assisted in documenting background information about the social characteristics of the twenty families, which later formed part of the methodological discussion of the thesis. At a later stage of the research study, the families were provided with a draft of the interview material for their chance to comment on the general and personal content of the study. Some of the participants had made an effort to provide feedback on the interview material. These comments were taken into consideration in the final drafts of this thesis. In considering some of the points raised in the methodology, this helped to shape the next set of analytical chapters based on interview discussions with twenty Sunni Muslim families on issues of ethnic identity, family, gender and racism.
CHAPTER THREE: ETHNIC IDENTITY

Introduction:

In the post war era, Australian sociological literature focused on examining concepts of multiculturalism and ethnicity, as a result of the ways in which the notion of ethnic diversity raised critical questions in regard to ethnic and national identities. Whilst there has been a broader consideration of multi-ethnic discourses at a national level, it is also apparent that social theories continue to offer a complex analysis of ethnic identity at a communal level. When we consider changes in global migration today, the competing claims of diverse ethnic groups still pose questions in terms of ethnic identity. In past decades, different theories have examined the notion of ethnic identity. An old school of thought refers to the assimilation model of ethnicity. Consequently, a group of writers seemed to be in agreement that subsequent generations of immigrant groups were to lose their ethnic identity as they gradually blended into the host culture. (Price, 1982; Cox, 1976; Storer, 1985; Zubrzycki, 1960).

There were some points of agreement among researchers within debates of assimilation and acculturation. A cluster of theorists seemed to focus on statistical changes of intra-ethnic marriages to indicate that ethnic origin has been breaking down in Australian society. It is also apparent that researchers assessed ethnic groups in terms of their association with people of similar ethnic background, and their patterns of contact with former countries, for indication of retention of traditions. (Price, 1982 and Cox, 1976:113-114).

Here, assimilation theories were quite subtle in attempting to understand the nature of ethnic identity, and what this had meant to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is apparent that theorists offered broad interpretations in terms of defining issues of ethnic identity. However, they placed little emphasis on the complex discourses of ethnic identity. Here, social theorists failed to grapple with issues of cultural diversity and difference in their attempt to interpret individual group identities. It is also clear that assimilation theories fail to reflect the cultural dynamics of ethnic minority groups.

Assimilation theories tend to offer weak distinctions between issues of individual identities and community identities. Rather, they mainly focus on a unified view of ethnic groups in their discussion of ethnic identity. Working from a different view on the notion of ethnic identity, this
thesis explores notions of ethnicity and identity from a number of perspectives. This study attempts to directly deal with the complex nature of ethnic identity. For instance, it was clear that my respondents offered various interpretations in terms of what ethnic identity had meant to them at a personal level, communal level, and their position in regard to the broad Australian community.

Many social researchers felt it was inevitable that immigrants would conform in time to the norms of the dominant culture. However, other writers felt that a pluralist model of ethnicity was needed in order to recognise and preserve some aspects of cultural differences. Consequently, a new school of thought concerned with the notion of ethnic identity emerged at a later stage. These included theories of constructing ethnic identities, hybrid identities, multiple identities and new ethnicity theories. For the purpose of this particular chapter, it is important to identify each theory of ethnic identity, and to discuss the common themes that emerge from these particular set of theories.

This particular method helps to provide a better perspective between themes identified within the theoretical literature and the interview discussions on ethnic identity which follows at a later stage. Firstly, I shall briefly discuss the different debates within this new school of thought, and then outline some of the common problems among these theories. It is apparent that theories focus on processes of shift and change in terms of ethnic identity at both an individual and collective level. Working around a plural model of ethnicity, they recognise that ethnic identity is one dimension of multiple identities that individuals tend to enunciate in the broad social community. This view reflects one group of social theorists who discuss the idea of constructing identities among diverse ethnic groups in modern settings. These writers suggest that individuals should have the ability to choose their own ethnicity from the various group identities within their community (Waters, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Tsolidis, 1993; also see Wexler, 1990).

The notion of hybrid identities is another important issue in theories of ethnic identity. There are two main positions within this debate. On the one hand, a cluster of thinkers discuss hybridity in terms of individuals having an identity position in two different cultural communities (Bottomley, 1992). Whilst other social theorists refer to hybridity in terms of individuals and their complex cultural experiences (Bhabha, 1990; Gilroy, 1993). This important concept is not seen as a positionality, but as the ‘in-between’, in which some researchers think about hybridity as something that doesn’t settle down as one fixed identity.

Other groups of ethnic theorists focus on the notion of multiple identities (Castles, 1996; Habermas, 1994; Hindess, 1993; Hall, in Terry 1995; Kymlicka, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Benmayor and Skotnes,
These debates on ethnic identity move away from a homogeneous view of the social self, but instead recognise subjectivity as comprising multiple identities – which relate to ethnic, gender and cultural constructs of the self (for example, Hall, in Terry 1995:2). There are two main arguments posed by social theorists in these debates on multiplicity.

At one level, there are multiperspectives of ethnic identity which recognise identity as a complex notion which relates to a number of positions that form the social self. Here, a group of theorists recognise that ethnic individuals are resisting a unified view of identity, but recognise new forms of identity representation (Bahbha, 1990; Habermas, 1994). Whereas, other researchers recognise culture as a political process, in which they argue that multiple dimensions of ethnic identity are being continuously contested and renegotiated between ethnic generations (Verdery, 1993; and Benmayor and Skotnes, 1994).

In recognising the complexity of ethnic diversity, a new literature has also emerged comprising of new ethnicity theories. The main viewpoint in this area of debate suggests that it is important to re-theorize concepts of ethnicity and difference to take account of new ethnic and cultural representations (Hall, 1996; Brah, 1992; Gilroy, 1987; Bottomley, 1991; Cohen, 1992). Social theorists suggest that dominant discourses of ethnicity fail to recognise the varying needs of social and cultural groups.

These theories recognise issues of cultural diversity and difference as important markers of ethnic identity. They understand the complex relationship between ethnic identity and cultural differences, but they fail to work thoroughly with these important concepts. It seems that new theories on ethnic identity share a common problem, in that, their interpretations of ethnic identity issues remain at a theoretical level. The main limitation to these theories is that they make brief connections between empirical data and their own ideas of ethnicity. Whilst some of them share positive ideas about identity construction and change, they fail to explain these changes in terms of the diverse cultures and religious beliefs of different social groups. A canvassing of theories on ethnic identity indicate there is unresolved tension in this literature. Whilst these theories discuss the positive implications of individuals having an identity position in two different cultural communities, they fail to make close links between ethnic identity and issues of class and gender.

Other researchers in this debate focus on the positive implications of hybrid identity and ethnic minority groups. These writers believe that a relationship exists between individuals’ historical traditions and their ability to negotiate aspects of their cultural differences in contemporary society.
However, the main problem in this debate relates to the various attempts of social theorists to interpret the complex relationship between individual’s cultural identity and their sense of location. This relationship seems to be an ambiguous one that requires further analysis in theories on hybridity.

It can also be said that this thesis relates to some of the theories on issues of ethnic identity and cultural differences. However, this study initiates more of a productive role on these important matters via its attempt to also examine the views of a particular community group on ethnic identity issues. For instance, debates on ethnic identity tend to place little emphasis on the self narration of ethnic minority individuals. It is also apparent that the new theories of identity recognise that former theoretical models of ethnicity need to be replaced with new models of collectivity that make links between multiple identities and group differences. These theories also suggest that discourses of ethnicity fail to recognise the complex and diverse nature of ethnic identities. They also fail to indicate how new models of collectivity can be applied to the different social situations of ethnic minority groups. In working from a different perspective, this thesis recognises the complex nature of ethnic identity. It attempts to understand how individuals think about their ethnic identity by interviewing Lebanese families from a Sunni Muslim background.

Whilst there are differences in some of the ways a community group might interpret concepts of ethnic identity, this thesis clearly demonstrates how respondents tend to define and interpret issues of culture, gender and religion. These respondents made important distinctions between issues of ethnicity, whilst at other times recognising the complex relationship of ethnicity with issues of class and gender.

The following were key areas in which respondents centred their discussions on the notion of ethnic identity:

(i) One of the issues that emerged in the thesis interviews was the notion of dual identities. In this section, I seek to provide a brief summary of key theorists who have contributed to debates centred on the notion of ethnic diaspora. Also, this section of the chapter provides the views of participants on the different social positions that they tended to enunciate as Sunni Muslims in the broad community. There is also a discussion of the views of female respondents about their ethnic identity and diasporic experiences in Australia. Another issue that emerged in the thesis interviews
was the idea of nationalism among respondents. This section also outlined the views of respondents about their ethnic and national identities.

(ii) The idea of respondents on issues of culture and integration was also a key aspect of the discussions on ethnic identity. My intention in this section is to outline some of the discussions centred on the idea of cultural pluralism.

(iii) Language was also a prominent issue in the discussions with participants on the notion of ethnic identity. In this section, I provide a discussion about issues of language being integral to participants’ notions of ethnic and religious identities. This particular discussion is also compared with contemporary studies on language and ethnicity.

Before commencing my analysis on ethnic identity, it is important to provide a summary of some of the complexities identified in writing about the notion of ethnicity. The aim of this summary is to provide the reader with a clear view of the structural analysis of this chapter. It also prepares the reader to identify with the complex nature of ethnicity at both a theoretical and empirical level. For instance, in contrast to other broad themes such as gender, the term ethnicity entails many sub categories such as culture, religion and national identity. The latter concepts seem to be discussed and treated separately at a theoretical level. Whereas from a community perspective, issues of ethnicity, culture, religion and national identity, are not simplistic when being defined in terms of the lives of an ethnic community group. For example, Sunni Muslim individuals seemed to discuss the latter issues all at the one time.

Respondents saw notions of ethnicity, culture, religion and national identity as being importantly interrelated issues in discussing their life experiences. Members of Lebanese Muslim families seemed to discuss the latter issues with relative ease, whilst making reference to multiple identities, all at the one time. This indicates that respondents knew what ethnicity, culture, religion and national identity had represented and meant to them, because all respondents were from the one ethnic community group. It can also be said that these families spoke with great confidence in regard to the notion of ethnicity, because all members shared similar knowledge about their own cultural way of life.

In generally discussing the notion of ethnicity with Sunni Muslim families, it seemed that there were a number of overlapping issues. For instance, in examining the idea of dual identity with participants, it was clear that respondents had interpreted this idea in a complex way. From the discussions, it seemed that categories of ethnicity and culture tended to overlap each other. For example, some respondents made strong links between the notion of ethnicity and religion. A first
generation female participant such as Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher), felt her ethnic identity was importantly linked with her heritage, traditions and religious background. Whilst other respondents spoke about issues of ethnicity, culture and religion in a different way. Here, it seemed that participants were speaking about a number of issues in their interpretation of the ethnic self. In particular, many first generation male participants spoke about issues of ethnicity, religion, culture and social practices all at the same time.

But clearly, from the discussions, it seemed that participants were clear about their Islamic identities as being central to their ethnic identities. However, at the same time, these participants interpreted the concept of culture in terms of social practices. These respondents felt that culture had to do more with an individual’s expression of social behaviour and practical way of life. For example, Ahmed Deib (unemployed father) viewed his Islamic identity as being his sole ethnic identity. However, he also viewed his social identity as shifting in terms of adopting different forms of cultural practices from the broader Australian community.

Another theme that emerged in broader discussions on ethnicity was the issue of national identity. For some participants, it seemed that the idea of national identity had separate meanings to issues of culture, ethnicity and religion. They were able to make a distinction between their ethnic and national boundaries. It was possible for these respondents to feel patriotic towards both their former and residential countries, without having to feel a sense of threat towards the loss of their ethnic origins. For example, Adham Amar (former car salesman) commented that an individual’s ethnic and religious identities do not change. However, he felt that individuals are able to adopt a sense of two national identities over a long period of time.

In other sections of this chapter, it was also evident that there were differences between the families about issues of cultural pluralism and social practices. In this discussion, the notion of culture was interpreted by respondents in different ways. For a number of respondents, the notion of culture seemed to have different meanings in regard to both an ethnic and social context. For instance, Sunni Muslim families from a low socio-economic background tended to interrelate notions of cultural identity and cultural practices in discussing their relationship with broader cultures in Australia. To them, the notion of culture had two different forms of meanings.

At one level, these respondents felt that culture had specifically related to their own ethnic traditions and practices. Whereas, at another level, respondents engaged in discussions where the notion of culture was being identified in terms of broader social and cultural practices. For example, Mouna
Mai (teacher) did not agree with the idea of individuals changing their religion and ethnic background. However, she welcomed the idea of individuals adopting new cultural ideas and practices from different social groups.

There seemed to be evidence of tension in some of the way these respondents had spoken about issues of culture and social integration. Their discussion about the concept of culture was quite complex, as it tended to overlap issues of ethnic identity, religion and social practices. For these respondents, the term culture was used as a point of reference to help participants to differentiate their views and definitions of cultural practices and social practices. Whilst it seemed that respondents spoke about these two issues both at the same time, however, they seemed quite aware of making appropriate distinctions between the term culture and social practice. For example, Kaled Zaki (doctor) felt it was important to carefully ascertain broader social practices. He commented that it was important to adopt social practices that did not affect your ethnicity, but rather improved your social lifestyle.

Language was another important issue raised in this chapter. In this particular discussion, respondents spoke about language in terms of a number of interrelated issues such as ethnicity, identity and religion. It was clear that language was an important expression of their ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Language was an important ethnic value for Sunni Muslim families, because it was used by respondents as a constant point of reference in discussing issues of ethnicity, culture and religion. From the discussions, many members of the families perceived language as an important tool of practice which helped to inform their views on different aspects of the Islamic culture. For example, Mayada Amar (unemployed mother) commented that Arabic was the language of the Qur’an. Consequently, she felt that Arabic helped her children to learn more about their Islamic cultural traditions. Other respondents had also viewed language practice for reasons beyond its ethnic value. They also made some connections between the issue of language and broader social benefits. In that, language was viewed by some respondents as an important skill to be utilised in terms of education and employment issues. For example, Rabih Mohamad (19 year old student) felt that the Arabic language helped to increase individuals’ chances in obtaining satisfactory educational and employment positions.

New Notions Of Diaspora:

The vast literature on ethnic diaspora offers a number of issues that cannot all be integrated and analysed within the structure of this thesis. It can be said that the main themes that emerge in
different sections of this literature relate to broad theories of immigration, settlement and social integration, ethnic conflict and exclusion. However, the concept of exclusion has been a dominant theme within debates of diaspora indicating that race and ethnicity have been problematic issues in regard to the cultural representation of ethnic minority groups (Hall 1990, Gilroy 1993, Brah 1996, Bhabha 1990, Cohen 1993, 1997, Clifford 1994). Here, the term diaspora is used as a way of rethinking issues to do with ethnic identity and representation as opposed to unified views of the self.

Hall (1990), for instance, argues that the diverse cultural practices of different group identities raise important questions concerned with issues of cultural identity. He believes that ethnic practices reflect on the different social positionalities of the individual, which he commonly refers to as “the positions of enunciation”. Hall comments that cultural identity is a very complex and problematic concept. In his view, the term cultural identity is not as authentic as it may seem. To him, individual and collective cultural experiences are two completely different issues, which tend to be associated with different cultural practices.

Furthermore, he suggests that cultural identity should not be viewed as a fixed component of an individual’s life. But rather, Hall suggests that identity assumes new forms of social positionalities. He further suggests that identity relations with the past is not as simplistic as it may seem. Consequently, Hall reinforces the idea that individual identities experience new forms of ethnic representation, which may not totally reflect upon a person’s history and cultural background. As Hall points out:

In this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture … It has its histories – and histories have their real, material and symbolic effects. The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is always – already ‘after the break’ (1990:226).

Bearing these issues in mind, Hall also suggests that the notion of diaspora needs to be analysed beyond an essentialist context. Instead, he comments that ethnic diaspora needs to be recognised in relation to the diverse experiences of different group identities. Hall further points out that diaspora identities need to be conceptualised in terms of individuals having to live in two different places at the same time. To Hall, this also means that individuals tend to negotiate a number of social positionalities in regards to two different cultures. The latter researcher claims that diaspora
identities assume new forms of change and identification through cultural differences. Hall comments:

The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (1990:235).

But as Hall points out in his work there is an unresolved tension within this literature. He points out that issues of race, class and gender continue to make important claims of ethnic representation despite our theoretical critique of diasporic discourses. To him, race, class and gender tend to constantly raise important and complex questions within theories on ethnicity and culture.

To Gilroy (1993), notions of diasporic identities and difference are complex and problematic issues. He suggests that it is no longer possible to make simplistic connections between traditions and ethnic identities. Instead, Gilroy comments that the term tradition is quite a diverse concept in itself. In his view, diaspora is a powerful concept which he suggests ‘can function to supply ethical and political legitimacy’ in relation to the social histories and ethnic identities of individuals (Gilroy, 1993:207).

Like Hall, Gilroy’s work does not place much emphasis on the notion of ethnic subjectivity and the unifying dynamics of a particular culture. But rather, Hall’s and Gilroy’s position on the notion of diaspora adopts a broad focus on the connections of culture across different ethnic and national groups, looking at issues of similarities and differences between cultures across different ethnic and national groups. Gilroy’s insightful analysis on new notions of diasporic identities have opened up new pathways in dealing with the conceptual frameworks of diaspora.

On the other hand, Brah’s (1996:179-180) analysis of diaspora makes distinctions between its theoretical use and the historical experiences of individuals. She suggests that it is important to analyse the historical experiences of diaspora in relation to broader issues of ethnicity, place and identity. Brah also points out that the concept of diaspora is a problematic term which involves complex interrelations between ethnic identity and place of origin. Furthermore, the latter researcher argues that it is not possible to have a fixed view of diasporic identities. Instead,
narratives of the Self are interpreted in different ways according to the diverse historical experiences of individuals. Brah comments:

It is within this confluence of narrativity that ‘diasporic community’ is differently imagined under different historical circumstances. By this I mean that the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively. (1996:183).

She also points out that the concept of diaspora is about multi-conceptions of identity within and across territorial and cultural boundaries. In her view, this raises a number of important questions in regard to new notions of diasporic experiences. To Brah, these new notions of diaspora refer to individual’s complex experiences of political practices, new subject positions and social power relations.

The work of Hall (1990), Gilroy (1993) and Brah (1996) on diaspora involves a new approach to working with concepts of race and cultural identity. These researchers have used the notion of diaspora to reposition our thoughts about ethnic representation beyond ideas of essentialism and ethnic subjectivity. However, there seems to be unresolved tensions in this main idea on new notions of diaspora. Whilst these social theorists claim that the specific histories of individuals are linked with their sense of new diasporic identities, they fail to provide a clear analysis between the changing shift of individuals’ traditional histories and their new experiences of diaspora. Other social theorists have criticised the work of these researchers. They argue theorists’ ideas are yet to deal with the problems identified with the exclusionary logics of ethnic and national boundaries. (Helmreich 1992 and Anthias 1998).

The latter discussion of researchers about diaspora and ethnicity (Hall 1990, Gilroy 1993) does not provide detailed analysis of the inter-ethnic differences of subjectivity. The latter theorists, for instance, fail to separate individual ethnic identity from broader unifying dynamics of social groups. Instead, the theoretical positions of these writers on diaspora adopts a broad focus on cultural issues across different social groups. However, these researchers seem to be more immersed with issues of race and conflicting representations of class and gender.

This area of debate on new notions of diaspora focus less on class and gender differences within a particular ethnic minority group. Also the complex tensions in this literature relate to the failure of
theorists to separate problems of nationalism from issues of ethnic diversity. There still needs to be theoretical evidence to show how the notion of ethnic diaspora can be reworked around nationalist discourse to take account of the fluid nature of ethnic identity formation.

It is apparent that questions raised in the diaspora literature specifically relate to theoretical implications of ethnic diversity and difference. Here, theories tend to focus on a unified view of the diasporic experiences of individual groups. Diasporic analysts fail to adequately engage with the intra-ethnic processes that have important symbolic cultural meanings to individuals within a particular diaspora group. These analysts also place little emphasis on some of the way class, gender and ethnicity intersect with notions of diasporic identities. When we look at how questions of ethnicity have been perceived from a community perspective, it seemed that respondents perceived such questions in a far more complex way than broader theoretical notions of diaspora. Diasporic theories tend to offer much more of a foreclosing of questions on ethnicity. In contrast, this thesis provided participants with open-ended questions on ethnic identity that enabled the interview material to reflect on issues of class, generation and gender differences.

**Dual Identity and Cultural Practices:**

In having examined theoretical views of diaspora, the next phase of this chapter provides an outline of participants’ views on notions of ethnicity. From these discussions, it was clear the notion of dual identity was viewed by respondents as overlapping a number of issues associated with concepts of culture and ethnicity. Some participants did not view themselves as having distinct ethnic and cultural identities. Rather, for these respondents, the notion of ethnic identity was linked to their religious background. Whereas, for other participants, cultural identity was viewed as a practical way of life. Also, some respondents viewed the notion of dual identity as a vague term which failed to give exact individual ethnic representation. Their definitions of ethnicity tended to mainly reflect upon issues of ethnic identity and representation.

There were differences between respondents’ interpretations of ethnic identification, self representation and cultural practices. The issue of national identity was also an important marker for some respondents’ broader conceptions of ethnicity and identity. However, the scope of this particular discussion on national identity was limited to the vast array of conceptual analysis on nationalism. It was also apparent that there wasn’t much tension among the views of participants in this particular aspect of the interviews to generate further analysis on this matter. Clearly, my main
contention in this chapter is to provide a brief analysis of the views of respondents about notions of dual and national identities.

It was apparent that a number of participants from a middle socio-economic background viewed the notion of dual identity as a complex concept. These respondents commented that dual identity was a broad term that did not take into account individuals’ perceptions of self-identity and representation. The participants also felt that a person’s ethnic and cultural identities were two separate issues. Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher), Souha Merhi (a 36 year old Arabic teacher) and Azam Zeydi (a 39 year old lecturer) discussed issues of cultural practices in terms of broader issues of social life. For instance, Mouna Mai commented that dual identity was a vague term that didn’t relate to her broad conceptions of ethnic identity. She felt she had both an Arab and an Australian identity. Also, Mouna Mai commented that she had a choice of selecting positive aspects from two different cultures.

[Umh!] I think there is a problem with the term dual identity. [Laughter], I mean it just doesn’t sound right. It sounds like you’re psychotic, [Laughter], you can’t tell the difference in life. [Umh!] anyway, to me, I don’t think that such a term encompasses the different views I have about my identity. [Umh!] For instance, I can be an Arab and I can also be an Australian. I can take the best of both cultures and to adapt them to my practical way of life. It is wrong. Who says you have to be one or the other. But, [Umh!], ethnicity is a whole different issue. I can’t play around with my ethnic identity. [Umh!] This has to do with my heritage, traditions and most importantly my religious background. But when it comes to culture, I feel I can move between one and the other.

Similarly, Souha Merhi (a 36 year old Arabic teacher) commenting on this issue, felt that the notion of dual identity was a broad category. She commented that both Muslims and other people had different views about their self-identities. To her, individuals had varying views about ethnic representation.

What do I think of dual identity. Well! I think dual identity is a very broad term. So each individual has a view, well, has his or her own view about their identity. Whether you’re a Muslim or not, it doesn’t matter. You will tend to have a different view to others on your own identity. I don’t think the term dual identity gives a good or an exact representation of a person’s ethnicity or ethnic character. Because everyone has their own perception of their ethnic background and of their culture. So ethnicity is something you belong to as a
group. You share similar beliefs and similar background. But still there’s individual views, and this differs. It differs in how you see yourself, how you represent yourself, and how you practice things. For example, I feel very strongly about my ethnic background, my ethnic identity, right.

Azam Zeydi (a 39 year old lecturer) also speaking on this matter commented that it was important to make a distinction between an individual’s perception of ethnic identity and their cultural practices. He believed that both Muslims and non Muslim groups tended to retain strong views of their ethnic identity in Australia.

When we speak about dual identities, then the first important thing is to distinguish between an individual’s view of their ethnic identity and their view of culture, of practices. Now we all know that everyone, whether you’re a Muslim or not, your ethnic identity is very important. There is no doubt about this. I don’t think anyone changes their ethnic background, because it is the most important thing in a person’s life.

A number of first generation male participants in the families saw the issue of dual identity from a religious perspective. Sami Yessi (a 44 year old lecturer), Karl Zaki (doctor), Ahmed Deib (unemployed father), Ziad Lail (engineer), Talal Houri (aero-technician) and Farouk Bassam (a 46 year old unemployed father) felt their religious identity was very important in terms of their own perceptions of the ‘Self’. Whilst these respondents felt that their religious identities did not change, however, they spoke about adopting a number of social and cultural positionalities in the broader community, commenting that ethnic and religious identities remained unchanged for many Muslims in Australia. However, he felt he had adopted different social ‘positionalities’ in the broader Australian community. For example, Sami Yessi commented that as a Muslim worker, he tended to interact with other work colleagues from a diverse cultural background. Consequently, he felt he had adopted different work habits and ideas through his interactions with other people in the workforce.

[Ah!] Well! In my view, [Ah!], dual identity is important in terms of how I look at it. [Ah!] I can say that my religious identity, first of all, is most important in relation to how I see myself, and [Ah!], the type of views I have on my life. [Ah!] I can’t say it changes for me. So definitely my religion, my ethnic background, [Ah!], does not change for me, even though I live in Australia. But having spent a long time here, [Ah!], I can say that, [Ah!], well for society’s sake, your identity shifts in relation to your [Ah!] position say, as a
worker, or perhaps [Ah!] as a Muslim parent in Australia. [Ah!] I believe that my family is interacting with diverse cultures. So it is important for us to respect their ideas, expectations and their ethnic territory. Now because I’m a worker, here in Australia, [Ah!], I tend to mix with workmates who come from different cultures. I have taken up some of their ideas about work, their habits about work, but this doesn’t have to effect the way I view my religious identity. [Ah!] So basically, it’s important not to state what your practices are about, but just to allow them to happen in the community.

Speaking along similar lines, Kaled Zaki (doctor) also had strong views about his Islamic identity as his sole ethnic identity. However, he also saw himself as taking on a number of social positionalities as a Muslim individual in Australia. Kaled Zaki, for instance, felt that his self identity comprised of multiple social positions. He commented that being a parent and a professional worker were important in regard to his own notions of the Self. Consequently, Karl Zaki believed that the latter social positions had different implications in terms of his personal perception of the family and work life.

[Umh!] I believe there is one identity that is important to me. And that is my Islamic identity. [Umh!] This to me does not change, and will never change. Because my faith, [Ah!], is basically my whole life. Now [Umh!], now you can talk about a number of other social things, [Umh!], that perhaps might be important to yourself, or to your own identity if you like. [Umh!] For example, I see myself as a worker, or [Ah!], I see my profession as being very important to me. [Umh!], I also see myself as a parent, and [Ah!], that is very important in relation, [Ah!], to say how I see my own identity as a parent. [Umh!] also it’s important in relation to how I see my family, [Ah!], how I relate to them. [Ah!] and definitely this is something that is different to say how I see myself as the worker, or [Umh!] say what I do in my work life, or how I relate to my work life.

Ahmed Deib (unemployed father) also speaking on this matter shared similar strong views about his Islamic identity. However, he felt that Muslims tend to adopt other cultural positionalities from their social participation within Australia’s multicultural society. Ahmed Deib viewed his social identity as shifting in terms of adopting new forms of cultural practices. For example, he commented that his family tended to adopt different cultural and work habits from the broader Australian community. On this point, he said:
No, No, No, I definitely don’t see myself as having two identities. I only have one identity, and this relates to me being a Lebanese Muslim, that’s it. But we can say that myself, my family, and other Muslims, yes, they may pick up other cultural practices. This comes from their interaction with other people in Australia, who say do not share similar cultural practices to us, but may have interesting ones for us to learn from. For me, I see my social identity, and only my social identity as changing a bit. And this is because I can pick other cultural practices. I can pick up new cooking habits or work habits. And yes this is the same for my wife too, and for my daughters.

In examining the views of Sunni Muslim families about dual identities, clearly, these participants shared strong views about their ethnic and religious identities. They also felt that these identities remained constant regardless of social change. Also, the views of first generation male respondents reflect the theoretical assumption of multiple identities discussed earlier in this chapter. It is apparent that some social theorists comment that the self is comprised of multiple identities. Whilst, they recognise the social, cultural and gender identities of individuals, these writers place more emphasis on the ethnic self within their work.

These theories fail to provide some examples of how minority individuals tend to reflect on the different forms of identity positions at both an individual and collective level. It is apparent that this thesis further explores the idea of multiple identities through its discussions with Sunni Muslim families on issues of ethnic identity. For instance, the thesis interviews indicate that male respondents such as Kaled Zaki (doctor) and Sami Yessi (a 44 year old lecturer) were thinking more broadly about issues of self identity. These male participants enunciated a number of identity positions, such as the professional worker and the parent. Clearly, the views of male respondents indicates that the ethnic self is perceived in a much more complex way at an individual level.

Other first generation female participants from a middle socio-economic background held different views about issues of dual identity. These particular female parents had a different perception of their ethnic identities and social practices. Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist), Hiba Spee (nurse), Noura Yessi (a 39 year old teacher), Ayda Sabah (a 35 year old Arabic teacher) and Souha Merhi (a 36 year old Arabic teacher) commented their ethnic, cultural and religious identities had informed their views about issues of social practices. For instance, Hiba Spee felt confused about her cultural identity. She saw her cultural identity as slightly changing in regard to her social behaviour and practices in the broader Australian community. Consequently, Hiba Spee commented that her social behaviour changed when interacting with Australian friends, as opposed to her usual
behaviour with family members. However, as a mature adult, Hiba Spee felt that it was important to maintain her religious beliefs and practices in Australia. She also commented that her religious identity helped her to maintain strong links with her ethnic family values and background.

I feel my cultural identity was slightly changing at a certain point in my life. But at the same time it was very confusing, because you knew it was very important not to lose your cultural identity or your religious background. I think I share similar views to many female Muslims, when I say that as a teenager, you don’t have a complete sense of your ethnic identity, so your social behaviour or your social practices tend to be slightly different. Well! I felt that my behaviour was totally different when I was out with my Australian friends. But, it was also different when I was with the family, or other Muslim women. But I think that by the time you’re an adult, and that’s my experience, you tend to understand your ethnic identity more, you understand your religion better. So you then realise that your religion, your culture and your ethnicity are all ‘one’ identity. And that your religious beliefs are really the ones responsible for your sense of identity, maturity, your whole life. So you know that it’s important to maintain strong links with our Islamic background, with our families and our traditions.

Similarly, Ayda Sabah (a 35 year old Arabic teacher) commenting on this issue also felt that her social behaviour changed when mixing with her Australian peer group. She believed that there were different social standards and ideas outside the family in which she adapted to. However, as a mature adult, Ayda Sabah placed more emphasis on her religious identity positioning both in the family and the broader Australian community. She also felt that her religious identity tended to inform her own views of society and the self.

Now I can see my identity not changing, but before, when I was growing up with my family in Australia, as a young girl, I believe I was dealing with two different social lifestyles. I could see that my Australian friends had different social ideas, different social standards, and these were quite different to the social standards of my family. So as a young Muslim girl I felt that I had to play between two different roles. I was an Australian person, and I was also a Lebanese person. At times this was confusing. But as an adult I have a stronger view towards my Islamic identity, towards my behaviour in the family and in the community. Because at this stage a Muslim woman realises that her religion is her identity, her relationship with others. It helps you to form a complete picture of yourself and your whole lifestyle, which is something you don’t have enough sense of as a child.
Souad Merhi (a 36 year old Arabic teacher) also speaking on this matter commented:

I believe as I was growing up in Australia, yes perhaps I did feel a sense of having a dual identity. Because I saw myself as having a Lebanese identity and an Australian identity. And therefore, this affected the way I behaved with my family, and the way I behaved with friends. But as a girl, I felt embarrassed about my identity, about who I was, basically about my ethnic background. For example, everyone had ‘Aussie’ names, except me. So you tend not to be that assertive in terms of your ethnic identity. But, over the years, this perception of myself changed, because as an adult I had gained a lot of knowledge about my religion. My religion has helped me to be more assertive towards my ethnic background. I now could see that my religion helps to shape my view on cultural things and religious things. So today I see myself as a wife, as a Muslim person, who feels very strongly about her Islamic identity. I feel that my religious knowledge also helps me to determine my social practices in the family and in the community.

It was apparent that the following three second generation female participants also made a connection between issues of ethnic and religious identities, and their social practices. These participants considered themselves as having both a Lebanese and an Australian identity. Ghada Bassam (an 18 year old student), Sonya Deib (a 17 year old, student) and Maha Mai (part-time medical receptionist) placed more emphasis on their ethnic and religious background. They spoke about having to adopt two different sets of cultural practices in Australia. For instance, Ghada Bassam commented about adopting two cultural practices as a young Lebanese teenager in Australia. She felt her social behaviour changed when mixing with non Muslim girls. As a young adult, Ghada Bassam commented that she felt more confident in terms of her ethnic and religious background. Consequently, she also felt confident in expressing her religious beliefs and practices in the broader Australian community. On this matter, Ghada Bassam commented that it was no longer necessary to change her behaviour when interacting with other social groups.

Well! I feel I’m both an Australian and a Lebanese person, because I was born here and I grew up in Australia. But, of course, my religion is my main identity in life. When I was growing up in Australia, I felt confused between the Australian culture and the Lebanese culture, because I was living in both. [Laughter]. So I felt my behaviour changed with my girlfriends, and with my parents and brothers. But today, as a young adult, I feel very proud, very confident about my ethnic and my religious background. I feel confident with
other people. I feel confident with my religious practices both in the family and outside the family. I feel I am no longer shy about my ethnic background. Instead, I discuss issues about Islam with other people and they seem very interested in our religion.

Sonya Deib (a 17 year old student) also shared a similar view. She also felt embarrassed about her ethnic background as a Muslim student in Australian schools. She felt her social behaviour changed when interacting with other Australian peer groups. However, Sonya Deib commented that she had become more assertive in terms of ethnic and religious practices at a later stage in life. On this point, she said:

I feel I have a little bit of a Lebanese identity and a little bit of an Australian identity. I think it has to do with your behaviour. Your behaviour changes. Like when I was in school, I behaved differently with friends, than say when I was with my family. Because, back then, you tend to be shy about your ethnicity. Because I went to a school where they were mainly Aussies. I was the only Muslim girl in the class. So it was hard to discuss issues about your culture or your background with anyone. But these days you’re no longer embarrassed. I feel not shy about my ethnicity, or I no longer feel embarrassed about practicing my religion, or expressing my religious beliefs.

Also commenting on issues to do with ethnicity and social practice, Maha Mai (part-time medical receptionist) spoke about her social experiences with school friends. In the past, Maha Mai commented that she mainly conformed to the social attitudes and practices of her school colleagues. Consequently, she felt she adopted two different sets of social identities. On this point, Maha Mai suggested that her behaviour changed between her social and familial life. Today, Maha Mai believed that her ethnic and religious identities were important factors in terms of her social life in Australia. Furthermore, she commented that her ethnic and religious principles were very important in terms of how she perceived her own social identity.

Well! In the past I would say dual identity applied to my life. When I was at school, I can’t help but feel, I had two social identities. Because with my school friends, you know, I felt I had to relate to their social practices, to their attitudes. [Umh!] My ethnic practices were left for when I came home. So I always behaved differently. I behaved different with friends and I behaved differently with my family. [Laughter]. Yeah! So, to me my ethnicity or my religious identity are now very important in terms of my social life. You know, you have a better understanding of your religion, as a grown up. Because your
religion, you know, tells you how to think of your identity, of your social life. So there are certain principles, we have to follow as Muslims.

As stated earlier, it is apparent that theories discuss the process of shift and change in terms of ethnic identity, but fail to show how individuals conceptualise identity change. This chapter indicates that Sunni Muslim respondents were not willing to negotiate any form of change in terms of their ethnic and religious identities, however, they seemed willing to encompass broader social practices which were not perceived as a threat to their religious beliefs. For instance, whilst it seemed that both first and second generation female participants shared a broad view of their self-identities, however, they made clear distinctions between their religious identities and social practices. Whilst their discussions on dual identities tended to overlap issues of culture and religion, it is evident that female respondents viewed their Islamic identities as their sole ethnic identity. Clearly, the discussions also indicate that religious beliefs and practices had informed the views of female participants about issues of social practices.

From the discussions, it was also apparent that many respondents had different interpretations of the concept of dual identity. Members of the Mai, Nahli, Amar, Bilal, Houri and Salah families spoke about issues to do with nationalism and dual identities. Adham Amar (former car salesman), for instance, felt that ethnic and national identities were two separate issues. He commented that his family maintained strong views in terms of their ethnic and religious identities. However, Adham Amar felt that it was possible for individuals to have dual national identities. On this point, he commented that his family had a sense of belonging to both their Lebanese and Australian national identities. Speaking further on this matter, Adham Amar felt that a person’s national identity tended to shift and change depending on the country they live in. On this matter, Adham Amar spoke in the following terms:

The question of dual identity is a very important one. I think that a person has his ethnic identity and his religious identity, but these two don’t change. They remain, I believe, very important in one’s life. For example, I feel that for myself and my family, we have a sense of belonging to the Islamic culture. There is no doubt about that. But at the same time, having lived here; (in Australia), for such a long time, I feel that my family, especially my kids, have also a sense of belonging to Australia. In the sense, that children can also be patriotic to the country they were born in. They can have an Australian national identity. A person’s national identity can change, well you can have two national
identities, because it depends on the country you live in. It also depends on how many years you have been living in it.

Samya Nahli, a first generation participant, also shared a similar view. Samya (housewife) viewed ethnic and national identities as two separate issues. She commented that ethnic identity remained unchanged, regardless of an individual’s new territory. As a result, Samya Nahli suggested that ethnicity was a complex issue which overlapped other cultural and religious categories. However, she felt that a person’s national identity tended to change according to where he or she lived. Speaking from her own personal experience, Samya Nahli felt that her ethnic identity did not change, regardless of her adopting Australian cultural habits over the years. However, she felt patriotic in regard to her Australian national identity.

I believe you have an ethnic and a national identity. But these are two completely different things. Because with ethnic identity, it remains the same, although you may be in a new place. Because your ethnic background has to do with important issues, like tradition, religion, your culture and many other things. But I believe that your national identity tends to slightly change. Because you can feel a sense of belonging to the community that you have lived in for a long time. Although I have picked up Australian cultural habits overtime, I didn’t allow these cultural habits to effect my ethnic identity, nor my religious beliefs. But I do feel patriotic towards my Australian national identity. I feel this most when I watch international sport shows and see that Australia is winning. I feel proud and happy towards this.

Also commenting on this matter, Khozi Mai (a 41 year old teacher) shared a different view on issues of nationalism. Khozi felt that ethnic and national identities were two complex and interrelated issues. He also commented that concepts of ethnicity and nationalism tended to overlap other social and cultural categories. In contrast to the views shared by the latter two first generation respondents, Khozi Mai felt that both ethnic and national identities remained unchanged, regardless of people’s movement from one region to another. However, from a religious perspective, he suggested that Lebanese Muslims were obliged to maintain respect and sincerity to the foreign country they live in. (i.e. Australia). On this point, Khozi Mai also commented that Muslims were obliged to maintain being productive citizens in Australian society.

