2010

'Becoming Me': perceptions of identity and self-efficacy among Australian and Saudi Arabian Muslim girls

Najah El-Biza

University of Wollongong

Recommended Citation

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
‘BECOMING ME’:
Perceptions of Identity and Self-Efficacy among Australian and Saudi Arabian Muslim Girls

by
Najah El-Biza
B.Ed. (Hon.)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education

2010
Identity and Self-efficacy
I, Najah El-Biza, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Najah El-Biza

20 October, 2010
DEDICATION

To Saad... you never failed to be by my side in truly the way I needed you,

To Mum & Dad... for raising me to be ME by nurturing my sense of self and strong efficacy,

To Rajaa, Ahmed, Maryam, Sarah & Omar... for being patient with Mummy,

And to all the Muslim girls... be strong in your journey to ‘becoming’ the best person you can be!
Praise be to Allah, I thank Allah for giving me the strength and knowledge to get through this long journey. Without his blessings I would not have come so far.

I would like to express my gratitude to the schools, the teachers and especially the young Muslim girls from both Australia and Saudi Arabia who participated in this study. Without their shared thoughts and support this study would never have been possible.

A special thank you to Samira Sidani and Umm Bakr Chakachi for willingly taking the time and effort in administrating and collecting data from Saudi Arabia. My gratitude also goes to A/Prof Mohan Chinnappan for his time and efforts in helping me with the use of the SPSS program. I would also like to thank the numerous people who gave me their advice, ideas, opinions, criticisms and support over the years.

Words are not sufficient to thank my Supervisor Dr Christine Fox with all my heart. Her support, encouragement and expert guidance and advice over the last ten years during the process of both the Honours and PhD theses have been unparalleled. I will be forever indebted to her for the hours, days and years she spent on both my research and listening to the many personal experiences that impacted on my life. We started as student and teacher, and I hope we end this particular journey as friends.

My greatest appreciation also goes to A/Prof Narottam Bhindi for his supervision, particularly during the writing of the thesis. His wise advice and wonderful stories opened up new worlds and new avenues to explore. I am grateful for his respected support and encouragement.

My deepest gratitude to my family and friends who have supported me throughout my life and encouraged my educational aspirations, especially during the long journey in completing this thesis. Above all my parents, Anwar and Hanan for their continuous prayers; my sister Huda for her support, assistance in transcribing and especially for keeping me laughing; and my brothers Jamil, Ahmad and Abdallah for their often eager encouragement to ‘get on with it!’.

To my darling children Rajaa, Ahmad, Maryam, Sarah and Omar, I would like to give all my love for making me proud to be their Mum. Their patience with Mum having too much ‘homework’ was admirable and appreciated, and I look forward to spending more precious time with them all.

And most importantly, my utmost gratitude goes to my husband Saaddeddine, my source of comfort and determination. His support surpassed expectations providing me with his understanding, generosity, dedication and love. He was there by my side, assisted in transcribing and other administrative tasks, and was present when I most needed him. Without him I would not have come so far and survived this journey.
This study sought to uncover the perceptions of self-efficacy and personal identity of Australian Muslim girls in private Islamic schools and those in public schools. It aimed to explore how the social and cultural contexts of the girls have influenced their experiences using their own voices. Insight into the self-efficacy and identity of Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia gave the study a distinctive and worthy addition. The external context of education has changed and with global events creating an environment for Muslim children that is both threatening and challenging to their sense of place, it was appropriate at the time to investigate how children described their identity and self-efficacy.

The pertinent theories to this study of identity, hybridity, and self-efficacy were explored portraying the importance of understanding how children are continuously negotiating their possible identities within various experiences and contexts. This study employed the interpretive paradigm, which underlies qualitative methods to illuminate the central questions asked about the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim primary school girls. A mixed method case study research approach was considered a suitable methodological framework for this study as it united the qualitative exploration of the girls own spoken narratives in their natural setting with the quantitative use of pre-structured data.

The data collected during this study included student questionnaires, student interviews, teacher focus groups and teacher questionnaires. This study was undertaken in seven primary school settings where 125 students from Years 5 and 6 from schools in Australia and Saudi Arabia participated. Of these students, 74 were from two public schools and three private Islamic schools in Australia. From among these students, eight girls from the private schools and 13 girls from the public schools participated in the interviews. In addition, 51 students from both a private international school and a public school in Saudi Arabia completed the survey. Ten teachers also took part in the focus groups and questionnaires. The data gathered from this research were analysed by applying a coding system, set out by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which includes open, axial and selective coding.
A number of salient concepts have been raised in this study underlying theoretical concerns of identity formation and self-efficacy that can help illuminate the sense of place and sense of self of pre-adolescent Muslim girls. Emerging themes of significance to this study revolved around theories of multiple identities, Islamic identity and hybridity. The primary idea of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’ was a recurring theme. The concept of Islamic identity raised issues of cultural capital, shared cultural codes, separateness, and stereotypical views of ‘other’ and ‘visibility’ of Muslim girls. The investigation of self-efficacy accentuated the researchers aim to consider how these young Muslim girls perceived themselves as individuals and in relation to their home, school and community contexts in the current, often hostile, global environment.