Well! I think that dual identity is a very complicated term on its own. Because when you speak about identity. Are you speaking about your ethnic identity, your religious identity,
your cultural identity or perhaps your national identity. To me, personally, I think that
dual identity refers to a person’s ethnicity and a person’s nationalism. Even so, these
particular identities are also very complex. They are complex because, [Ah!], because they
are, well they are interrelated with many social things. Because when you speak about
belonging to a community or to a nation, you are also addressing issues about your
identity, your social life, [Ah!], your cultural practices. So to me it’s a question of seeing
any changes in them. No, to me I don’t consider these two identities; (national and ethnic
identities), changing, even though I am living in Australia. Because, you know, in Islam
there is no sense of nationalism. In Islam, you have to be sincere to the country you live
in. [Ah!] We are obliged to respect the country we live in, and to be productive citizens.

It was clear from the discussions that many respondents did not use bi-cultural terms in responding
to questions on ethnic identity. This view was shared by respondents who came from both low and
high (Muslim) concentrated areas in Melbourne. These participants did not feel the need to acquire
a “bi-cultural” label. However, some first and second generation female participants, such as Hiba
Spee (nurse), Ayda Sabah (a 35 year old Arabic teacher), Souha Merhi (a 36 year old Arabic
teacher), Ghada Bassam (an 18 year old student), and Sonya Deib (a 17 year old student), spoke
about their experience of dual identities at a younger age. These participants felt that age was a
factor in terms of their perception of ethnic identity.

They felt they lacked insights into their ethnic identity as young individuals. Respondents such as
Hiba Spee (nurse) and Ayda Sabah (a 35 year old, Arabic teacher), felt confused about their
behavioural shifts between the family and outside peer groups. However, these respondents gained
better understanding of their ethnic identities as mature adults. They commented that their religious
identity was the main virtue to their understandings of the self. For instance, Hiba Spee commented
how her social behaviour changed when interacting with family members as opposed to non-
Muslim friends. She also felt a complete sense of understanding of her ethnic and religious
identities as an adult. Similarly, Ghada Bassam (an 18 year old student) and Sonya Deib (a 17 year
old student) shared similar views to the latter parents. Ghada Bassam, for instance, felt confused
living in both an Australian culture and a Lebanese culture. She felt more confident with her ethnic
identity in her late teenage years.

Other broad discussions on ethnic identity indicated that some second generation participants felt
the need to acquire an “ethnic identification” label in Australia. It was apparent that peer groups
and schooling contributed to the need of ethnic identity labels among second generation
respondents. The latter participants felt it was difficult to identify themselves as Muslims in Australian schools. For instance, Houda Nahli (a part-time dress shop assistant) found it difficult to identify herself as a Muslim in a state school where the majority of staff and students were from an Anglo-Saxon background. She felt there was a need for her to adopt a bi-cultural label (Australian-Lebanese) to interact well with English speaking students. However, Houda Nahli also pointed out that it was not necessary for her to superficially label herself, had she attended schools where Muslim students predominate.

It was clear that second generation respondents who attended Islamic schools, such as Jalal Bilal (part-time male travel agent assistant), Jenan Khandi (a 16 year old female student), Ayad Merhi (a 16 year old male student) did not use bi-cultural terms to describe their self identities. These respondents were very assertive in describing their ethnic and religious background. For instance, Jalal Bilal (part-time male travel agent assistant) felt very strong about his Islamic identity. He viewed Islam as his sole cultural identity. The latter respondent described himself as a Muslim citizen who belonged to the Lebanese community in Australia.

The idea of Faith overriding any other component of identity was shared by Lebanese Muslim respondents in this thesis. Regardless of age, gender or socio-economic background, Sunni Muslim participants viewed their Islamic identities as their sole cultural identity. It seemed that participants in this thesis identified with their religious status in terms of their sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group. Clearly, this was evident through some of the discussions pertaining to issues of ethnicity, identity, nationalism and the family in the interviews.

This thesis also indicates some of the complex ways in which respondents describe their ethnic identities. There were differences between first and second generation respondents in terms of their perception of ethnicity. It was clear that factors of age and gender contributed to the way Sunni Muslim respondents viewed their ethnic identities. Many first and second generation male participants in the families, for example, had solely identified with their Islamic identities in terms of their narration of the self.

Other respondents such as Sayed Merhi (social worker), Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker) and Mohamad Zeydi (a 17 year old student) also used single labels to describe their ethnic identification. While Sayed Merhi (social worker) felt issues of race and culture were important components of the social self, however, he felt that his religious identity was his sole cultural identity. In contrast, some female participants across the families used a mixture of bi-cultural
terms to express their ethnic identity, such as “I am a Lebanese and an Australian”, or “I am an Australian-Muslim”. The former phrase was mainly used by first generation female participants, such as Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher), Ronya Khandi (housewife) and Salimi Bassam (unemployed mother). Whilst the latter phrase, (i.e. “I am an Australian-Muslim”), was used by some second generation female respondents, such as Sonya Deib (a 17 year old student), Houda Nahli (part-time dress shop assistant) and Nadra Salah (student).

In speaking about ethnic and dual identities, Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher) saw herself as being both a Lebanese individual and an Australian person. She viewed these cultural labels as being two important identities in her life. Sonya Deib (a 17 year old student), also perceived herself as maintaining dual-identities in Australia. She felt a sense of belonging to both the Australian and Islamic cultures. Sonya Deib also commented that being raised in Australia has allowed her to adapt to multiple identities. She felt very comfortable with her bi-cultural practices in the broad community. Other respondents from a middle socio-economic background, such as Noura Yessi (a 39 year old teacher), Kaled zaki (doctor) and Nazih Spee (accountant) also saw themselves as being both Lebanese and Australian individuals. Noura Yessi, for instance, commented that she was able to identify herself with both the host culture and her own ethnic group. She felt Australia had lived up to its rhetoric as a multicultural society, because she was able to maintain links with her ethnic and religious background.

Whilst it was clear that Sunni Muslim families shared strong views about maintaining their ethnic and religious identities in Australia, other respondents felt it was possible to also maintain dual national identities. For example, the Amar family felt a sense of belonging to both their Lebanese and Australia national identities. Here, participants shared broad conceptualisations about the notion of nationalism. They viewed the notion of national identity as a separate issue from culture, ethnicity and religion. Also, they felt patriotic to both former and residential countries. These participants did not feel that their sense of patriotism was a threat to their ethnic identities. Other respondents such as Adham Amar (former car salesman) and Samya Nahli (housewife) shared similar views about the idea that individuals felt a sense of belonging to their residential community over a long period of time. Samya Nahli, for instance, felt that her ethnic identity remained the same, despite her long stay in Australia. However, she felt individuals’ experienced a slight shift towards their national identity after adapting to some of the social lifestyle of the host community. In opposing the views of the latter respondents, Khozi Mai (a 41 year old teacher) shared more of a general view on the notion of national identity. For him, this form of identification was a far more
complex issue that tended to interrelate with discourses of ethnicity. He viewed notions of ethnic and national identities as overlapping broader social and cultural categories.

Cultural Pluralism:

Another important issue raised in broader debates on ethnicity is the idea of cultural pluralism (Hall 1996, Brah 1992, Gilroy 1990, Bhabha 1994, Castles 1996, Bottomley 1997). Here, I do not wish to discuss the ideas of social theorists in detail. Rather, I want to narrow my discussion to their ideas about promoting commonalities across group differences. Hindess (1993), for instance, provides some discussion on the notion of cultural pluralism in relation to his broader analysis on multiculturalism and citizenship. He comments that ‘States have always had to live with culturally diverse populations, including significant groups of foreign descent.’ (p.39).

As a result, Hindess suggests that cultural diversity has become a complex issue for both Western and non-Western societies. He points out that this has raised important questions in regard to the political boundaries between different cultural groups and the nation-state. Furthermore, Hindess suggests that the government should provide ethnic minority groups with additional support to pursue their own cultural practices. He also suggests that the government should recognise some of the shared interests between group differences, and attempt to promote these mutual interests. In his view, this government action will help to relieve some of the major differences among diverse social groups. The latter researcher argues that individuals should be encouraged to actively engage in a plurality of purposes that they may wish to pursue in life. On this point, Hindess comments:

Briefly, the argument is that most individual purposes can be pursued effectively only in association with other individuals – and that within any reasonably large community there will be a plurality of purposes that individuals might reasonably wish to pursue. A desirable polity, on this view, would be one that actively promoted the development of associations, precisely so that individuals would be free to pursue their version of the good (1993:44-45).

Similarly, Hall (in Terry 1995) recognises that people will tend to constantly make claims through their different forms of identity positions. He argues that race, ethnic and gender identities tend to intersect each other in different ways. The latter researcher believes that individuals will always have to live with issues of change and differences. Hall further suggests that individuals have to also learn to negotiate with people from different ethnic backgrounds. In his view, intellectuals
have a responsibility to ‘negotiate and to form practices which are able to deal with difference’ (Hall, in Terry 1995:15).

Hall suggests that the next step is to attempt to rework some of the difficult questions centred on issues of identity. With this in mind, he suggests that it is important to consider a new form of ethnic politics that addresses issues of multiple identities and differences in a much more positive way. Whilst Hall recognises that ethnic identities will continue to make important claims of representation, however, his attempt to rework issues of ethnic differences remains embedded within theoretical conceptions on identity issues.

A particular tension in this debate relates to some of the attempts made by writers to address differences among cultural groups. However, there is also evidence which indicates that different ethnic identifications are complex and endless processes, which challenge our contemporary theories of cultural pluralism. Theories also fail to take account of the specific ways that issues of race, gender and class tend to intersect the notion of ethnic identity among group differences. Furthermore, these theories indicate the necessity to separate issues of ethnic identity from debates about multiple identities. However, social theorists fail to follow through with some of their ideas about the complex conceptions of identity.

Many of these diasporic debates fail to take account of the complex social relations between issues of ethnicity, culture and identity. They also do not take account of the fluid nature of ethnic identity and difference. Furthermore, the idea of social theorists concerning the promotion of cultural pluralism is in itself a very broad theoretical conception. These writers are yet to offer us a cultural model that caters for the differences between ethnic minority groups. Here, theorists would need to consider the competing and differing claims of individual minority groups.

Religious Identity and Social Practice:

While the participants viewed their religious identities as being integral to their notions of ethnicity and the social self, however, many of the respondents also discussed adopting other cultural practices from the broader Australian community. While some first generation participants across the families had clear views about their ethnic and religious identities, some members of the Yessi, Mai, Nahli, Yegli, Mohamad, Oula, Houri, Lail and Bilal families felt that it was also productive for Muslims to interact with other cultures in search of new knowledge. These respondents commented that learning new ideas from other cultures, enabled Muslims to adopt new forms of social
practices. Consequently, there was a general agreement among members of the families that Lebanese Muslims were able to utilise different cultural habits to better their own social life.

Sami Yessi (a 44 year old lecturer) speaking on this issue commented that it was important for his family members to share new cultural ideas with non Muslim people. He felt that individuals were able to select particular cultural habits, and apply them to their own social life. Also, Sami Yessi commented that both Muslim and non Muslim individuals tended to gain better understanding of other cultures. Consequently, he felt people were able to effectively communicate with each other in a multicultural society.

Well! I think there is nothing wrong in mixing with others and in sharing new ideas. [Ah!] There is nothing wrong in learning from other cultures. [Ah!] You can learn new habits from, [Ah!], say these different cultures and they can relate this, [Ah!], to their own life, and to their own practices. [Ah!] In my view, learning say about another person’s culture, [Ah!], well you tend to have a better understanding of that person’s background. Also, I feel that this helps you to communicate better with others, [Ah!], in society. Because, in my view, we live in a multicultural society, and [Ah!], it is important for me and members of my family to share cultural ideas with each other.

Speaking along similar lines, Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher) also welcomed new cultural ideas into her family. She felt it was important to adopt certain cultural habits to improve her own social lifestyle. For example, Mouna Mai commented that she had learned new cooking and work techniques as a former multicultural aids teacher. She believed that these techniques have helped to improve her social practices in regard to the family and work life.

I believe you can adopt particular cultural practices or habits, if you like. But I don’t, [Umh!], believe it’s important for me or anyone to adopt a new religion, or a new ethnic background. [Umh!] I feel I have picked up certain cultural habits, and I believe they have strengthened my own lifestyle. Well! Before I became a full-time teacher, I worked part-time as a teachers aid in a number of schools. So, over that time, [Umh!], I have learned certain styles of cooking. [Umh!] I have picked up certain work techniques, which I see as having improved my work life. So these new skills, [Umh!], or these new techniques have improved my work practices and my practices at home.
Members of the Oula family also shared a similar view on this matter. Wissam Oula (former butcher) felt that it was important for Muslim children to interact with other cultural groups. He commented that children were able to learn from their broader social experiences. Also, Wissam Oula felt that Muslim children were able to gain knowledge about different forms of social and cultural practices. Consequently, he commented that this sort of social experience allowed Muslim children to be more productive citizens in the Australian community.

I mean, I don’t want my children or my family to change their religion or their identity, or their Lebanese traditions. But I believe it is important for Muslim children, or my children to mix with different groups. I don’t disallow it, on the contrary, children need to mix out there with others. They need to experience social things, and to learn from them. Because, I believe the family can’t teach the children everything about life. Muslim children learn about their religion, their identities from the family, but they also need to participate with social groups to have a broader view on life. You then find that children learn different practices, and this helps them to be productive citizens in the community.

Continuing this theme of cultural adoption from another angle, some first generation male participants from a middle socio-economic background felt that it was important to make a distinction between “religious-based cultures” and “societal cultures”. These respondents commented that their cultural practices were bound to their Islamic principles and beliefs. Consequently, it was important for these participants to adopt certain social practices that did not interfere with their ethnic and religious identities. Commenting on this issue, Nazih Spee (accountant) suggested that the concept of culture was a complex one. Consequently, he felt it was necessary to make a distinction between social and religious practices. Nazih Spee felt that it was not necessary for his family to adopt other religious cultures. Instead, he commented that members of his family tended to adopt different forms of social practices.

I think it is important to make distinctions, [Ah!], between religious-based cultures and societal cultures. Because the term culture, you know, is a complex one. Many people have different interpretations of culture. [Ah!] I think you tend to benefit from hearing about other cultures. But in terms of adopting other religious cultures, well this is not something we see necessary in adopting. My family and I, [Ah!], are interested in other cultural methods in terms of social practices. It is important to be learning and sharing different ideas, but these are simple things that don’t effect your ethnic or your religious identity.
Similarly, Azam Zeydi (a 39 year old lecturer) felt it was important to distinguish between cultural and religious practices in terms of adopting ‘outside’ social practices. He commented that Islamic principles had informed his views of social practices in life. Consequently, Azam Zeydi and his family were careful in adopting other social and cultural practices. To them, it was important to adopt simple social practices (for example cooking practices), which did not misdirect them from their own religious practices. On this point, Azam Zeydi said:

Well! I think you first have to make a distinction between your cultural practices and your religious practices. Because we are Muslims, we mainly follow the Islamic culture and the principles which direct us in terms of proper ways of behaving in society and with other people. So because Islam is an important thing in our life. Faith for us means that it encompasses our whole lifestyle. So it is important not to be misdirected by other cultural practices. But, of course, sharing ideas and cooking and other things in terms of simple social aspects, we welcome to our family. Because, Islam welcomes the knowledge of other cultures, but it doesn’t tell us to change our own religion or beliefs.

Kaled Zaki (doctor) agreeing with other participants suggested that it was important for members of his family to maintain their religious beliefs and practices in Australia. However, he commented about his family adopting certain cultural methods, which they perceived as extra benefits to their regular social practices. On this matter, he said:

I, I seriously, [Umh!], don’t think it is appropriate to go about, say, changing slightly your religion or your cultural beliefs. [Umh!] It doesn’t benefit us, it doesn’t benefit the family. We already have a sense of belonging to a culture, a religion. [Ah!] We don’t need to alter our sense of cultural identity and practices. [Umh!] This I see as, [Ah!], jeopardizing our family closeness and togetherness. But, [Umh!], you know, there are obviously different cultural methods used say by the Italians or others, which, [Ah!], you can blend or add to your own cultural practices, [Umh!], and this is just something my family and I see as an extra benefit to our own say culture, [Umh!], our own practices in life.

It seemed that participants were clear about their ethnic and religious identities, however, their idea of two different forms of cultural identities also emerged in the discussions. At one level, participants spoke about a unified cultural identity – which only related to their own cultural practices. (for example children’s cultural upbringing and other common social practices shared by
Lebanese people). But at another level, what emerged from the discussions on cultural identity was an extended view shared by some participants in regard to cultural practices. This relates to their idea of selecting other multicultural practices which they felt helped to improve their social and work life. To participants, such as Sami Yessi (a 44 year old lecturer) and Mouna Mai (a 34 year old teacher) their notions of ethnicity and culture tended to also include other common cultural experiences in the broad community. For instance, some of these family members held a different view to the idea of cultural identity. This relates to some of the cultural boundaries constructed by respondents in terms of their diasporic experiences in Australia. Mouna Mai, for example, spoke about adopting other forms of cultural cooking and work habits which helped to improve her role as a mother and a worker.

So when we consider how culture is discussed at a theoretical level, it is apparent that concepts of culture and ethnicity are positioned as broad and separate term within the analysis. Many social theories have discussed these terms very loosely in terms of the common ethnic boundaries of different social groups. However, this thesis indicates that ethnicity and culture are complex and interrelated categories which intersect issues of identity, race and gender. Other respondents across the families shared different views about the concept of culture. Their notion of culture was not a clear-cut issue, as opposed to other participants.

Respondents such as Nazih Spee (accountant), Azam Zeydi (a 39 year old lecturer) and Kaled Zaki (doctor) suggested that the concept of culture was a complex one that is difficult to separate from issues of ethnicity and religion. To these participants, culture tends to overlap categories of identity, religion and social practices. To them, tension arises between individuals’ Islamic identities and their acquisition of social practices. For respondents such as Azam Zeydi, Kaled Zaki and Nazih Spee, it was a matter of maintaining an ethnic balance. To these respondents, it was a matter of selecting outside social practices that did not affect one’s ethnic background. For instance, Azam Zeydi commented that it was important for his family to adopt social practices which did not misdirect them from Islamic practices.

From broader discussions with the families on issues of culture and integration, it was clear that ethnicity was viewed in terms of individuals’ reshaping their cultural practices to benefit their own social lifestyle. Some of the empirical evidence of this thesis seemed to indicate that there wasn’t this sense of an ethnic identity shift that respondents experienced at a practical level. But rather, all participants shared a distinct ethnic boundary that distinguished one’s ethnic and religious characteristics from their social characteristics. Regardless of age, socio-economic and gender
background, respondents were aware of their ethnic limits in terms of how they chose to practice their own social life. For instance, some participants felt intrigued by the variety of cultural cuisine and work habits of other cultures. They felt these social practices tended to enrich their own social situation in Australia.

Language and Ethnic Identity:

There are very diverse debates in the literature on language and ethnic identity. However, there are varying views among sociologists and sociolinguists in terms of the relationship between language and ethnicity (Fishman, 1989; Giles, 1977; Clyne, 1982; Williams, 1992; Omar, 1991; Eriksen, 1993; other scholars include; Haugen, 1980). The arguments of these researchers are centred around three main contentions. Firstly, some researchers suggest that there is a strong link between language and ethnicity. These researchers believe that minority languages were retained by ethnic communities because language was an important part of people’s social and cultural life. (Fishman, 1989; Williams, 1992).

Secondly, other researchers did not view language as being an important part of people’s ethnic identity. These researchers felt that ethnic languages were not importantly dependent on the ethnic survival of a social group (Eriksen, 1993; Omar, 1991). Thirdly, some scholars have proposed their own theories that attempt to explain the language contact and maintenance of minority languages in the host country. These scholars provided their own views in regards to language maintenance and language shifts among ethnic minority generations in language contact situations. (Giles, 1977; Clyne, 1982). Fishman (1989:7), for instance, states that ‘ethnicity is linked to language, whether indexically, implementationally or symbolically.’ He also viewed language as being importantly linked to religion. Fishman’s position in this debate is centred on the idea that language is an important symbolic expression within a social group. He felt language was the primary essence of ethnicity and religion. In his view, language enabled individuals to define and mobilize themselves within a unified group.

Furthermore, the latter researcher commented that language was more than a means of communication. Fishman viewed language as an important symbol of ethnicity, as well as, a powerful symbol on its own. Whilst Fishman (1989) viewed issues of food, dress and work as also being linked to ethnicity, however, he felt language was the prime symbol of ethnicity. Consequently, Fishman believed that language enabled members of ethnic communities to express their ethnic message. As Fishman pointed out in his work, ‘All that has been said, above, implies
the degree to which language can be vastly more than a means of communication. Obviously, language can also be a very powerful symbol (in the discussion, a symbol of ethnicity) as well as a verity (a deity) in its own right’ (1989:32).

Fishman also contributed his own point of view to the literature on language maintenance and ethnicity. He suggested that there were three possible outcomes when ethnic languages come in contact with the host language society from a perspective of more than three generations of time. Firstly, Fishman suggested that the ethnic language tended to be lost. Secondly, the host language tended to become lost. Thirdly, both languages tended to become maintained, in which each language had its own distinct position in the broader national community (1989:202-215).

Similarly, Giles (1977) also viewed language as playing an important role in terms of ethnicity and intergroup relations. They felt that language enabled an ethnic group to express its thoughts, cultural symbolism and emotions. For instance, Giles suggested that other research in this area have indicated that ingroup and outgroup speech can serve as a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity. Furthermore, the latter researchers commented that language played a number of other important functions that helped people to understand their ethnicity. For example, they saw language as a reminder for individuals about their ethnic heritage, inter-ethnic group communication, and for the exclusion of outsiders. In addition, Giles viewed language as emphasising group solidarity under conditions of ethnic threat by outside social circumstances.

Furthermore, Giles also discussed their own theory of ethnolinguistic vitality. They suggested that the more vitality an ethnic group had, then the more likely it was going to retain its ethnic language in the host community. Alternatively, Giles suggested that the little vitality a group had, then it was more likely to adopt the host language. For these researchers, ‘the structural variables most likely to influence the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups may be organised under three main headings: the Status, Demographic and Institutional Support factors.’ (1977:309).

According to Giles, the Status factors refer to the prestige variables of an ethnic group, such as socio-economic status. Whereas, they suggested the Demographic factors referred to the geographic distribution and ratio of the group. Furthermore, the latter researchers suggested that the Institutional Support factors referred to the extent in which a language group received both formal and informal representation from various institutions in the broader social community, such as government services (formal) and religion (informal). According to Giles, the latter ‘three types of
structural variables interact to provide the context for understanding the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups’ (1977:309).

Here, it is my intention to situate some of the discussions of this thesis with some points raised by the latter researchers about language and ethnicity. It was clear from the interviews that Muslim participants shared similar views to researchers such as Fishman (1989) and Giles (1977) about the importance of language in regards to ethnicity and religion. Here, the latter researchers saw language as being an important ethnic value in relation to physical, cultural and communication factors. In considering the views of Lebanese respondents about the physical aspects of language, clearly, some of the first generation women in the families felt the Arabic language was an important source of communication between first and second generation Lebanese people. For example, Nada Oula commented that language helped second generation Muslims to communicate with their families and other Muslim people.

Also, in earlier sections of the thesis, some second generation participants were able to define and express their own well being in terms of ethnic and familial contexts. It was obvious that their ability to situate their own self-identification in terms of belonging to the family and an ethnic community, was a result of their understanding of language and cultural values. For example, Rabih Mohamad felt that the family was the essence of an individual’s self-identity. He also commented that individuals utilised their family values to make important decisions in life.

Furthermore, Fishman (1989) and Giles (1977) suggested that language acted as a reminder for individuals about their ethnic heritage, as well as assisting them to express their ethnic message. Clearly, these views related to the ideas of male parents across the families, who shared similar views about the importance of language in relation to ethnicity and religion. These respondents felt that the Arabic language helped the Muslim community to gain a better understanding of their ethnic and religious identities. For example, male parents such as Kaled Zaki (doctor), Ahmed Deib (48 year old unemployed), and Nazih Spee (accountant) felt that Arabic religious texts were enriched with ethnic and religious knowledge which individuals tended to gain through language practice and the fluent understanding of Arabic. Kaled Zaki, for instance, commented that English translations of Islamic religious texts failed to capture the Arabic idiom of particular statements. On the other hand, he commented that Arabic texts provided Muslim children with better insights into their ethnic and religious identities.
It was also clear that many of the mothers in the families who practiced the Islamic dress code, (the Veil), spoke about issues of ethnic and religious representation. It was obvious that these respondents utilised their linguistic skills to comment about their gender and religious positioning in terms of the Islamic and non-Islamic communities. For instance, Najah Deib (38 year old housewife), Ronya Khandi (35 year old mother), and Salimi Bassam (housewife) expressed their own thoughts about the Hijab (the Veil), being an important symbol of their ethnic and religious identity representations. Najah Deib, for example, saw the Veil as an important form of ethnic and religious identity representation. She also viewed her Islamic dress code as a message to non-Muslims that she felt strong about her ethnic identification.

In further discussing issues of language and ethnicity, Fishman and Giles also discussed their own theories on matters of language maintenance and language shifts. Some of the points raised in the latter theories can be compared to the ethnic language situation of Lebanese Muslim families in Australia. Whilst there is a slight difference in relation to the intergenerational time depth between Fishman’s theoretical perspective and the thesis, however, there can be some discussions made in reference to the ethnic language maintenance of Lebanese Muslim families and their exposure to a multilingual Australian society. From the interviews with this particular group of Sunni Muslim families, it was clear that immigration and settlement factors had no effect on the ethnic language of these families, despite their great exposure to the anglophone community.

From the discussions, there has been strong support for language maintenance and practice for both first and second generation members. It was also evident from the interviews, that many second generation family members were able to maintain and utilise their bilingual skills (Arabic/English) in the family and the broad Australian community. In fact, some of the discussions with the families in the thesis, indicated an intrinsically interrelated relationship between the language practices of respondents and their view of ethnicity and religion. Therefore, it can be said that the ethnic language will be maintained by subsequent future Islamic generations because of its ethnic and religious values. Whereas, in relation to Giles (1977) theory of ethnolinguistic vitality, it can be said that the findings of the thesis indicated a high vitality of language use among Lebanese Muslim families in Australia.

The thesis interviews indicated that the ethnic language has been maintained over two generations among this particular sample of family groups, since their Australian settlement three decades ago. Some of the structural factors outlined by Giles in terms of their influence on the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups can also be related to the language situation of (Sunni) Muslim families in
For instance, in assessing the language status of these families, it was clear that the ethnic language practice has been vital in the lives of all respondents, regardless of age, gender and socio-economic background. Whereas, in considering the demographic ethnic and language factors of Lebanese Muslim families in Australia, it can be said that these families have experienced a high vitality as an ethnolinguistic group.

Moreover, it can be argued that the high influx of Lebanese Muslim immigrant settlers to Sydney and Melbourne regions in the late 1970s, as well as the high concentration of Muslims in particular suburbs have helped to maintain a high language vitality among these particular ethnolinguistic groups. Some of the families interviewed in the thesis had come from a high concentration of Lebanese people in certain areas of Melbourne. For instance, Azam Zeydi (39 year old lecturer), Hayfa Hani (housewife), Souha Merhi (36 year old Arabic teacher), and Wissam Oula (former butcher) felt comfortable living in suburbs with a high proportion of Muslim residents. These respondents felt a need to maintain their heritage language, because it enabled them to communicate with people who shared similar ethnic and religious background. This idea of a shared group contact reflects the idea of Giles ethnolinguistic vitality theory in commenting about intergroup language situations. Giles, for instance, suggested ‘The vitality of an ethnolinguistic group is that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations…It follows, too, that in group members would turn more to one another in intergroup situations rather than functioning as isolated individuals.’ (1977:308-309).

Furthermore, in focusing on Institutional Support factors, it was clear that Lebanese people were receiving both formal and informal language representation in the community. However, from the discussions, it was obvious that Sunni Muslim respondents spoke more in terms of informal support in regards to their language practices. For instance, some of the discussions with respondents indicated that the pre-existing social community network for Lebanese Muslim people in Melbourne had provided strong support in regards to informal language representation. This support was initiated by various Islamic and Arabic schools, religious institutions and the family. For example, the Arabic language was viewed by all respondents as being closely linked with the cultural and religious education of Sunni Muslim individuals. Consequently, all twenty families interviewed saw Arabic as an important language practice for first and second generation members in the family.

A canvassing of the debates on language and ethnicity seemed to indicate that there were unresolved tensions surrounding the converging and diverging views of researchers centred on the
connection between language and ethnicity. It was clear that researchers such as Fishman and Giles, who saw a strong link between language and ethnicity, tended to argue that language was an important ethnic dimension in terms of people’s definitions, actions and deep symbolic meanings which involved very complex ethnic interrelations. Other researchers such as Eriksen (1993) and Omar (1991) have considered language and ethnicity from an empirical point of view. In this case, researchers have simply considered whether or not there is a close relationship between language and ethnic community. These methodologies are based on various case studies that have examined language factors in terms of intergenerational, soci-economic and historical issues. In which case, some of these studies have come to conclude that some ethnic communities do not appear to need a language-based identity.

Clearly, this thesis develops a different opinion to broader studies where language wasn’t intrinsically connected to the ethnicity of a community. In contrast, this thesis shared an equal position with other research which viewed strong links between language and ethnicity. This thesis indicated that there was a strong desire for Lebanese Muslim families to maintain their heritage language in Australia. To these respondents, the Arabic language was integral to their notions of ethnicity and religion. Some first and second generation participants were able to shift between minority and host languages with relative ease.

Finocchiaro’s (1995) study, is an example of a smaller scale research, which examined factors of language maintenance and language shift among a three generation Italian family in Australia. This particular researcher was keen to examine the maintenance of minority languages in the host country beyond first and second family generations. Whilst, broader research in the field of language maintenance consists of studies using large samples of participants, Finocchiaro was interested in smaller ‘personalised’ case studies. She wanted to gain insights into the experiences of family members in regards to language maintenance and shift. In situating the methodology of the thesis with Finocchiaro’s study, it can be said that some of her methods of inquiries related to the investigative approaches adopted in this particular thesis.

Finocchiaro, for instance, used unstructured and semi-structured interviews to collect her data for the study. She felt this qualitative method allowed interviewees to structure their own relevant responses. Finocchiaro conducted ten interviews in the homes of participants. These recordings took one hour to ninety minutes. She later transcribed the interviews. Consequently, it can be said that in-depth interviews were the major data collecting device for both the latter study and the thesis. The data of this thesis was based on in-depth interviews with twenty Sunni Lebanese
Muslim families. The questions posed to participants were unstructured ones. This method was also based on recorded information obtained from participants’ homes. Similar to Finocchiaro’s (1995) interviews, the interviews with Lebanese families took one hour to ninety minutes. The thesis data was also transcribed at a later stage.

A number of important points can also be raised in regards to the sociolinguistic context of Finocchiaro’s study and this thesis. Finocchiaro suggested that the Italian language comprised a number of regional dialects. She spoke about her first generation participants and the use of regional/popular Italian dialects as a means of communication in the 1950s and 1960s. Finocchiaro also discussed the different methods of linguistics used at various stages of the interviews. Consequently, she used regional/popular Italian in her discussions with first generation participants. Whilst, the language used with second generation respondents was English and Italian.

Some of the findings of Finocchiaro’s study indicated that there was a language shift from Italian to the host language among third generation participants. She also commented that second generation participants were bilingual speakers due to their life experiences in a bicultural society. Finocchiaro also felt that her latter findings were common to other studies among second generation migrants. She further pointed out that whilst the host society did not greatly influence the linguistic skills of second generation individuals, however, Finocchiaro believed that the host society influenced the attitudes of individuals towards the use of their mother tongue. Furthermore, Finocchiaro’s results suggested that ‘the second generation acquired the minority language as their first language.’ (1995:49). She pointed out that the host language did not have an effect on the use of Italian among second generation participants in the home domain.

In speaking about language issues, Finocchiaro also commented that the use of the host language by first generation respondents depended greatly upon the couples’ attitudes towards migration. As early immigrants, Finocchiaro suggested that the couples’ decision to make Australia their permanent residence helped to shape their attitudes towards the host language. For instance, Finocchiaro suggested that one of these couples perceived themselves as temporary residents in Australia. Consequently, Pietro and Alice felt the need to maintain their heritage language. Whilst Finocchiaro commented that Francesco and Giovanna saw themselves as permanent residents in Australia. However, Finocchiaro indicated that the latter first generation couple experienced little contact with English-speaking people. Consequently, she suggested that Francesco and Giovanna also saw the need to maintain their Italian language in the home domain.
Whilst the notion of language was important in terms of broader discussions with Lebanese Muslim participants in regards to issues of ethnic identity and the family, however, Finocchiaro’s findings have raised a number of important points to do with issues of intergenerations, immigration, language and environment which can also be discussed in regards to the ‘language’ situation of Lebanese Muslim families in contemporary Australia. Similar to Finocchiaro’s study, some of the first generation participants in this thesis, such as, Adham Amar (former car salesman), Nada Oula (40 year old housewife) and Farouk Bassam (46 year old unemployed father) were among the early group of Muslim settlers in Australia. These participants were among a large group of unskilled Lebanese immigrants in 1976. These participants had left the effects of the Lebanese Civil War in terms of seeking safer living conditions in Australia.

Many first generation Lebanese participants from a low socio-economic background, (including Adham Amar, Nada Oula and Farouk Bassam), had arrived in Australia speaking the Arabic language only. This was with the exception of some first generation Lebanese participants from a middle socio-economic background (such as Sayed Merhi (social worker) and Souha Merhi (36 year old Arabic teacher) and Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker), whom spoke Arabic, French and English on their arrival to Australia. The latter three respondents participated in intensive English learning programmes in order to increase their level of English proficiency for employment purposes. However, many of the first generation Lebanese participants from a low socio-economic background had different perceptions about the English language. Similar to Finocchiaro’s first generation Italian couple, (Pietro and Alice), some of the latter participants felt the need to maintain their heritage language. Some respondents, such as Salimi Bassam (housewife), Fadi Yegli (44 year old male parent), Iman Mohamad (housewife), and Mustafa Khandi (former taxi driver), also perceived themselves as temporary residents in Australia.

In contrast to Finocchiaro’s study which only focused on members of one particular family, the language situation for Lebanese Muslim respondents in this thesis was far more complex and diverse. For instance, this thesis focused on the views of respondents across twenty families, in which there were different patterns of language attitudes and experiences between family members. Therefore, when we explore the language situation of these particular Lebanese Muslim families, there was evidence of a wide range of social factors affecting the attitudes of first generation members in regards to issues of language maintenance and language shift. From the broader discussions with Sunni Muslim respondents about issues of language, it was clear that geographical, gender and immigration factors had an effect on the perceptions of some first generation respondents towards the host language. For instance, first generation respondents, such as Ayda
Sabah (35 year old Arabic teacher), Talal Houri (aero-technician), Hajar Zaki (female acupuncture therapist), Fadi Yegli (unemployed father), Ronya Khandi (35 year old, housewife), shared similar experiences to the first generation Italian couple (Francesco and Giovanna) in Finocchiaro’s study.

Finocchiaro (1995), for instance, suggested that the latter couple experienced minimal contact with English speaking people. Consequently, she commented that these first generation couple saw the need to maintain their mother tongue in the home domain. Similarly, the latter first generation respondents in the thesis settled with relatives in Australia. Whilst others such as Hayfa Hani (housewife) and Azam Zeydi (39 year old lecturer), settled in Melbourne regions with a high concentration of Lebanese Muslim residents. Consequently, these first generation Lebanese participants also saw the need to maintain the Arabic language in the home domain. However, Fadi Yegli (former Dunlop employee) shared a different view in terms of acquiring the English language. For example, Fadi Yegli had a personal desire to acquire English speaking skills. He felt it was a useful language to know both in terms of work and socialisation. Fadi Yegli worked at Dunlop factory in the late 1970s. Fadi Yegli was a very ambitious worker who had a strong desire to work in a managerial position. Consequently, he learnt English through correspondence school, and later became a Foreman for his work section.

It was also apparent that gender was an issue among first generation family members in this thesis. It seemed that many first generation female participants experienced less opportunities than their male partners in terms of adapting to the host language. For instance, Souad Yegli (former factory tailor), Najah Deib (housewife), Suraya Bilal (unemployed mother), Nada Oula (housewife), Salimi Bassam (42 year old mother), found themselves still constrained within their traditional gender roles as the family care-taker. Consequently, these Lebanese women experienced little contact with English speakers in the wider Australian community. However, there are some exceptions to be made in the case of Souad Yegli. She worked as a factory tailor for two years in the late 1970s. However, Souad Yegli worked short hours, and spent the rest of the day with her children. Consequently, her strong commitment to the family meant that she was mainly communicating in Arabic with other individuals. Whilst, she understands little English, however, Souad Yegli has major problems in communicating with English speaking people.

Over the years, these women felt it was important to maintain their home language. For example, the latter first generation female participants felt it was also essential for their children to maintain their heritage language. They saw Arabic as being important for Lebanese youth in terms of both family communication and ethnic background. Over the past three decades, the latter female
respondents have encountered little work experience. Consequently, these particular female parents from low socio-economic background lacked proficiency in English. In contrast, the language situation for many first generation males was different to the women in the families. Some males from a middle socio-economic background were functional bilinguals, whilst others participated in English language courses. However, many male parents from a low socio-economic background experienced a high degree of contact with English speakers in terms of their former workplace. The fact that first generation participants were former full-time employees in the past two decades, meant that they had experienced prolonged social contact with the host society.

In contrast to their female partners, these male participants were exposed to a number of language contact situations and challenges offered by the bicultural society. For instance, some of the unskilled/semi-skilled participants in the thesis such as Fadi Yegli (former Dunlop employee) and Hilal Mohamad (former self-employed business owner), experienced a variety of jobs during their stay in Australia. For example, Hilal Mohamad had former employment experiences in factories, taxi work, family cafes, and as a self-employed business owner. Consequently, these male parents experienced many contacts with English speaking individuals.

The views of second generation Lebanese participants about language acquisition relates to the findings of Finocchiaro’s study. For instance, Finocchiaro suggested that her second generation participants spoke Italian as children in the family. She pointed out that, ‘As children, the mother tongue was the main medium of communication in their home domain, whilst English was required for education and other public domains’ (1995:51). Similarly, it can also be said that many second generation participants across the families spoke Arabic in the home domain. However, they used the English language for education and socialization in the broader host community. Furthermore, Finocchiaro also commented that as adults, these participants preferred to use English in their marital home. Clearly, the nature of the methodology of the thesis focused on the language situation of second generation participants as children in the family. Over the years, it was evident from the discussions that second generation Lebanese participants maintained the ability to move through the process of language shift from Arabic to English and vice-versa with relative ease.

From the broader discussions with the twenty Sunni Muslim families, it was clear that these families had their own different ways of practising Arabic among second generation members. Members of the Bilal, Yessi, Nahli, Khandi, Houri, Spee and Hani families used solely the Arabic language to communicate with their children in the home. The first generation respondents felt this method of practice would ensure that Arabic would be maintained among second generation youth.
For instance, Asad Bilal (45 year old unemployed father) and Suraya Bilal (housewife) felt very strict about family members speaking Arabic in the home domain. Whereas Kaled Zaki (doctor) and Hajar Zaki (accupuncture therapist) spoke both Arabic and English with their children to improve their bilingual skills. Other first generation parents across the families, such as Hilal Mohamad (former self-employed business owner), Nadia Salah (dental nurse) and Sayed Merhi (male social worker) sent their children specifically to schools that also taught the Arabic language.

Finocchiaro has also raised some important points in regards to the vital role of language in people’s lives. She pointed out that language is much more than a means of communication (1995:42). The latter researcher suggested that language can also be a very powerful symbol in terms of both a linguistic and cultural context. She pointed out the inseparability of language and culture stated in some theories on language maintenance. Finocchiaro also stated that language maintenance among ethnic individuals indicates a strong and conscious identification with their ethnic group (1995:50). Consequently, Finocchiaro viewed her findings as challenging theories of language maintenance that maintain the inseparability of language and culture.

She suggested that the different language practices by the first generation parents did not seem to affect the ethnic identification of the two second generation participants. Finocchiaro did not necessarily view a strong relationship between language and culture. For example, she pointed out that ‘The male second generation informant, who with his parents’ approval, preferred to use English whenever he could and who was never coerced by his parents into doing anything which was ‘Italian’, expressed a strong sense of ‘Italianicity.’ (1995:50).

In contrast, the interviews conducted with Lebanese Muslim families, indicated that the Arabic language was an integral aspect of these people’s lives. For instance, language was not only viewed by respondents as a means of communication. The notion of language was a complex issue in which participants tended to associate it with culture, religious identity and work. The latter views of Lebanese respondents indicated a strong relationship between language maintenance and ethnic identification. It was important for many first generation respondents to maintain the Arabic language among second generation youth. Language practice was importantly interrelated with aspects of culture and religion.

Other respondents felt it was important to maintain bilingualism in the family. Both first and second generation participants saw their heritage language as being useful in terms of education and employment. For instance, Maha Mai (part-time medical receptionist) and Yehya Salah (Arabic
community worker) saw the Arabic language as an important educational asset for both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals. Maha Mai pointed out that bilingual individuals had the advantage of understanding two separate cultures. Whilst second generation participants, such as Rabih Mohamad (19 year old male student) and Nader Lail (part-time store salesman) saw Arabic as being important in terms of education and work skills. Rabih Mohamad commented that Arabic was useful in terms of educational courses, and in obtaining a variety of jobs.

The views of the latter respondents relate to Finocchiaro’s second generation Italian participants, Alex and Nora, and their personal beliefs in regards to the positive aspects of bilingualism in the family. Similar to the views of second generation Lebanese respondents, Alex felt that speaking the ‘heritage’ language will be one day useful for his children in terms of education and the workplace. Whereas first generation Lebanese participants shared similar views to Nora, in which Nora saw bilingualism as providing her children with extra personal and literary knowledge. However, the ambiguity that arises in terms of the views of Nora and Alex, is that they tend not to express much support towards bilingual practices in the family at certain stages of Finocchiaro’s study. Whereas, some of the male parents across the families viewed language as being integral to the ethnic and religious identities of Muslim individuals.

Kaled Zaki (doctor), Nazih Spee (accountant), Ahmed Deib (unemployed father) and Asad Bilal (45 year old unemployed male) shared a strong desire to maintain the mother tongue among their children in the families. Ahmed Deib commented that it was important for his daughters to also have the ability to read and understand the meanings of Arabic religious texts. Some of the first generation female respondents in the families viewed their heritage language more in terms of a sociolinguistic context. For example, Noura Yessi (39 year old teacher), Fadwa Houri (36 year old science teacher), Hiba Spee (nurse) and Nada Oula (housewife) felt that Arabic helped second generation speakers to maintain cultural communication with the family. Nada Oula, for instance, felt that Arabic helped Muslim children to better communicate with their families and other Lebanese people.

On the other hand, Tamis (1990) also studied factors of language maintenance and change among Greek people in Australia. In particular, Tamis focused on both linguistic and non-linguistic factors which determined the extent of language maintenance and change for the Greek people. He also considered the relationship of language with national identity of the Greek community. In his work, Tamis commented that occupation was an important factor in terms of language shift. He suggested that both professional and non-professional bilingual Greek workers tended to experience a
language shift to English. In his view, Greek workers were more exposed to the anglophone community. As Tamis pointed out, ‘Of the remaining variables, occupation seems correlate to some degree, in that people with some form of responsibility in their work (managers, foremen, technicians) as well as bilinguals with greater exposure to the anglophone community (salesmen, businessmen) tend to transfer more’ (1990:488).

In contrast, this thesis did not show a relationship between issues of work and language shift among Lebanese Muslim families. Whilst, it is important to note the different backgrounds and migration histories between Greek and Muslim immigrants, however, for the purpose of comparison, this study considered some of the similarities and differences between the views of Greek and Muslim immigrants on issues of ethnic language. Respondents from a middle socio-economic background who were current employees did not have a problem in maintaining their ethnic language whilst having worked in Australia for several years. (For example Kaled Zaki (doctor), Noura Yessi (39 year old teacher), Khozi Mai (male teacher), Leila Lail (female social worker), Fadwa Houri (science teacher) and Azam Zeydi (39 year old lecturer). From the discussions, these respondents saw language as having its own separate place in terms of the family domain and the workplace. Some of the participants such as, Mouna Mai (34 year old female teacher), Azam Zeydi (39 year old male lecturer) and Sayed Merhi (male social worker) who spoke about spending most of their life at work, resorted to their ethnic language in the family. Consequently, the bilingual skills of the latter respondents were not affected, despite their heavy exposure to the anglophone workplace.

Tamis (1990) also considered linguistic factors such as geographic regions, family and schools as having some influence on the language shift of the Greek community. For instance, Tamis commented that the family tended to ‘influence the incidence of transfer’ in cases where children attended Australian schools, and English communication between parents and children. (1990:488). Clearly, this thesis did not show any evidence of geographic regions having an influence on the linguistic skills of Lebanese Muslim families. These respondents tended to rely heavily on their heritage language at home, despite socio-economic and residential background. Although the families came from both low and high areas of Muslim neighbours, this did not effect the ethnic language maintenance of these particular families.

Tamis also suggested that the high or low density of Greek population appeared not to have any real effect on Australian Greeks (1990:488). However, he suggested that family composition was a factor in terms of language shift among the Greek community. He suggested this was evident in cases where Greek children attended Australian schools, and the use of English in the
communication process between parents and children. In contrast, family composition did not seem to influence the language maintenance or language shift of Lebanese Muslim families in this thesis. For example, many first generation parents in the thesis such as Hisam Nahli (46 year old former taxi driver), Nadia Salah (dental nurse), Sayed Merhi (male social worker) and Hilal Mohamad (former self-employed business owner) ensured that their children were receiving a bilingual education in both Islamic and non-Islamic Victorian schools. Also, many first generation participants such as Kazi Sabah (geologist), Suraya Bilal (female housewife) and Khozi Mai (41 year old male teacher) placed important emphasis on the use of Arabic between family members in the home.

Furthermore, Tamis (1990:488) also commented that the alternated use of both English and Greek was mainly high among second and subsequent generation speakers. He felt that this reflected the process of language shift in the direction of English. Tamis further commented that the negative attitude of children towards the ethnic language, and the social influences of the host society tend to affect children’s view about learning the Greek language. Clearly, the discussions in this thesis indicated that the alternated use of both English and Arabic was mainly high among second generation speakers, and first generation working participants. Respondents such as Nadia Salah (dental nurse), Hajar Zaki (accupuncture therapist), Nour Yegli (part-time mechanical assistant) and Houda Nahli (part-time dress shop assistant) tended to use mainly English to communicate with non-Muslim people in schools and the workplace. However, the thesis did not indicate a process of language shift in the direction of English among first and second generation Lebanese Muslim participants.

From the interviews, it was clear that many family members have continued to alternate from English to Arabic for many years without having fully submitted to the host language. For example, Sami Yessi (44 year old male lecturer) and his family have maintained the Arabic and English languages over three decades in Australia. Furthermore, many second generation speakers in this thesis shared a positive view towards the acquisition and learning of the mother tongue. It seemed clear from the interviews that second generation Muslim participants did not experience any external societal factors which affected their acquisition and learning of the ethnic language. For example, Fatima Deib (part-time hospitality assistant), Jalal Bilal (part-time male travel agent assistant), Nina Yegli (part-time clerical worker) and Nader Lail (part-time store salesman) viewed language practices as being important in maintaining their ethnic heritage. For instance, second generation participants such as Sonya Deib (female student), Ayad Merhi (16 year old, male
student) and Mounzar Houri (male student) were still attending ‘weekend’ language schools to improve their Arabic linguistic skills.

Tamis also commented that the Greek community maintained a strong sense of loyalty towards their language and ethnic identity. He suggested that Greek families had a strong desire to maintain their ethnic identity among second and subsequent generations. Consequently, Tamis saw the latter issue as one of the main factor for the language maintenance of Greek families (1990:492-493). Other reasons for the language maintenance of Greek people mentioned in Tamis’ study referred to ethnic values and cultural communication. Tamis suggested that there was a small percentage of Greek respondents who viewed religion as being an important factor for their language maintenance. He further pointed out that ‘second generation respondents proportionally outnumbered their first generation counterparts in suggesting cultural values as the main reason for language loyalty to the mother tongue’ (1990:493).

Similarly, Lebanese Muslim families also viewed their language maintenance as being important in terms of maintaining their ethnic and religious identities among future generations. In contrast to the latter findings of Tamis, all Muslim participants felt that their religion and ethnic loyalty were the main reasons for maintaining their ethnic language in the family. For example, first generation respondents such as Nazih Spee (accountant), Mayada Amar (housewife), Ahmed Deib (unemployed male parent) and Fawaze Hani (44 year old unemployed male) suggested that the Arabic language was important in maintaining their culture and religion among second and subsequent generations. For example, Nazih Spee commented that the Arabic language helped his daughters to better understand their Islamic identities. He also expressed a personal desire for his daughters to transmit the Arabic language to their children.

Furthermore, Lebanese Muslim families shared different views to Greek respondents in Tamis’ study towards language and cultural values. It was apparent that both first and second generation Muslim respondents felt ethnic and cultural values were important factors for their ethnic language maintenance. For example, Mayada Amar (housewife) felt that Arabic helped her children to read Arabic books and to learn about their culture, religion and traditions. Also, Rabih Mohamad (male student) commented that language, culture and religion provided people with important social, moral and ethnic values in life.

**Arabic Language and Self-Empowerment:**
While a number of respondents raised the issue of identity at different stages of the interviews, some participants felt that the Arabic language was also important in terms of their ethnic and religious positioning within the broader Islamic community. Clearly, there were similarities and differences across the families in describing the importance of the Arabic language in terms of their identities and ethnic background. Many of the participants viewed language in terms of a broader definition of ethnic identity. Moreover, language practice was viewed by respondents as being integral to their notions of culture and religion. A number of first generation female participants across the families commented that the Arabic language was important in regard to the ethnic and religious identities of their children.

Noura Yessi (39 year old female teacher), Fadwa Houri (science teacher), Hiba Spee (nurse), Samya Nahli (unemployed mother), Najah Deib (housewife), Nada Oula (40 year old, housewife), Suraya Bilal (unemployed female parent) and Mayada Amar (housewife) felt the Arabic language was important in maintaining cultural communication between first and second generation Lebanese families. These respondents also viewed the Arabic language as an important tool for Lebanese youth to gain better understanding of their own culture and religion. For instance, Hiba Spee (nurse) commented that her children were obliged to maintain learning the Arabic language in her family. She felt that the Arabic language helped Muslim children to gain knowledge about their own culture and religion. More importantly, Hiba Spee commented that Arabic helped her children to learn more about their own ethnic identity positioning within the broader Islamic Lebanese community.

The Arabic language is very important for our families to maintain in Australia. [Umh!] The main reason is that it is the language of the Quran, the language of our culture. My daughters can read Arabic books, [Umh!], it helps them to learn and understand better their own culture and their religion. [Umh!] Arabic, I believe the Arabic language also helps my daughters to learn more about their ethnicity, their identity, [Umh!], it helps them to understand their own identity, or their own place rather, within our family and also in the Lebanese community.

The mother from the Oula family also spoke about the importance of Arabic for second generation Muslims. Nada Oula (housewife) commented that language was an important tool for Muslim children to gain a better understanding of their ethnic and cultural identities. She also felt that Arabic helped Muslim children to better communicate with their families and other members of the broader Lebanese community.
Oh! Definitely. Arabic is very important, because it’s the language of our culture, of our religion. Arabic is very important for the second generation. If they don’t learn it, then they tend to lose it in later generations. But the Arabic language is like a weapon for Muslim children. It’s an educational weapon that helps them to have a better understanding of their cultural identity. It also helps children to communicate better with the family and with other Muslim people. So definitely, I believe it is very important for my children to learn Arabic in Australia.

Also commenting on issues to do with the Arabic language and individual identities, Mayada Amar (unemployed mother) felt that Arabic provided Muslims with a sense of empowerment towards their ethnic and cultural identities. She suggested that Arabic enabled her children to learn more about their Islamic cultural traditions. Mayada Amar also commented that Arabic provided her children with self-confidence to discuss issues pertaining to their ethnicity, culture and gender background with non-Muslim people.

The Arabic language is very, very important, not just for my family, but for all Muslim families in Australia. Arabic is the language of the Qur’an. It is also important for my children’s culture, their identity, and other things. I teach my children Arabic, because I feel it helps to strengthen their self-identity, their cultural identity. Well! They will feel more confident with their own culture, religion, their own traditions. Also, the Arabic language has helped my children to become more confident in speaking with Australians about their ethnic identity, about their gender, and their religion.

It was also felt by many of the first generation male participants that Arabic would assist Muslim children to expand their knowledge about their ethnic and religious identities. The fathers in the Yessi, Deib, Zaki, Spee, Khandi, Hani, Sabah, Yegli and Bilal families spoke about the importance of Arabic, because they believed that Arabic was the language of the Qur’an (The Holy Koran). For instance, Karl Zaki (doctor) commented that Arabic was important for second generation Muslims in Australia. He felt Arabic helped Muslim children to read religious texts, and learn about their culture. Karl Zaki also pointed out that the English translations of Arabic religious texts were limited. As a result, he commented that English translations failed to clearly capture the Arabic idiom of English statements. Moreover, Karl Zaki commented that Arabic texts provided his children with a lot of meaning in regard to their ethnic identities and religious background. On this matter, he spoke in the following terms:
Oh! Arabic is of utmost importance in our family. [Umh!] Well! Basically it’s the language of the Qur’an, you see. So there is no doubt that Arabic is maintained in our family. My wife and I stress the importance of Arabic to our children. Besides their English studies, they attend Arabic school on Saturday mornings. We believe it helps our children to learn more, [Umh!], to learn more about their religion, and generally their cultural background. [Umh!] You know, it’s, Arabic is important for the second generation, so they don’t lose their language, and [Ah!] basically their identity, [Ah!], as Arabs. In my opinion, children find it difficult to learn and understand their ethnic background and their own religion. [Umh!] This I believe comes from the English translations of Arabic texts. [Umh!] Religious texts, you see, don’t offer a lot of meaning in English. [Ah!] The Arabic language, I believe, sometimes, Well! Put it this way, [Umh!] there are some things in Arabic which don’t have a lot of meaning in English. Therefore, [Ah!], we rely on Arabic texts to help reinforce our children’s religion, culture and tradition.

Ahmed Deib (48 year old unemployed father) also shared a similar view. He felt that Arabic helped his daughters to better understand their own religious identities. Ahmed Deib commented that Arabic provided his daughters the ability to read and understand the complete meanings of religious statements in the Qur’an. He also believed that English translations did not provide his children with a clear understanding of religious narrations by the Prophet Mohamad.

Oh! Yes, the Arabic language is very important to keep it in Australia. It is the language of the Qur’an. Our children are able to communicate with their culture. Just how I like to read and understand the words of the Qur’an. I also like my daughters to also have the ability to read and understand the essence of the meanings. You know, the Qur’an offers a lot of meanings in Arabic. It is different to the English translations. Arabic helps my daughters to learn about their religion, and as a result, it helps to strengthen their religious identities. You know, English translations don’t provide a clear picture or a clear meaning of the Prophets, of the Prophet Mohamad’s narrations of religious stories.

Commenting along similar lines, Nazih Spee (accountant) felt that it was important for Muslim children to read the Qur’an in Arabic, because the Qur’an was enriched with the essential definitions of Islam. He commented that Arabic religious texts provided his daughters with better understanding about their Islamic principles and identities. Also, Nazih Spee felt that it was also
important for his daughters to maintain the Arabic language in future generations. On this matter he said:

Well! I believe the Arabic language is very important for a Muslim family, because it is the language of the Qur’an. So we have to maintain Arabic in our family, and especially since we are in Australia. Well! You wouldn’t want the children to lose their religious identities. I believe, my daughters should learn Arabic and to maintain it for their own sake. Arabic will help them to learn the Qur’an and to learn all the proper interpretations of Islam. Because the Qur’an is filled with all the essential descriptions of God’s statements. So this also helps my daughters to have a better understanding of their religious principles. Well! It also helps them to understand better their religious identity. I also feel that the Arabic language is even more important for girls, so they can carry this valuable information and teach their children at home.

Speaking further on this matter, Sami Yessi (44 year old male lecturer) commented that the Arabic language carried a lot of cultural meanings which Muslim parents found it difficult to clearly express to their children. Consequently, he felt that the Arabic literature provided Muslim children with a clear insight in regard to their cultural and religious practices. On this point, he said:

The Arabic language, [Ah!], I believe, [Ah!], is useful for Muslim children to gain good understanding of their religion and their culture. [Ah!] It is a well known fact that Arabic, [Ah!], Arabic has a lot of meanings contained in it. It helps Arabs to learn better about their culture, [Ah!] their religion, [Ah!] even their own history. I believe Arabic gives Muslim children a much more clear picture of their cultural practices and their religious practices. [Ah!] the way cultural things are explained in the Arabic language is most effective, [Ah!], when children read them, [Ah!], they tend to understand them more. In my view, Muslim parents find it very hard to explain to their children, in a clear way, [Ah!] about issues of culture and issues of religion. So it’s important to keep our Arabic language in Australia, because it is, [Ah!], it benefits our children, I think the most.

Continuing this theme of Arabic and religion from another angle, Kazi Sabah (geologist) commented that language was very important in terms of constructing individual self-identities. He felt that the Arabic language helped to enrich a Muslim’s knowledge about his or her ethnic and religious identities. Consequently, Kazi Sabah also commented that Arabic helped Muslim individuals to further develop their social identity and personality.
Firstly, I think Arabic is important for our self identities. It is like a building block for our individual identity. I think Arabic assists a Muslim to expand his or her knowledge of their religion, and of their ethnic background. Also, the Arabic language helps, I think, helps to develop a person’s personality and therefore their social identity. Because, you see Arabic helps you to learn about a number of things, like your culture, your religion, so it all comes together, and gives you a sense, a full sense of who you are. So I think Arabic is important in terms of your identity, and more so, in terms of developing your self identity.

In contrast to the views proffered by first generation members in each of the families, some members of families from a middle socio-economic background, had a different view of the Arabic language. Members of the Mai, Salah and Houri families saw the Arabic language as an important educational asset for both Muslim and non Muslim individuals. These participants felt that Arabic offered individuals with numerous advantages in regard to their social lives. For instance, Mouna Mai (34 year old female teacher) suggested that Arabic was valuable for all cultural groups. She commented that bilingual individuals had the advantage of understanding two separate cultures. Also, Mouna Mai commented that Arabic, as another language, contributed further to a person’s knowledge and productiveness in life. Furthermore, she points out that learning Arabic and other languages will help the second and third Australian generations to be more productive in a multicultural society.

Arabic is very important as a language, [Umh!], we can read and understand our culture, our religion. [Umh!] There are a lot of advantages in learning Arabic. [Ah!] when someone has two languages, two different sorts of understanding, [Umh!], say, of two cultures. This understanding, [Ah!], with this understanding, you are adding more to this person’s knowledge, and this person’s productiveness in life. Arabic, of course, is useful for everyone, not just Muslims, not just Arabs, but for everyone. [Umh!] By learning the Arabic language, we want to help the second and third generation to be more productive in the Australian community.

Members of the Salah family shared similar views. Both Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker) and Nadia Salah (dental nurse) felt that Arabic was an extra educational skill for both Muslim and non Muslim individuals. These participants commented that Arabic and other languages were important in terms of individual’s self-identity and self-esteem. They also felt that Arabic provided
their children with knowledge about their ethnic and religious identities. Responding to a question about language and reflecting her own and her partner’s experience, Nadia Salah (dental nurse) said:

Arabic is important, I believe, for both Muslims and all other people. Firstly, yes, we would like to maintain Arabic, [Ah!], in our family. [Ah!] Arabic helps our children to learn more about their ethnic background, most importantly, their religious identity. But I believe Arabic is just like any other language. [Ah!] It is seen as an education, as a skill for a person. [Umh!] When you encourage someone to learn Arabic, you’re encouraging their self-esteem. [Ah!] You’re saying to them, you have the education you deserve.

Similarly, Fadwa Houri (science teacher) commenting on this issue, suggested that Arabic allowed people to be ‘open-minded’ about two separate cultures. She also viewed language as being beneficial for Muslim children in regard to educational and employment opportunities. For example, Fadwa Houri commented that the Arabic language was useful for all Australian workers to increase their trade with various Middle-Eastern cultures.

In my view, Arabic is not just another language. All languages are important for all people, from all different backgrounds, to learn. A person who is bilingual, a person who has studied another language than his own, well this is good. It means that person becomes open-minded about two cultures. In my view, Arabic, learning Arabic, by all individuals, increases a person’s chances of getting a job. For example, to increase trade with the Middle-East, for example, you need to understand those cultures. So, I believe Arabic is not just important for Lebanese people to learn, but also, it is important for everyone. It increases their chances of getting employed.

It was also felt by many of the second generation participants that Arabic would benefit Muslims and other individuals in terms of education and employment. Rabih Mohamad (19 year old student), for instance, commented that language was important in terms of increasing an individual’s chances of selecting various tertiary courses. He also felt that Arabic helped to increase a person’s chances of obtaining employment in the workforce.

Arabic is for education reasons. It’s also good for a person in getting a job. [Umh!] Arabic helps you get into Uni. Because, you know, language or Maths, gives you more chances, more chances of getting into a lot of Uni courses. Arabic also helps, [Umh!],
individuals to get a lot of jobs. It increases their chances of becoming employed. Because, you know, employers these days, prefer people with more than one language. Because, it helps them discuss things better with people or customers who don’t understand English, who don’t know how to speak English good.

Nader Lail (part-time store salesman) shared a similar view. Nader Lail also felt that language was an important skill that increased an individual’s chances of finding a job. He commented that there were a number of jobs available for bilingual people. For example, Nader Lail felt Arabic helped a person to seek employment in teaching, trade, tourism and interpreting services.

I know Arabic is important for Muslims, because of their tradition, and their religion. But Arabic is also important as a language skill. It is important for people in finding work. [Ah!] It increases their chances of getting work. Because there are many jobs that a person can do, when they know two or more languages. They can work as Arabic teachers in schools. It helps people in business and trade, trade with Arab countries. Arabic is also good for a person interested in tourism. You know, they can communicate better Lebanese tourists or Arabic tourists. Arabic in Australia is very useful for interpreting for Arabic people who go to hospitals, or in Centrelink, or [Umh!] in a lot of businesses.

Commenting along similar lines, Sana Hani (part-time store assistant) felt that learning other languages, like Arabic, helped to expand people’s educational knowledge in regard to different cultures. She commented that learning Arabic made it easier for individuals to pursue other language courses. Sana Hani also felt that Arabic helped individuals to learn other various language dialects in the Middle East.

Besides Arabic being important for Muslims in terms of, you know, their religion and their cultural background. I think that by learning Arabic or another language, [Umh!], you gain knowledge of other cultures, that’s perhaps very different to yours. Arabic, [Umh!], is important because it helps people to learn other languages. You know, it makes it easier for them to learn other languages. You know, it makes it easier for them to learn other languages. For example, when you learn Arabic, then [Umh!], then you tend, I mean it makes it easier for you to tell the difference between different dialects in the Middle East. For example, you can tell the difference between say the Egyptian dialect, and the Syrian dialect say. Because, you know, Arabic is the language of the Middle East, but as you probably know, there are different dialects between Egyptians and the Lebanese for
example. Also, you find differences between the Palestinian dialect and say that of the Syrians. Basically, Arabic is important, I believe, for everyone’s education.

Conclusion:

A canvassing of the literature on ethnicity indicated that many debates in this area are mainly centred on theoretical perspectives with little empirical support. In situating the thesis with theories of dual identities, it seemed that ethnic, national and religious identities were interlinked in a much more complex way at an empirical level. Clearly, all three identification labels were significant in terms of individuals’ expressions of their ethnic self identification. Furthermore, empirical data on ethnicity indicated new and different complex ways in which people identify with their self identities, as opposed to simplistic former versions of theories on ethnic identity. Clearly, broader studies on ethnicity raised important questions which were very complex and challenging and required further research in this area.

Having examined the views of Sunni Muslim respondents on ethnic and national identities, this chapter also highlights the participants’ complex definitions of ethnicity. Some of the respondents felt a sense of belonging to both a Lebanese and Australian national identity. But, at the same time, the participants made a distinction between their ethnic identity positioning and their own personal experiences of nationalism. Clearly, for some first generation participants, issues of ethnicity and nationalism were viewed as two separate issues. This can be said with the exception of Khozi Mai’s view, who felt that ethnic and national identities were interrelated issues, which overlapped social and cultural categories. From the discussions, clearly, some respondents shared a general view, that ethnic identity remained unchanged, regardless of place or time. However, it was also apparent that participants viewed their national identities in terms of broader definitions of social and cultural practices.

It is important to note that issues of ethnicity, culture and gender tend to be broadly discussed and treated separately at a theoretical level. However, the discussions with Lebanese Muslim families indicates that issues of ethnicity, culture, gender and religion proved to be more complex and interrelated issues in terms of respondents’ views and social experiences. In some instances, family members shared a rigid view of notions of culture and practice. Some of the respondents’ discussions about the concept of culture tended to overlap issues of ethnic identity, religion and social practices. However, it was apparent that overall respondents were able to make appropriate distinctions between the term culture and social practice. It was also apparent that respondents’
idea of two different forms of cultural identities also emerged in the discussions. At one level, family members spoke about a unified cultural identity, which only related to their own cultural practices. But at another level, some respondents shared an extended view on cultural identity which tended to encompass broader multicultural practices. They felt that other cultural practices helped to generally improve their social and work life.

It was also clear that language was an important expression of respondents’ ethnic, cultural and religious identities. There were two main reasons that emerged in this chapter as to why Sunni Muslim families saw language as an important ethnic value. Firstly, respondents saw language as an important tool of practice to further educating family members about Islam. Secondly, other respondents also saw language practice as an important skill to develop in terms of education and job prospects. It was apparent that for these reasons, some of the parents in the families were willing to allow their children to participate in language schools. Therefore, it is important for both the state government and Arabic organizations to work together to provide more funding towards pre-existing Arabic schools in Melbourne. It is important to develop an effective and detailed Arabic programme to address the specific needs of different age groups for both Muslim and non-Muslim prospective students.

Members of the families, particularly female respondents, viewed dual identity as a broad term which did not take into account individuals’ perception of the social self. For these women, the notion of dual identity was perceived in terms of broader issues of social life. They felt that their self-identities tended to shift between two different cultures. Whilst respondents viewed their Islamic identities as being integral to their notions of ethnicity, however, these respondents also discussed adopting broader cultural practices from the Australian community.

This research has considered some of the ways in which (Sunni) Muslims tend to make connections between issues of identity and practice. In so doing, it also highlights the different social and cultural practices adopted by participants in reference to their participation within the broader Australian community. Many respondents felt that it was important to broaden their social experiences by sharing new ideas with other cultural groups. Clearly, members of the (Sunni) Islamic Lebanese community shared strong views about their ethnic and religious background in Australia. Regardless of socio-economic status, gender, or age, the participants saw themselves as adopting cultural habits in terms of their social participation with the broader community. More specifically, a number of participants spoke about adopting different forms of social practices to further improve their social, work and family life.
In reviewing some of the earlier analysis on language, the findings reported in this thesis were not common to other studies among second generation groups (such as Finocchiaro, 1995 and Tamis, 1990). For example, there weren’t any social or cultural factors which indicated that Lebanese second generation participants in this sample of families were experiencing a dramatic shift from their mother tongue to the exclusive use of the host language. Whilst we can’t make assumptions about future generations and the Arabic language, however, it is highly unlikely that future Lebanese generations will lose the mother tongue language in the home domain. This view is based on the interviews conducted with twenty Lebanese Muslim families that indicated that language practices were important in terms of the cultural and religious identities of Muslim individuals. Also, future generations will inevitably be exposed to some form of Arabic communication, since it is inseparable from culture and religion.

There are also other reasons that support the need for language maintenance among future Lebanese generations. Firstly, there will always be a personal desire for Muslim individuals to learn about the historical aspects of their ethnic heritage and family ancestry. As indicated in earlier discussions with first generation male participants, Arabic language skills were vital for Muslim individuals to better understand their cultural and religious literature. Secondly, this thesis has also shown that some first and second generation participants shared strong views about the need for bilingual skills in relation to educational and work enhancement. Thirdly, Finocchiaro’s (1995) and Tamis’ (1990) findings also pointed to schools as other important factors in regards to the language maintenance of an ethnic minority group. However, in considering the social structure of the Islamic Lebanese community, it was apparent that there existed a number of Arabic social institutions which expressed strong support for language maintenance among second generation Arabic youth in Australia.

For instance, in reviewing some of the broader discussions with Lebanese community workers and the families, it was apparent that there were a number of Islamic schools which offered Arabic classes. Some secondary colleges in Melbourne also included the Arabic language as part of their curriculum. There were also a few primary schools that offered Arabic classes for Lebanese children on weekends. Some Mosques in Melbourne also taught Arabic during certain days of the week. There were also language and religious classes available through particular Islamic associations. Some of the studies on intergenerational language maintenance require further research which show some of the complex relationships between language and ethnic identity. For
example, do members of certain cultures feel it is necessary to maintain their ethnicity, because it is viewed as being importantly expressed through their heritage language?

From the above discussion of ethnic identity, which includes the respondents’ thoughts and experiences of ethnicity, language and social practices, it became clear that issues of identity overlapped other social and cultural categories. One of the issues that emerged during these discussions was the important position that religion occupied in the informants’ conceptions of ethnicity. For example, the respondents also felt their ethnic and religious identities comprised of multiple cultural practices in which they adopted from the broader community. From the discussions, it was apparent that the participants also raised issues of family as being integral to their notions of ethnic identity. It is these family related issues that are further explored with participants in the chapter that follows.
CHAPTER FOUR: FAMILY

Introduction:

The concept of family is a broad and complex term in itself. What is a family? Meanings vary from text to text and author to author. E.F. Young, for instance, states that a family is ‘a group of related individuals living under one roof as a household.’ (cited in Aspin, 1987:14). From a sociological perspective, Segal (1983) offers us a definition of the traditional family.

Our traditional family model of the married heterosexual couple with children – based on a sexual division of labour where the husband as breadwinner provides economic support for his wife and children, while the wife cares for both husband and children remains central to all family ideology. (p.13)

Over the past century, social and technological changes have blurred simplistic definitions of the family. These include changes in family roles and structure; new reproductive technologies; changes in the patriarchal views of family; the change from single to dual incomes; family law and remarriage; and the disposition of family values as a result of migration – among other historical patterns of change in the family. These significant shifts have further complicated the notion of family as an important unit in society.

The family is constantly changing through external social, economic, legal and political factors. It is the influential forces that exist within these factors that generate change within families. It is important to note that no particular social change can be responsible for a particular family change. All factors are interrelated. For example, there are many interrelated factors between the individual, the family and society as a whole which helps the family to deal with developing changes and maintain its existence as a functional unit in society.

Whilst the aim of this chapter is to examine the general views of participants about family life, therefore, it was generally difficult to situate this thesis within broad studies on the family. The reason being that this thesis explored factors of parental roles, ethnic identity and traditional practices with Sunni Muslim families in detail. This study considers the perceptions of participants on the latter three themes. In contrast, other family studies tend to offer a broad discussion of family issues. Therefore, this created difficulties in attempting to situate the family chapter in terms
of an analytical framework. Here it is important to note that there is a difference in the general approach adopted between broader studies and this chapter on the concept of family. Many family case studies tend to discuss the theoretical implications of the family. They tend to discuss the changing patterns and composition of the family according to social change. Whereas this chapter offered more of an in-depth analysis into the social and cultural family life of a particular ethnic community group.

To overcome this barrier, this chapter seeks to identify relevant themes from family case studies, and to highlight the different thoughts of writers on these particular themes; (i.e. parental roles, ethnic identity and traditional practices). Consequently, this analytical approach formed the basis of background family methodologies to this chapter, followed by in-depth analysis of participants’ views on the family. This chapter is divided into four parts. The first section provides a discussion of parenting issues with Sunni Muslim families. In this section attention is also given to the various ways traditional parental roles have been analysed in other research studies. The second section is about issues of ethnicity and the family. The cultural continuity and identification of respondents with their ethnicity and family background is discussed in this section. The third section of the chapter is about the traditional practices of Sunni Muslim families in Melbourne. It also states the specific family practices of Lebanese Muslims in regard to issues of respect, education and general safety practices. The fourth section of the chapter outlines some of the limitations of broad studies on the family.

Parental Roles:

In this section, I provide a brief discussion of studies on family and parental roles. The traditional and contemporary views of Lebanese Muslim families about parental roles is discussed in this section.

A cluster of social researchers have focused on broad definitions of parental roles in their study of the family (Hassan et al., 1985; Eichler, 1997; Lewis, 1986; also see McAdoo, 1986). A common theme expressed by these writers related to the traditionalist views of parenting in the family. Their work broadly outlined the expected roles of males and females in the family. From a traditionalist perspective, family theorists indicated that the female was the nurturer and the male was the breadwinner. Hassan et al. (1985), for instance, examined Lebanese families in Australia. Their study explored various aspects of family life. These included some discussion on the historical and religious background of the Lebanese. The latter writers briefly discussed migration and social
demographic factors relating to the Lebanese population. They also discussed general aspects of family kinship and Lebanese traditions. They briefly outlined some of the problems confronting Lebanese people in terms of resettlement and cultural change.

Within their broader discussions on Lebanese families, Hassan et al. briefly focused on the issue of parental roles. Their work offered some discussion about the role expectations of men and women in regard to a traditional context. For instance, their discussion on traditional family roles was centred on three main points. These included brief discussions on the parental roles of males and females in Lebanese families. Here, Hassan et al. broadly discussed the family positions and responsibilities of the mother and father. For instance, they commented that the father exerted more power than other members in Lebanese families. These writers commented about the traditional division of labour between males and females. They suggested that the female was responsible for domestic duties, whilst males played the provider role. On this point, Hassan et al. suggested that the father was responsible for the economic support of the family, and was responsible for providing household goods. They believed the mother was the care-taker of the family. They also commented that the parental role of males was to transmit both economic and religio-cultural knowledge to male children. To these writers, the mother was responsible for sharing domestic skills with female children. Hassan et al. also outlined the traditional social roles of Lebanese men and women. Here, these writers focused on the differences between sex roles and general practices in the family. They commented that the male played a dominant role, as opposed to females who were viewed as dependents on their partner. The latter family researchers emphasize the maternal and nurture roles of women in the family.

Also, they discussed the traditional role expectations of male and female siblings in the family. Here, Hassan et al. briefly discussed the sexual differences between Lebanese children in regard to their responsibilities in the family. According to Hassan et al., for instance, female siblings were expected to be obedient to parents and to perform domestic duties, whereas males were expected to achieve a socio-economic status, and to maintain family prestige in the community. The latter family researchers also extend their discussions on parental roles in relation to the obligations of males and females in Lebanese families. Hassan et al. commented that both males and females carried important responsibilities in terms of their positions within the family. For instance, these writers suggest that a male’s obligation was to support family members and to protect the family’s honour. Whereas, they also point out that the responsibility of women was to preserve the moral values of the family.
Another theme which emerged in broad discussions on parental roles and the family, was the economic roles of men and women in contemporary society. Researchers such as Eichler (1997), Hassan et al. (1985) and McAdoo (1986) have commented upon the complex relations between parenting and the economic contributions of men and women towards family income. These writers also suggest that social change has raised important questions in terms of dual income and family roles. However, the work of Eichler (1997) provided more insights into the complex nature of defining parental roles in regard to social, legal and economic issues. My concern in looking at this writer is not so much the specifics of her subjects, but the theoretical approach she uses to discuss parenting. Eichler examined the changing nature and circumstances of family issues. She raised important questions in regard to the complex definitions surrounding notions of family policies, gender equality and the concept of family itself. In particular, Eichler focused on broad definitions of the family, and how these were affected by social, legal and economic factors. In speaking about factors of parenting and economics, Eichler, for instance, commented that female workers in contemporary society tend to deviate from the patriarchal model of the family. From an egalitarian model, she argued that both men and women shared equal rights towards economic family support. The latter writer suggested that social and economic change had required both “husband-wife families” to participate in family dual income (1997:37).

Furthermore, Eichler (1997) points out that the legal perspective on the economic roles of parents has changed in recent decades. On this matter, she comments that women have been granted some recognition as individual economic contributors in cases relating to family law. Eichler also suggests that the idea of parents being recognised as interdependent spouses had provided women with a different economic position in the family. To Eichler, the “wife/mother” was viewed as being both responsible in terms of providing family care and services. (1997:103). With this in mind, the latter family researcher argued that the assumption of economic dependency of women to men was no longer appropriate in regard to the modern family. She believed the reason being that many mothers are financially contributing to family expenses. To this writer, women’s labour was recognised as paid work in contemporary society. Eichler also claimed that the latter assumption also led to the recognition of housework as valued female work. She argued that women’s economic contribution to the family has increased in contemporary society.

She points out that women contributed more than their husband in terms of labour and domestic work. On this point, Eichler comments; ‘In about one-fifth to one-quarter of all marriages, the wife earns as much or more than the husband, but in all likelihood, she continues to do the larger share of housework.’ (1997:105). Bearing these issues in mind, she argues that there were problems in the
broad social conceptions of economic roles fulfilled by both the husband and wife. Eichler felt that issues of gender and equality tended to further complicate the economic definitions of parental roles. In her view, ‘it is apparent that gender equality can be achieved only if women and men both have the opportunity to earn an equal and independent income’ (1997:107).

Another key area in the literature of parental roles and the family related to the changing roles of male parents in modern society. A group of family researchers discussed the changing conceptions of fatherhood, and the increase in the participation of males in family work (Lewis, 1986; McAdoo, 1986; also see Eichler, 1997). A family researcher such as Lewis (1986) has highlighted the changing image of the father’s role through some of his research on married men and their participation in the family. In the last fifteen years, Lewis’ research studies on the role of men in families indicated that there has been an increase in the nurturing role of male parents towards their own children, particularly in American families. In adopting a different approach to family issues, Lewis examined men’s changing roles in marriage and the family. In particular, he discussed media sensationalism and growing research data which indicates the changing role of men in the family. He also focused on the changes in role expectations and behaviours of married men. He claimed that some married men enjoyed spending their spare time with family members. The latter researcher suggested that studies in past decades has indicated that there was an increase in the participation of males in family work, regardless of their partner’s economic status. On this point, Lewis commented:

One of the newest studies of fathers’ participation in family work also reflects the recent changes but in a slightly different form. In this study of 160 fathers and mothers of kindergarten and fourth grade boys and girls Barnett and Baruch (1984) report that the mothers’ employment status (whether they worked outside the home or not) significantly predicted the proportion of the fathers’ participation in child care and child play relative to the mothers’ (1986:7).