The thesis concludes with recommendations and important implications for providing new avenues for researchers, teachers and leaders of schools to develop insightful, relevant and appropriate policies and programs that will assist pre-adolescent Muslims in developing a positive self-identity and higher levels of perceived self-efficacy. The need for a concept such as ‘interculturality’ is highlighted as a possible solution for both minority and mainstream students.
Identity and Self-Efficacy
Identity and Self-efficacy

Contents

Thesis Certification ................................................................. i
Dedication ........................................................................ iii
Acknowledgements ................................................................ iv
Abstract ................................................................................ v
Contents ................................................................................ viii
List of tables ........................................................................ xiii
List of figures .......................................................................... xv
Glossary of terms .................................................................. xvi
Prologue .................................................................................. xx

Chapter One  Introduction ......................................................... 1
  1.1 Introduction ................................................................... 1
  1.2 Background to the study ............................................... 1
  1.3 Purpose of the study and research questions .................. 3
  1.4 Significance of the study .............................................. 4
  1.5 Personal subjectivities and limitations ......................... 5
  1.6 Summary of chapters ................................................. 6

Chapter Two  Literature Review ............................................... 11
  2.1 Introduction ................................................................... 11
  Chapter map ....................................................................... 13
  2.2 Theories ......................................................................... 14
    2.2.1 Identity ................................................................. 14
    2.2.2 Hybridity ............................................................. 18
    2.2.3 Self-efficacy ........................................................ 23
    2.2.4 Gender, education and ‘self’ .................................. 27
  2.3 Applications ................................................................. 31
    2.3.1 Notions of self: Cultural and Islamic identity .......... 31
    2.3.2 Cultural synthesis: Australian, Muslim or both? ...... 38
    2.3.3 A visible presence: Agency and efficacy ............... 40
    2.3.4 Single-sex schooling: Advantage to girls? ............ 43
4.8 Validity and trustworthiness
  4.8.1 Internal validity
  4.8.2 External validity
  4.8.3 Ethical considerations

4.9 Conclusion

Chapter Five  Phase One: Questionnaire Findings

5.1 Introduction

Chapter map

5.2 The questionnaire
  5.2.1 Self-efficacy questionnaire
  5.2.2 Review of self-efficacy findings
  5.2.3 Open-ended questions
  5.2.4 Review of open-ended questions findings
  5.2.5 The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Muslims (MEIM-M)
  5.2.6 Review of MEIM-M findings

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter Six  Phase Two: Interview findings

6.1 Introduction

Chapter map

6.2 Participant profiles

6.3 The interviews
  6.3.1 Identity
  6.3.2 Self-efficacy
  6.3.3 Review of interview findings

6.4 Conclusion

Chapter Seven  Phase Three: Teacher focus groups and questionnaires

7.1 Introduction

Chapter map

7.2 Teacher focus groups in the Australian context
  7.2.1 Choice of student sample
  7.2.2 Difference between girls then and now
  7.2.3 Changes with Muslim girls specifically
  7.2.4 Perceptions regarding Muslim girls
  7.2.5 Positive experiences with Muslim girls
  7.2.6 Negative experiences or concerns with Muslim girls
  7.2.7 The home environment
  7.2.8 The teacher effect
  7.2.9 The roles of leadership

...
7.2.10 Review of teacher focus group findings ......................................................... 232

7.3 Teacher questionnaires in the Saudi Arabian context ........................................... 234
7.3.1 Choice of student sample .............................................................................. 235
7.3.2 Difference between girls then and now ....................................................... 235
7.3.3 Changes with Muslim girls specifically ....................................................... 236
7.3.4 Perceptions regarding Muslim girls ............................................................. 237
7.3.5 Positive and negative experiences with Muslim girls .................................... 239
7.3.6 The home environment .............................................................................. 239
7.3.7 The teacher effect ...................................................................................... 240
7.3.8 The roles of leadership ................................................................................ 240
7.3.9 Review of teacher questionnaire findings .................................................... 241

7.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 243

Chapter Eight Discussion ......................................................................................... 245

8.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 245
Chapter map ............................................................................................................ 247