Also, Lewis commented how other studies indicate that the role expectations of men are changing beyond their traditional norms. For instance, he discussed some examples of other research which indicated that a small sample of families had practiced role-reversal situations between parents. Moreover, Lewis commented that whilst the mother worked, the father had played the role of caretaker. In particular, this writer suggests that there has been changes in the role expectations of male parents in American families. According to Lewis, these recent changes refer to the equalitarian relationships between husband and wife. However, in drawing on other research studies, he points
out that in some instances, “equalitarian husbands” had greater work flexibility which provided them with more time to pursue other social activities (1986:5). Overall, Lewis points out that there were both positive and negative implications in men’s changing roles in the family.

Overall, these case studies on parental roles focus on broad aspects of the family. It is also clear that the theoretical basis of these studies is mainly concerned with a structural method of analysis. In contrast, this thesis adopted a cultural method of analysis, which looked at how Lebanese Muslims narrate their family positions, in particular, their parental roles. It also provides a discussion of the social and cultural implications of parenthood in regard to Sunni Muslim families. This thesis approached the notion of parental roles from a community perspective to identify the similarities and differences between individual views from different socio-economic backgrounds. In contrast to this view, family theories tend to identify the issue of parenthood as a category, rather than examining the views of ethnic groups about parenting as a role. It also considers social, cultural and gender factors in terms of parenting. Two important themes emerge from family and parental studies – class and education.

Clearly, class was a factor in terms of participants’ perceptions of parental roles. From the interviews, it was apparent respondents expressed both traditionalist and a modern views of parenting. For instance, male participants from a low socio-economic background viewed their parental role as a dominant one in the family. Fadi Yegli (former Dunlop employee) and Fawaze Hani (unemployed father), who were from a low socio-economic background, viewed themselves as occupying a functional position in the family. From a traditionalist perspective, these respondents viewed the father as playing the sole economic role in the family. However, it was apparent that male parents from middle socio-economic families held a different view on this matter. These male parents did not define their parental roles within a traditional context. Unlike male parents from a low socio-economic background, they did not see themselves as playing a dominant role in the family.

Kaled Zaki (doctor) and Sami Yessi (lecturer), for example, did not view the father as occupying a separate and dominant role in regards to the family. Instead, they felt that it was important to share their responsibilities with the family as a whole. In contrast, male parents from a low socio-economic background placed little emphasis in regard to their social participation with the family. From the discussions, it was apparent that first generation males from a low socio-economic background were concerned with their responsibilities as parents in the family. However, it seemed that male parents from middle socio-economic families had expressed stronger views in regard to
their paternal participation with the family. It was clear that employed male parents had also discussed the importance of spending their spare time with family members. This involved male parents and family members discussing and sharing ideas among themselves as a family group. For instance, Sayed Merhi (social worker), Sami Yessi (lecturer) and Kaled Zaki (doctor) felt it was important for them to share their opinions with other family members.

From the discussions, it seems that male parents from a middle socio-economic background played the traditional role of the provider for the family. However, male parents did not project a direct authoritative role towards members of the family. Rather, the father figure was also there for family members to perceive as a close companion in terms of sharing their emotions and social opinions with.

Similarly, class was also an important factor in terms of how female respondents had perceived their family roles. Respondents from a low socio-economic background such as Nada Oula (housewife), Mayada Amar (unemployed mother) and Najah Deib (housewife) perceived the role of motherhood within a traditional context. They all shared a conservative view towards females playing the role of the care-taker in the family. Nada Oula, for example, felt it was her responsibility to raise and discipline the children.

It was apparent that female participants from a middle socio-economic background shared an extended view on the role of motherhood. They saw the mother as occupying an advanced position in the family through her educational and working status. Besides their role as nurturers, these respondents felt that the mother was the principal educator of the children in the family. These female parents were keen on educating their children about language, morale and tradition. Fadwa Houri (science teacher) and Roula Zeydi (teacher), for instance, tended to question the role of motherhood beyond its traditionalist context. To these respondents, the mother occupied a unique and important position in the family. Fadwa Houri and Roula Zeydi, for example, saw themselves as playing an important educational and guidance role in the family. They also felt that the role of the mother was important in maintaining family stability. Roula Zeydi, for example, perceived the role of the mother as the educator. She felt the mother was responsible for teaching and guiding her children about social values in life.

From broader discussions with the twenty Sunni Muslim families, it was also apparent that factors of class and education played a role in terms of how respondents perceived their parental participation in the family. Generally, female respondents exercised a higher degree of parental
participation than their male partners. For instance, female parents across the families such as Samya Nahli (housewife), Nada Oula (housewife), Iman Mohamad (unemployed mother), Noura Yessi (teacher), Fadwa Houri (science teacher) and Roula Zeydi (teacher) spent a lot of time teaching, guiding and raising their children. However, as stated earlier in this thesis, female respondents from middle socio-economic background families (such as Fadwa Houri and Roula Zeydi) felt they had a choice in terms of how much parental participation they tended to exercise in terms of the family. In contrast, male parents shared different views about their paternal participation in the family. For instance, male parents from a low socio-economic background placed a great deal of emphasis on their role as the provider in the family. In opposition, they felt that the mother was responsible for the nurturing of their children.

From the discussions, it seemed that the latter male parents had continued to make connections between social ideology and the gender role of women as care-takers of the family. Consequently, the latter male parents did not directly identify with the idea of parental participation, despite the fact these respondents had been unemployed for several years. To male respondents such as Fadi Yegli (former Dunlop employee), Fawaze Hani (unemployed father) and Hisam Nahli (parent) their social welfare benefits allowed them to continue playing the provider role through some of the general activities that they continued to fulfill outside the home. These activities included paying the bills, driving the children to school, taking the family shopping and to picnics, picking up the meat, fruit and other occasional groceries. However, broader discussions with the latter male parents about parenting issues, indicates that some of these male respondents spoke about spending regular time educating their children at home as we shall see in other sections of this thesis.

It was obvious from the interviews that male parents from a middle socio-economic background shared a different view on this issue. The degree of paternal participation exercised by these male parents was evident through their broad discussions on shared family practices. These respondents tended to some extent to share an egalitarian relationship with their spouse towards parental participation, despite their work schedules. Kaled Zaki (doctor), Sami Yessi (lecturer) and Sayed Merhi (social worker), for example, saw themselves as sharing an equal position with other family members in terms of work and family decisions.

**Parenting in Muslim Families:**

Other first generation participants in each of the families also discussed their parental roles in terms of a broader definition of family. Male parents from a low socio-economic background, like Fadi
Yegli, Hilal Mohamad, Mustafa Khandi, Fawaze Hani, Hisam Nahli and Ahmed Deib saw themselves as occupying a dominant and productive position within the family. They also commented about the duty and responsibility of the father as the main worker and provider in the family. Here, it is important to note that I referred to unemployed male parents as former workers, in order to stipulate the former labour contribution of these individuals for a particular period of time in Australia. This method also applied to unemployed female parents who had former work experiences in Australia. The latter method of approach was also used in this thesis to refrain from constantly having to refer to all first generation respondents from a low socio-economic background as unemployed individuals. Instead, it was felt that the former employment status of these respondents provided better character descriptions in support of their views.

It is also necessary to point out that whilst all male parents from a low socio-economic background were unemployed individuals for over ten years, clearly, these respondents continued to identify themselves as providers for their families. From the interviews, it was clear that the unemployment status of male parents did not seem to have an effect on the ways they had perceived themselves as the non-working parent in the family. It seemed there was not much distinction made between some of the ways these male respondents had defined their role as the non-working father, as opposed to their earlier full-time positions as workers and providers for the family. From broader discussions, it was clear that male parents continued to view themselves as occupying a productive position in contemporary family life, regardless of their employment status.

It was evident that the provider roles of these male parents still continue to fit into their family lifestyle through some of their different forms of practices within the family. It can be generally said that these male respondents had continued to perceive their role as workers, through some of the ways they had spoken about their social behaviour and practices in the family. For instance, some male parents from low socio-economic families had interpreted their role as the provider in terms of their responsibilities towards the general social care of the family household. For example, the latter male parents had expressed their family provision through their payments of household bills, taking family members to social gatherings, and purchasing the groceries. As former workers in milkbar shop, cafes and taxi service, these male parents spoke in the following terms:

Fadi Yegli commented:

The father is the foundation of the family. He brings in the income. This is the main duty and responsibility for the father. My role is also to look after the children, and to make
sure they are raised properly. I’m also in charge of paying the bills. I’m the one who takes the children out, to the park, to my parents, and other places. I also make sure that the family stays together. That there is a good relationship between everyone. If I don’t do these things, [Laughter], then there would be no family. This is why the role of the father is very important in the family.

Similarly, Fawaze Hani commenting on this issue:

I’m responsible for home, my duty is to work, to be the ‘bread-winner’. The father is the essence of the family. He looks after the family. He looks after everything in the family. I also make sure that there is respect between family members. I see my role as very important in the family, because I am the worker. It’s my responsibility to bring in money to the family, to feed my children, to buy them new clothes, to pay the bills, to pay for their schooling. Yeah! So there are many things that I do in the family, and it is my duty to do so.

Hisam Nahli also speaking on this matter commented:

My role as the father, well I see it, as a big responsibility. I play a very important role in the family, because I see myself as being involved in everything. I make important decisions. I look after the children and their education. I’m the worker. So it is up to me to work and support the family. I also have to be the leader of the family and make sure that all the family needs are met. As the father, I have to act in a responsible way in front of my children. I have to be a good role model for the children.

However, it was apparent that some first generation male participants from families of a middle socio-economic background had a different view. Kaled Zaki, Sami Yessi, Sayed Merhi, Yehya Salah and Azam Zeydi placed less emphasis on their role as workers in explicating a view about their own position within the family. These respondents did not view the role of the father in regard to being the dominant one within the family. Kaled Zaki commented that it was not appropriate to consider the father as playing the major role in the family. He felt all family members play an important role, and have certain obligations to fulfill. Also, Kaled Zaki commented that all members in his family were workers who contributed to family income.
The father having the dominant role, you know, is not the right way of looking at it. Everyone has their role and every role is important. You know, my wife helps as well, at work. My son helps me with the accounts. You know, it’s all a joint effort. I don’t see myself as the only one, that’s [Umh!], that’s [Umh!], playing [Umh!] the major role, or I’m the only one that’s working, like earning the money. But they’re all putting in. I think this is a good equal and joint effort.

Also commenting on the role of the father, Sami Yessi felt that all family members should contribute to making decisions that affect the family as a whole. He commented that it was not appropriate for the father to make all family decisions on an individual basis. Also, Sami Yessi felt that it was important for male parents to share an equal position with other members. He felt it was important for the father to communicate and share opinions with family members.

I see that [Ah!] I am spending a lot of time hearing about the lives of my family members, about study, about work. I try to share an opinion with them. [Ah!] Exchange information about individual needs. I feel we are sharing our lives together. So it is not important to have one member making a decision for the family, without taking into consideration the decisions of the family as a whole. Other ways I see myself as a father, [Pause], I also feel I have a duty [Ah!] to follow up my children’s studies at school. I also act as a person who gives them moral guidance, and this is important when I see who my son is befriends in the community.

Sayed Merhi also speaking on this matter, commented that the father cannot represent that whole family. He also felt it was necessary for male parents to take into consideration the views of other family members. Also, Sayed Merhi commented that the family needs to share its ideas with other members, and to make decisions based on team-effort. On this matter, Sayed Merhi spoke in the following terms:

You know, the father is not the only family member with a view for everybody. It is not right to see him specifically as the leader of the family. This is not right. You know, the father in the family cannot represent the views, the opinions, the decisions of the whole family. My wife may have a different view on something. My son might have a view about something else. So I think certain issues need to be discussed by family members as a group. The decision should be based on team effort.
Other first generation female participants in each of the families also discussed their position as the parent in the family. Female parents from a low socio-economic background such as Samya Nahli, Nada Oula, Najah Deib, Iman Mohamad, Souad Yegli and Mayada Amar saw their role of motherhood mainly within a traditional context. These respondents commented that the mother played the role of the care-taker in the family. The mothers in these families felt that it was their duty and responsibility to nurture and guide their children. For instance, Nada Oula commented that her position in the family was to raise and discipline the children. Also, Nada Oula commented that the mother has to ensure that respect is maintained among members within the family.

I am the care-taker. I am responsible for raising my children properly and to discipline them properly. I also have to guide my children to what is right and wrong in life. I make sure that their homework is done. As the mother, I also have to ensure that respect is always there in the family. As the mother, I make sure that I am spending some time teaching my children Arabic and other homework. So really all these things are important for the mother to do in the family.

Speaking along similar lines, Mayada Amar felt that the mother was responsible for the domestic maintenance of the household. She also commented that her position in the family was to guide her children in regard to the various social and moral issues in life. She said:

My role is to look after the cooking, to clean, to raise my kids properly. You know, that’s my main duty as the mother. Also, [Ah!], I spend a lot of time teaching my children about the right things and the wrong things that they may face in the community. I feel I am responsible to provide proper guidance to my kids. I spend a lot of time telling my son and my other younger girls about social issues that a child may be exposed to in school or in the community, or with their friends. You know, I tell them, they can also see me as a friend and talk to me about personal issues, about what they are feeling. This is important for the mother to guide her children, because teenagers are usually exposed to issues like drugs, boyfriends, smoking. So if I can be the first person to correct these mistakes and give them proper advice, [Ah!], then this will be good for all the family.

However, it was apparent that some first generation female participants from families of a middle socio-economic background had a different view. Noura Yessi, Mouna Mai, Fadwa Houri and Roula Zeydi interpreted the role of the mother in regard to being the educator. Fadwa Houri commented that it is important for the mother to play the role of the teacher in the family. She felt
that it was necessary for female parents to spend a lot of time teaching and guiding their children about Islam and the Arabic language.

The mother is everything. Besides her role as the care-taker, the bearer, the home-maker in the family. The mother is also the teacher. The mother has to educate her children about a lot of things in life. She has to be involved with their education and study routine. She has to teach them about certain subjects in schools. In playing the role of the ‘educator’, the mother also has to spend time teaching her children about the Arabic language, also the history of Islam. She has to basically contribute knowledge to the children, so that they become better educated people. They can communicate effectively in schools, with the teachers and other people in the community.

Also commenting on the role of the mother as the educator, Roula Zeydi felt that it was her responsibility to educate her children about the moral and ethics of family traditions. She felt that the obligation of female parents was to teach and guide their children about social etiquette and moral dilemmas in life. Also, Roula Zeydi commented that it was important for the mother to teach her children about what is right and wrong in life.

I believe the mother plays a very important role in the family, as she is usually the person who spends a lot of time with the children. I believe her main role, is the ‘educator’. She is the one responsible for teaching her children about everything in life. She is responsible for ensuring that the moral and ethics of family traditions are present within the family. The mother has to guide her children, her husband if necessary on all the right ways and things in this life. She is also responsible for teaching and guiding her children about social manners in life, in terms of fashion and dress-wear, in terms of eating habits, and their general communication with other people. The mother’s duty is to also teach her children about social and moral and personal issues in life, which are not really addressed in Australian schools. So it is her duty to ensure that children have some knowledge about social and moral issues, so that in the future, they are able to better handle themselves, should they face social and personal crises in their lifestyle.

A canvassing of the literature on family and parental roles, indicated that many research studies have focused on the social effects of reproductive technology, industrial work, marriage and family law on conceptions of parenthood. There has been little research done to help us understand how individuals perceive the complexities of their parental roles across different cultural groups. While
some studies have attempted to explore the complex nature of defining parental roles, however, their analysis remains mainly within a theoretical context. Consequently, these discussions have not been extended to include individual views about the social and cultural implications of parenthood in ethnic families. Furthermore, whilst research studies have tended to treat the issue of parenthood as a category within their analysis, the thesis examined the views of a specific immigrant group about parenting as a role. It also focused on the implications of parenting in terms of social, cultural and gender factors.

Ethnic Identity:

This section outlines some studies on ethnic identity and the family. In particular, it provides a discussion about the strong desire of Sunni Muslim respondents to maintain their ethnic identity and family commitments in Australian society. The notion of ethnic identity was an important marker for some respondents’ conceptions of the family. It was apparent that there wasn’t much tension among participants in this section of the interviews to generate further analysis on this matter. Hence, my primary concern is to provide a brief analysis of the views of respondents about notions of ethnicity and the family. I shall commence this section of the chapter with some discussion about broader studies on ethnic identity and the family.

A review of the literature on ethnic identity and the family indicated that there were two main ideas through which family researchers had considered notions of ethnic community, parentage, self-identification, intra-generations, family traditions, cultural influences, and other social categories (Carlson, 1998; McKay, 1989; Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, 1996). Firstly, there were generally strong links made between the idea of ethnic identity and the family. Here, family researchers such as Carlson discussed how ethnic minority groups had viewed aspects of the family, such as traditions, as being important markers to their sense of ethnic and cultural background.

Secondly, other family researchers such as Kvernmo and Heyerdahl (1996) viewed both the family and the ethnic community as two important categories which tend to have both a positive and negative influence on individuals’ ethnic identities. For instance, many family researchers made connections between individuals’ ethnic background and the notion of family (Carlson, 1998; McKay, 1989; Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, 1996). However, this idea was mainly evident in Carlson’s study. This family researcher commented about the cultural continuity of Italian families with their ethnic background in Australia.
Carlson (1998), for instance, conducted interviews with Italian family descendants in central Victoria about their cultural continuity and identification with ethnic heritage. She wanted to understand how Italian people tend to make imaginary connections with their former country and ancestors, despite factors of time and distance. Secondly, this writer wished to explore the idea of cultural continuity among Italian people, despite social change. With this in mind, Carlson commented that Italian people had maintained aspects of their ethnic traditions, language and cultural lifestyle, whilst still adapting to a new environment. The latter family researcher commented that the past settlement difficulties of Italian people, created a strong sense of unity among this ethnic group. As a result, Carlson suggested that being Italian became an important ‘bonding force and expression of ethnic identity.’ (1988:82). Other ways in which Carlson suggested that Italians had maintained a strong sense of ethnic self-identification, was through their commitment to kinship and communal ties. She also pointed out that Italian people were committed to contributing to different aspects of family, home and land resources.

It is important to note that Carlson’s (1998) study shared both a similar and different perspective to this thesis in regard to notions of ethnic identity and the family. For instance, Carlson’s study and this thesis both highlighted some important connections made by individuals in regard to ethnic identity and the family. Some respondents, for example, referred to ethnic traditions as being importantly linked to a person’s background. In further examining the issue of ethnic ties, Carlson discussed how food preparations, housing structures and work patterns were an important expression of Italian speakers ethnicity. For instance, she comments that the structure of family housing among Italian descendants was specifically designed to reflect their ethnic and cultural way of life. Carlson (1998) commented:

The Righetti home at Yandoit, with its ornamental ironwork, is one example. Around their homes the Italian speakers planted the vegetables, crops and fruit trees which supplied most of their food needs. Small and not especially fertile, the blocks were farmed with the same intensive methods which they had adopted in Europe; every last centimetre of soil was placed under cultivation, a minimum of livestock supplied animal fertiliser and ingenious irrigation systems were adopted. (p.84).

Furthermore, Carlson also discussed other cultural practices which she believed were indicative of strong ethnic ties among Italian descendants in the twentieth century. She comments that many Italian immigrants preferred second-generation individuals to participate in family businesses, rather than schooling. Consequently, Carlson also comments that many second-generation
individuals ventured into similar work patterns as their parents, and established dwellings close to family homes.

Another important issue raised among studies in the area of family and ethnic identity, was the general influence of the family and ethnic community on an individual’s self identity. Family researchers such as Kvernmo and Heyerdahl (1996) and Cameron and Lalonde (1994) commented that various social and cultural categories tended to have a positive and negative influence on individuals’ perceptions of the self. However, some of these social influences were clearly highlighted in Kvernmo and Heyerdahl’s (1996) study in which ethnic identification was significantly associated with family and regional background. In particular, these writers examined the influence of parentage and ethnic community on the self-identification, attitudes and practices of the Samis group in Norway. They were keen on examining some of the links between parentage, community and the ethnic identity of Sami adolescents.

Kvernmo and Heyerdahl (1996:453), for instance, commented that ‘the family and the ethnic community both provide important cultural contexts for ethnic identity.’ They raised an important point in their study in regard to the ethnic influence of the family on children’s identities. The latter researchers believed that the primary focus and attitude of the family towards its own ethnic background was important in shaping the ethnic identities of children. Furthermore, it was clear that Kvernmo and Heyerdahl also perceived both the ethnic and host communities as having an influence on individuals’ ethnic identities. These writers commented that the latter communities have the tendency to either reinforce or weaken the ethnic values of the family. To Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, external factors were more likely to effect the ethnic identities of adolescents in the family. On this point, they commented; ‘Ethnic groups vary in the extent of their institutional completeness, i.e. the organised support (e.g. religion, schools, media) which is available within the group’ (1996:454).

The study by Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, for instance, indicated some of the ways Sami adolescents had identified with their ethnic identity. They suggest that adolescents’ perceptions of ethnicity varied in terms of family influence and their place of settlement. These researchers point out that monocultural Samis identified themselves in relation to the ethnicity of their parents. However, they also point out that nearly half the bicultural Samis adolescents had identified with their ethnic origin, despite their exposure to multiethnic socialization. Overall, Kvernmo and Heyerdahl suggested that monocultural Samis in the highlands of Norway were more frequently exposed to the
influences of ethnic behaviours, the Sami language and the overall support of the ethnic family, than adolescents in coastal areas.

Defining the Family:

In discussing the notion of the family with participants, there were a number of issues that emerged across the families. The following discussions were based on the general views of respondents on the notion of family. Many first generation participants in each of the families interpreted the family as a place of security and support for all its members. Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist), Hiba Spee (nurse), Mouna Mai (a 34 year old, teacher), Leila Lail (social worker), Iman Mohamad (unemployed mother), Asad Bilal (unemployed male parent), Mustafa Khandi (former taxi driver) and Adham Amar (former car salesman) spoke about educational support from the family. Leila Lail (social worker) commented about education being an important issue in Muslim families. She felt that it was important to financially support family members seeking an education. Also, Leila Lail commented that educated members will tend to benefit and support their families in the future.

To a person a family means security. [Umh!] It's a place where [Umh!] not just the children, but the husband can come to and feel peace, and [Umh!] confide with eachother. As family you support eachother to move on with life. [Umh!] Whether it be education or you would like to support other goals in your life. So, I believe that the parents have to support their children’s education at all times. [Umh!] Later on, once the children have gained respectable work, they will help the parents financially, and also eachother. The family is an important thing in the community. Because, [Umh!], unfortunately the education [Umh!] does not also give the child the ethics and beliefs to the children in support of eachother.

Similarly, Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist) commenting on this issue:

Family is a place of security. Family is support. It is about family members supporting eachother, economically. It is about the parents sending their children to schools, to get a good education. It is important to us, that we all help eachother as a family with money, with problems, with a lot of things. It is important for me, that my children feel that the family is a place of finance for them, I mean, in terms of education, of course. For example, my husband and I work, and we pay school fees. It is important for us that the children get a decent education and the best education, I think, in life.
To me the family means a financial security for educational purposes. I think the family is about support, supporting one another. This is important in our culture. I think the family, well the parents, its their responsibility to send their children to school. It is the responsibility of the father and the mother to give their child the means and choice of becoming an educated person. So the family is a source of support for the children’s education, but it also contributes to a number of other matters in life. But, education is one very important matter in the family, especially for the children.

Many second generation participants explicated different views to those of the parents in regard to the notion of the family. Samir Amar (a 17 year old student), Maha Mai (medical receptionist), Rabih Mohamad (student), Ghada Bassam (female student), Manar Spee (receptionist), Mounzar Houri (male student), Nahed Hani (supermarket cashier), Houda Nahli (dress shop assistant) and Mohamad Zeydi (a 17 year old male student) interpreted the family in terms of broader issues of cultural life. These respondents commented that the family informed their own views of ethnicity, culture and subjectivity. To them, the family was a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic community. For instance, Sami Amar and Maha Mai shared similar views on the family. These participants felt that the family was an integral aspect of their own self-identities. Sami Amar and Maha Mai further commented that the family was an important source of connection between individuals and their past history, traditions and ethnic community. Maha Mai, for instance, felt that the family was an important tool for her to make connections between her past, present and future. She further commented that the family also informed her own views on issues of self-character and representation. On this matter, Maha Mai spoke in the following terms:

The family is very important for me. [Umh!] It is important because it is my identity, my culture, and it has given me a lot of traditions. So I see family as being important in terms of who I am. [Umh!] As an individual belonging to a family, the family means I have a sense of the present, the past and future. Basically, the family has to do a lot with how I see myself, my ethnic background, my religion, and stuff like that, you know. [Umh!] the family to me, [Pause], also means a sense of belonging to one family, one community, which is the Lebanese community.

Sami Amar also speaking on this matter commented:
Family to me [Ah!] is very important. [Ah!] It’s, it’s my identity, my culture, basically my background. [Ah!] The family is important because it gives me a sense of meaning, a purpose in life. You know, like I know where I belong, what my culture is all about, my religion, just a sense of belonging to something. Whether this means being Lebanese or not. [Ah!] The family is an essential thing in life, it is my cultural heritage, [Ah!], it is my history. Basically, family shapes my identity, and gives me a purpose in life. You know, there is not a gap in my past, but there is some kind of belonging. There is more meaning in terms of my personality, you know, in terms of the family, well! In terms of identifying with specific traditions.

From the latter discussions with second generation respondents about the notion of family, it was evident that issues of ethnicity, identity and community were important to Sami Amar and Maha Mai in defining the concept of family. Also, these respondents felt that the family was an integral aspect of both their ethnic and cultural representation. Other second generation participants from families of a low socio-economic background also made important connections between issues of cultural identity, and their own idea of the family. Rabih Mohamad (student), Ghada Bassam (female student) and Nahed Hani (supermarket cashier) interpreted the family as being importantly linked with the development of individual identity. These respondents commented that the family acts as a primary source of identification for many people. They also felt that individuals rely on family traditions and cultural values to further develop their sense of personal character. On this matter, Ghada Bassam (female student) said:

The family is my identity. It has to do with my cultural identity, with who I am. I think the family is an important thing in a person’s life, because it gives them a culture, a unique society. I believe the family is something that a person can relate to in terms of understanding who they are, what their culture is all about. What is their ethnic background. The family helps to develop a child’s sense of identity, I believe. I believe the family gives family members cultural values, which people carry on in life and reflect on later in life, in terms of their own families or their own goals in life.

Also commenting on the family as the primary source of self identification for individuals, Rabih Mohamad felt that the family was the core essence to an individual’s sense of identity. He commented that the family provided individuals with social, cultural and religious values. Also
Rabih Mohamad commented that social morality and ethics are taught in the family. He felt that individuals utilised family values to make important decisions in regard to their social life.

I see the family is the main social foundation for individuals. I think it gives them a strong sense of who they are, and where they belong in life. The family teaches individuals many values which relate to religion, to culture, and other things, [Umh!], important things in life. You know, the family is an important social place for Lebanese, for all children to be taught moral values, as well as, ethical issues in life. This basic understanding, I believe allows children to have a better view on life. These cultural values help Lebanese people to make important decisions in their own life.

From the discussions with (Sunni) Muslim families, it was evident that definitions of the family varied between respondents and social theory. Many studies tend to treat the family as a formal and abstract concept. Whereas respondents interpreted the family more in terms of a cultural context. Clearly, there was a difference between first and second generation respondents in defining the concept of family. For second generation participants such as Rabih Mohamad (student), Ghada Bassam (female student) and Nahed Hani (supermarket cashier), issues of ethnicity, traditions and cultural identity were viewed as important markers of the family. Ghada Bassam (female student), for example, saw the family as being an important component of her self-identity.

She saw the family as an important social category that provided her with personal characteristics and a sense of belonging to an ethnic and cultural group. Clearly, the views of respondents such as Ghada Bassam and Rabih Mohamad indicates that the notion of family is a complex one which individuals utilised to identify with broader definitions and experiences of cultural life. To these respondents, it was evident that the family was an important social unit for them. The family provided both Ghada Bassam and Rabih Mohamad with a basic view of their ethnic identity positions in the family and the broad community. To these respondents, the notion of family was integral to their interpretation of the ethnic self. There was a close relationship between ethnic identity and the family among second generation participants.

In contrast, first generation participants shared a different view in their interpretation of the family. Many of these respondents viewed the family as playing more of a functional role towards its members. For instance, first generation participants such as Leila Lail (social worker), Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist) and Adham Amar (former car salesman) defined the family in terms of a formal context. For these respondents, the family offered its members financial support and
security in life. They also perceived the family as an important social unit that catered for the social and educational development of its members. Leila Lail (social worker), for example, felt that the family provided members with financial support in terms of their education.

From the latter discussions with members of the families, it was clear first generation participants provided formal definitions of the family. However, second generation respondents viewed the notion of family exclusively in terms of culture and identity. Moreover, these participants tended to link the issue of family with their own constitutive experiences and ideas about ethnicity, traditions and religion. It seemed that religion was also an important expression of their ethnicity. Moreover, religious beliefs served to strengthen cultural ties between second generation participants and their family traditions. Some of these participants saw their family values as being integral to their identity development. Second generation participants, Rabih Mohamad (student), Ghada Bassam (female student) and Nahed Hani (supermarket cashier), for example, felt that individuals relied on ethnic family values to further develop their self-identities. More specifically, these respondents felt individuals utilised their family values to make important social and ethical decisions throughout their lives.

In reviewing the literature on ethnic identity, many studies had offered a broad analysis of ethnicity and the family. A cluster of studies focused on the effects of social discrimination and the ethnic identities of adolescents. Other studies discussed the social ties of family generations in regard to ethnic identity and beliefs. Also, some studies examined factors of resiliency and ethnic identity in relation to the family. Furthermore, some of the studies focused on ethnic individuals and their commitment to maintain family values, ethnic identity and cultural background. Many of the studies in this section were concerned with the notion of ethnic identity from a cross-generational perspective. Both the following studies and this thesis indicated a strong pattern of ethnic identification across first and second generation family members. Many respondents shared strong views about their cultural values, families and ethnic communities in terms of their reflections of the Self. These categories were perceived by respondents as being central to their social identifications. Also, individuals shared strong views about their ethnic self-identification, regardless of outside social influence.

Traditional Practices:

This section outlines the traditional practices of Sunni Muslim families. It also provides a discussion of broad studies on traditional family practices.
There has been little research done on traditional family practices, particularly as it relates to ethnic groups in Australia. In examining the literature on traditional family practices, it was apparent that studies did not indicate any drastic changes or differences in terms of the current traditional practices of ethnic families in Australia. Clearly, they did not indicate any tensions in regard to factors of generation, class and regional contexts. Also, this thesis did not indicate any tensions in terms of the current traditions practiced by Sunni Muslim families in Australia.

Some family research in this area relates to the texts by Hartley (1995) and Storer (1985). These texts include a compilation of articles by different authors that broadly explore the migration and settlement experiences of ethnic immigrant families, and the effects of these experiences on family values and traditions. Some of these family case studies provide a brief discussion of traditional family values practised by ethnic immigrants in Australia. The following case studies are an example of traditional practices in the family. Hassan et al. (in Storer, 1985), for instance, examined Vietnamese families in Australia. In particular, these writers were interested in exploring the effects and changes of immigration and settlement factors in regard to Vietnamese family values. Some of the topics covered by Hassan Healy, McKenna and Hearst (1985) in this study relates to the historical and ethnic composition of Vietnamese families: religious beliefs; social demographic factors; family traditions and attitudes; refugee settlement; and legal conflicts. Within their broad discussion on Vietnamese families, Hassan et al. briefly discuss common family values practiced by Vietnamese people. They comment that the notion of respect is an important factor in the family.

These researchers suggest that family members had respect for older relatives, including the father as head of the family, and for the dead. They also comment that the advice of older relatives was sought and respected by younger ones. To Hassan et al., good manners among family members was an important Vietnamese tradition. To them, good manners were considered important in preserving family status. These writers also comment that it was a common tradition among rural Vietnamese women to manage family finance. Furthermore, Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst point out that traditional Vietnamese families were fairly large, because children were considered as important social and economic values to the family. Other Vietnamese traditional practices discussed by these researchers relate to issues of family power, sex roles and marital customs. Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst, for example, commented that parental power, in particular paternal authority was an important tradition in terms of family decision making. They also point out that family conflict was resolved within the family without recourse to outside social resources.
Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst suggested that grandparents held great power in traditional Vietnamese families. They also point out that the duty of the eldest son is to maintain family and ancestral honour.

Furthermore, these family researchers also spoke about traditional labour roles in the family. Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst suggest that Vietnamese females played the nurturer role, and males played the provider role. They also comment that traditional marital customs in Vietnamese families prohibited ‘marriage within the extended family (for example, with cousins).’ (Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst in Storer, 1985:271). These writers suggest that it was a family tradition for parents to arrange marriage for their children. Overall, Hassan, Healy, McKenna and Hearst point out that factors such as immigration, industrialization and modernization had effected traditional family practices among Vietnamese people in Australia.

Likewise, the study by Hearst (in Storer, 1985) also examined the historical and socio-economic context of Greek families in Australia. She considered traditional family values, the impact of emigration, various family patterns, and the attitudes of Greek families on broader aspects of socialization. Hearst also provided a brief comparative discussion between former Greek laws and the Australian legal system in her study. In particular, she briefly discussed different aspects of family traditions. Hearst, for example, commented that family authority reflected a sense of paternal dominance among members of Greek families. She also commented that older siblings were responsible for the younger ones. From a traditionalist perspective, this writer suggested that females tend to marry before the males in Greek families. She also pointed out that marriage was prohibited among first and second cousins, however, they were encouraged to become loyal friends. In further commenting about traditional marital Greek customs, Hearst suggested that marriage was arranged by families rather than individuals. She pointed out that the social and economic background of Greek families were important factors in regard to marital decisions. (Hearst in Storer, 1985:127).

Furthermore, the latter family researcher outlined three important points in regard to Greek marriages. Firstly, she suggests that both partners contributed economically to the marriage. Secondly, Hearst comments that both partners also contributed to protecting the moral values of the family. Thirdly, she points out that the responsibility of married couples was mainly towards the benefits of their children’s future. In speaking about traditional Greek family values, Hearst (in Storer, 1985) also provided a general discussion of traditional sex roles in Greek families. For instance, she comments that males were responsible for the general provision of the household. The
latter family researcher also commented that males were responsible for safe-guarding the honour of females in the family. Also, Hearst comments that honour was an important traditional family value for both Greek men and women. She points out that ‘women should be chaste and restrained; men should be assertive and courageous.’ (Hearst in Storer, 1985:130). Overall, Hearst points out that factors of immigration, law, urbanization and modernization affected traditional family practices among Greek people in Australia.

A number of family researchers discussed the notion of family values in their work. It was apparent that the study by Mak and Chan (in Hartley, 1995) offered a more detailed conception of the various traditional values in Chinese families. This thesis also adopts a similar approach to Mak and Chan’s discussion. Both of these studies discussed a number of traditions in detail. These traditions were considered of great importance to the family. This thesis also considered the perceptions and experiences of Lebanese Muslim families in terms of their current traditional practices in Australia. Mak and Chan, for instance, examined Chinese family values in Australia. Their work included a broad discussion of Chinese settlement, family structure, traditional values, marriage, adolescence and cultural identity. In particular, Mak and Chan spoke about four important traditional family values which they felt were key characteristics to Chinese family life: the notion of respect, harmony, economic success, and the family itself. On this matter, Mak and Chan spoke about the traditional Chinese value of respect among family members. They commented that children are taught to respect their parents and older siblings. The latter family researchers also suggested that respect helped to define the authoritative role of older family members.

Mak and Chan also spoke about the notion of harmony as another family value among the Chinese. To these writers, harmony helped to maintain family stability. They further suggest that individuals tended to deliberately avoid conflicts with other family members. Mak and Chan point out that harmony was an important family value, because individuals were expected to suppress their own views in the interest of the family (Mak and Chan in Hartley, 1995:75). Another traditional family value discussed by Mak and Chan related to the economic success of Chinese family members. They commented that the economic success of individuals helped to strengthen the wealth and status of the family. According to the latter family researchers, the qualifications and skills of individuals were also perceived by the Chinese as important accomplishments towards the family’s economic success. Consequently, Mak and Chan commented that higher education was generally encouraged by members in traditional Chinese families.
Furthermore, Mak and Chan comment that the overall ‘importance of the family’ was considered by
the Chinese as an important tradition in itself. To these writers, the family is perceived as a major
unit among Chinese people. In reference to this view, they also suggest that individuals’ identities
were defined in terms of their familial roles and relationships. On this matter, these writers
commented, ‘Individual matters are often treated as family matters. Traditionally, important life
choices are usually made according to the family’s wishes. For example, the family decides, or at
least has a major input into, grown-up children’s choices of vocations and marriage partners’ (Mak

Furthermore, Mak and Chan point out that members of the family worked as a team to maintain
family status and cohesiveness. To the latter family researchers, this also meant that Chinese
families provided individual members with social and financial support. Moreover, Mak and Chan
comment that it was important for the Chinese to deal with family problems as a group to remain
self-sufficient as a family unit. According to Mak and Chan, the latter family values were
considered central to the cultural identities and family unity of Chinese families. These family
researchers also viewed the family unit as providing the necessary resources for the personal and
educational growth of family members.

Traditional Family Practices:

From the discussions, there seemed to be a general agreement among members in each of the
families that issues of respect, education and safety were important family practices. In particular,
many respondents felt the latter issues were important in maintaining good kinship relations and
family cohesiveness. For instance, many parents across the families spoke about their concerns of
safety in the family. Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist), Noura Yessi (teacher), Ahmed Deib
(unemployed father), Ayda Sabah (teacher), Fawaze Hani (unemployed parent), Farouk Bassam
(unemployed male parent) and Nada Oula (housewife) felt that it was important for them to be
constantly informed of their children’s location outside the family. Hajar Zaki and her partner
Kaled Zaki (doctor), for instance, commented that their son always leaves them a note containing
the name and number of his present location. To them, this was an important family habit that
ensures the safety of their child. Also, these respondents felt that such practices provided family
members with a sense of security and closeness. In reflecting her own and her partner’s view of
family practices, Hajar Zaki spoke in the following terms:
It is important for us, as parents, to know where my son is. We would like to know where our son is for safety purposes. Our son always leaves a note informing us where he is staying, and a number where he can be contacted. [Uh!] We have to know for safety issues. This is something that is practised by the family all the time. [Uh!] You can say it’s an important family habit. You know, if someone has an accident or we are expecting them to come home, at a certain time, if they then don’t turn up, you know, we have every reason to worry. This, I feel, is a good sense of security for the person, and it gives the family a sense of closeness, a sense of togetherness.

Ahmed Deib (unemployed father) also speaking on this matter commented:

It is important that my daughters tell us where they are going and when they will be back when leaving the home. They leave a note of where they are going and the number, before going out. This is an important thing in my family. All family members do this. I make sure that it is done, because it gives me a peace of mind, knowing where my children are and what they are doing.

Other first generation participants in families from a middle socio-economic background discussed issues of kinship relations in regard to their familial practices in Australia. A number of first generation male participants in the families shared similar views about the importance of respect in Muslim families. These respondents felt that it was important for family members to respect each other. The fathers in these families commented about the importance of children respecting their parents in Islam. For instance, Kazi Sabah (geologist) commented that the family is the essence of Islam. He felt it was important for family members to respect each other. He says:

The family means respect between parents and the children. In Islam, the child must respect, be good to his parents, to be dutiful to his mother and father. No matter how old the child is, he is always expected to respect his parents, grandparents, uncles and other family members. [Pause] In a Muslim family, there also has to be respect between husband and wife, and, and the children. There has to be a good relationship between parents and children. So respect is a very important thing in a Muslim family.

Mustafa Khandi (former taxi driver) commenting on this issue:
So the family I guess, is about respect between parents and children. Basically this is an important thing in the family, because it is bound by religious limits. I guess respect starts with how parents think of each other, how parents associate with each other. Respect in the family is also about children obeying the parents. I mean children obeying parents rules. I think there also should be respect in the family in relation to the way parents and children should behave and act in front of each other.

Speaking along similar lines, Nazih Spee (accountant) also said:

Family is about respecting each other. Helping each other. Basically, the family is about respect and trust between all family members. Respecting the family, in particular the parents, is part of one’s Islamic principles and therefore is part of one’s religious practices. Respect between parents and children, means that there will be a good relationship between family members. So there needs to be respect in the family, because it also means, it means that, that the children listen more better to their parents’ advice. It also means that the family functions good, together.

Similarly, Nazih Spee (accountant), Mouna Mai (a 34 year old, teacher) and Sayed Merhi (male social worker) felt that the issue of respect between elders and youth was an important cultural principle in Muslim families. They also commented that kinship relations did not change regardless of time and place. Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker), for instance, commented that respect for family members was a set precedent in the family. He felt it was a common family practice for children to respect their elders. Also, Yehya Salah commented that the idea of respect also meant that family members respected their relatives, and maintained regular visits with them. Yehya Salah commented:

I believe respect between children and their elders is very important in the family. This is also important from a religious point of view. Because, even though Muslims live in Australia, this does not necessarily mean that their cultural practices, or that their family principles change. No, they always stay the same no matter in which country you live in, or for how long you have been living in it, I believe cultural practices do not change. Respect between the children and their elders is a set precedent if you like, in my family. It is also important for us to make sure that our kids have respect for their relatives, and we also make sure that there are regular visits between us and our relatives.
Also commenting on the idea of respect among family kinship, Iman Mohamad (housewife) commented that respect between family members was an important issue in terms of both tradition and religion. She felt that respect was an important family practice that members choose to be part of and adhere to. Also, Iman Mohamad commented that family respect did not change regardless of time and place. On this matter she said:

I think respect is important in all Muslim families. This is not just a traditional thing, but it is also a religious issue. It is important that the child has respect for his parents and elders. It’s something you choose to be part of and you adhere to. So respect in the family does not change regardless of time and place. So this is one important thing that my family hold on to in Australia.

Jalal Bilal (travel agent assistant), a second generation participant, expressed a different view to the first generation participants. Jalal Bilal commented that there are some simple family traditions that were no longer practised well between Muslim parents and children in Australia. In particular, he suggested that some Muslim families lacked respect between young and elder members. Also, Jalal Bilal felt there was less communication between Lebanese family members. He believed that was created from the busy working lifestyle of many Muslim parents in Australia. For example, he commented that there was less contact between kinship relations, particularly in terms of relatives visiting each other.

In looking at how some participants had defined family practices in terms of safety issues and family respect, it was also apparent that the concept of education for some participants was another key issue in regard to broader practices of the family. First generation respondents from a middle socio-economic background, like Noura Yessi (teacher), Kazi Sabah (geologist), Roula Zeydi (teacher), Kaled Zaki (doctor) and Hiba Spee (nurse) spoke about adopting a regular study time and routine for their children. Roula Zeydi felt that it was important for parents to monitor their children’s education. She commented that her children spent three hours per day studying at home. Also, Roula Zeydi commented that this regular family practice was reinforced by strict parental guidance.

Education is an important family practice for us. We, as the parents, make sure that our children are spending three hours a day, after school, doing their homework and other studies. We make sure that our children read library books. In our free time, we ensure that our children learn and read Arabic books, also. Yeah! It’s very important for us, that
our children are well educated. So in our free time, we also take the children to outside places, to the Museum, the National Gallery, [Ah!] historical sights. Yeah! all of these things are important because they help to educate our kids.

Speaking along similar lines, Kaled Zaki (doctor) also commented that a study routine was compulsory in his family. He commented that the parents set strict guidelines for their children in regard to study and leisure time. Also, Kaled Zaki felt that this particular method of family practice ensures that Muslim children are spending adequate time in regard to their education. Kaled Zaki commented:

We have set a study time for the children, [Umh!], that they have to stick to, or follow if you like on [Ah!] a daily basis. It’s important that we as parents, [Umh!], we involve ourselves a lot with our children’s education. We have set strict guidelines. The children know when it is time to sit down and study, and also they know when it’s time to play, and do other things. [Umh!] my son comes from school eats, he studies for a couple of hours or more, and later on he does other things, like sports or going out. I believe, [Umh!], that it is important to set a study time for our children, because it gives them a sense of discipline on their education. And [Ah!], it makes sure that the children get their homework done.

Other first generation respondents from a low socio-economic background, like Mustafa Khandi (former taxi driver), Suraya Bilal (housewife), Najah Deib (unemployed mother) and Wissam Oula (former butcher) shared similar views. These participants also spoke about issues of ‘education’ in terms of regular practice in the family. Wissam Oula commented that there was regular practice of religious teachings between the parents and children. He felt that it was important for him to maintain preaching Islam to his children in order to expand their knowledge on religious issues. Also, Wissam Oula commented that he discussed religious stories with family members on a daily basis. On this matter, Wissam Oula spoke in the following terms:

I always teach my children about religious things. I feel it is important for myself and for my wife to educate the children about their Islamic culture and practices. This is important to do, so that children are properly taught about different life issues. The children get to also become well educated about their religion. They will tend to know about a lot of religious issues and stories. Everyday, I tell my family members stories about Islam, about
the Prophets, about their lifestyles, and other things. This is an important family thing that we do together.

Suraya Bilal (housewife) also speaking on this matter commented that it was important for members of her family to practise speaking other languages. She commented that family members gained knowledge about other cultures. Also, Suraya Bilal felt this regular family practice helped her children to communicate effectively with other cultural groups.

Learning another language is important for Muslims, so that when they enter a new society, they enter with peace. For example, it is not possible for me to approach a Westerner without having knowledge about his cultural and language background. This won’t ensure a positive communication. So therefore, it is important to learn other languages. In my family, the children are always taught about other cultures and languages. Not only it is important to teach the children the history of Islam, the Arabic language or other Arabic stories, but we ensure that our children learn a wide range of education. So that we enable our children to be better educated, to be better communicators with others.

From the discussions, it is clear there were different perspectives between social theories and Sunni Muslim families about traditional family practices. For instance, there were different forms of family practices which respondents viewed as being of great significance to their cultural way of life. Clearly, this methodology was in contrast to other family studies which tended to pre-select broad social categories, (marriage, religion and food), and to make connections between these traditional practices and ethnic minority groups. This method of approach was based on theoretical analysis which focused on broad patterns of family practices among cultural groups. In contrast, this thesis defined ethnic traditions from a cultural and communal perspective. The thesis interviews indicate traditional practices that were important to Lebanese Muslim people both in terms of the family and broader aspects of the Islamic culture.

From the discussions, it seems that issues of respect, education and safety were important regular family practices to the participants. For instance, participants from a low socio-economic background, shared a simplistic view of family practices. They felt issues of respect, education and safety were important in maintaining a good family structure. Other respondents from a middle socio-economic background felt issues of respect, education and safety helped to provide a stronger unity between members of the family. For example, Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist) and her
partner Kaled Zaki (doctor) commented about issues of safety being an important practice in the family. They felt this form of practice was not solely about close connections between parents and children. Hajar and Kaled Zaki also felt that safety issues provided all family members with a sense of security and closeness.

Some of the respondents also viewed family practices as being important in terms of family relationships. For instance, respondents such as Kazi Sabah (geologist) and Nazih Spee (accountant) commented that respect was an important family value in Muslim families. They felt that it helped to maintain a good relationship between family members. Nazih Spee, for instance, viewed the notion of respect as an important religious practice for all family members. In particular, he felt that respect was significant in maintaining good relations between parents and children. Furthermore, a study routine was perceived as an important educational practice in the Zeydi and Zaki families. Roula Zeydi (teacher) and Kaled Zaki (doctor), for instance, felt that this particular method of family practice provided children with a sense of discipline towards their education. It was also perceived by the latter participants as enhancing the knowledge of children in the family.

A canvassing of the family literature indicates that some studies briefly examine traditional practices in terms of broad social factors and ethnic minority groups. Other methods of analysis have focused on specific traditional practices, such as religious beliefs, food, marriage and traditional birth practices. Some of these studies deal with traditional family practices in terms of a theoretical context. They fail to address the views of family members in regard to specific traditional family values. In contrast, this thesis discussed the views of Sunni Muslim families about ethnic traditions from a cultural perspective.

Some ethnic family values were important to participants in terms of their understandings of cultural and religious issues. They viewed issues of education, safety and respect as important family practices that help to maintain close family relationships. This chapter indicates that traditional family practices were much more complex in nature. It also shows that first and second generation respondents have maintained their traditional practices despite outside social influences. Family practices were also important to members of Sunni Muslim families, because it helped them to establish links between their cultural identities and ethnic traditions.

Overview:
A canvassing of the family literature indicates that such studies continue to conceptualise the family as a category to be analysed. This perspective is criticised by Bernardes’ (1993) examination of methodological issues in which he says, ‘the most obvious harm done by our methodology centres around the continual portrayal of the family as existing and being in itself a relevant category of analysis’ (p.41). Family studies tend to mainly discuss the functional side of the family (for example broad family structures). It is also apparent these studies fail to adopt a critical perspective on the dynamic processes of family life. There is little research that focus on an in-depth analysis of cultural issues and the family.

It is clear that family studies provide a general discussion of culture, tradition and religion in regard to ethnic families. Moreover, these studies tend to address the social experiences of family members within an historical framework. Whilst family studies provide a brief historical description of Muslim people and their religious identities, they did not discuss complex identity issues and the family. A number of ethnographic researchers also focus on questions of immigration, family and generation in the Lebanese literature. In particular, these writers centre their analysis on models of integration and social-history. However, these studies fail to provide a detailed examination of particular societal factors and their effects on the identity position and cultural practices of ethnic families. Basically, many family studies fail to adopt an interactionist model of analysis. They do not make explicit the views of individuals about their understandings of the family.

A closer examination of the family literature also indicates that studies fail to recognise diverse family practices in terms of the broad Lebanese community. Clearly, some family studies place little emphasis on the family as a complex notion. For instance, these studies fail to provide alternative research models in terms of their ideas about future family policies. They are yet to take account of the diverse cultural background of Australian families in some of their discussions on multiculturalism.
There were a number of problems identified in the methodologies of family studies. A number of researchers focused on a descriptive analysis of the family. They tended to provide a static view of family life. While family studies discussed factors of class, gender and ethnicity, however, they fail to provide a detailed analysis of such categories. For instance, it is important for family researchers to focus on the similarities and differences between the views of individual family members. Here, the challenge for family researchers is to examine how individuals perceive their own family experiences. Furthermore, family researchers need to focus on a multi-dimensional model of analysis in studying ethnic families. In doing so, this helps researchers to recognise the complex and diverse cultural practices of ethnic minority families. As when we consider Hartley and McDonald’s (1994:8) point, ‘So while official statistics give us a useful snapshot picture of household families at a particular time they cannot convey the complexity and diversity of family functioning and relationships, how people identify themselves and their families for different purposes, and the shifting composition of individual families.’

It is important to move beyond western definitions of the family, but to recognise issues of diversity and difference in ethnic family studies. Clearly, this indicates that we need further research in two main areas. Firstly, it is important for family researchers to take into account the views of individual family members about their identity positions in the family. Secondly, there is a need for family researchers to critically examine the complex interactions of family members with key social institutions. This critical analysis opens up new pathways and offers potential researchers new challenges in the area of family and cultural diversity. In discussing the notion of family with participants, clearly, this study provided some insights into respondents’ definitions and experiences of family life in Australia. Many participants viewed traditional and cultural values as being integral to their notions of family and ethnic background. It was apparent that other family studies offered broad debates on issues of kinship in relation to social and cultural change. However, traditional family practices remained the same for many (Sunni) Muslims, regardless of time or place. From the discussions, family members viewed issues of culture, respect and safety as being important family practices in Australia. The latter issues were viewed by many first generation respondents as important practices in terms of family guidance and cohesiveness.

It is important to note that other family research, including family members in this thesis, have identified external social and economic factors as generating change within families. From the discussions, it seems that the concept of class played an important role in some of the ways respondents saw their parental role in the family. For instance, parents from middle socio-economic
families shared progressive ideas in their interpretation of the modern parental role. This was opposite to other respondents from low socio-economic families who mainly interpreted their parental roles from a traditionalist perspective. Both the traditional and modern views of parents in this thesis also tended to reflect the patterns of parental roles expressed in broader family studies discussed earlier in this chapter.

Whilst, overall these family case studies had focused on broader aspects of parental roles, the methodology of this thesis focused more on a cultural model in looking at some of the ways Lebanese Muslim parents tended to narrate their family positions. Also, the notion of ethnic identity was an important marker in both this thesis and other studies in terms of respondents’ definitions and interpretations of the family. For many respondents, some of their ideas on ethnic identity and traditions were strongly linked to their definition of the family. The findings in both this study and broader research stated in this chapter indicates that families maintained aspects of their ethnic traditions, language and culture in their host communities. In particular, this thesis highlights the fact that many second generation participants had made some connection between ethnic identity and the family. They felt that the family had informed their own views of ethnicity, culture and subjectivity.

This particular chapter on the family clearly indicates that definitions of the family varied between respondents’ views and social theory. Lebanese Muslim respondents, for instance, interpreted the family more in terms of a cultural context, as opposed to formal abstract meanings. It was also clear that broader studies on traditional family practices did not indicate any drastic changes or differences in relation to the current family practices of ethnic groups in Australia. Some of the common forms of family practices identified among broader studies and this thesis relate to notions of respect, education, kinship relations, and family cohesiveness. In this instance, there weren’t any striking differences among Lebanese Muslim families in terms of their views on family practices. Generally, it was felt by all respondents that maintaining good kinship relations was important in terms of both their religion and family tradition.

The family literature considered ethnic family values at a broad collective level. These studies failed to consider the various family practices that were important to members of an ethnic group. However, this particular study outlined the similarities and differences of individual family practices across twenty Muslim (Sunni) families in the Lebanese community. Clearly, for some of the participants, there were different forms of family practices which members continued to experience throughout their lives in Australia. It is clear that this initial discussion with participants
about the notion of family focused around concepts of culture, education and tradition. In the
course of the discussions, it became clear that issues of family overlapped other social and ethnic
categories. For example, the respondents also viewed issues of gender as being integral to their
own positions within the family. Consequently, the views of participants on issues of gender
positions are explored and discussed in the chapter that follows.
CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN AND GENDER IN ISLAM

Introduction:

The notion of gender is a broad term that has received considerable attention in debates concerning ethnicity, identity and family issues. Gender has always been a significant issue in the literature on ethnicity. It has been subject to increasing debates in the past decade. There are numerous debates on gender related issues with very diverse perspectives. Two major debates in this area refer to a feminist perspective and an Islamic perspective. Feminist perspectives have tended to draw more upon narrow and hegemonic conceptions of ethnic issues in their discussion of women and gender. Feminist theory has received criticism by social researchers about some of its problems in understanding definitions of culture and gender, in relation to a particular cultural group (Afshar and Maynard 2000, Badran 1999). Whilst gender debates from an Islamic perspective have tended to engage more with some of the complexities of ethnic issues in relation to women. Some studies in this area have examined gender issues from both a cultural and religious perspective. These studies have indicated some of the limitations associated with western research concerning the Islamic interpretations of gender practices (Badawi 1995).

Whilst I recognise that feminism has contributed a great deal to the gender literature in terms of ethnic, cultural and religious issues, I do not wish to provide a detailed outline of the gender debate. My main reason being that the essence of this research was to examine the general views of Sunni Muslim respondents in regard to gender identity. The questions posed for this particular section of the interviews were not constructed within a feminist type of framework. Instead, the set of questions on gender aimed to elicit the general perceptions of Sunni Muslim families about their gender positions and practices within the family and the broad outside community.

In response to this methodology, it can be said that respondents’ discussions on gender issues did not reflect a direct critique of feminist issues. There was no evidence of any direct engagement between participants views and feminist-gender issues. But indirectly, it seemed female respondents were defending their own gender position and cultural ideals in response to what they tend to perceive as a western model of gender issues. From the discussions, it can be said that the views of female respondents in this thesis indicates that this particular group of Sunni Muslim women felt that they had their own set of gender practices that they were able to express in the broad Australian multicultural society. But, at the same time, their views indicate that these women felt they had to explain their gender positions and practices to a broader hostile community – which
they felt perceived them as a separate and different group of people. Rather members of the families viewed gender issues in terms of cultural and religious practices. For some participants, issues of responsibilities, family and work practices were important markers or dimensions of gender rights.

This chapter provides an overview analysis of respondents’ views on gender, and some of the tensions that exist in the literature on gender, women and Islam. It examines the issue of gender from a communal perspective to highlight some of the misrepresentations to do with women in Islam. In light of the interview discussions, there was some emphasis placed on the gender rights of female respondents and the range of choices available to them in Islam.

A canvassing of the literature on women, gender and Islam indicates that researchers have centred their ideas of gender rights, culture and religion on three main arguments (Badawi 1995, El-Sohl and Mabro 1994, Azim 1997, Kandiyoti 1991, Bingham and Gross 1980). These arguments tend to highlight some of the tensions and differences between western and non-Western influences on gender relations and Islam:

(i) One particular unresolved tension in the literature relates to the universal assumptions of western gender theories which are present in the literature on gender and Islam.

(ii) Another tension relates to the gaps that exist between Islamic principles and the diverse cultural practices of Muslim women.

(iii) Whilst another key argument in the gender literature relates to the complex interrelations between religious beliefs and the social realities of Muslim people.

I will consider each of these three points in turn. The first key area in this literature relates to the universalistic premises of western theory on issues of gender relations and Islam. A number of social researchers such as Badawi (1995), El-Sohl and Mabro (1994), Kandiyoti (1991), Bingham and Gross (1980) have argued that western-inspired gender theories provide an erroneous literature on gender and Islam. These writers suggest that the diversity of gender contexts in the lives of Muslim women is often ignored in western studies. To them, gender studies from a non-Islamic background often fail to take into account the positive aspects available to women in Muslim societies. A key tension identified by social researchers in this area relates to the ethnocentric attitudes and misinterpretations underlying universalistic assumptions depicted in western theory
(Ahmed 1992, El-Solh and Mabro 1994, Badawi 1995, Bingham and Gross 1980, Azim 1997). The main criticism offered by gender writers refers to the broad frameworks used in western theory to depict a simplistic view of gender relations between men and women in Islam. Western-based literature tends to provide a general view of male-female relations, where males are viewed as playing a dominant role in the public sphere and females playing the submissive role in the private sphere.

Many gender writers (such as Bingham and Gross 1980, Azim 1997, also see El-Solh & Mabro 1994, Badawi 1995), have highlighted these gender misconceptions through some of their discussions on the economic aspects of women in Islam. Gender researchers such as Bingham and Gross and Azim have commented that the workforce statistics of Muslim women do not reflect the exact economic status of females in Muslim societies. To these writers, the separate and private working lives of female Muslims tends to indicate little economic opportunities for women. Instead, these gender researchers suggest that this gender separation in particular Islamic communities often creates jobs for women in both urban and rural areas. Bingham and Gross, for instance, have commented that Muslim women occupy an important economic role in both urban and rural areas worldwide. They suggest that economic status is important to women from all socio-economic backgrounds. Also, the latter researchers, for example, suggest that Muslim women engaged in important agricultural work are often excluded from female labour statistics.

On the other hand, Azim’s (1997) work on the relevance of employment and women in Islam, relates to the views of female respondents expressed in this thesis. For instance, both Azim and female participants shared similar views about the relevance of employment towards women’s social status and self-esteem. In further sharing similar views about employment issues, Azim comments that the economic participation of women is important to a nation’s development. Likewise, some female respondents such as Nada Oula (housewife), Suraya Bilal (housewife) and Ronya Khandi (housewife) felt it was important for Muslim women workers to contribute to family expenses and the broad community. Furthermore, Azim suggests there is an increase in the participation of Muslim women in varying fields of employment. He also comments that Muslim women’s representation in employment may vary according to differences in cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. In his work, Azim also suggests that issues of culture, family, economic and gender differences are no longer having a great influence on the role of women as workers. Instead, he suggests that economic and technological developments have influenced individual views towards women’s employment. Whilst Azim comments that the latter attitude is more welcomed among younger than older generations, however, the thesis interviews indicates that all
respondents shared positive views about women workers, regardless of age, gender and generation background.

The discussion offered by Badawi (1995) about employment and gender aspects of Islam relate to the views of female respondents in this thesis. It was evident that female participants justified their gender views on the premise of their religious understandings and social realities. Once again, there is an option available for Muslim women to exercise their full rights as workers in Islam. The idea of Muslim women having an important and essential role as the mother is clearly conveyed through Badawi’s work and interview discussions. In sharing similar views to Badawi, many female respondents felt that the mother played an important role as the educator and rearer of the children. But, at the same time, both Badawi and female respondents recognised that work rights were also an important component of the gender practices of women in Muslim societies.

Bearing these issues in mind, Badawi’s (1995) views and those of female respondents also highlight the range of choices available to Muslim women when it comes to making decisions concerning their gender rights and economic status. For example, Badawi points out that Muslim women had the right to negotiate and determine their work role with their spouse. He also commented that women were able to apply their work skills in a range of employment fields, where applicable. Also, Badawi commented that the varying gender positions of Muslim women as widows or divorcees also enabled them to seek employment in order to survive. Likewise, the views of first and second generation female respondents also related to the idea that there were multiple perspectives available to females in Islam in order to enhance their own socio-economic status. These participants shared similar views about the gender rights and practices of Muslim women as professional workers.

In my interviews, first generation female respondents such as Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher), Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher) and Souad Yegli (former factory tailor) spoke about the social advantages of education and employment for female Muslims in society. These respondents felt that the latter skills provided women with broader choices to be made in terms of work, finance, independence, child-support, self-development and social contribution. Souha Merhi commented that the educational and work skills of both Muslim girls and boys helped to increase their social choice in life. Similarly, second generation respondents such as Manar Spee (receptionist) and Nina Yegli (part-time clerical worker) were keen about the idea of Muslim girls becoming active workers in the future. Both participants suggested that a professional skill helped female Muslims to achieve a range of social and work opportunities in life. For example, Nina Yegli commented that a
professional skill provided female Muslims with the opportunity to become productive and experienced workers in society.

There were different views offered by social researchers to highlight the distorted views on Islam depicted in western-based gender theories (El-Solh and Mabro 1994, Ahmed 1992). They suggest that tension exists between gender categories imposed by western theory and the social experiences of Muslim women. This particular issue is often ignored by social researchers dealing with gender issues from a non-Islamic perspective. Other gender writers also criticised western studies for failing to recognise the complex nature of gender relations. To them, the notion of gender tends to overlap social and cultural factors, and has a different effect on female status in different countries. However, the work of El-Solh and Mabro has provided a valuable contribution to the literature on gender. These social researchers have provided a much more detailed analysis of gender issues in Islam, as opposed to other studies, by considering the views of Muslim women and their gender roles within diverse Islamic cultures.

They suggest it is important to examine the perceptions of Muslim women to gain better insights into gender roles and Islam. In my study, female respondents shared similar views to El-Solh and Mabro about the need to disassociate themselves from feminist perspectives in terms of assessing gender relations. Both El-Solh and Mabro and female respondents believed that feminist models of analysis were based on a universalistic approach to gender relations in Islam. For them, this analytical view tends to solely judge Muslim women’s status in western cultural terms. El-Solh and Mabro argue it is important to consider the complexities of women’s way of life in diverse Muslim communities to avoid the ‘overemphasis of Islam as a cultural determinant’ in the lives of all Muslim groups (1994:19). The latter writers also suggest that Muslim women have a choice in negotiating their gender roles within the limitations of social and cultural boundaries. To these writers, Muslim women may utilise their own personal choices within these rigid boundaries to influence factors pertaining to family and community interests.

**Gender and Work Rights:**

It is important to note that previous discussion on wider sources of gender-based studies offer us a general discussion of western feminist model of gender, women and work. However, this particular chapter provides a specific case study of a specific sub-section of the Lebanese community (Sunni Muslim women). What I realized from this discussion is that there was an indirect dialogue which unfolds between first and second generation females about issues of gender and work. It seems that
female participants were indirectly engaged with western feminist dialogue. However, as stated earlier, this section of the interviews also indicates that this particular group of women felt that they had to explain their own gender position and practices to an outsider in the broad Australian community.

In examining the way in which issues of gender inscribed the views of the participants on notions of rights and equality, it was also apparent that many of the respondents felt that issues of work were important gender practices for both males and females in Islam. Some first generation female respondents from the families, such as Mouna Mai (teacher), Hiba Spee (nurse), Nadia Salah (dental nurse), Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher), Mayada Amar (housewife), Souad Yegli (former factory tailor), Samya Nahli (housewife) and Iman Mohamad (housewife) commented that both sexes had the right to exercise their role as the worker in the community. These participants commented that female Muslims, in particular, had a choice between her commitment to work and the family.

While these women recognised the right of female Muslims to participate in the workforce, however, they felt more committed to their parenting roles. According to Nadia Salah, female Muslims have the right to work in Islam. But to her, whether women choose to practice work is solely based on their own decision. Consequently, in her view, it was important for the woman to work, but not at the expense of her child’s upbringing. Nadia Salah spoke about her own experiences as a dental nurse and a mother. She felt more committed towards raising her children. Consequently, Nadia Salah commented that she worked part-time as a dental nurse, whilst her children were in school.

In Islam, both men and women have the right to work. But whether a woman chooses to practice this right, and to practice work, is her own decision. I personally believe that it is important for women to work, if it’s not at the risk of her children’s upbringing. For example, I work part-time as a dental nurse, while my children go to school. Because I feel it is important for the mother to spend more time with children, while they are growing up.

Similarly, while Hiba Spee (nurse) also felt that Muslim women had the right to become educated workers, however, she also emphasized a greater commitment towards children in the family. From her own experiences, Hiba Spee spoke about spending many years raising her daughters, before returning to the workforce. In her opinion, it was important for Muslim women to raise their
children, whilst the father’s income was sufficient to support the family. Also, Hiba Spee commented that female Muslims were able to utilise their work skills at a later stage in life.

It is not like how people think of Muslim women. Muslim women are like Muslim men. I mean, they also have their own rights to education and to work. Like I studied at University, and I ended up with a good career in health. But it is just different when you get married. I mean I didn’t feel it was necessary for me to work, when I had two little daughters to look after. As long as my husband was able to work and support us, then I believe the children come first. I think all Muslim girls should get an education, because this skill will stay with them for the rest of their life. [Umh!] Education will give women a work skill, and they can use it at any time in their life. For example, in my situation, I left work to be with my daughters, but after many years, I was still able to apply for a job and work as a nurse.

Also commenting on issues to do with gender, work and motherhood, Souad Yegli (former factory tailor) felt that she had the right to work as a Muslim woman in Australia. She also commented that westerners tended to have negative perceptions of the gender identities of Muslim women. Consequently, she believed that westerners viewed Muslim women as being dependent on their partner’s income. In contrast to the views of non Muslims, Souad Yegli felt that she had the right to an independent income and economic status. As a mother, Souad Yegli felt committed towards raising her young children. She commented that she might apply to teach in Islamic schools in the future.

All women have the right to work. I used to work in factories when I first came to Australia. You see, it is the non Muslims that have a wrong idea about Muslim women, about their identity in Islam. Other people don’t understand the exact gender roles of women in Islam. They always tend to see Muslim women as the ‘home-maker’. She is seen as being totally dependent on her husband. It’s the husband that works and provides for her. This may be true in some Muslim families, but some Muslim women also work. They have the right to work and to earn money for themselves. For many years I have been unemployed, because I was raising my children. It’s not until a few years down the track that I may apply to teach Arabic in an Islamic school.

Continuing this theme of the female worker from a religious angle, Nada Oula (housewife), Suraya Bilal (housewife) and Ronya Khandi (housewife) who were from low socio-economic background
families, perceived work matters as good religious deeds on behalf of Muslim women. It is important to note that all these women are described as housewives, because female parents from low socio-economic background families had never worked in the past, with the exception of Souad Yegli who was a former factory tailor. These participants also felt it was important for Muslim women workers to contribute to family expenses and the broad community. From a religious perspective, Nada Oula commented that the work of female Muslims was interpreted as an act of charity in Islam. She felt that it was important for Muslim women to contribute to family expenses. To her, the support of female workers helped to strengthen the socio-economic status of Muslim families.

Yes, there is nothing wrong with Muslim women working. On the contrary, if a Muslim woman works, then this is something good in our religion. Because her work is seen as a good deed, an act of charity in Islam. The work of a Muslim woman is seen as an act of charity, because she is contributing to family expenses. Besides, her financial assistance, only helps to increase family income. It also helps the family to feel financially secure and confident in terms of their lifestyle.

Speaking along similar lines, Suraya Bilal (housewife) commented that female Muslims were encouraged to work, according to the history of Islam. She also viewed the notion of work as a charitable act from a religious perspective. Furthermore, Suraya Bilal felt that it was important for female Muslim workers to provide economic support to both the family and the broad community. In her view, Muslim women workers also had religious obligations to provide economic support outside the family, in order to improve the social conditions of their community. Suraya Bilal commented:

I believe that work matters for Muslim women is quite acceptable in Islam. In fact, in times of the Prophet, women were encouraged to work. Muslim women, around that time, helped with the labour work in their town. They helped to improve the roadways and other environmental conditions surrounding their dwellings. This was something that was done in relation to special guests who considered visiting their town. So the work of Muslim women can be seen as an act of charity on their behalf. So therefore, the work of Muslim women is an important economic means not just for her family, but for her community as well. So I believe that Muslim women should be working, even in special cases, where their own community requires assistance in improving their town’s environment.
Other first generation female participants in the families also discussed issues of gender aspiration in the interviews. While these female parents had high aspirations for both their sons and daughters to succeed in terms of education and employment, in particular, the respondents commented about the gender position of Muslim girls as the educated worker. Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher), Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher) and Souad Yegli (former factory tailor) all felt that westerners perceived female Muslims as non-educated and non-working citizens, but rather saw their gender role in the home. However, these particular respondents also had high aspirations for their daughters. In response to this view, the participants felt that education and work were important for females for a number of reasons. For instance, Ayda Sabah felt that education provided Muslim girls with independent financial security. She also felt that female Muslims who were no longer dependent on their husband, had the choice to work at a later stage in life. Commenting on this matter this respondent said:

I have high aspirations for both my son and daughters to succeed in school and to succeed in getting a job. Many people think that the place of a Muslim girl is in the home. They don’t see her as an educated and hard working person, just like other males and females in society. This is the stereotype for both Muslim girls and women in Australia. However, I feel it is important for girls, in particular, to get an education and to have some sort of a work skill. An educated Muslim girl will be able to feel economically secure. Here, I am speaking about educated Muslim girls who get married and have children. This is fine, because, if things don’t work out with their partner, or their husband happens to die. Well then she is able to work and raise her children. She won’t have to depend on anyone for financial support.

Speaking along similar lines, Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher) felt that education provided Muslim girls with an independent work status and income. Consequently, she also felt that female Muslims were able to utilise their educational and work skills if deemed necessary in the future.

I believe education is important for everyone, for girls and boys, in particular the girl. I have aspirations for all my children to complete their education. But particularly I would like to see my daughters also complete their education, before getting married. Because the girl then would have established herself an independent educational and work status. Therefore, she has these important skills, that she can rely on in the future. Sometimes in the future, the female is not left deserted, because she can use her educational background
to get a job, if she feels it’s necessary for her to do so. She will always have that right and that choice to make if she feels it’s necessary for her to work in the future.

Also commenting on issues to do with gender and her own aspirations, Souad Yegli (former factory tailor) felt it was important for her daughter to complete a tertiary degree, and to work. She commented that education helped to provide individuals with a particular intellectual skill. Consequently, Souad Yegli believed that such intellectual skills helped to strengthen her daughter’s self-identity. In that, she suggested that Muslim girls were able to apply educational skills to better improve their own social lifestyle. For example, Souad Yegli commented that educated female Muslims were able to deal with social problems in a much more effective way. On this matter she said:

I want my daughter to finish her education by going to university. I want her to also work in the future. Because education will give her a particular intellectual skill. She will be able to think for herself and to make better judgements in life. Also, I believe that having an education, will help to strengthen my daughter’s sense of identity. She will feel more confident about sharing her views with other people, and she will be able to think about social issues in a more rational and logical way. So, in this way, this helps my daughter and other females to improve their social lifestyle. Education will always help them to think better about things in their lives, and make good judgements about these things. Therefore, Muslim girls who are educated tend to deal much better with their own problems in life.

In response to the views of first generation participants in the families, some second generation female respondents commented that gender was an important issue in terms of how they generally tended to represent themselves as educated working females. Manar Spee (receptionist) and Nina Yegli (part-time clerical worker) saw their gender role more in terms of their own individual needs to become active workers in the Australian community. Manar Spee, for instance, felt that it was important for her to represent herself as an educated Muslim worker in the broad community. She felt she had the right to practise her work skills as a Muslim individual in Australia. Also, Manar Spee commented that it was important for her to utilise her intellectual and work skills, in order to become more preoccupied with her own social life. On this issue, she suggested that there were no gender differences between the work practice of Muslim men and women.
I would like to see myself, like personally, I would like to be a well educated person in the future and with a good job. I feel this is important to me. [Umh!] It’s important in terms of my gender identity, and most of all who I am as an individual. I don’t believe there are differences between the gender rights of Muslim men and women in terms of them working. Like I believe I have the right to work and to earn a good status not just in my field but in the Lebanese community as well. As a person I would like to see myself or I hope to have accomplished a good education and career. Because I feel this will then give me some sort of an important status or position in my family and in the community. I mean it doesn’t sound right for a female to be also educated and have a working skill, but not to in fact apply these skills in the future. For me, I would personally want to apply these skills in the future, because I think this will keep me very busy in life.

Speaking further on this matter, Nina Yegli (part-time clerical worker) commented that concepts of education and work were important issues in an individual’s life, regardless of gender background. She felt it was important for her to continue achieving new work goals and experiences as a female Muslim in Australia. In her view, it is difficult for female Muslims to isolate themselves from the workforce, knowing they have the potential to achieve greater social opportunities in life. On this point, she said:

I believe that education and work is important for both the guy and the girl. It has nothing to do with gender. It’s good to continue achieving new goals and experiences in terms of your education and work life. Because to me, it’s an incomplete and continuing process. So if you’re an educated girl, you won’t be able to cut yourself from further education or work. Because there will be an empty gap in your life. You’ll feel you have to fulfill and achieve certain things.

Generally, it was felt by some first generation participants from a middle socio-economic background that the issue of dual income applied to both Muslim couples in Australia. These participants tended to make a connection between their gender practices and the socio-economic conditions of the family. To them, it was vital that both Muslim couples contributed to family income. For instance, speaking on this matter, Talal Houri (aero-technician) commented that there was a need for both Muslim parents to work in Australia. In considering Australia’s economic conditions, Talal Houri also felt that Muslim couples needed to generate sufficient incomes to support family expenditure.
Well, these days, frankly, it is important for both the husband and his wife to work. I see dual-income as a necessity for the couples, or for the family’s survival. When we consider Australia’s economic climate, well we can see that it is not so great. Therefore, it is important for us as parents to work, and to help our kids, and to pay the bills. Well, I look at it this way. For me to work only, well, this is not something that I see as being sufficient for the family. I don’t think the family will survive in a comfortable and totally relaxed financial situation. Simply, the reason being, the family spends a lot of money on a lot of things. For instance, you need money for leisure time, or going out sometimes with the kids.

In addition, Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist) shared a similar view on this issue. Hajar Zaki felt that it was important for both her partner and herself to work. In her view, it was impossible for one parent to provide economic support to the family. Hajar Zaki also commented that the social life for both Muslim and non-Muslim families were very expensive in Australia. For example, she commented that her family had spent a lot of money on household bills and groceries. On this matter, Hajar Zaki spoke in the following terms:

I believe that it’s important for both my husband and myself to work. I don’t think that the income of my husband only is enough to support the family. Because the way I see it, is that life for all families, for everyone, not just Muslims, you know, is very expensive in Australia. For example, my husband and I spend a lot of money on house bills. You also have to pay for your children’s school fees, not to mention food and shopping bills. So you know it’s important for both of us to work. Well that’s what I think. I think this is important for many other couples as well.

A number of second generation male participants shared similar views to the parents in the study. Commenting on the idea of dual income, Basem Nahli (full-time student) felt it was important for both his parents to work and to support their family. This participant also felt that a dual income between Muslim parents was necessary to cover the costs of family maintenance fees. For example, Basem Nahli commented that his parents had spent a lot of money on school fees each year.

You know, these days, it’s important for both the parents to be educated, and for both of them to work. Because these days you need the income of both the father and mother, so that it’s possible to support your family. [Ah!] You need ‘dual incomes’ to cover the cost
of many family affairs. For example, my parents spend a fortune every year for my sister’s and my school fees.

Ayad Merhi (a 16 year old student) also shared a similar view. Ayad Merhi spoke about the necessity for both Muslim men and women to become workers in Australia. He spoke about the high costs of general living expenses. Commenting on this matter, Ayad Merhi spoke about his parents paying a lot of tax and rent. To him, it was impossible for his family to survive without the dual income of both parents.

Today, in Australia, it’s important for both the man and woman to work. Parents today are spending a lot of money on their families. This can only be done, if both the mother and father had a good job. So you can say dual income is necessary for all Australian families. My parents spend a lot of money every month for our rent. Every year, they also spend a lot of money on tax. Now, we can’t survive as a family, unless everyone somehow share their money and contribute to different sorts of family payments.

Also commenting on issues to do with dual income, Mohamad Zeydi (a 17 year old student) suggested that historical social changes have created economic barriers for both Muslim and non-Muslim families. In his view, the high costs of global economic markets have effected the average income of Australian families. Consequently, Mohamad Zeydi believed that it was necessary for both Muslim and non-Muslim couples to seek employment and contribute to family finance.

Society has been changing over time, and these social changes have made it difficult for both Muslim and non-Muslim families to depend on the economic support of the father. For example, there is a lot of change in modern technology and business markets have increased their sales all around the world. So these changes have affected all Australian families. Many can no longer support themselves, because they are spending money on computers and other electronic gadgets. So it’s not enough these days to have the father as the only working member in the family. These world ‘market’ changes have created a demand for Muslim couples to both find work. It has also meant that both parents have had to contribute to family income.

In considering the key themes on gender relations and the views of women in this thesis, clearly, the gender attributes of Muslim women are often ignored in broad gender-based studies. However, studies such as this thesis tend to show that the gender positions of Muslim women overlap a
number of social and cultural factors. In interviewing female Muslims from a specific cultural group (Sunni-Muslim Lebanese), it was evident that these women occupied a number of gender positions both within the family and the broad community. For instance, many participants in this thesis spoke about their important role as the mother in the family. To them, the mother had the right to contribute to the decisions made in the family, as well as, the right to receive marital maintenance by their spouse. For example, Salimi Bassam (housewife) commented that she contributed to the decision-making process in the family. She also commented about her rights to receive financial support from her husband. Also, other respondents spoke about their own individual rights and choices in regard to family and work. Some of these participants saw their position in the family as being of greater significance than the workplace. For example, to respondents such as Mouna Mai (teacher), Hiba Spee (nurse), Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher) their commitment towards their children’s upbringing was considered of great value as opposed to their professional status. For example, whilst Nadia Salah (Arabic teacher) was aware of her rights as a Muslim worker, however, she felt more committed towards raising her children.