8.2 Notions of self and cultural synthesis ............................................................... 248
8.2.1 Multiple identities ...................................................................................... 248
8.2.2 Islamic identity ........................................................................................... 252
8.2.3 Hybridity .................................................................................................... 255

8.3 A visible presence: self-efficacy and influencing factors ..................................... 258
8.3.1 The ‘inner self’ factor ................................................................................ 259
8.3.2 The teacher factor ...................................................................................... 260
8.3.3 The curriculum factor .............................................................................. 263
8.3.4 The peer factor .......................................................................................... 265
8.3.5 The home environment factor ................................................................... 267

8.4 Differences between school contexts ............................................................... 268
8.4.1 Identity ....................................................................................................... 269
8.4.2 Self-efficacy ............................................................................................... 270
8.4.3 Single-sex schooling ................................................................................... 274
8.4.4 Differences in teacher perspectives ............................................................ 276

Chapter Nine Recommendations and Conclusions ............................................... 279

9.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................... 279
Chapter map ............................................................................................................ 280

9.2 Implications and recommendations: Leadership and the curriculum for Muslim girls 281
9.3 Limitations of the study ................................................................................... 287
9.4 Suggestions for future research ....................................................................... 288
9.5 Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 290
List of tables

Table 4.1: Summary of data gathering methods__________________________________________ 91
Table 5.1 Items relating to emotional support provided by teacher _______________________ 108
Table 5.2 Sse9 'My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset' ______________________ 109
Table 5.3 Items relating to care and interest teacher shows in students' learning _______________ 109
Table 5.4 Sse10 'My teacher cares about how much I learn' ________________________________ 110
Table 5.5 Items relating to getting along with the teacher ________________________________ 110
Table 5.6 Items relating to whether peer tutoring was encouraged by the teacher ____________ 111
Table 5.7 Sse23 'My teacher lets us ask other students when we need help with our work' _______ 112
Table 5.8 Items relating to teachers encouraging peer respect. ____________________________ 113
Table 5.9 Sse26 'My teacher wants us to respect each others' opinions'______________________ 114
Table 5.10 Items relating to teachers being approachable ___________________________________ 114
Table 5.11 Sse37 'I can live up to what my teachers think of me' __________________________ 116
Table 5.12 Ase14 'My teacher thinks I am smart' ________________________________________ 118
Table 5.13 Ase13 'I never answer questions from the teacher in class' ______________________ 120
Table 5.14 Items relating to social relationships with peers ________________________________ 121
Table 5.15 Items relating to care classmates had for their learning _________________________ 122
Table 5.16 Sse19 'Most students in this class do not care about how much I learn' _____________ 123
Table 5.17 Items relating to confidence girls had during conversations and interactions with peers ______ 124
Table 5.18 Sse29 'I can live up to what my peers expect of me' ____________________________ 125
Table 5.19 Items relating to cooperating with classmates ____________________________________ 126
Table 5.20 Items relating to being a valuable group member ______________________________ 127
Table 5.21 Items relating to ability compared to classmates _______________________________ 129
Table 5.22 Ase28 'When other students are distracting me in class, I often find it difficult to keep concentrating on my work' ____________________________________________ 130
Table 5.23 Ase40 'I find it easy to participate in class discussions' ___________________________ 131
Table 5.24 Items relating to family expectations, assistance and involvement____________________ 132
Table 5.25 Items relating to personal social abilities ______________________________________ 134
Table 5.26 Items relating to dealing with problems ________________________________________ 135
Table 5.27 Sse33 'I can live up to what I expect of myself' ___________________________________ 137
Table 5.28 Items relating to effort in academic aspects ____________________________________ 138
Table 5.29 Items relating to level of security about ability ________________________________ 139
Table 5.30 Ase3 'When unexpected problems occur, I do not handle them very well' ____________ 141
Identity and Self-efficacy

Table 5.31 Items relating to importance of school and education 142
Table 5.32 Ase10 'I go to a good school' 142
Table 5.33 Items relating to academic aspirations 143
Table 5.34 Items relating to beliefs about achievements 144
Table 5.35 Items relating to reasons for doing school work 146
Table 5.36 Islamic identity achievement subscale - 7 items 157
Table 5.37 Islamic Affirmation and Belonging subscale - 5 items 158
Table 5.38 Islamic Behaviour subscale – 2 items 159
Table 5.39 Non-Muslim Orientation subscale - 6 items 161
Table 6.1 Student participant profiles 167
Table 7.1 Profile of focus group teachers in Australia 209
Table 7.2 Profile of questionnaire teachers in Saudi Arabia 235
List of figures