Therefore, this important link between theoretical and community perspectives on gender relations tends to provide better insights into women’s status in Islam. Clearly, studies from an Islamic perspective tend not to ignore the gender decisions and contributions made by both males and females. These studies also demonstrate the flexible role Muslim women tend to exercise within their gender and cultural boundaries in the community. From the interview discussions, it was evident that female Muslim respondents made important individual choices about the personal and social responsibilities that they felt it was important to adhere to. This indicates the complex nature of gender relations in Islam, because they need to be considered from a range of perspectives, including issues of Islamic practices, socio-economic factors and social theory.

A second key area in the literature relates to the claims of social researchers that gender writers have difficulty in differentiating between Islamic principles and the diverse cultural practices of Muslim women. Researchers such as Badawi (1995), El-Solh and Mabro (1994), Azim (1997), Kandiyoti (1991) suggest it is important to consider the religious teachings and the position of women in society in evaluating the gender practices of Muslim women. However, Badawi (1995) seems to have offered a much stronger argument on this matter. He provides the reader with better insights to gender issues in Islam. Badawi, for instance, offers much more in-depth interpretations of key issues relating to Islamic principles and the role of women in Muslim societies. His work tends to highlight some of the distinctions between the teachings of Islam and how religious issues relate to the gender positioning of Muslim women. Badawi also points out that the interpretation of
Qur’anic statements by social scientists also require further explanation from the Sunnah perspective. According to Badawi, the role of the Sunnah is the authentic secondary source of Islamic teachings, after the Qur’an. He claims it plays an important role in further explaining Qur’anic text based on the revelation given to Prophet Mohamad (Badawi, 1995:1-3). As Badawi points out, there are multi-perspectives involved in understanding the overall context of particular Qur’anic statements. He comments:

In the case of the Qur’an, this indicates both the context of the Surah and the Verses under examination, as well as the general perspective of Islam, its teachings, and its world-view.

As for the Sunnah of the Prophet (P) the same applies to its texts. (1995:2).

Bearing these issues in mind, Badawi suggests that this lack of extended examination within western gender-based methodologies may lead to misinterpretations of gender issues in Islam. He further points out that wider gaps exist between Islamic practices and the stereotypical role of Muslim women in regard to western gender studies. Here, it is important to provide an example to gain some insight between religious principles and the diverse practices of Muslim women. Whilst wearing the veil is an important Islamic principle that applies to all Muslim women, it is apparent that this form of practice is applied differently in terms of the social realities of this particular group of Sunni Muslim women. From broader discussions with participants, it seems that the wearing of the veil has a lot to do with particular individuals and their adherence to Islam. Therefore, some women adopt this form of religious practice at different stages of their lives.

Another example that emerges from the discussions with some female respondents relates to the rights of Sunni Muslim women to work. However, this form of practice tends to differ from one particular woman to another within this specific religious community group. For instance, the idea of work depends on the individual choice and social situation of Sunni Muslim women. From the discussions, it is apparent that female parents from a middle socio-economic background felt that it was important to rear their infants, rather than to continue working. To these participants, it was important for female parents to spend a lot of time with their children and to continue work at a later stage in life. It was clear from the interviews that female respondents made their own individual choices in regard to work matters and parenting. The idea of gender theories and their cultural limitations is also shared by female respondents in this thesis. The main idea among women, here, is the number of gender binaries which tend to overlap issues of culture and religion. To these respondents, it was important to distinguish between the social, religious and gender issues in discussions about Islam.
These women believed that female Muslims had a choice in terms of how they tended to utilise their gender rights and practices. While female participants made a connection between their gender roles and religious practices, however, they felt that non-Muslim people misinterpreted their gender status because of their limited knowledge in Islam. For instance, participants such as Souha Merhi (teacher) and Fadwa Houri (science teacher) felt that their lack of acceptance by other cultural groups in Australia, related to non-Muslims misunderstandings of gender and Islam. In response to this view, they felt that education was the next positive step for all Australians. To these respondents, this step allows non-Muslim people to relate better to the gender practices of Muslim women in Australia. It is important to note that the overall discussion on this point with some of these women, indicates that participants did not feel that such campaigns were the ultimate solutions to eliminate prejudice views towards Islamic practices. However, they felt that community education was an initial positive step towards conveying a clear message to westerners, and a better understanding of Islamic practices, particularly as they relate to women wearing the veil as one form of female practice.

Gender Rights and Practices:

A number of female participants in the families spoke about their gender rights and gender roles as Muslim women in Australia. From the interviews, it is apparent whether or not there were any differences between the gender lifestyle of Sunni Muslim women in Australia as opposed to them living in their former homeland. It is important to note that tensions outlined in this thesis were only noted within the actual community. This research study indicates that female gender practices were linked with to their Islamic beliefs. These practices were inclusive of respondents’ social identities regardless of time and place. However, it can be said that there might be slight differences in terms of the social and gender practices between Sunni Muslim women and to what extent individual women adhere to their Islamic faith. Therefore, gender practices also depend on the individual interpretations of Sunni Muslim women.

While, Mouna Mai (teacher), Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher), Leila Lail (social worker), Noura Yessi (teacher), Fadwa Houri (science teacher), Hayfa Hani (housewife), Mayada Amar (housewife) and Suraya Bilal (housewife) felt confident with their gender rights and roles according to cultural and religious practices, these women pointed out that other non Muslim individuals, often had a problem in relating to their gender practices as Lebanese Muslim women. Many of these participants commented that Westerners tended to misinterpret the gender practices of Muslim
women, due to their lack of understanding of the Islamic culture. Mouna Mai, Noura Yessi, Suraya Bilal, Souha Merhi and Hayfa Hani shared similar views on this matter. All of these female respondents, for example, talked about the importance of making distinctions between the social, religious and gender rights of Lebanese Muslim women.

Mouna Mai, for instance, felt that it was important to distinguish between social, religious and gender issues, when discussing the rights and practices of Muslim women. Mouna Mai saw herself as occupying different sorts of rights from three particular social positions. In her view, she felt she had independent rights as an individual belonging to a particular society. Mouna Mai also saw herself as having religious rights as a Muslim woman in the Islamic community. She also commented about her parental rights as a female member of the family. Consequently, Mouna Mai pointed out that the latter social positions had informed her own views of gender rights and practices. On this matter, Mouna Mai spoke in the following terms:

I think it is important to first of all, [Umh!], it’s important to make a distinction between the social rights of Muslim women, their religious rights, and [Umh!] their gender rights. For example, I see myself as having rights as a Muslim woman belonging to an Islamic community. [Umh!] I also see myself as having rights as a female member of this family. [Umh!] Basically I have my own set of religious rights and laws. [Umh!] These set of rights tell me what my gender rights and practices are as a Muslim woman. I have certain gender guidelines which govern my behaviour and my own way of life, [Umh!], not necessarily as a woman, but as an individual, as well.

Noura Yessi (teacher) also speaking on this matter commented that it was important to make a distinction between culture and religion in terms of gender rights. To Noura Yessi, there are no differences between the gender rights and duties of Muslim men and women in Islam. In her view, many Westerners tended to misinterpret the gender rights of Muslim women in Australia. From a cultural perspective, Noura Yessi saw herself as having her own independent female identity. She also felt there was an equal relationship between Muslim men and women. On this point, Noura Yessi commented that she had the right to solely decide various social practices in life. Furthermore, this female parent also felt that Islam provided Muslim women with many rights. Whilst Noura Yessi commented that religious laws had informed her own views of gender rights, she also pointed out that there was a considerable amount of freedom to practice her gender rights in society.
I believe you have to make a distinction between gender in terms of culture and religion. In relation to religion, there’s no difference in rights and duties. For me, I think society misinterprets the gender rights of Muslims. I also believe that the relationship between men and women applies the same for Muslim men and women. I believe I have my own identity as a female, and this is different to that of my husband, or say of my son. But there is an equal relationship between me and my husband in the family. I have the right and control to decide what things I would like to do. Here, I am talking about things that concern myself, and not the family, of course. [Ah!] Also I believe I have many rights as a Muslim woman in Islam. There are religious principles that I must follow which relate to my gender background. But, at the same time, I have a lot of freedom to choose how I practice my social practices, and my rights in society.

Furthermore, Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher), Fadwa Houri (science teacher) and Suraya Bilal (housewife) also commented that other people failed to make a connection between a Muslim woman’s Islamic principles and her social and gender practices. These respondents were less concerned with issues of gender rights, because they felt that Muslim women had their own set of rights in Islam. Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher) felt that westerners tended to misinterpret the gender roles of women in Islam. She believed that these misinterpretations stem from people’s lack of knowledge about Islam. Consequently, Souha felt that this was a major reason behind the negative stereotypes of Muslim women’s gender practices. She discussed the need to educate non Muslims about Islam.

I believe that Muslim women are only judged on their social behaviour in Australia. Non Muslims don’t have a full understanding of gender issues in Islam. I believe that the gender roles of Muslim men and women are misinterpreted by Australians. I believe this comes from their limited knowledge of Islam. This, in turn, also creates negative stereotypes of the gender practices of Muslim women. You see, people don’t understand that the gender practices of Muslim women has a lot to do with their Islamic beliefs and principles. You see, the social behaviour of women is reflected back on their religious background. So this is an important issue that is hard to be ignored by practicing Muslim women, such as myself. Therefore, I believe that there is a great need for the government to fund educational seminars about other cultural practices and gender practices about Islam and other nationalities and religions.
Also, Fadwa Houri (science teacher) commented that while Muslim women felt confident with their gender identity, however, other people misunderstood Muslims gender positions in Islam. Consequently, she felt some people treated Muslim women as a separate and different group of people in the Australian community. Also, Fadwa Houri suggested that the Australian government needed to educate non Muslims about gender issues in Islam. In her view, this will help to demystify the negative views of westerners about Lebanese Muslim women in Australia. Commenting on this matter, Fadwa Houri said:

There are a lot of stereotypes about Muslim women. Society sees Muslim women as illiterate people. They also see them as non-educated individuals. As a result, I believe Muslim women are seen as being very different people by Australians. I think there are moments where Muslim women are treated as separate people. This treatment by westerners comes from their lack of education about Islam. They are unaware of women’s gender rights and gender status within the Islamic community. This is why I strongly believe that the Australian government needs to teach people about Islam and about women in Islam. I see this as one step to overcoming the negative views of people about Muslim women in Australia.

From these discussions, clearly, there was tension between the views of respondents in terms of their definitions of a couples’ gender rights and their responsibilities. The tension here was that participants were keeping away from broad conceptions of gender which tend to focus on the gender traits of men and women. It was apparent that gender rights were not viewed by participants in terms of gender differences between males and females. Instead, many respondents viewed gender issues in terms of individual rights. They felt that notions of gender and rights were two separate issues. To some respondents, all individuals had their own set of rights. They also claimed that individuals had their own set of gender practices. Leila Lail (social worker), for example, commented that gender was not about distinguishing notions of rights, but she felt both males and females had their own set of responsibilities. Other respondents viewed the notion of gender rights in terms of marital rights and women. A group of female participants from an unemployed background shared a formal and conservative view of gender rights. They felt they had the right to receive social and economic maintenance from their spouse. At the same time, these female respondents were also aware of their own individual rights as married women. Interestingly, as quoted earlier, Ronya Khandi (housewife) felt she had more rights as a married woman, including the right to receive social support from her husband.
Therefore, it can be said that gender theories tend to select aspects of Islamic teachings and attempt to interpret them according to outside social and cultural influences. However, this thesis tends to offer better insights into the gender practices of Muslim women as opposed to gender theories. This study gives women an actual voice to represent their own individual social experiences. It also indicates that there is a range of choices available to Muslim women in terms of their cultural and religious practices.

The third key tension that social researchers have discussed in the literature on gender and Islam relates to the complex interrelations between religious beliefs and the social realities of Muslim people. It is important to note that in this section of interview discussions with Sunni Muslim families, I seek to specifically highlight how factors of class and generation were important issues in terms of how respondents viewed gender rights and the social realities of Sunni Muslim women. Researchers such as El-Solh and Mabro (1994) and Badawi (1995) and Kandiyoti (1991) have commented that discussions of Islam need to take into account the diverse perspectives of Islamic teachings which provide clearer interpretations of the gender practices of Muslim people, in particular women. However, the work of El-Solh and Mabro in this area provides a more detailed discussion of religious-based issues concerned with gender discourses in Islam. My concern in looking at these writers is not so much the specifics of their subjects, but the theoretical approach they use to discuss gender in Islam.

Their analysis provides some insights into social factors affecting the realities and experiences of Muslim women in different communities. For instance, El-Solh and Mabro have argued that issues of customs, legislation and traditions have either inspired or affected interpretations of the Qur’an in relation to definitions of female roles in different societies. They further point out that the latter issues vary according to class and generation factors within specific Muslim groups. Also, El-Sohl and Mabro comment that, ‘this divergence of views on women’s social position is reflected by the different Muslim discourses depicting modernist, traditionalist and fundamentalist trends’. (1994:1). To them, these diverse views reflect upon the reality that differences exist between Muslim women in regard to different social circumstances.

**Gender and Individual Responsibilities:**

At this stage, it is important to reinforce my earlier point about the fact that this section of the chapter specifically highlights how class and generation were important issues in terms of respondents perspectives of women and gender in Islam.
In discussing the matter of gender rights with the families in the study, a number of first generation participants from a middle socio economic background felt that the issue of gender was intricately related with notions of rights and responsibilities. Mouna Mai (teacher), Azam Zeydi (lecturer) and Leila Lail (social worker), in particular, spoke about both male and female parents having a particular set of rights and responsibilities to adhere to. Azam Zeydi and Leila Lail felt that it was important to place emphasis on the responsibilities of individuals, rather than their gender background. Commenting on this matter Leila said, ‘It’s not a matter of distinguishing issues of rights between men and women. But rather, it is important to focus on the sorts of responsibilities that both males and females need to adhere to. Each individual has a right to fulfill all their religious responsibilities as parents. The responsibilities of parents help to achieve family cohesiveness.’

Commenting along similar lines, Azam Zeydi also said:

I don’t think it is right to focus on the gender background of individuals. Both males and females need to be seen as individuals. They each have certain sets of rights and responsibilities. When these rights and responsibilities are applied properly by both the man and the woman, then you have a better relationship between each other. Otherwise, you also tend not to have a good family relationship, when there is gender competition between couples. So I think that gender is not about making comparisons between the man and woman. Each individual is governed by religious laws and rules, giving the parents rights and responsibilities that they are obliged to follow.

Also commenting on issues to do with the idea of gender rights and responsibilities, Mouna Mai commented:

When we speak about gender issues or gender rights, [Umh!], I don’t believe we should be making clear-cut distinctions between the rights of the man and the rights of the woman. But I, [Umh!], believe that while all individuals have rights, [Umh!], these rights are interrelated with issues of responsibilities. So it, [Umh!], no longer becomes an issue of say differences between masculinity and femininity. You can’t isolate one from the other, and look at gender just in terms of people’s rights. [Umh!] Both men and women have gender rights in Islam, but [Umh!], gender views need to encompass the certain gender
characteristics, gender practices, and certain responsibilities that a woman needs to stick to, and those that relate to the man.

Many first generation female participants from a low socio-economic background also made a connection between the issue of gender rights and their role as the wife. Ronya Khandi (housewife), Salimi Bassam (housewife) and Najah Deib (housewife) all felt it was their right to receive maintenance support from their husband. These respondents felt that it was their husband’s duty to respect their wife, and to provide her social and financial support. While gender was an important issue to these female participants, their roles as wives also was central to their broad definitions of gender rights. For instance, Ronya Khandi commented that she has the right to be treated with respect by her partner. She also felt that it was her partner’s duty to ensure that her basic needs and essentials are fulfilled in all aspects of life.

I feel that as a married woman, I have more rights as a wife. Now I have the right to be respected by my husband. I have the right for my husband to be more faithful to me. Also, as a married woman, I have the right for my husband to look after me and to provide for me. My husband’s duty is to support me with my needs in life. He has to spend on me and my children. He has to provide me with my basic household essentials, like food and groceries. Yeah! I have these rights and many other rights as the wife in the family.

Members of the Deib family also shared a similar view on this matter. Najah Deib (housewife) felt that she had the right for her husband to look after her, and to treat her with honesty and respect. She also commented that she has the right to be an equal partner in terms of her husband’s financial assets.

I think I have many rights as a mother, and as a wife in a Muslim family. First of all, I have the right to be well looked after by my husband. I have the right to be supported by my husband, both from a social perspective and from an economic perspective. A married woman also has the right for her husband to be honest and reliable towards her. She has a right to be an equal partner with her husband’s financial assets. Whether this might be property or other materialistic possessions, she is entitled to half these things.

Also commenting on this issue, Salimi Bassam (housewife) spoke about her familial rights as a Muslim woman in Australia. She suggested that Islamic laws had informed her own views of gender rights. Salimi commented that she has many rights as a female parent in a Muslim family.
On this matter, she spoke about having equal rights with her partner in terms of making important decisions for the whole family. Salimi Bassam also felt that it was part of her rights to be financially protected by her partner. Also, Salimi commented that gender rights was also an important issue in terms of marriage and divorce in Islam. She spoke about her right in regard to the Mahr (financial compensation for divorce). On this point, Salimi Bassam commented that she was entitled to financial compensation, if her partner was at fault at the time of divorce.

I believe a Muslim wife has many rights in Islam. As a married woman, I have a number of rights as a member of the family. These are what we call the familial rights of the woman. For example, a married woman has the right to make family decisions with her husband, together, or as a team. The wife also has a right to receive constant financial support by her husband, throughout their lives together. Also, I believe I have my own rights when it comes to marriage and divorce. I have the right to collect my ‘Mahr’ at the time of divorce. So I would be collecting money from my husband if he was the one to blame for the divorce.

While a number of first generation participants saw the issue of gender in terms of social, familial and religious rights, other first generation respondents in the study commented about issues of gender rights and equality. For instance, some male parents from a low socio-economic background felt that it was important to have an equal relationship between Muslim men and women. Fadi Yegli (former Dunlop employee), Hisam Nahli (unemployed father), Adham Amar (former car salesman) and Farouk Bassam (unemployed father) all felt it was important to have a good relationship with their partners based on equal communication. However, in some instances, the participants ideas on gender equality were rigid and not clear in the interviews. In discussing notions of rights and equality with these participants, it was clear that they felt that gender was a factor. However, they seemed quite contradictory on this, where at other times gender was not seen as an important issue.

For instance, Fadi Yegli and Farouk Bassam felt that the issue of gender rights applied equally to men and women in Islam. As part of their initial response to questions of gender rights and differences, these respondents also commented that gender was an important factor in terms of equal negotiation and communication between Muslim parents. However, in continuing their discussion on gender issues, Fadi Yegli and Farouk Bassam spoke about occupying a distinct and dominant gender position within the family. Farouk Bassam, for instance, felt that his rights as the
male was to be the head of the family. He also felt it was his right to be the sole decision-maker and provider (worker), for both his wife and children.

Yes, everyone has their rights in the family. My wife has her own rights. There has to be an equal relationship between the wife and husband. They have to share equal trust and respect between each other. They have to both decide on important family decisions. My right as the man is to be the head of the family. I have the right to make final decisions for my family. My right is to work. I’m the man, so I have to work and provide my family with food and other things. I don’t want my wife to work, because it’s enough for me to work and to take care of the family.

In contrast to this view, many first generation participants from a middle socio-economic background had a different interpretation of the notion of gender equality. Kaled Zaki (doctor), Noura Yessi (teacher), Mouna Mai (teacher), Sayed Merhi (social worker), Ziad Lail (engineer), Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker) and Roula Zeydi (teacher) felt it was important to make a clear distinction between gender equality and gender differences. These respondents also felt that both Muslims and non Muslims have equal rights, regardless of their gender background. However, in focusing specifically on issues of gender rights and equality, these parents shared similar views about gender differences. To these participants, the notion of equality was viewed as a vague term in reference to issues of gender. Many of these parents commented that the notion of equality was not about comparisons between the physical and gender traits of both men and women. But clearly, the participants perceived gender differences between Muslim men and women, according to their social and gender practices in the broad community.

Roula Zeydi (teacher) commented that the definition of equality is not about exact gender traits between men and women. She suggested that Muslim men and women had their own set of gender practices and obligations in Islam. Furthermore, Roula Zeydi commented that individuals had their own particular social and gender roles to fulfill in both the family and the broader community. Consequently, she believed there were certain social tasks that only males and females were capable of accomplishing, regardless of gender background and gender rights. For example, Roula Zeydi commented that males were not capable of breast feeding their children, whilst she also felt that female physique was not appropriate for heavy labour work. In response to this view this latter participant commented:
I think gender rights has to do with the way people interpret equality. Everyone has a different interpretation of gender and equality. I don’t believe that equality is about exact physical and gender traits between men and women. Everyone, I believe have their own set of rights and obligations in Islam. Both men and women have the right to practise certain social things in life. This opposes societal theory that there are things permissible for the man to do and not the woman. Instead of focusing specifically on gender, I believe it is important to see gender in terms of both men and women having their own social roles to fulfill in the family and in the community. For example, I think there are certain tasks that only men can achieve, and there are some that are only suitable for women. For example, a man is not able to breast feed his child. Whereas heavy labour work, say, is not really something that is suitable for women to be doing.

Commenting along similar lines, Kaled Zaki (doctor) felt that it was important to differentiate between issues of gender equality and gender difference. He felt it was inappropriate to make comparisons and judgements between the intellectual capabilities of males and females. Rather, Kaled Zaki commented that both sexes had their own set of gender rights and practices. Instead, he felt that the social practices between Muslim men and women were different in regard to their gender positioning in the family and the broad Islamic community. Clearly, Kaled Zaki commented that there were particular social practices that were more appropriate for males to perform, and vice-versa.

Look, I think, first of all, there is a need to distinguish between what you mean when you speak, say, about issues of gender equality, and what does one mean by gender differences. Well! You know, these are two totally different issues, here. I mean, everyone, whether you’re a male or female, you have your gender rights as a Muslim, and you have your own gender practices. Now these become a separate issue in terms of what woman does in the family, say, or in society. And, I think this is certainly the same for the male. I don’t believe in equality, as in that there are physiological and intellectual differences between men and women, and sadly some see it in a different way. For instance, there are things that are performed by males, that females cannot do. And there are these things that females do, that a male can’t do.

In examining the relationship between the latter key theme and the views of female respondents, this complex and diverse relationship between societal factors and the religious realities of Muslim women seem not to be explored in detail in western studies. Whilst western studies tend to ignore
this diversity, however, they further tend to reinforce the stereotypical role of Muslim women in society. The analysis of western studies is influenced by generalised assumptions that Islam tends to completely dominate the lives of Muslim people. However, Islamic and community-based studies (such as this thesis) tend to highlight some of the complex and diverse relations between Muslim women’s gender position and their religious ideology. Rather, they tend to show that Islam does not necessarily control all aspects of its adherents’ lives. Furthermore, there is more of a unified view shared by social researchers who look at gender issues from an Islamic perspective. In contrast, western conceptions of Islam and gender practices fail to make connections between Qur’anic teachings, and the actual gender practices and realities of Muslim women. For example, this thesis highlighted some of the complex ways in which Sunni Muslim women tend to view their social and gender position in Australian society.

Also, this study has shown the various interpretations of Islamic beliefs and gender relations among female respondents from different class and generational background. Therefore, this thesis tends to provide a better view of the complexities and gender realities experienced by a particular group of Muslim women in Australia. For example, the social and gender experiences of Muslim women living in Pakistan is going to be different than the lives of Muslim women in Australia. With this in mind, it can be said that western studies tend to offer a distorted view of the complex realities of the Islamic culture. In that, western-based studies on Islam tend to place little emphasis on the social, economic and cultural factors which tend to have an influence on the lifestyle of different groups of Muslim women. Western studies often neglect to highlight some of the reasons between the social and political factors that operate at both a communal and state level.

Conclusion:

It is apparent that this study provided some insights into the way in which members of a specific ethnic and cultural minority group define gender rights and differences in Australia. It can also be said that there are a number of limitations associated with broader studies on gender, in that these studies fail to take into consideration how minority individuals tend to narrate their own gender positions in terms of broader issues of social and cultural life. Moreover, such studies do not specifically explore the gender positioning of minority individuals within a cultural context. Consequently, the overall methods of analyses used in these studies fail to adequately engage with some of the diverse and important issues associated with gender, class and ethnicity. For instance, many studies fail to make explicit the views of minority women in terms of gender and their cultural practices. In contrast to this view, this particular study tends to outline the social claims
made by Lebanese (Sunni) Muslims in regard to gender practices. This research also considered the social and cultural needs of participants in reference to their definition of gender.

There seems to exist a wide gap between the theoretical assumptions of gender and Islam, and the actual gender realities of Muslim women. There are often false assumptions stated by western researchers in regard to the gender practices of Muslim women. For instance, many gender theorists assume that the traditional cultural practices of Muslim women have a lot to do with their gender and religious background. They fail to separate the complex interrelations between discourses of gender, ethnicity and culture and female Muslims. A number of these theoretical perspectives tend to be based on broader assumptions of the Islamic culture. It is clear that the social realities of Muslim women are often neglected by gender theorists in terms of their broader analysis of gender and Islam. This seems to be a constant unresolved tension in gender based studies which often indicate a lack of in-depth analysis between the stereotypical role of Muslim women and Islamic practices.

In further discussing the stereotypical role of Muslim women, it is apparent that social researchers do not focus on the positive aspects of gender and cultural issues in Muslim societies. For instance, the degree of freedom given to Muslim women to exercise their own personal choice in Islam is often given little attention in theoretical debates and studies. The literature on gender and Islam poses critical questions that challenge the broad interpretations of social researchers. Also, gender theorists fail to realise the ethnic gender differences that exist between Muslim and non-Muslim group of women. For example, this thesis indicates that female respondents experienced different forms of gender practices.

There is a shortage in the number of studies conducted on gender and the perception of Muslim women. Many writers focus on the general issues of gender and Islam. There are many theoretical gaps encountered within the literature on gender, women and Islam. A major gap that exists in this literature relates to the misinterpretation of Islamic practices and the traditional cultural practices of Muslim women. From the discussions, it was apparent that first generation female participants across the families felt westerners often misrepresented the gender practices of Muslim women due to their lack of understanding of Islam. To these women, many non Muslim people failed to make a connection between the gender practices of female Muslims and their Islamic beliefs. Whilst female participants in this study felt culture and religion were important issues in terms of their gender practices. However, these respondents felt that non Muslim people needed to gain better insights into the gender positioning of women within an ethnic minority group.
From this research it was evident that ethnic and cultural representation were important for (Sunni) Muslims in defining the concept of gender. It was also clear there were varying definitions of gender among women in this thesis. These gender definitions depended on the socio-economic, age and educational background of female respondents. However, these participants felt that their religious beliefs tended to inscribe their own views of gender rights and practices. They felt that the notion of gender was a broad and complex term, which needed to take into account the gender positions of individuals within a specific cultural group. For instance, a number of the respondents viewed issues of work, responsibilities, equality and the family as being intricately related with notions of gender practice and difference.

Clearly, gender analysts need to place more emphasis on cultural discourses in their interpretations of gender and Islamic practices. It is also important that these writers refrain from repeatedly selecting popularised conceptions of gender and Islamic practices from previous research. Rather, social and gender researchers need to focus on an in-depth analysis of Muslim women and gender related issues. Clearly, there is a need for future research in this area, which tends to highlight the positive aspects of Islamic practices. In contrast to theoretical discussions of gender issues, which continue to be subdued within western political thought, this research has explored the views of Lebanese Sunni Muslims about gender issues in regard to broader issues of social and cultural life. The next chapter provides a discussion about issues of racism which were explored with the participants as part of this study.
CHAPTER SIX: RACISM IN THE COMMUNITY

Introduction:

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general analysis of the views of Sunni Muslim respondents about their experiences of racism in the wider Australian community. The chapter is divided into three main parts. The first section provides a discussion of participants’ responses to issues of ethnicity and racism. It outlines the views of family members about implicit signs of social discrimination in terms of their experience with non-Muslim people. There is also a discussion with respondents about issues of schooling and racism, and their relationship with other Australian ethnic groups.

This chapter explores important issues that have emerged from the empirical material in detail. Clearly, respondents perceived media stereotypes and employment factors as inhibiting their social mobility within the Australian community. This is the subject of the second section of the chapter. Some of the literature about media stereotypes and the educational responses offered by social analysts is also discussed in this section. There is also an outline of comparative views between respondents in regard to their definitions of racism. The third section of the chapter is about racism and employment issues. In particular, this section outlines the racial experiences of veiled women in employment. Whilst the Veil has been an important issue raised in discussions on racism with both male and female respondents, clearly this has been more of an important issue for female workers in this study.

Racism and Muslims in Australia:

In this section, I do not seek to provide a detailed analysis of the views of participants on racism. Instead, I wish to outline their own racial experiences in the Australian community. Although it is apparent that the general thoughts and experiences of respondents seem to have emerged in this chapter on racism, particularly as it relates to dominant themes of media stereotypes and work discrimination, it is also important to discuss Zelinka’s (1996) broad approach to the various types of racism (individual racism, and institutional or systemic racism). This information helps to complement the many examples of individual racism experienced by family members as stated in the interview discussion sections of this chapter.
According to Zelinka (1996) individual racism ‘occurs where an individual or a group is singled out as the victim of racist behaviour – behaviour which may encompass prejudice, discrimination, harassment, vilification, intimidation or even violence.’ (p.11). One of the many examples she provides of individual racism is schoolchildren ‘picking on’ another pupil because of visible difference such as, ethno-religious clothing, (for example, Hijabs). (Zelinka, 1996:11). Furthermore, Zelinka refers to the term institutional or systemic racism, which she defines as ‘the discrimination against (or oppression of) certain groups of people by the institutions and systems which regulate our society: the legal and medical systems, the educational system, the public service.’ (Zelinka, 1996:12).

She believes these institutions are regulated by and thereby represented the views of people belonging to a dominant social class. These ideas relate to the individual experiences of many respondents across the families who encountered racial experiences either as parents, professional workers or as employees in various public services. For instance, first and second generation participants in this thesis felt inhibited as work participants because of the misinformed views of managers about the islamic practices of Muslim workers. Some parents spoke about both their experiences, as well as their children’s experiences of educational discrimination. This reflects the general views of family members about their inability to fully participate in school activities because of the stereotypical views of non-Muslim people in regard to their ethnic and religious identities.

Zelinka (1996) also refers to institutional or systemic racism as ‘a pattern whereby one particular group, identifiable by its colour, ethnicity or national origin, is systematically advantaged or disadvantaged. She points out that it is difficult to ‘pin-point’ discriminatory behaviour against ethnic minority individuals. Zelinka’s view complements the many views and experiences of female Sunni Muslim respondents in this study who experienced work discrimination in Australian institutions solely based on the fact that they were easily identifiable as being of an Arabic background due to their Islamic dress code. Some of these women were in agreement with Zelinka’s point about the difficulty of identifying individual discriminatory acts.

In her work, Zelinka (1996) also briefly identifies issues of direct and indirect racism. She comments that direct racism is ‘that which identifies overtly the individual or group to be singled out for particular treatment.’ (p.12). A particular instance in which Zelinka believes direct racism may occur is in the workplace. Whereas indirect racism is ‘that which does not identify a group by name. It pursues an action which appears to be non-discriminatory but which in reality only one
group can satisfy.’ (Zelinka, 1996:12). Zelinka, for instance, provides an example of indirect racism by suggesting that although setting minimum height and weight standards may appear to be non-discriminatory as it applies to all applicants. (pp.12-13).

Zelinka’s idea of indirect racism reflects upon some of the general interview discussions with Sunni Muslim families (particularly respondents from a low socio-economic background), who spoke about their broad racial encounters as participants in social services. For instance, some respondents discussed their social experiences in communicating with non-Muslim people. Some of these respondents interpreted the attitude and body language of other people as being implicit signs of discrimination.

When discussing issues to do with racism, some second generation participants across the families felt that Muslim people experienced minimal racial incidents since the Gulf War, 1990. As stated earlier in the methodology chapter, it is important to acknowledge that the fieldwork of this thesis, including major analytical sections of this study were established prior to the terrorists attacks on America in September, 2001. These respondents commented that the attitudes of many non-Muslims have slowly changed over time towards Muslims in Australia. They believed that non-Muslims were beginning to accept Muslims, rather than perceiving them as a different group.

Walid Zaki (part-time clinic assistant), Manar Spee (part-time receptionist), Hisham Sabah (grocery sales assistant), Fida Lail (female student), Farah Oula (student), Fatima Deib (hospitality assistant), Jamal Bilal (male student) and Jenan Khandi (female student) felt that other people have become more aware of Muslims’ contributions to Australian society in terms of art, sport and other social achievements. Jamal Bilal, responding to such a view, commented that the contributions of Australian Muslims in professional and community work has allowed westerners to view Muslims with curiosity rather than contempt. He also felt that the Australian people have become more accepting of Muslim individuals. On this matter, he spoke in the following terms:

Since the Gulf War I think racism has decreased against Muslims. I think the attitudes of Australians towards the Muslim community has slowly changed. In my view, this also has to do with the fact that many Australians are recognising the contributions of Australian Muslims in professional services and other areas of community work. This has allowed some westerners to view Muslims with curiosity rather than contempt. I think there is more awareness of accepting Muslim individuals among the Australian community.
Fida Lail (female student) also speaking on this matter commented that Muslims have often been victims of racism in the past. However, she felt that many westerners were beginning to learn more about the Islamic culture in contemporary Australian society. On this point, Fida Lail commented that there were currently Arabic organisations targeting issues of racism. She also suggested that these organisations were helping to educate other people about Arabic cultures and religions. In her view, this positive approach by Arabic organisations helped to demystify the negative attitudes and racial differences between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Australia.

I believe that Muslims have experienced a lot of racism in the past. This is something which cannot be denied. But we are not seeing or hearing much these days about strong issues of racism against Muslims by Australians or other nationalities. I think this is because, today, you tend to have a lot of Australian people being interested in learning about our culture, [Umh!], the Islamic culture and a Muslim’s way of life. You also tend to have some Arabic community groups which address issues of racism experienced by Lebanese Muslim people. These Arabic groups also help to teach other people about the Arabic culture, Islam, among other things. This kind of action by Arabic groups, I believe, helps to change the racist attitude of other people towards Muslims, because Arabic groups give them more information about the differences in Arabic cultures and religions.

Similarly, Farah Oula (student) commenting on this issue, suggested that Lebanese Muslims have experienced less racial incidents since the Gulf War. She commented that the attitudes of other people have changed over the years. Also, Farah Oula felt that non-Muslims are beginning to relate to the religious practices of Lebanese Muslims in a much more positive way. Consequently, she felt that Muslims were no longer treated as separate and different individuals in the broader Australian community.

I believe racism is a little bit of a problem for Muslims these days say, as opposed to the time when the Gulf War was on. There was a lot of racism against Muslims back then. But today, I think Muslims are experiencing less racism here in Australia. Also, I believe the attitudes of some Australians have changed towards us Muslims, then say, how it was a few years ago. Now you see many people relating much better to our religion, to our culture, and our behaviour. I don’t think society sees Muslims as different people anymore, oh!, you may have the odd occasion, but it seems that generally Muslims are accepted more these days.
Some first generation members in families from a low socio-economic background also felt that the racial abuse of Muslim citizens have declined over the years in Australia. While these respondents felt that physical and verbal abuse seldom occurred in the community, however, they spoke about issues of body language and their implications in terms of social discrimination. Salimi Bassam (housewife), Fawaze Hani (unemployed male parent), Iman Mohamad (housewife) and Ahmed Deib (father) commented about their social experiences with other people in the broader community. For instance, Salimi Bassam commented that some westerners gave her a dirty gaze whilst attending community services. She felt other people were often impolite towards her. Also, Salimi Bassam commented that the body positions and posture of non-Muslim people implied that they weren’t willing to accept her as an individual. On this matter, she said:

I don’t think Muslims experience a lot of racism these days, certainly, not in terms of physical or verbal abuse. But I think racism is expressed in the body language of some people. In the way they look at you, in the way they treat you. You always get this certain look in the eyes of other people which clearly means they do not approve of you, and the way you are dressed. For example, when I attend a local community service, I get this stare a lot, by many people behind the counter. They offer me impolite service, which I don’t believe I deserve. But hey, it happens. Racism to me is expressed in their silent treatment, in the lack of response to your simple questions, and also in the way they position their body towards me, I believe says it all. It says that these people are not willing to accept you.

Speaking on this issue, Fawaze Hani (unemployed male parent) felt that racial encounters also depended on individual feelings and behavioural experiences. He commented about his own experiences in regard to social meetings with non-Muslim individuals. Fawaze Hani commented that some people deliberately raised issues to do with Islamic practices, despite the fact that such issues were not pertinent to the discussion. This participant also suggested that some non-Muslim individuals attempted to pose difficult questions in regard to sensitive religious issues. From his own experiences, Fawaze Hani commented that other people had a hidden agenda when proposing to query the nature of Islam. Consequently, he suggested that people tended to question the religious differences between practising and non-practising Muslim individuals in Australia.

You don’t experience racism in a physical sense. This is a thing of the past. The fighting and swearing between different nationalities, I don’t think is that common today. Racism can be felt in your talks with other people, in meetings, in a person’s job place, in every
place you can experience racism through behaviour, and through your feelings. For example, when I attend work meetings, some people deliberately bring up the subject of Islam. People start asking me about my religious practices. Then they start to ask you difficult questions about sensitive religious issues. I think these people always have a hidden agenda in discussing Islamic issues. For example, I was told by a certain woman, why don’t you drink alcohol? I say it’s against my religion. But she will say, oh! But isn’t so and so Muslim, but why does he drink? I tell her that not all Muslims are practising Muslims, that every individual is different.

In contrast to the idea of the latter respondents who felt that Muslims experienced a low degree of verbal racism in the general community, two female respondents spoke about their own specific experiences of verbal abuse in the streets. Mouna Mai (teacher) and Nadia Salah (dental nurse), who came from middle socio-economic background, felt that their gender status was an issue that they needed to protect in terms of their social participation in the broad community. In response to this view, they commented about their experiences of verbal abuse in the streets. Speaking on this issue, Nadia Salah suggested that Muslim women were easy targets to racial conflict because of their religious status. She commented that non-Muslim people were harassing her both on the bus and in the streets. Nadia felt frightened about the idea of being approached by non-Muslims whilst travelling to work. Consequently, she had to find an alternative route to her workplace.

I experienced racism while going to work for quite some time. I would travel on foot in some streets and I would also catch the bus to also drop me off near my work, and then I walked about a block to get to my work. But this was never a pleasant journey for me. I dreaded going to work every morning for many weeks. Because I wore the Hijab to work, you tended to have a lot of people verbally harassing me on the streets. Even I had to put up with school kids calling me names, swearing, as well as, making racist remarks. I used to feel very frightened that people were going to get closer to me, and physically hurt me. In the end, I had to work out an alternative and suitable way of getting to work to avoid all these racist obstacles.

Similarly, Mouna Mai (teacher) commenting on this issue, spoke about her past experiences in a particular Melbourne neighbourhood. She felt uncomfortable living in an area which mainly comprised residents from a non-Muslim background. She also spoke about her physical and verbal racist attacks by other residents in the streets. This participant believed the reason being that she was of an ethnic background. Also, Mouna Mai commented that she felt insecure and frightened
living in a racist environment. Consequently, Mouna and her family felt it was necessary to move to another place in Melbourne. She commented:

I once lived in an area which was mainly people of Anglo-Saxon background. Now most of these people were obviously racist towards Muslims. [Umh!] If it wasn’t me, it would be my husband or the kids, who would experience both physical and verbal racist attacks by other people in this particular suburb. Now we were easy target for these racist people. My husband and I follow the Islamic dress code. So I used to always quarrel with neighbours and other children in streets, or in front of the house. Of course, people tried to interfere with us, because they could see we were Muslims in the way we dressed, and in the way we looked outside, [Umh!], in the streets. [Umh!] I was constantly frightened. I also felt insecure living in this area. One day, I got sick of these racist incidents, so I told my husband that we had to move to another place. [Umh!] So, in that same time, as I recall, we sat down and worked out some plans to do exactly just that.

It was apparent that some second generation participants had a different view of racism and Muslim people in Australia. They felt that Muslims experienced minimal racial incidents in Australia. But in continuing to dismiss issues of racial differences with other second generation participants, it was clear that some members of the families spoke about their experience of racism in Australian schools. These respondents felt that many non-Muslims seemed to emphasize the racial and religious differences of Muslim students. Consequently, Houda Nahli (part-time dress shop assistant) spoke about her racial experiences in the classroom. She commented that she was constantly questioned and patronized by staff and students about her racial and religious background. Also, Houda Nahli commented that one particular teacher tended to single her out from other students in the class. Consequently, she found it difficult to participate effectively in regard to class activities. Houda Nahli spoke about her experience within a class test situation. This respondent commented that the teacher had blamed her for cheating on her test. However, Houda Nahli commented that her parents demanded that she perform an oral test. The fact she had passed her oral test, Houda Nahli and her parents, felt there was an underlying issue of racism in this particular situation. On this matter, she spoke in the following terms:

As a Muslim student, you always get teased in schools about your religion, your background. The racist attitude of people comes from both the teachers and students. It’s not just the students that tease you, but some teachers as well. I’ve experienced racism from a couple of teachers in school. I had once an English teacher in year eight who
singled me out from the rest of the class. She used to always pick on me for no reason. Once she failed me for no reason on one of my tests. I felt very hurt and depressed around this time. The teacher blamed me for cheating. I told my mum. She felt very upset. My parents went down to the school and demanded that I take an oral test. I passed my oral test. The fact that I passed my oral test with high marks, proved to my parents that the teacher had been racist towards me.

Ayad Merhi (16 year old, student), who had similar experiences to Houda Nahli, spoke of situations in which teachers would treat him differently to other students, because of his racial and religious differences. He commented that non-Muslims found it difficult to understand his cultural and religious practices. Consequently, Ayad Merhi felt isolated from other students in the classroom, because some teachers questioned his social behaviour and practices. Ayad Merhi, for example, felt frightened by his sports teacher’s racist views about fasting in Islam. He commented that his teacher made racist remarks about his religious background in front of the class. In response to this view, Ayad Merhi felt that some teachers used their authoritative work position to verbally abuse Muslim students. He also felt that these particular individuals were not acting as responsible teachers. But instead, he suggested that these teachers were setting a bad example for other students, by implying that Muslim students were different people. Ayad Merhi speaking about what it meant to be a victim of school racism commented in the following way:

I experience a lot of racism in Australian schools. This comes from the prejudice attitudes of the teachers and the students. People don’t understand about Islam. I always feel people treat me differently to other students in the classroom. I feel both teachers and students don’t relate to my Islamic dress code, and also to my prayer times. Teachers always question my behaviour and practices in the class. Once I felt frightened by my sports teacher who was very racist towards Muslim students. He did not agree with the fasting practices of both myself and two other Muslim students. He said rude and racist things about our fasting practices in front of the whole class. I believe teachers use their work position and abuse this position to pick on Muslim students. Some teachers do not act as responsible teachers, but instead they open ‘racial’ doors. I think their treatment towards Muslim students implies to other students that Muslims are ‘different’.

Suraya Bilal (housewife), a first generation participant, also shared a similar view to the latter second generation participants. Suraya Bilal talked about her personal experience in attending a parent-child school picnic. She felt isolated from other groups of non-Muslim parents. Suraya
Bilal also suggested that her ideas about picnic activities were not taken into consideration by teachers and other parents. She believed non-Muslim parents excluded her from the group because of her racial and religious background.

I also felt racism at my children’s school. Once I attended a school picnic with my son. I felt very isolated from the other group of parents. When discussing picnic activities to do with the children, I used to always feel excluded from these decisions. Other parents and the two teachers that were present would ignore my suggestions about picnic activities with the children. I believe this was because of my nationality and my religious beliefs, because I was the only Muslim parent there at the time.

Other second generation participants across the families also raised concerns about other non-Muslim people questioning them about their racial and racial background. While Hisham Sabah (grocery sales assistant) felt comfortable with his religious practices, however, he suggested that other people tended to question his social behaviour. He commented that westerners tended to have negative views about Islam. Consequently, Hisham Sabah felt it was important to educate other people on religious matters.

I have experienced racism indirectly you could say while attending university here in Melbourne. While you may feel comfortable with your religious beliefs and practices, however, other people tended to have negative views about your religion. Other people tend to question your social behaviour and your own practices. So they tend to question your behaviour. But, you know, when you feel people are being indirectly racist through their verbal speech and choice of words, it’s better not to argue with them. But it is better to educate them about issues to do with Islam.

Nahed Hani (supermarket cashier) also shared a similar view. She commented that other people constantly questioned her about her Islamic identity. Nahed Hani believed the reason being that these people were yet to come across her cultural and religious practices. She pointed out that non-Muslim individuals raised their own concerns and disagreements in discussing religious matters with her. In sharing a similar view to the latter participant, Nahed Hani also saw herself as further educating non-Muslims about broader aspects of Islam.

In Australia, you always face some form of racist experience as a Muslim. Whether this be direct racism or indirect racism. In terms of my own experience of racism, [Umh!], I
would class it as indirect racism. People always tend to question you on religious matters, and you tend to sense their indirect racist views towards your background. I think people constantly ask questions about your religion, because they are yet to come across your cultural and religious practices. They have probably not seen such behaviour or practice in the past, so they tend to question this. Some people tend to question your behaviour. [Uhm!] They try to explain their own views on these matters, and sometimes they seem to be disagreeing with you indirectly. But you tend to educate them further on some issues.

Some first generation participants from a number of the families spoke about their relationship with other cultures within the community. While these respondents felt other people were racist towards them, however, they were tolerant of other cultures. Souha Merhi (Arabic teacher), Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker), Ziad Lail (engineer), Hajar Zaki (acupuncture therapist), Mayada Amar (housewife), Asad Bilal (unemployed male parent) and Hilal Mohamad (former self-employed business owner) felt they had a religious obligation to accept individuals despite their racial background. Souha Merhi, responding to such a view, commented that Muslim individuals had a duty to treat non-Muslims groups with respect. Souha Merhi and her partner also commented that they shared a good relationship with other non-Muslims in the neighbourhood. The reason being that members of the Merhi family were tolerant and accepting of differences within other cultures. On this point, Souha Merhi said:

You have a duty as Muslims to be good to other people, and to also be good and to treat neighbours with respect, whether they be Muslims or non-Muslims. We get along well with other non-Muslims in the neighbourhood, because we respect other cultures and the differences within these cultures. I believe one has to tolerant and accepting of other cultures and other religions. We have this mutual boundary of respect between us and our neighbours. We socialise and get on well with the neighbours despite our racial or religious differences. When we see people not appreciating us as Muslims, then we let go.

Also speaking from a religious perspective, Asad Bilal (unemployed male parent) felt that it was important for him to treat his neighbours with respect, regardless of their racial and religious background. He also felt it was inappropriate to have a unified view of people’s religious identities. In response to this view, he suggested that there were cultural differences among families within a particular community group. Consequently, this participant felt comfortable with other non-Muslim people who shared mutual respect towards racial differences.
It’s important for me to be a good Muslim and to act as a good Muslim. I have to be good to my family, to my friends, and to my neighbours. I have to respect all groups of people. It doesn’t matter if they are Spanish, Italian, Chinese or Lebanese. All people, all races, all religions are welcomed in Islam. I have to respect others as a Muslim, as long as they do not interfere with my religion. Every human has his individuality, his own culture, his own religion. So we have to respect these differences. Everyone is also different in their views and in their practices. They are different in how they follow traditions and other cultural things. So not all Lebanese Muslim families are the same. And not all Italian families are the same. So I am comfortable with other people who respect my ethnic background, and those who do not have a problem with people’s religious differences.

Commenting on these matters, Yehya Salah (Arabic community worker) and Ziad Lail (engineer), who were from families of a middle socio-economic background, shared different views to the latter participants. Consequently, they felt comfortable with people of similar cultural and religious background. These participants spoke about their relationships with non-Muslim people in the past. The fathers in these families commented that the prejudiced views of other people tended to prevail at certain stages in the relationship. Commenting on this issue, Yehya Salah suggested that he preferred to mix in an environment with people who shared similar religious beliefs. He felt comfortable in expressing his social practices at these particular places. This participant also felt that individuals tended to relate and respond very well towards him. On this matter, Yehya Salah commented:

I have to admit that I prefer to mix with people who share similar religious beliefs to me. This is most important. Well! I feel more comfortable in an environment where those around me have the same sort of cultural practices. Because then I feel much comfortable with my social behaviour, and my social practices. And therefore, the people around you, well they don’t have a problem with your behaviour. Therefore, they tend to relate very well towards you.

While the participants saw their religious identities as a basis for their racial experiences, they generally preferred to live in areas where there was a high concentration of Muslims. Some of the participants across the families felt comfortable living among individuals of a similar cultural background. They felt protected from the prejudiced views of non-Muslims in the broader Australian community. Fawaze Hani (unemployed father), for instance, commented that he preferred to live in suburbs comprising many Lebanese-Muslim neighbours. He felt that Muslim
individuals were better able to relate to his cultural practices than non-Muslim groups. Fawaze Hani also felt a strong sense of belonging to this particular community group. He generally felt accepted and valued as an individual by Lebanese Muslim families in the neighbourhood.

I like to live in suburbs where there are a lot of Lebanese Muslim families. I feel much safer in these areas. I feel I am away from other racist people who don’t like Muslims. In places where there are Muslims, you feel accepted, you feel comfortable, you feel a warmth atmosphere. It’s as if you are one big happy family. Because there are your family members, your relatives and your friends surrounding you. You can walk to their house and have a cup of coffee. You know these people are from the same country, they share a similar culture and a similar religion to you. So you feel better accepted and wanted in this neighbourhood.

Similarly, Mayada Amar (housewife) commented that she enjoyed living in an Islamic environment. She felt safe living close to family members and relatives in Melbourne. Mayada Amar also felt confident in approaching Arabic-speaking people in the streets. Consequently, she did not feel isolated or different to other people in the area. This participant also commented that she did not experience any form of racism in this particular area. Mayada Amar commented:

I’ve been in this area now for twenty-three years. Before, when I first came to Australia, I didn’t enjoy where I stayed. People were very racist in that area. You felt you were alone. There weren’t any Arabic speaking people around you. It was lonely and sometimes very depressing. You felt like a totally different person. My family lives in this area, of course. But I also enjoy it here, because I am surrounded by a lot of Muslim neighbours and friends. I feel very safe living here. When I walk to the local shops, there are a lot of Muslim owners, and I feel I can communicate with them. I have not yet experienced any sort of racism while living here.

Media Stereotypes:

In this section, I seek to provide a brief review of written reports on media stereotypes and the views of respondents on this issue.
Since the 1990 Gulf War, the media has generated a lot of interest in Islam and Muslim people world-wide. The negative portrayal of Islam in the media remains a central concern for Muslim activists. A number of proactive individuals and groups have continued to address media problematics in the past decade. A critical evaluation of the media indicates that media narratives have their own style of reportage which excludes a closer examination of cultural issues. Moreover, current media practices fail to reflect the true representations of different social groups. It is these critical perspectives on contemporary media issues and Islam that form some of the discussion in this chapter. This particular section of the chapter on media stereotypes and Muslims is based on a discussion of three main themes:

(i) A key argument in the literature on racial stereotypes and Islam relates to the media generating a problematic link between Islam and violence.
(ii) Another central argument in this literature relates to cultural misinterpretations in media stories.
(iii) A third theme is concerned with the idea of addressing media misrepresentations in a positive way via community education.

The lack of a critical perspective by media analysts in community stories generates a problematic link between Islam and violence. According to a number of writers, the social stereotypes that emerge from community stories tend to misrepresent Islamic groups (Baderoon, 1998; Said, 1997; Hall, 1996). However, Baderoon’s work provides a critical analysis of media discourses and its representation of particular groups. She also offers her own views about changing media discourses towards a more critical practice of reading and writing on community information. Baderoon’s discussion indicates that the media tends to draw on the idea of “false associations” in its description of a Muslim character. As Baderoon points out, ‘The masked Muslim man is the true Other – foreign, alien and exotic; moreover, fixed, unchanging, and lacking subjectivity’ (1988:2). According to Baderoon, there are contradictory political dynamics surrounding international media affairs. To her, both local and global news seem to reinforce media stereotypes about Muslim people. In her work, Baderoon comments that media reports tend to link violent-related adjectives with images of Islam. Consequently, she believed the media made false association between violence and Muslim people. For example, Baderoon commented that words such as “militant”, “death threats” and “vigilante group” were commonly connected with images of Islam in the media (1988:2).
Furthermore, Baderoon argues that the media tends to include broader information relating to its stories which excludes a careful analysis of material content. She suggests that the media draws upon wider social sources which both serve in the interest of the media and a particular social group. To Baderoon, these simplistic forms of journalistic practices tend to place little emphasis on the historical practices and social realities of different groups, (for example Muslim groups). Consequently, she believed that the complex experiences of social groups (such as African Muslims) were excluded from the media. In her view, the complex experiences of social groups tended to become lost in the broader political dynamics of media stories. In response to this view, Baderoon suggests that there is a need to change media writing discourses towards a critical reflection of ethnic related issues. To her, media analysts need to be careful of how they represent ethnic groups in the media. With this in mind, Baderoon, for example, believes that such changes allow media stories to provide a clearer perspective on the social and cultural experiences of Muslim groups. She further comments, it is also the responsibility and right of individuals to be critical of ethnic misrepresentations in the media.

Other researchers have made a contribution to the wider literature on race and ethnic representation in the media (Jakubowicz et al, 1994; also see Zelinka, 1996; Bertone et al., 2000). It is important to recognise some of the arguments of these studies (particularly Jakubowicz et al., 1994 and Zelinka, 1996), because they were seen as being of more relevance to the material content presented in this particular chapter on racism. Jakubowicz et al. (1994), for instance, examine issues of race and ethnicity in the media. They also draw on the main findings of broader research on ethnic representation in the media. In particular, their text engages with complex theoretical questions which address the contextual analysis of the media, and its role in ethnic representation. The work of this particular group of researchers generally depicts some of the pre-existing structural flaws of newsmaking and media misrepresentation on issues of ethnic immigration in Australia. This is achieved through some of their thoughts on issues of media and racism, as well as, these particular writers engaging with other broader studies on this topic.

Jakubowicz et al. (1994), for instance, suggest that generally the ideology of the media is immersed in broader versions of multi-ethnic values, whereby its analysis does not take into account issues of cultural pluralism and group interests. They further suggest that problems associated with culture and media misrepresentation arise from the structural format and content of Australian media services. In that, Jakubowicz et al. (1994) argue that one of the limitations of news production reflects upon the journalists’ and editors’ own interpretation of news values, and how they envisage the audience would react to particular story lines.
These writers (based on their citations of other studies), argue that a particular problem with the media relates to its language use and its broad communication level with the reader. Jakubowicz et al. (1994), for example, suggest that the media generally tends to focus less on the positive contributions of ethnic minority groups. But rather, these writers comment that the media places more emphasis on negative stereotypes, associating ethnic minorities with crime, violence and other social problems. Also, they argue that politics plays an important role in some of the ways media stories are portrayed to the world. They argue media stories have underlying levels of meanings which are open for its readers to make sense of the context.

Jakubowicz et al. (1994) also comment that other Australian studies suggest that the media continues to portray negative stereotypes of ethnic groups in its stories. These writers suggest that the media’s lack of emphasis on the social realities of ethnic groups stems from the government’s broad understanding of multiculturalism, and its great influence on media content. They also suggest that there is a shortage amount of studies on how newsmaking on race and ethnicity actually occurs in Australia. These writers also conclude that the Australian mainstream media has failed to substantially engage with themes of cultural diversity. They recommend that changes be employed in the current practices of media scripts and reporting, to also include an analysis of cultural group interests and expectations.

An important matter which emerges in broader discussions of racial stereotypes and the media relates to cultural misinterpretations in media stories. Social researchers such as Hall (1981), Said (1997) and Baderoon (1998) raise critical questions in regard to particular cultural stories in the media. To these writers, the media has always been very slow and resistant towards changing its ideas about racial misrepresentation. They suggest that media stories are shaped around simplistic versions of cultural representation. To them, the complexities of race and cultural issues are excluded from the media. Consequently, they suggest that media stories consist of common stereotypes about different group identities. For instance, Said’s (1997) work provides insights into how the western media exhibits a set of myths on matters of Islam. He also points out that media reportage is based on simplistic ideas and stereotypes of Muslim people. Said comments that media misrepresentations of Islam stem from numerous methodological and intellectual problems that are yet to be addressed by media analysts world-wide. For example, he points out that simplistic descriptions of Islam in the media result from the lack of preparation and experience of reporters about cross-cultural issues and social events. As a result, Said comments that a wider gap exists between racist media caricatures and the social realities of Islam.
Furthermore, Said argues that there are a lot of hidden assumptions in media stories concerning Islam and its adherents. He claims that many media statements about the social, political and cultural aspects of Islam are often simplistic and generalized. Also, Said raises some concern about media interpretations of Islam. To him, an in-depth interpretation of the complexities of Islamic subjects and cultural knowledge are often excluded from media stories. Consequently, he suggests that the western media offers negative stereotypes of Islam due to its limited knowledge of this religion. In his view, current media practices fail to provide a true representation of the social lives and experiences of Muslim people in contemporary society. Bearing these issues in mind, Said comments that Muslims and the media need to work side-by-side to demystify the myths and stereotypes of Islam. He suggests that Muslims need to become actively engaged with media discourses to provide a new and different representation of the Islamic culture in global news.

Another central theme to the discussion on media stereotypes relates to the educational responses offered by social analysts on this important issue (Millbank, 1998; Karpman, 2000; Baderoon, 1998; Kutty, 1993). From the discussions, this group of writers tend to show how it is possible to contest racial discourse from a community perspective. They feel there is a need for closer links to be established between the community and the media. To these writers, the media needs to educate itself to ensure that objectivity is included in its discussions on ethnic and cultural issues. For instance, Millbank (1998) seems to be in agreement with other writers about the need for community education as an alternative strategy to media misrepresentations. However, this writer provides insights into the limitations of the anti-racism campaign run by the Australian government. In general, he suggests that the research methodologies used by Australian individuals and organisations to measure racism is questionable. His analysis shows that there is ‘a wide gap between ‘expert’ or ‘elite’ opinion on the issue, and the views of ‘ordinary’ Australians’. (1998:2). This social analyst also suggests that messages of anti-racial campaigns tend to be questioned in terms of their need and effectiveness according to the current political climate. Furthermore, Millbank comments that flaws exist within immigration government reports that address ethnic ‘myths and misinformation’ (1998:2). In his view, these government reports include short and simple responses that exclude the complex concerns of a specific social group. Instead, Millbank suggests that it is important to have detailed information in anti-racial campaigns. He further comments that anti-racial campaigns need to include a wide representation of well-informed views.

Clearly, there seems to be unresolved tensions between the views of social analysts and respondents on community education and the media. Social analysts such as Baderoon, 1998; Millbank, 1998;
Karpman, 2000; Kutty, 1993 seem to have conflicting views on the effectiveness of educational campaigns and media stereotypes. To these writers, there is evidence of pro-active ethnic organisations monitoring media misrepresentations. For instance, Baderoon suggests that Muslim groups are actively engaged with religious topics in the media. She believes that group lobbies against journalistic practices is the first step to overcome media stereotypes. However, other writers such as Millbank, have questioned the actual contents of community education and their effects on people. As stated earlier, Millbank indicates that anti-racial campaigns remain questionable in terms of their broad educational content. He suggests that anti-racial campaigns are based on simplistic views which exclude the cultural concerns of community groups.

Media Stereotypes and Islam:

Some respondents in this thesis offered their own solutions to help overcome media stereotypes on Islam. They felt there was a need to further educate journalists and the community about media narratives and Islamic stereotypes. For instance, respondents such as Sami Yessi (lecturer) and Mouna Mai (teacher) offered their own solution to this problem. Sami Yessi suggested the need for the government to fund media workshops to educate both journalists and the community about Muslim people. Similarly, Mouna Mai commented that it was the responsibility of Islamic associations and the government to provide the public with educational seminars about racism in the media.

There were similarities and differences across the families in terms of their thoughts about racism in the Australian community. For a number of these respondents, racism continues to create barriers for (Sunni) Muslim groups in Australia. Mouna Mai (Arabic teacher) and Sami Yessi (lecturer), who came from middle socio-economic background, saw the media as a major source of the negative stereotypes of Muslim groups in Australia. These participants felt that the media often provided the public with misrepresentations in regard to the racial and religious background of Muslim people. Consequently, Mouna Mai and Sami Yessi felt that the media created barriers for Muslims in terms of their social participation in the broader Australian community. Sami Yessi (lecturer), for instance, commented that the Australian mainstream media provided a negative portrayal of the Arab world. He believed that the media influenced intellectuals to reprint vague information about the racial background of Islamic communities. In offering his own solution to this problem, Sami Yessi suggested that the government needed to fund media workshops for both journalists and the public to teach them about Arabic speaking groups and Muslim groups.
I believe there will always be a high degree of racism experienced by a Muslim individual, [Ah!], across Australia. [Umh!] The media, I believe, plays a big part in this issue. [Ah!] The media provides Australians with a negative view of Muslims, [Ah!], and generally the Arab world. Therefore, [Umh!], you have some intellectuals who hear about these negative issues from the mainstream media. [Umh!] To me, this is like a chain-reaction of misrepresentation in the media and by intellectuals. [Ah!] The media misprints things about Muslims, and then, [Ah!], you have intellectuals who tend to do the same thing. Therefore, it’s important for one to be prepared to respond to these issues from an educational perspective. I believe, [Umh!], that the government needs to set up a number of media workshops for the public, [Ah!], and journalists, to teach them about Muslims and Islam.

Speaking along similar lines, Mouna Mai also felt that issues of media misrepresentation needed to be reassessed in relation to the broader Islamic community. She commented that the racist statements by the media provided the public with generalisations about all Muslim individuals living in Australia. In her opinion, older generations were against accepting racial differences, as opposed to Australian youth. Consequently, she was concerned about the prejudiced attitudes of adults being passed on to younger generations. In response to this view, Mouna Mai suggested that both the government and Islamic associations needed to provide further educational seminars which specifically target problems of racism. She felt it was necessary that information about the Islamic community is made available to the Australian public.

I believe that racism has always been an issue for Muslims in Australia. [Umh!] I believe this will continue to be so. I think racism needs to be reassessed in Australia. It’s important to target these problems, and to deal with them. [Umh!] I believe that younger people are less racist and more accepting of Islam than the adults. [Umh!] My concern is that these racist attitudes will be carried through into the second generation. My belief is that the mainstream media is a major contributor to racism against Muslim people in Australia. It provides the public with a lot of generalized statements about this particular group of people. [Umh!] I think information about the Islamic community be made available to the public. [Umh!] I see this a joint by both the government and Islamic associations to offer educational seminars to the public.

While it was felt that media stereotypes created negative views about the Islamic community, other participants commented about the media misrepresenting Muslim groups by interrelating issues of
race, culture and religion. Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher) and Mustafa Khandi (former taxi driver) felt that the media failed to treat issues of race and religion as two separate issues. Ayda Sabah (Arabic teacher) commented that media stories always tend to mix racial traditions with Islamic principles. She felt it was the negative images and statements of the media that tended to exacerbate the prejudice attitudes of other racial groups towards Muslims in Australia. On this point, Ayda Sabah said:

There is a lot of misrepresentation I believe in the media about Arabs, especially the Muslims. This is creating racism and hatred towards Islam as a religion. The media tends to mix racial traditions with the Islamic principles of Muslim people. So, these are two important issues that are still to be separated by the media, in terms of its stories on Muslims. So, it is the negative image that the media provides about Islam that tends to increase the hatred feelings of other people towards Muslims.

While, some first generation participants shared general views about racism in the media, some members of the Zeydi, Merhi and Zaki families had a different view to the latter participants. Speaking from a slightly different angle, the male parents in these families felt more concerned with some of the ways Islam was being represented by the media. Instead, Azam Zeydi (lecturer), Sayed Merhi (social worker) and Kaled Zaki (doctor), who were of a middle socio-economic background, saw the media as continuing to portray and promote negative stereotypes in regard to Muslim groups. Sayed Merhi speaking on this issue commented that racism is not represented as a clear-cut issue in the media. However, he suggested that the media continues to reinforce negative stereotypes about the Islamic community. In response to this view, Sayed Merhi felt that westerners lacked knowledge about the Islamic culture. Consequently, he believed that misrepresentation about common issues in Islam such as the Hijab (the veil), continued to be promoted in a negative way by the media. As a result, Sayed Merhi felt that misleading information about Muslim people often tended to reinforce the negative stereotypes depicted by the media about Islam.

I don’t think we can talk about racism as being a visible factor in the media. But rather the underlying assumption is there. Plus, I believe, you don’t find much racism in the media today, anyway. But at the same time, this is not to say that the media does not continue to reinforce negative stereotypes about Muslims in some of its stories. This all comes from the fact that there are many people in Australia who still don’t have a lot of knowledge on Islam. Therefore, the media continues to misrepresent a lot of common issues about Islam.
For example, the ‘Hijab’ has always been promoted in a negative way by the media. So this false information about Muslims continues to be promoted by the media.

Members of the Zaki family also shared a similar view on this matter. Kaled Zaki (doctor) commented that it was important to make a distinction between concepts of racism and stereotypes in discussing issues of media misrepresentation and Muslim groups. He felt the media manipulated its written information by creating underlying assumptions about the racial background of Muslim people. In his view, the media allowed its viewers or readers to form their own assumptions about the racial differences of Muslims by interpreting the broad statements of the media. Bearing these issues in mind, this participant felt that the media created generalised stereotypes about Islam, due to its broad and limited statements on this particular religion. Kaled Zaki commented:

Well firstly, [Umh!], I think it’s a matter of making a distinction between the issue of racism, and the issue of stereotype when it comes to say the media. [Umh!] I believe, and this is my opinion, [Ah!], the media writes its information in a particular way which allows the reader to imply racist ideas about Muslims. [Umh!] The media has its own hidden agenda on issues of racism. It’s statements are usually written in a broad context which allows readers to read between the lines. But it is these broad and limited generalizations expressed in the media about Islam as a religion, [Ah!], is the main result of negative stereotypes about Muslim people in Australia.

There seemed to be slight tensions among participants in regard to their broad definitions of racism. For instance, male parents from a middle socio-economic background such as Azam Zeydi (lecturer), Sayed Merhi (social worker) and Kaled Zaki (doctor) shared a view on issues relating to the media. These respondents felt the media provided broad assumptions on Islam that created generalised stereotypes about its adherents. Similarly, whilst the discussions on racism with the families, indicated that second generation participants such as Walid Zaki (part-time clinic assistant), Hisham Sabah (grocery sale assistant) and Jenan Khandi (a 16 year old, student) shared similar views to the latter male parents, however, they also felt that some Australians were starting to become more tolerant of Muslim people. For instance, second generation participants viewed race relations between Muslim and non Muslim people in terms of contributions and curiosity, and not so much in terms of contempt. For example, Jamal Bilal (part-time travel agent assistant) felt that the social contributions of Muslim people in Australia allowed westerners to view them with curiosity rather than contempt.
This view was in contrast to first generation participants who saw the matter of racial stereotypes more in terms of contempt towards Lebanese Muslim people. Other, first generation participants shared a negative view on this matter. They felt racism was still evident in Australian society. These respondents also felt that the attitudes of westerners towards Muslims was changing at a very slow pace. Many first generation participants felt that little education was available to westerners about Islamic groups. They blamed both the Australian government and ethnic communities for insufficient community seminars about Islam. In contrast to this view, second generation participants such as Farah Oula (a 19 year old student) and Fida Lail (a 17 year old student) felt that Arabic organisations have been active in campaigning against racism towards Muslim groups in Australia. They felt there were positive steps taken by Arabic organisations to help demystify the negative attitudes of westerners towards Muslims in Australia.

From the discussions, there was evidence of slight tension between the views of respondents and their experience of racism. For instance, some members of the families felt there were minimal racial incidents confronting Muslim people in contemporary Australian society. On the other hand, some respondents discuss their own negative racial experiences with non Muslim people. For example, Salimi Bassam (housewife) spoke about issues of body language and social discrimination. She received dirty gazes from westerners whilst participating in the broad Australian community. She also felt that the lack of response and body posture of non Muslim people towards her were implicit signs of social discrimination. However, in considering the overall context of the interview material, it seemed that both first and second generation respondents experienced different forms of social barriers in terms of their ethnic and religious background.

**Employment:**

This section provides a discussion about the racial experiences of Sunni Muslim respondents in the workforce. In particular, it outlines the racial experiences of veiled women in employment.

There has been little research conducted on the racial experiences of Lebanese Muslim workers in the Australian context. In particular, the perceptions of Muslim individuals are often ignored in broader studies on racism. A particular aim of this chapter is to explore the views of Sunni Muslim participants in terms of racial and work relations. Clearly, this study makes an important contribution to literary studies on ethnicity by making explicit the views of Muslim workers about racism in Australia. In the past, western-based studies identify Muslims (particularly women) as
comprising a low number of migrants in the workforce. Mubarak (1996), for instance, points out that many female Muslims do not participate in the workforce. She comments that, ‘An examination of the involvement of Muslims in the workforce indicates that while 28 per cent of males are not in the labour force, for women, exactly double this number (56 per cent) representing over half the female population are not in the labour force’ (Mubarak, 1996:123). However, it is important to note that issues of racial harassment and other social barriers may also explain why many Muslims do not participate in the workforce.

A cluster of social researchers have discussed the social participation of Muslims in the workforce, with a particular view of Muslim women (Mubarak, 1996; Young et al., 1980; Abu Duhou and Teese, 1992). These studies tend to provide a general one-sided conception of the social and work positions of Muslim women. In general, western studies tend to indicate that the low rates of female Muslim participation in the workforce is a result of cultural and religious factors that place important emphasis on female roles as care-takers of the family. However, other studies which have approached the latter issue from a religious perspective tend to show a different view of females’ work positions. For instance, studies conducted by Mubarak (1996) and Badawi (1995), and this thesis, tend to highlight the range of social choices available to Muslim women in regard to issues of culture, work and the family.

Mubarak (1996) makes an important contribution to this literature through her discussion with veiled Muslim women and their work experiences in Australia. Whilst Mubarak is aware that family and religious issues are influential factors upon Muslim women’s decision to work, she also comments that issues of racism, ethnicity and individual experiences need to also be considered in terms of broader discussions on the work participation of Muslim people. With this in mind, Mubarak argues that female Muslims experience worse cases of racism than males, because they are clearly identifiable as being of an Arabic background. She also suggests that veiled Muslim women are treated as being different to other Australian ethnic groups. In response to this view, Mubarak points out that social stereotypes make it difficult for these women to exercise full social participation in the broad community. Clearly, there are similarities shared between Mubarak’s methodology and this thesis. Both studies are based on qualitative research to ascertain in detail some of the themes that emerge from discussions pertaining to the veil of Muslim women, and their employment experiences.

These studies have also relied on in-depth interviews to obtain detailed information about the social experiences of veiled Muslim women in Australia. Whilst this thesis is not mainly concerned with
the significance of the veil to Muslim women, this issue has been raised by female participants at certain stages of the interviews in their response to issues of gender, identity and employment. There were also similarities and differences shared by this thesis and Mubarak’s (1996) sample. Both studies made initial contacts with representatives from Islamic associations in terms of seeking participants to be interviewed. However, Mubarak had selected ten female Muslim respondents, over the age of eighteen, with some employment experience. In contrast to the previous sample of participants in Mubarak’s study, this thesis interviewed twenty Sunni Muslim families consisting of gender-mixed participants. The age of respondents ranged from 16 to 49 years of age. The families came from both low and middle socio-economic backgrounds.

Other sections of this thesis have highlighted the issue of work as being an important act of charity for female Muslims in Islam. For instance, female respondents such as, Nada Oula (housewife), Suraya Bilal (housewife) and Ronya Khandi (housewife) considered social and charity work as an important religious deed for Muslim women. They also felt that economic status was important to Muslim women. From broader discussions with participants on this issue, some female respondents such as Ronya Khandi (housewife) also commented that there were many female Muslims involved in voluntary Islamic community services that were also not recognised as members of the workforce. This thought is also shared by Mubarak, when she comments that women’s social and charity work are not considered as paid employment. Consequently, Mubarak suggests that ‘all women who do such work would be considered to be unemployed women’ (1996:132).

Mubarak, for instance, also extends her discussion to include some of the social reasons as to why some Muslim women worked within the Islamic community. However, in order not to reiterate previous discussion about issues of gender and work, it is important to examine the work experiences of Mubarak’s participants and the views of Muslim women in this thesis. Both Mubarak’s study and this thesis highlight some of the problems encountered by Muslim women who adopt the veil in the workplace. It was clear that both studies raised concern about the tensions experienced between veiled Muslim women and their work colleagues. For example, both Mubarak’s (1996) female respondent, (Aza) and Mouna Mai (teacher) in this thesis adopted the veil in the workplace. These respondents felt that the attitudes of their colleagues had changed towards them. Consequently, they felt isolated from other work mates. However, Mubarak suggests that the attitude of workers towards Aza had changed at a later stage. She comments, ‘Once they accustomed themselves to the change in Aza’s dress code and once they were assured that she was the ‘same person’, the ‘hijab’ was no longer an issue’ (1996:134). On the other hand, Mouna Mai felt that the negative attitudes of non Muslim employees continued to limit her ability to excel in the
workplace. She felt that her religious practices hindered her social mobility within the workplace. Consequently, Mouna Mai applied for a teaching position in an Islamic school in order to avoid further racial barriers in the workplace. In contrast to Mouna Mai’s racial work experiences, Mubarak suggests that Aza’s little incidents of racial harassment were influenced by the general tolerant attitudes of cultural diversity within the workplace.

It was also clear that the racial and work experiences of Mubarak’s female respondent “Meryam”, was also shared by second generation participants in this thesis. Mubarak commented that Meryam worked as a receptionist in an electronics firm. She suggests that Meryam’s decision to wear the veil defied the social conception of receptionists looking glamorous. Consequently, Meryam’s choice of clothes created tensions in the workplace. Meryam felt it was necessary to leave work because the attitudes of her employers was an implicit sign of discrimination (Mubarak, 1996:138). Clearly, the general social misconceptions of the Islamic dress code is experienced by many Muslim people including respondents in this thesis. For example, Maha Mai (a part-time medical receptionist) experienced racial harassment by her employers after having worn the veil to work. She was constantly questioned by some doctors about her decision to adopt the hijab in the workplace. From broader discussions with Maha Mai on this matter, she suggested that some doctors did conceive the veil as not a suitable practice for reception work. On this point, Maha Mai commented that one particular doctor felt that the veil tended to discourage patients from using the clinic. However, in contrast to Meryam’s choice to leave the electronics firm (Mubarak, 1996:138), Maha Mai was dismissed from the medical clinic on the basis of her religious practices. Similarly, Nour Yegli (a part-time mechanical assistant) also commented about his dismissal from an Australian company because of the Islamic dress code. After having made the decision to wear the Islamic male dress code, Nour Yegli commented other work colleagues did not respond well towards him. Consequently, Nour Yegli’s boss dismissed him from the company.

In summary, it is evident from previous discussions that racism has been a major contributor to the work limitations of Muslims in Australia. As a result, many male and female Muslims experienced unfair treatment in the workplace. For example, some Muslims were treated as isolated and different workers to other employees. Consequently, this tended to limit the social mobility and success of Muslims in the workplace. Also, the Islamic dress code and social prejudice tended to accentuate the work problems of Muslim people, particularly female workers. However, the findings in both Mubarak’s (1996) study and this thesis are by no means a general representation of the larger population of Muslim people in employment. Instead, these case studies provide some insights into the general racial and work experiences of a sample of the Muslim population. In
response to this view of work discrimination, both Mubarak and some respondents in this thesis felt that this was due to the limited knowledge of westerners about the religious practices of Muslim groups (Mubarak, 1996:144).

Continuing this theme of the outside worker, Abu Duhou and Teese (1992) also discussed a number of social barriers experienced by Arab Australians, including Lebanese in the Australian labour market. Similar to Mubarak’s study, their work also contributes to the idea that Arabic speaking communities experience social and racial barriers in terms of accessing work in the labour market. Abu Duhou and Teese, for instance, identified ten barriers in terms of Arabic workers and their access to the labour market. These included: ‘language (accent); lack of local work experience, non-recognition of qualifications; discrimination (racism and prejudice) against ethnicity – including Lebanese, Arabs, Palestinians; social contacts and language; bureaucracy and management, local education and language; lack of cultural understanding; language discrimination, finding a job and cost of living; discrimination because of age; local education; and discrimination against NESB’ (Abu Duhou and Teese, 1992:xxxiv).

Some of the latter barriers identified by Abu Duhou and Teese related to broader discussions with Sunni Muslim participants about their employment experiences. For example, some members of the families commented that Australian employers failed to recognise them as qualified skilled workers in the workplace. For example, Sami Yessi (lecturer) felt that his inability to excel in the workplace was a direct result of his ethnic background. He commented that his employer and workmates treated him differently to other colleagues with similar work skills. Also, Sami Yessi commented that his manager’s lack of interest with his work plans and contributions were an implicit sign of ethnic discrimination.

It was also apparent that factors of prejudice and ethnicity were also major limitations to the work situations of two female respondents as pointed out in the interview material outlined in the next few pages of this chapter. Both of the mothers in the families shared similar views to Sami Yessi about their employers failing to recognise their work potentials, but were rather concerned with their ethnic background. As former factory workers, Samya Nahli (housewife) and Salimi Bassam (housewife) suggested that employers placed a lot of emphasis on the physical appearance of veiled Muslim women, as opposed to their work merits. They felt that the negative attitudes of employers and other workers towards their religious status was a direct consequence of their social immobility and productiveness in the workplace. For example, Samya Nahli (housewife) commented that non Muslim workers tend to focus on her ethnic and religious status rather than her work merits.
Clearly, it can be said that the latter work situations of these three respondents were overshadowed by factors of ethnicity and prejudice. The general ignorance of non Muslim employers and employees about Islamic practices tended to accentuate their prejudiced views towards Muslims in the workplace.

From broader discussions with Sunni Muslim participants, it seems that Muslim workers experience racial barriers which limit their chances to gain promotion in the workplace. In response to this view, social researchers such as Abu Duhou and Teese (1992) have provided their own recommendations to improve the experience of ethnic and Arabic workers in the Australian labour market. Abu Duhou and Teese (1992), for instance, suggest the need to develop community educational programmes to promote a positive image of Arabic groups in Australian society. Moreover, Abu Duhou and Teese suggest that the public image of Arabic groups could be enhanced by educating other Australian ethnic groups about Arabic culture and the contributions of Arabs to civilisation. Furthermore, the latter researchers point out that it is necessary for both the government and the Arabic community to work side-by-side in such a campaign.