Figure 4.1 Sequential Explanatory Design [Adapted from Creswell et al. (2003)] __________________________ 83
Figure 5.1 Sse20 'I find it easy to just go and talk to my teacher' ___________________________ 111
Figure 5.2 Sse21 'My teacher discourages us to share ideas with one another in class' ___________________________ 113
Figure 5.3 Sse31 'I can get teachers to help me when I get stuck on school work' ___________________________ 115
Figure 5.4 Ase9 'I would get better grades if my teacher liked me better' ___________________________ 117
Figure 5.5 Ase18 'Kids who get better grades than I do get more help from the teacher than I do' __________ 119
Figure 5.6 Sse22 'Most students in this class want me to come to class every day' ___________________________ 121
Figure 5.7 Sse22 'I find it easy to start a conversation with most students in my class' ___________________________ 124
Figure 5.8 Sse35 'I’m not very good at getting a friend to help me when I have social problems' __________ 126
Figure 5.9 Ase7 'When the class does group work, I see myself as a valuable group member' __________ 128
Figure 5.10 Ase19 'During group work, I often feel unaccepted by other group members' __________ 128
Figure 5.11 Ase15 'My classmates usually get better grades than I do' ___________________________ 129
Figure 5.12 Sse40 'I can easily get my parents to take part in school activities' ___________________________ 133
Figure 5.13 Sse5 'I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends' __________ 134
Figure 5.14 Sse36 'I find it easy to resist peer pressure to do the things in school that can get me into trouble' ___________________________ 136
Figure 5.15 Sse39 'I stand firm to someone who is asking me to do something unreasonable or inconvenient' ___________________________ 136
Figure 5.16 Percentage of girls who agreed to questions regarding 'effort' ___________________________ 139
Figure 5.17 Ase6 'It is not hard for me to get good grades in school' ___________________________ 140
Figure 5.18 Ase13 'When I am old enough I will go to college' ___________________________ 143
Figure 5.19 Ase20 'I am smart' ___________________________ 145
Figure 5.20 Ase32 'I am good at finishing homework assignments by deadlines' ___________________________ 145
Figure 5.21 Ase37 'An important reason I do my school work is because understanding the work we do is important to me' ___________________________ 147
Figure 5.22 lid1 'I have spent time trying to find out more about my religious group, such as history, traditions, and customs' ___________________________ 158
Figure 5.23 lid11 'I have a strong sense of belonging to my own religious group' ___________________________ 159
Figure 5.24 lid16 'I participate in cultural practices of my own religious group, such as special food or customs' ___________________________ 160
Figure 5.25 Percentage of girls who agreed from each school context for items in the Non-Muslim Orientation Subscale ___________________________ 162
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abayah</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alhamdu-lilah</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Allah</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eid</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hadith</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hajj</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Halal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Haram</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hasanaat</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hijab</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insha-Allah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khushu’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met-hajbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met-hajbeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Identity and Self-efficacy

written as Koran or Qur’an.

**Ramadan**  
The ninth month in the Islamic calendar. It is considered a special month in which Muslims fast, refraining from eating and drinking during daylight hours. They also seek to improve themselves by staying away from sins, and praying and reading the Quran more.

**SAW**  
An acronym used after the name of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) specifically, and it is a form of showing respect. (SAW) - Sallalahu Alaihi Wa-salam - Allah's praise and peace be upon him.

**Separate/single sex education**  
The practice of conducting education where male and female students attend separate classes or in separate buildings or schools. Single-sex education in many cultures is advocated on the basis of tradition, as well as religion and is practised in many parts of the world.

**Subhan-Allah**  
Arabic word meaning ‘Glory be to Allah’.

**Sunnah**  
The way of life prescribed as normative for Muslims on the basis of the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and interpretations of the Quran.

**Tarbiyah/tirbyi**  
Arabic word translated as ‘education’ or ‘the education and upbringing of the people’

**Taqwa**  
A concept in Islam that is interpreted by some Islamic Scholars as God consciousness. It has many further understandings and interpretations. Taqwa may mean piousness, fear of Allah, love for Allah, and self restraint.

**Toub-al-Nabawi**  
It is the health advice and exemplary practices that Prophet Muhammad (SAW, may God bless him and grant him peace) imparted to his community, and it occupies a wide place in the world of medicine today.

**Ummah**  
An Ummah is a community or a people. It is used in reference to the community of Believers or Muslims across the globe because they consider themselves brothers and sisters in Islam.
Identity and Self-Efficacy
Growing up in a Western context, a public school with a small number of ethnic minority students and even fewer Muslims, I thought I was distinctively different. I had what nobody else had: a second language, the skill to translate for teachers who had new non-English speaking students, the long black hair, the tantalising food, the parents with the unique ‘costume’, and great stories from the constant flow of relatives visiting our house and living overseas.