Racism in the Workplace:

From the discussions with members of the twenty (Sunni) families in this study, it was apparent that some first generation participants spoke about work discrimination in terms of their own racial experiences in the broad community. Consequently, it was felt by many first generation members in each of the families that many non-Muslims Australians did not perceive Muslims as qualified skilled workers. However, despite this view, first generation participants from the Spee, Houri, Mai, Yessi, Salah, Nahli, Amar, Yegli and Khandi families did not see themselves as being less skilled to other workers in Australia. Sami Yessi commented that many people tended to place more emphasis on the racial and religious background of Muslim people in the workforce. Whilst Sami Yessi felt he was a qualified and experienced worker, other workers failed to accept him as a professional worker. He commented that his manager often overlooked his work plans. Consequently, Sami Yessi felt that he was treated differently to other skilled employees in the workplace. In response to this view, he felt he was unable to be a productive worker, because of his racial background. Commenting on this matter he said:

   From my experience as a worker in Australia, [Ah!], you feel that other people are racist towards you. You feel you are qualified, you are experienced, [Ah!], you are a professional worker, but you feel others don’t see you in that kind of a way. [Ah!] You
have the skills and work plans, but you feel you are being treated differently. You’re not receiving the fair treatment, you deserve, because of your racial background. The manager at my work used to always overlook my personal work projects that I might have put forward. After several months, I left this particular workplace, and I felt I had to go elsewhere. [Ah!] I needed to feel more of a productive worker, someone who was appreciated for his work skills and intellectualism.

As has been discussed earlier in this study, there was a general view among participants that Muslim women faced social barriers because they were clearly identifiable as being of Arabic background. While this was the case, many of the female participants spoke specifically about wearing the veil to work. Mouna Mai (Arabic teacher), for example, commented that her work colleagues had a problem with her wearing the veil. After wearing the veil, she felt other people no longer treated her with respect in the workforce. She also pointed out that some workers had no longer perceived her as the successful and challenging worker. Also, Mouna Mai commented that other workers failed to recognise her work efforts and potential to succeed in the workplace. Speaking on this matter Mouna Mai said:

I have now been wearing the Hijab for the past two years, but since wearing it, I have lost the respect of my work colleagues. [Umh!] They have treated me differently. [Umh!] At first, everyone thought I was this good and professional worker, but when I wore the Hijab, some spoke behind my back. These people felt this successful and challenging woman has gone backwards. Westerners saw my decision to wear the Hijab in a negative way.

Continuing this theme of work discrimination from another angle, some first generation members in families from a low socio-economic background also spoke about their former experiences as the ethnic worker. These participants shared similar views to other members in the families. The women in the families also experienced racism in terms of wearing the veil to work. As a former factory worker, Samya Nahli (housewife) commented that employers did not focus on the work potential of female Muslims. Instead, she felt that employers placed a lot of emphasis on the physical appearance and racial background of female Muslim workers. Samya Nahli also commented that her racial background limited her work participation in the factory. On this matter, she said:
When I used to work in factories, other people were always racist towards my culture and my religion. They weren’t happy with the fact that I covered myself. The other workers would always question me about the Hijab. They wanted to know why it was important for me to wear the Hijab. No one really looks at the work potential of Muslim women. I believe they just focus on your looks and ethnic background. It was the fact that I was a Muslim, that tended to effect the amount of work I did in the factory.

Members of the Bassam family also shared a similar view on this matter. Salimi Bassam (housewife) felt isolated in the workplace. She commented that other workers treated her as a different person. This participant also pointed out that employers judged Muslim women on their physical appearance rather than on their work capacity. Salimi Bassam commented:

I used to wear the Hijab to my work. But back in the ‘70s I experienced a lot of racism, because of my religious background. I was treated as a different person. I felt isolated from other workers. Nobody related well towards me. Everyone tended to judge you on your looks rather than your work skills, and what you were capable of doing. I used to always find it difficult to find work. Where I found work, I always found it difficult to participate, because you’re always seen as the ethnic worker.

Many second generation members in each of the families also expressed a view on the issue of work discrimination. Maha Mai (part-time medical receptionist) commented on this matter by talking about her personal experience at a Melbourne medical centre. She suggested that work colleagues did not have a problem with her as a receptionist, until she commenced wearing the veil at the clinic. Consequently, Maha felt that the pleasant attitudes of both staff and patients had changed towards her. This participant also spoke about the fact that some of the doctors had a problem in accepting her decision to wear the veil. Maha Mai pointed out that some doctors viewed the veil as a religious practice from the past, in which they felt had no place in modern society. After one week, Maha commented that she was asked to leave work on the basis of her wearing the veil. Maha Mai speaking on this matter commented:

I personally experienced racism because of my religion while working at a medical clinic. I had been working there as a receptionist for one year, and there was not a problem. In fact the two doctors-in-charge were very happy with my work. But everything changed after wearing the Hijab. [Umh!] I felt that the attitudes of both the doctors, the other receptionists, and the patients had changed towards me. [Umh!] Hardly anyone spoke with
me a lot, like they used to. The doctors-in-charge had a problem with me covering my head. They kept saying stuff to me, [Umh!], like why would you want to wear it. This is a thing of the past. It is not a modern thing. [Umh!] So a week later one of these doctors told me to leave the work, because he felt that his colleagues and patients were not comfortable with me wearing the Hijab.

Speaking along similar lines, Nour Yegli (part-time mechanical assistant) also commented about non-Muslim workers having a problem in relating to the Islamic dress code. After having worked three years for an Australian company, Nour commented that he had decided to wear the Islamic code appropriate for Muslim males. He also felt isolated from the other workers. This participant commented that work colleagues did not relate or respond well towards him. Consequently, Nour Yegli suggested that his boss had given him the sack two days later. On this matter he said:

I once got the sack, because my boss and other workers were racist towards Muslims. I worked for this company for three years. But once I decided to wear my Islamic clothing, these people did not accept me following the Islamic dress code. At first I felt other workers had little to do with me. Later on, I could tell they weren’t responding well at all towards me. It only took two days since wearing my Islamic clothes to work, that my boss had decided to give me the sack. He called me into his office and said that you are ‘fired’.

Overview:

There is little research concerned with the broader views of minority groups about ethnic discrimination and difference. Moreover, studies on racism tends to lack insights into some of the ways individuals interpret their own experience of ethnic discrimination. It is evident that unresolved tension exists between the structures of journalistic practice and their responsibilities towards better representation of a community’s experiences. A canvassing of the literature on media stereotypes indicates that media writers need to take on a much more responsible role in regard to their reporting about particular social issues. From the discussions, it was clear that media analysts need to expand on their broad statements in discussing particular minority groups. They also need to take into account the contemporary social and cultural realities of community groups such as Muslim groups. Also, it can be said that writers on Islam need to equally consult with the variety of ethnic community resources that address media issues. In that, they need to include the views of professional ethnic workers that are pertinent to complex subject matters on Islam.
Clearly, this sort of liaison between the media and community groups will allow the media to depict a clear picture of the social realities of cultural groups. (for example Muslims).

Whilst the work of social analysts has identified problems of racism, however, they are yet to propose a clear model of analysis which attempts to change the racial views of community groups. Clearly, the problems identified in racial studies indicate that there is a need for better anti-racial education which represents diverse and well-informed views of members from the public sphere.

It is apparent that there are various types of racism identified in the broad Australian community. (see Zelinka, 1996). Many writers have identified racial discrimination as occurring since early colonisation in Australia. Racial experiences are recognised by researchers as occurring within our legal, medical and educational systems, and other broad social services. Many racial experiences are recognised as stemming from the lack of understanding of the socio-cultural and religious practices of ethnic minorities by the dominant social class. It is difficult to ‘pin-point’ indirect racism because it is not easily identifiable as being of a direct discriminatory nature towards a specific individual or group. Broader studies on racism suggest that it is important to recognise individual or systemic racism, in order to address some of the concerns related to social discrimination. One particular recommendation shared by many studies on racism reflects upon the need to device informative educational campaigns to provide people with a better understanding of different social groups.

The little research conducted on employment, racism and the perceptions of the Lebanese made it difficult to assess the views of participants with other studies. However, studies such as Mubarak (1996) and this thesis tend to provide detailed insights into the racial experiences of Muslim workers in Australia. The significance of such studies is that they offer a representative voice of ethnic individuals and their work positions in the Australian context. In also considering the studies conducted by Abu Duhou and Teese (1992) and Young, Petty and Faulkner (1980), it was clear that factors of ethnicity and prejudice contribute to the social immobility of Muslims in the workplace. In examining studies on employment and ethnic groups, (in this case, Lebanese Muslim groups), it was evident that the general ignorance of westerners towards Islamic practices tended to accentuate their prejudiced views of Muslim people. Some of the studies on racism recommended the need for educational programmes to promote a positive image of Arabic speaking communities. As Abu Duhou and Teese point out, there is a need for government departments to offer a detailed education programme about Arabic cultures and their contributions to Australian society. There is also a need
for the Australian government to work side-by-side with Arabic-speaking communities to produce effective campaigns in the future.
CONCLUSION

Having examined the views of Sunni Muslim families on issues of family, ethnic identity, gender and racism, this thesis provided insights into some of the complex ways these participants tend to define and experience ethnicity in Australia. It has also considered some of the ways in which Sunni Muslims tend to narrate the ethnic self in regard to their social and cultural practices in contemporary Australia. In so doing, this research highlights definitions of family, ethnic identity, gender and racism as complex concepts that require in-depth analysis in regard to social and cultural factors. This thesis also highlights how a range of theorists tend to explore issues of ethnicity, family and identity at a broad theoretical level. Obviously, there were a number of wide gaps that exist between these theories and the actual views of participants in this study. Regardless of socio-economic status, gender or age, there were similarities and differences across Sunni Muslim families in terms of their thoughts and experiences about issues of ethnicity, racism, gender and the family.

Some of the discussion on notions of new ethnicities raised in earlier sections of this thesis propose a range of theoretical ideas on issues of race, ethnicity and cultural difference. There are some limitations recognised by this study in terms of theories on new ethnicities. Whilst social theorists draw on different research models to discuss issues of ethnicity and difference, however, their ideas on new notions of ethnicity remain limited at a theoretical level. It is apparent these writers conceptions of ethnicity are more complex at a practical level.

A number of theorists in this area fail to outline particular strategies which show how notions of new ethnicities can be applied to different group identities. There are unresolved tensions in this new literature, particularly as it relates to discussions on ethnic diversity. There still remains the need for alternative models of ethnicity to make clear links between notions of ethnicity and group differences. Whilst contemporary sociology continues to deal with the challenges of ethnic diversity, this study provides a starting point for thinking about how future researchers might work with specific social groups. For instance, this thesis attempts to make some connection between theoretical ideals of ethnicity and the social practices of Sunni Muslim families.

The notion of family is identified by theories and other case studies within a broad context. For instance, family theories discuss general patterns of the family according to social change. In opposition, this thesis explores factors of parental roles, ethnic identity and the traditional practices
of Sunni Muslim families in more detail. This study offers in-depth analysis into the social and cultural life of a particular ethnic community group. During the course of this research, it became clear that theories provide an abstract view of family traditions. It is apparent that social theorists examine the traditionalist views of parents in a broad context. Whilst research data indicates an increase in the nurturing role of male parents in America (see Lewis, 1986), however, this thesis has considered how male parents have interpreted their traditional parenting roles.

Whilst other research studies do not consider issues of class, gender and culture, this particular thesis has interviewed families from different class backgrounds. It can be said that class was a factor in terms of how participants interpreted their traditional parental roles. There were differences between participants in terms of their definitions of family positions. For instance, male parents who came from a low socio-economic background interpreted their family role more in terms of their responsibilities and duties to the family as a whole. This view was in contrast to male parents from a middle socio-economic background who viewed themselves as occupying an interactive role with the family. Some of these male parents expressed interest in sharing ideas and decisions with other family members. It was also apparent that first generation female participants from a middle socio-economic background saw themselves as playing a progressive family role in modern society. These participants saw themselves as playing an important educational and guidance role in the family. Whilst past theories discuss the functions of traditional parental roles, however, this study considered the views and experiences of Sunni Muslim participants in terms of family positions.

Another common theme explicated by social theorists is the economic roles of men and women in the family. Whilst these theories recognise that a complex relationship exists between parenting, gender and family income, this study highlights the views of participants about issues of dual income. It provides insight into participants’ definitions of parental roles in regard to social, economic and religious issues. For instance, a number of first generation female participants, from a middle socio-economic background, spoke about their own views of family commitments and work matters. These women felt it was their decision to prioritise the welfare of their children instead of participating in the workforce. It is apparent that theories broadly work with complex definitions of the family in addressing social, legal and economic issues. In opposition, this thesis has shown how social and economic change has required Sunni Muslim couples to have equal share in terms of family income. It also considers how participants have interpreted such changes according to their own social situation. This study also recognises that both Muslim men and women have the right to make work related decisions. This is opposite to family theories which are
yet to deal with important questions raised in terms of the complex uncertainties surrounding notions of family and cultural practices.

Other areas of family research have identified factors of culture, ethnicity and community as having strong ties with the notion of family. But they do not convey how participants define the notion of family according to their own ethnic background. This thesis indicates that the family had various cultural meanings to the participants. Also, there seemed to be strong links between participants’ ethnic representation and the notion of family. For instance, many second generation participants across the families commented that the family had informed their own views of ethnicity, culture and self identity. To them, the family was a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic community. For other second generation participants, this thesis shows how the notion of family was integral to their notion of self identity. For example, a second generation male participant felt that the family was the essence of an individual’s sense of identity and cultural values. The next step for researchers in this area of the family literature is to consider how strong ethnic and family ties are maintained among ethnic groups in Australia, as opposed to families in their former countries.

There is also a need for future studies to consider the traditional practices of ethnic families in the context of cultural diversity in Australia. Whilst former studies in this area have recognised that social change inevitably affects the traditional practices of ethnic families, they do not actually convey how participants maintain to practice family traditions. This thesis has discussed the traditional values of Sunni Muslim families in detail. It draws on the actual perceptions and experiences of participants in terms of contemporary family practices in Australia. This study also outlines what some traditional values had meant to the family as a whole. From the discussions, many parents across the families viewed safety practices as an important family value. They felt this practice provided family members with a sense of security and closeness. Other research in this area have focused on broader patterns of familial practices among cultural groups. However, this thesis considered participants’ definitions of ethnic traditions from a communal perspective.

Generally, family studies fail to explore in detail how social factors affect the cultural practices of individual ethnic families. It is important for future research to adopt an interactionist model of analysis. These studies need to include individual views and their understandings of the family. Furthermore, family researchers need to focus on a multi-dimensional model of analysis in studying ethnic families. This will help researchers to recognise the complex and diverse cultural practices of ethnic minority families.
Overall, it can be said that family theories and studies remain embedded within a structural method of analysis, as opposed to this thesis, which adopts a cultural method of analysis. This study looked at how Lebanese Muslims narrate their own family positions. It also considered the social and cultural implications of Sunni Muslim participants in terms of their own views on family issues. From a community perspective, this thesis has been able to highlight the similarities and differences in regard to the diverse views of Sunni Muslim families. It has also made important connections between the notion of family and issues of class, gender and ethnicity.

It is also important for future family research to explore the different social and cultural implications of parenting across diverse ethnic and cultural families in Australia. There is the need for the notion of parenting and other family related issues to be explored and recognised within the diverse cultural backgrounds of Australian families. It is also important for researchers to make connections between particular family issues and their implications with social, cultural and gender factors.

It was also clear that there were many discrepancies between explanations of ethnic identity at both a theoretical and community level. There are various theoretical explanations of ethnic identity. Many of these theories tend to broadly discuss this important concept in terms of an abstract context. Ethnicity theories tend to share a unified view of identity issues. They tend to offer simplistic explanations in terms of the identity positions of different social groups. The different groups of theories on ethnic identity fail to make direct links with issues of cultural diversity and difference in their interpretations of individual group identities. In opposition, this thesis indicates the complex nature of ethnic identity through the various social positionalities enunciated by members of Sunni Muslim families. From the discussions, it was evident that the notion of ethnic identity included various interpretations by respondents across the families in terms of broader social and cultural contexts. For instance, many family members had interpreted their views of ethnicity in terms of multiple identities.

Some respondents, for example, saw their notion of self in terms of a number of positions, including those of parenting and the professional worker. Therefore, this study tended to indicate that Sunni Muslim participants had viewed the social self in terms of a number of complex and competing identity positions. The simplistic nature of identity often reinforced in broader theoretical frameworks proved to be very complex at a community level. Many members of Sunni Muslim families offered diverse and different interpretations of ethnicity in terms of their narration of the self. For example, participants in this study tended to interrelate the notion of ethnic identity with
issues of culture, religion and national identity. For many first generation respondents in the families, issues of ethnicity and religion tended to overlap each other and were directly linked with issues of heritage and tradition. Whilst other respondents viewed their ethnic identity in terms of broader and different forms of social and cultural practices.

Furthermore, it was clear from the discussions that language was integral to respondents’ notions of ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Language was perceived by participants as an important form of practice for both first and second generation Sunni Muslims, because it helped them to learn more about ethnic and religious traditions. Other respondents had also made important connections between the issue of language and broader social contexts. They felt language was an important skill to be utilised in terms of education and employment issues.

As stated earlier, this thesis has highlighted the complex nature of ethnic identity, as opposed to simplistic versions of identity often embedded within broad theories on ethnicity. It also indicates that future studies need to adopt a pluralist model of ethnicity in exploring the notion of identity. It is important for future research to offer a multidimensional view of ethnic identity in exploring factors of cultural diversity and difference at a collective level. This sort of research needs to also recognise the complex intersections between notions of identity and cultural constructs of the self. It helps ethnic researchers to provide a clearer view of ethnic identity by recognising the diverse and differing ethnic identity positions of members of a particular social group. This will help future research studies to highlight the complex views and narrations of participants in terms of their ethnic, gender and cultural positions within their own community group.

From the discussions, it was also clear that gender-based theories often treated the term gender as a categorical concept. The lack of detailed examination within western gender-based methodologies often misinterpreted gender issues in Islam. This thesis is considered to be a good starting point to addressing some of the wider gaps which exist between the stereotypical role of Muslim women and Islamic practices, through its in-depth interviews with participants from an Islamic background. The methodology of this study has helped to overcome some of the cultural limitations often found in gender theories through distinguishing between the social, religious and gender issues in its discussions with Sunni Muslim families. In allowing Sunni Muslims, particularly female participants, to narrate the gender self in terms of religious and other broad social contexts, this thesis was able to convey a clearer view of gender issues. It was clear from the discussions with Sunni Muslim families that the notion of gender tended to overlap issues of culture and religion.
For many female participants in this study, it was important for non Muslim people to recognise that Muslim women had a choice in terms of how they tended to utilise their gender rights and practices. To these respondents, the limited knowledge of westerners in Islam was often the cause of misunderstanding towards the gender practices of Muslim women. In response to this view, a group of female participants felt that religious education was the next positive step for all Australians. From the discussions in this thesis, it is important for future researchers to develop a more effective approach towards gender and other issues in Islam. There is a need to offer the community in-depth and detailed information about the wider gaps that exist between Islam and western stereotypes. This sort of community education should also include the views and experiences of Muslim women in Australia. It is important for future researchers to work closely with Islamic social networks in order to develop a much more productive campaign which provides non Muslim people with a better informed view of gender issues in Islam.

It can be said that theories tend to provide formal definitions of gender. It seems that theories often address gender issues in terms of the characteristics and stereotypes of gender traits. These theories are often limited in understanding gender as a social construct. They fail to explore the different gender positions of members of a particular ethnic and cultural community group. Gender-based theories are yet to address various social and cultural factors that tend to intersect issues of gender in different ways. Instead, theories tend to centre their discussions on the gender ideals of social groups. In opposition, this thesis has highlighted the realities of gender ideals by providing an insight into participants’ views on gender, particularly as they relate to female representation. In commenting on gender issues, for instance, a group of female participants were able to make distinctions between notions of gender and rights. The complexity of gender was highlighted through the broad definitions and different cultural experiences of participants in this study.

To some respondents, gender characteristics were also perceived in terms of responsibilities and mutual respect. Therefore, it can be said that this study offered more insights into the gender positions of Muslim women, because it has provided them with an actual voice to project their own individual social and cultural experiences. To achieve this matter, it is important for future research to adopt similar methods of research used in this particular study. Clearly, the use of in-depth interviews with Sunni Muslim respondents was useful in gaining insights into the concerns of this religious group about ethnic, cultural and gender issues. The use of open-ended questions generated significant information into the broader thoughts and differing experiences of respondents across the families. Consequently, this thesis was able to work with the detailed responses of participants in a much more positive context. On the basis of this research study, these methods of analysis are
also seen as useful techniques for contemporary social research in their attempt to better understand the social experiences and cultural practices of particular social groups in Australia.

The chapter on racism in this thesis centred on the problematics of media stereotypes, as opposed to a direct approach on theories of racism. From the discussions, it was apparent that a gap exists between racial media stereotypes and the social realities of Islam. Clearly, media stories tend to provide simplistic versions of the lives of a particular social group, which excludes a community perspective on these matters. The broad information portrayed by the media about different group identities tends to exclude careful analysis of its contents on cultural issues. This often leads to cultural misrepresentations of ethnic minority groups in the mainstream media. As stated earlier, a group of media analysts have discussed the need to change media discourses to include a better representation of the complex historical practices of different social groups. They also suggest that the media needs to draw on wider social sources which serve both in the interests of community groups and the media. The media was also perceived by some participants as playing an influential role in regard to the negative stereotypes of Muslim groups. In response to this view, other respondents across the families suggested that Arabic organisations were combating racism in the community through their education programmes.

Whilst Arabic organisations such as the Australian Arabic Council, have organised social projects to deal with issues of racism in the 1990s, there is a further need for the government to develop national projects to provide a better representation of ethnic communities across Australia, particularly Islamic groups. These sorts of projects need to be constructed through the collaboration of media analysts, ethnic community networks and members of a particular social group. This helps future researchers to establish direct links between racial media stereotypes and issues of culture and religion. It is also important for media analysts and researchers in this area to examine the views of people in both western and non western countries. This will help to provide a cross-section of people’s attitudes towards global media issues. It also provides a clearer view of how other media analysts are assessing and combating media misrepresentation via electronic and literary means in foreign countries.

Other broader discussions on racism also outlined the racial experiences of Sunni Muslim respondents in regard to issues of schooling and employment. Here, this study has also highlighted the wide gap that exists between the social participation of Muslim people and their Islamic beliefs. In identifying some of the common problems confronting Muslim people in terms of education and work issues, this thesis also indicates that further research is necessary to examine the specific and
complex concerns of a community’s views in these two areas. For instance, second generation participants spoke about their racial experiences in Australian schools. They commented that emphasis was placed on the racial and religious differences of Muslim students in the classroom. Consequently, they found it difficult to participate effectively in particular school situations.

Whilst the issue of schooling was only one aspect of broader discussions on racism, it does raise important implications for future research to be conducted in this area. As stated earlier, the use of in-depth interviews offered valuable data to social research concerned in areas of ethnic and cultural diversity. It can also be argued that this form of methodology is useful for future research in this area. The use of in-depth interviews helps social scientists to gain insights into participants views on social issues that are of particular interest to them. In some instance, in-depth interviews also tend to explicate the personal experiences of respondents in reference to social issues. In particular, group interview settings is a useful way of allowing participants to spontaneously speak about relevant topics which they view as being significant to their current lifestyle. Therefore, in conducting various groups of interviews, this form of methodology offers detailed and valuable data for both social scientists and policy makers to work with in terms of future case studies about ethnic and cultural community groups.

There is a need for more research studies to focus on the actual perceptions of ethnic students, particularly Muslims, in Australian schools. It is important for social researchers and educationists to provide a better representation of ethnic discourses in schools in future research studies. For instance, there is a need for studies to place more emphasis on discourses of ethnicity by applying in-depth interviews to different groups of people in schools. A starting point to this particular situation would be to interview both students and teachers, including principals and possibly the parents, and to both examine and assess their views on ethnicity. For example, it is important to consider how Muslims perceive themselves as students, as well as how non Muslims perceive them. This methodological approach creates new challenges for social researchers, because it offers more of a critical practice of researching ethnic discourses in education. In establishing more community-based studies on racism and schooling, the next positive step is for educationists and social researchers to organise parent-teacher meetings to discuss tentative points raised in research reports. This helps to develop better strategies to ensure the full participation of ethnic minority students in school curriculums.

The issue of employment was also raised in discussions of racism with Sunni Muslim families. It was also apparent that studies on racism and employment often misrepresent the labour
participation of Muslim men and women. Studies in this area tend to only place emphasis on the wider participation of Muslim workers in Australia. There has been little research conducted on Muslim workers which include factors of racial harassment, social barriers and the work experiences of this particular religious group. Although this thesis is not composed of a large segment on issues of employment, however, it has generated important discussions that reflect the views and work experiences of Sunni Muslim respondents in Australia. This study has outlined the different sorts of social barriers confronting Muslim people in relation to employment, particularly the racial experiences of Muslim women. From the discussions, it was clear that this thesis has raised important points about the social experiences of Sunni Muslim workers, and how these experiences tend to reflect on issues of ethnicity, culture and religion. It can also be said that this study has made an important contribution to broad discussions on the work participation of Muslim people, as it has considered issues of racism and the individual experiences of Sunni Muslim participants on work matters.

It is clear from earlier summaries of studies in the racism chapter, that issues of racism and difference have been major contributors to the work inhibitions of Muslims in Australia. From the discussions, there was a general view shared by many participants across the families that factors of ethnicity and religion contributed to their social immobility within the Australian workplace. Both research studies and Sunni Muslim participants indicated the need to educate employers about the religious background of Muslims in the workforce. This sort of community-based education is said to help promote a positive image of Muslim workers (Abu Duhou and Teese, 1992).

There is still a need for further research about employment and Muslim groups in the Australian context. It is important for future studies to consider issues of ethnicity, racism and employment and to make direct links with issues of culture and religion. There is also a need to have more detailed studies which consider the social experiences of Muslim workers. These sorts of detailed discussions will help to provide a better representation of Muslims and their work positions in the broad Australian workforce. There is also a need for government researchers to work more closely with Arabic community workers in terms of future research on employment and Muslim groups.

It is important for research studies to consider the views of Muslim people to achieve a better assessment of the actual employment experiences and problems confronting different Muslim groups in Australia. This sort of research helps to provide both semi-skilled and skilled Muslim workers with better access to employment programmes and effective work participation within Australian industries. Also, there is a need for local employment recruitment agencies to conduct
research with Arabic community workers in terms of establishing employment workshops that specifically address the special needs of Muslim immigrant workers. This helps to develop the appropriate work skills of this particular ethnic and religious group.

This study has highlighted the diverse social and cultural experiences of Lebanese families from an Islamic Sunni background. It also indicates that the notion of ethnic identity tends to intersect issues of family, gender and race in a complex way. Therefore, it is important to move beyond theoretical definitions of ethnicity, and to recognise issues of diversity and difference in regard to a particular social group. Clearly, this indicates that we need further research in two main areas. Firstly, it is important for social researchers to take into account the views of individuals about identity positions within a cultural context. Secondly, there is a need for writers to critically examine the complex situations of social groups at a communal level. This critical analysis opens up new pathways and offers potential researchers new challenges in the area of ethnicity and cultural diversity.
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Dear Participant

Mustafa Rostom is currently undertaking a Doctorate research study at the University of Melbourne. The research study aims to examine the social and cultural practices of Islamic Sunni Lebanese individuals on issues of kinship, ethnic identity, gender and race relations. The researcher is intending to interview members of the Lebanese community in order to gather data as part of the research. Your assistance and co-operation in these interviews would be greatly appreciated. Could you please read the following consent form, and place your signature on the bottom line:

- I understand that this research study is aimed at exploring the social and cultural practices of Lebanese Muslim individuals in relation to the family, ethnic identity, gender and race relations.

- I understand that it focuses on people’s experience of intergenerational and cultural change.

- I understand that the study as a whole is exploring family and kinship relations, racial experiences, the changing meanings of ethnic and gender identities, adults and teenagers, and the cultural practices relating to the social lives of Lebanese Muslims.

- I understand that at any time I can withdraw from this research, and withdraw my contribution from material to be transcribed. I am also aware that this research is for a PhD thesis. However, if published, I will be notified. Furthermore, I understand that I have the right to withdraw my material, if necessary.

- I understand that my participation is anonymous. No names of any individual participants will be used in reports coming from this research. I am also aware that information obtained in this research will remain confidential subject to any legal circumstances. I wish to participate in a two hour interview session. The interview procedure will involve fifty three questions;(under five separate headings.). I also agree to complete questionnaire.
• I understand that the tapes and other material collected at the interview, will remain confidential. I am aware that the material is to be held with the researcher. I understand that the material will not be issued to other researchers without my written permission.

• I am aware that the researcher may re-approach me to finalize any incomplete work, and that I can withdraw at any time from this research. To help with note taking the sessions are being tape-recorded, but at any time I wish the tape recording could be stopped. All participants’ names will be changed when the recordings are transcribed. I can review the transcription to make sure it is accurate.

For further queries, please contact:

Dr. Graham Willett                          Mr. Mustafa Rostom
The Australian Centre                      Doctorate Research
University of Melbourne                   University of Melbourne
Ph: (03) 8344 6865                           Ph: (03) 9350 6154

The purpose of this research study has been fully explained to me by the researcher. I wish to participate in these interviews.

Signature: ........................................

Guardian’s Approval:..................................

(if under 18).
APPENDIX C

PROFILE FORM

1) NAME: ..............................................

2) AGE: ............ years .................. months

3) SEX:   Male ....   Female ....

4) EDUCATIONAL LEVEL: ...........................................

5) 
   a) OCCUPATION: ..................................................
   
   b) ARE YOU CURRENTLY EMPLOYED?   Yes / No

   c) TICK THE GROUP WHICH RELATES TO YOUR ANNUAL INCOME:

       Under 25 000 ( )   Between 25 000 – 35 000 ( )

       Between 35 000 – 50 000 ( )   Over 50 000 ( )

6) PLACE OF BIRTH:

                   Australia......
7) WHEN DID YOU ARRIVE IN AUSTRALIA?

....................month ...............year

8) WHAT LANGUAGES ARE SPOKEN AT HOME?

.............................  ......................  ........................

9) IS YOUR HOME PURCHASED OR RENTED?

..........................................................
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Family and Kinship:

1) How important is family to you?
2) How would you describe your relationship with family members?
3) What are some of the things you do with your family?
4) How would you describe your position within the family?
5) What are some of the rules for living in your family?
6) How would you describe parent-child relationship in your family?
7) What are some of the cultural principles that are still practiced by the whole family today?
8) What are some of the differences between Lebanese families in Australia as opposed to Lebanon?
9) How often do you keep in contact with family members overseas?
10) How often do you travel to be with family members overseas?

Ethnicity and Identity Positioning:

1) What does being a Lebanese-Muslim mean to you?
2) How do you represent yourself as a Lebanese individual in Australia?
3) In what ways is language important in relation to your ethnic background?
4) How would you describe the importance of cultural identity and maintenance during your upbringing?
5) Do you feel your identity is changing?
6) Do you feel you have two sets of identities?
7) In what ways has modern technology influenced your own sense of identity?
8) What struggles have you had to overcome to maintain your ethnic identity, whilst living in Australia?
9) At what moments in your life have you felt strong and positive about your own ethnic background?
10) Have you felt any less strong about your ethnic background since arriving to Australia?
11) How do you feel towards adopting other cultural identities and practices?

Gender Identity / Sexual Positioning:
1) What can you tell me about your role as a parent/child?
2) What are the differences between the rights of men and women?
3) Do you feel your gender rights have changed in Australia?
4) How would you describe your social lifestyle?
5) Who do you go out with to social clubs/events?
6) Do you mostly mix with men and women at social events?
7) Do you want men/women to attend? Why? Why not?
8) Do you prefer your children to go out with you? Why? Why not?
9) Why is it important for the man/woman to work?
10) What do you think are the appropriate ages for males and females to marry? Why?
11) Do you think that marriage tends to affect the gender rights of individuals?
12) What aspirations do you have for your sons and daughters in the future?

Racism and the Community:

1) Do you feel that racism is a growing concern in Australia? Why? Why not?
2) What have been some of the current ‘racial’ experiences faced by the Lebanese in today’s society?
3) Is there a particular reason why it is important for you to live in this area?
4) What have been some of your social experiences in this neighbourhood?
5) How do you get along with other ethnic minority groups?
6) Has there been any social functions, where you have felt isolated from others because of your ethnic background?
7) What has been your experience of racism in school(s)?
8) Have you or someone you know experienced racism whilst visiting a particular health centre?
9) What have been some of your experiences as a worker in an Australian workplace?

Social and Cultural Practices:

Television viewing:

1) What TV programmes do you watch? How are they important to you?
2) In what ways does TV have an influence on your family’s lifestyle?
Friendship:

3) Who are your best friends?
4) What is their occupation?
5) What type of group of friends do you mix with? Why?
6) What are some of the influences do your friends have on you?

Attendance to Ethnic Organisations:

7) What do you do in your leisure time?
8) Are you a member of an Arabic/Ethnic organisation?
9) Why is it important for you to be a member?
10) Do you go to any social/cultural/religious events?
11) Why is it important for you to do so?
APPENDIX E

SURVEY:

1) What is your current position in the family?

Father ( )       Grandfather ( )
Mother ( )       Grandmother ( )
Sister ( )       Step-father ( )
Brother ( )      Step-mother ( )
Adopted member ( )        Child ( )

Other? ( ) (please specify) ....................

2) How would you describe your current family size?

Too large ( )       Fairly large ( )
Small ( )          Fairly small ( )

Other? (please specify) ....................

3) How often do you keep in contact with family members overseas?

Less than a month ( )
Once a month ( )
Two to three months ( )
Four to six months ( )
More than six months ( )

Other? (Please specify) ……………………………..
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………

4) How often do you travel to be with family members overseas?

Once every six months ( )
Once a year ( )
1 year to 2 years ( )
3 years and over ( )

Other? (Please specify) ……………………………..
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………

5) What type of TV network do you watch?

Prime Time TV ( )  Austar ( )
Optus Vision ( )  Channel 31 ( )
Foxtel ( )  SBS ( )
Overseas Satellites ( )
Other Cable TV? ( ) (please specify) …………………
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………...
6) How many hours of TV do you watch per week?

- Approximately 2 hours a day ( )
- Over 2 hours a day ( )
- Approximately 14 hours per week ( )
- Over 14 hours per week ( )
- Other? ( ) (Please specify)

7) What type of programmes do you watch?

................................................................
................................................................
................................................................
................................................................

8) How often do you listen to the radio?

- Once a day ( )
- Twice a week ( )
- More than twice a week ( )
- Once a fortnight ( )
- Other? (Please specify) ..............

................................................................
................................................................
................................................................

9) What radio programmes do you listen to?

..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................
10) How often do you read the newspaper?

   Once a day ( )
   Twice a week ( )
   More than twice a week ( )
   Once a fortnight ( )
   Other? (Please specify) ……………..
   ………………………………
   ………………………………
   ………………………………

11) Which newspapers do you read?

   ………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………………………………………………………

12) How much time do you spend/meet with friends?

   Once A Week ( )
   Twice A Week ( )
   More Than Twice A Week ( )
   Once A Fortnight ( )
   Other? ( ) (please specify) …………………
   …………………………………..
   …………………………………..
   …………………………………..

13) How would you describe your group of friends?

   (Tick more than once, if applicable)

   Mostly males ( )     Mainly adults ( )
   Mostly females ( )    Mainly teenagers ( )
   Mostly Lebanese ( )   Mainly relatives ( )
Mostly Australian ( )  Mainly family ( )
Mainly school mates ( )

Other? (Please specify) ........................................
........................................................................
........................................................................

14) From which nationality do you believe most of your friends come from?

Lebanese ( )  Australian ( )
American ( )  African ( )
Chinese ( )  Greek ( )
Italian ( )
Other Arabic background ( )
Other Asian background ( )
Other European background ( )

Other? (Please specify) ........................................
........................................................................
........................................................................

15) What are your best friends occupations?

........................................................................
........................................................................
........................................................................

16) What do you do in your spare time?

Go to the movies ( )  Visit friends ( )
Go to a nightclub ( )  Visit relatives ( )
Go to a Café ( )  Go for a walk ( )
Go to the gym ( )  Read ( )
Telephone friends ( )  Exercise ( )
Go shopping ( )
Other? ( ) (please specify) .........................
17) Do you belong to any social clubs?

Netball ( ) Sales clubs ( )
Football ( ) Swimming ( )
Other Sports club ( ) Scouts ( )
Athletics ( ) Science club ( )
None ( )
Other? ( ) (please specify) ___________

18) Do you attend any of the following social events?

Arabic Festivals ( )
Public Ethnic Seminars ( )
Religious Lectures/Meetings ( )
Ethnic Community Organisations ( )
Other Cultural Events? ( ) (please specify) ___________

19) Are you a member of an ethnic/social organisation?

Yes ( ) (please specify) ___________
No ( )

20) What have been some achievements of the organisation?

Publications of Books ( ) Public Seminars ( ) Social Functions ( )
Pamphlet Promotions ( ) Video Production ( ) Newsletters ( )
Editorial Displays ( ) Magazine Distribution ( ) Conferences ( )

Other? ( ) (please specify) ..................................................

.................................................................

.................................................................
### APPENDIX: A

**TABLE 1: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TEN LEBANESE MUSLIM FAMILIES FROM LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Yegli</th>
<th>Mohamad</th>
<th>Nahli</th>
<th>Hani</th>
<th>Amar</th>
<th>Oula</th>
<th>Deib</th>
<th>Bassam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>western</td>
<td>western</td>
<td>southern</td>
<td>southern</td>
<td>north-eastern</td>
<td>western</td>
<td>northern</td>
<td>eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td>Parents Unemployed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>P/t worker</td>
<td>Daughter P/t worker</td>
<td>Daughter P/t Worker</td>
<td>Daughter P/t worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>P/t worker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** f = female; m = male; fp = female parent; mp = male parent; d = daughter; s = son

**TABLE 2: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TEN LEBANESE MUSLIM FAMILIES FROM MIDDLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Zaki</th>
<th>Spee</th>
<th>Yessi</th>
<th>Sabah</th>
<th>Mai</th>
<th>Merhi</th>
<th>Lail</th>
<th>Salah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
<td>m/f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Participants</td>
<td>mp-43</td>
<td>fp-38</td>
<td>s-18</td>
<td>mp-45</td>
<td>fp-37</td>
<td>d-19</td>
<td>mp-44</td>
<td>fp-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
<td>north-western</td>
<td>western</td>
<td>eastern</td>
<td>north-western</td>
<td>western</td>
<td>southern</td>
<td>north-western</td>
<td>western</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>m-doctor</td>
<td>m-accountant</td>
<td>m-lecturer</td>
<td>m-geologist</td>
<td>m-teacher</td>
<td>m-social worker</td>
<td>m-engineer</td>
<td>m-Arabic community worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f-accupunct-ure therapist</td>
<td>f-nurse</td>
<td>f-teacher</td>
<td>f-Arabic teacher</td>
<td>f-teacher</td>
<td>f-Arabic teacher</td>
<td>f-social worker</td>
<td>f-dental nurse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son p/t worker</td>
<td>daughter p/t worker</td>
<td>son p/t worker</td>
<td>son p/t worker</td>
<td>daughter p/t worker</td>
<td>son p/t worker</td>
<td>son P/t worker</td>
<td>son P/t worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** f = female; m = male; fp = female parent; mp = male parent; d = daughter; s = son
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Rostom, Mustafa

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