‘I’ was Lebanese!

But then upper primary school years hit, and I became the weird ‘wog’, the person whose mum wore a ‘tablecloth’ on her head, who bought smelly food and did not know what porridge was.

But ‘I’ was as Australian as anyone!

Then high school came and I put the hijab on—things got worse with people’s attitudes (students and teachers alike) – so did that change me? I became stronger, more confident, more sure of who I was and what I was going to achieve. I was going places, despite, no, because of what others thought!

‘I’ was an Australian-Lebanese Muslim!

Finally, I entered the adult world and the reality of society and its prejudices struck me hard. University and work life presented me with greater obstacles and the further restriction of being a woman. But of course as an adult trying to assert herself in both academic and domestic domains, I had something to prove to myself and to society by succeeding in my aspirations as being a wife, a mother and a career woman.

‘I’ was becoming a successful Australian-Lebanese Muslim Woman!

Given this personal background, this thesis will be part of my own journey of ‘becoming’, investigating my identity and self-efficacy. This time I am the outside researcher and yet with insider awareness.
1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, its objectives and its organisation. The background to the study is first presented outlining the motivation behind conducting this particular research topic. The purpose of the study is also outlined, along with the research questions investigated, the significance of the study, the researcher’s personal subjectivity, and the study's limitations. A brief summary of the chapters is also included. A glossary of terms to assist the reader with particular terminology used in the thesis has been included before the prologue.

1.2 Background to the study

During recent years, Muslims in Australia have experienced increasing tensions in the community. This is despite the fact that the Muslim community in Australia is only a small part of Australian society making up 1.7 per cent of Australia’s population (ABS, 2007). Muslims in Australia are progressively adopting the impression that Australia is not giving them a ‘fair go’ and they are torn between being considered foreigners and being accepted as Australians. Although their communities are constantly being asked to ‘stand up as Australians’ and co-operate with those who do not seem to accept them (Clennell et al., 2006; Wakim, 2006), they are rarely identified as such. Studies from as early as the late 80’s have highlighted the maltreatment of Muslims with legal Acts, such as the Race Discrimination Act, doing little to help protect their rights. The Race Discrimination Act for example, covers other religious groups such as Jews and Sikhs, but it does not include Muslims and thus protection of Muslims under Australian federal law is limited (HREOC, cited in Hassan, 2007). A study by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2004) revealed that anti-Muslim sentiment is ‘very strong’ in Australia. It is claimed that Muslims are the most discriminated against and victimised Australians, that there has been a widespread rise in violence against Muslims and Arabs, and 90 per cent of female respondents reported experiencing racism, abuse or violence (Hassan, 2007).
The climate of fear, which media has been stirring since 9/11 and the Bali bombings, tends to be transformed into an element of hate against Muslims and Middle Eastern people. Overall, the media has played a major role in imposing particular stereotypical representations of Muslims (Said, 1997; Kabir, 2005). A recent report by the Independent Centre of Research Australia [ICRA] has stressed one of the biggest challenges facing young Muslim Australians is religious and racial discrimination by the media, turning young Muslim Australians into a marginalised, alienated group within their own society (Hassan, 2007; and see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1).

With all this in mind, one must consider the impact on students, in particular, a student’s rejection of values and practices of mainstream schools and classrooms (Nasir, 2004). Children sometimes fail by choice in a school culture that they view as unsupportive or alienating. Other children seem to exhibit resilience, find strength and confidence, in other words their identity and self-efficacy are more firmly grounded. Multiculturalism has been a feature of Australian society for over three decades, with various policies introduced over the years to ensure the success of a tolerant multicultural society (Hickling-Hudson, 2003; DIAC, 2007). However, despite the efforts of government policies and community groups, there exist numerous dissident opinions towards the social policy of multiculturalism (Hage, 1998) with evident hostility towards ‘non-whites’, including the Muslim community. In spite of this apparent hostility and intolerance towards Muslims, there are suggestions that Muslim girls are overcoming the discrimination and establishing a strong and vibrant place in Australian society (and see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1).

With about 100, 000 Muslim children attending Australian schools (ABS, 2006), and with the majority (85-90%) in public schools (Donohue Clyne, 2001a) it was one aim of this study to find out the relevance of these concerns to Muslim girls’ sense of identity and self-efficacy in multicultural Australia, with some reference to the political, cultural, social, and religious context. Some insightful analysis was also conducted with girls in Saudi Arabia, a major Islamic country, to discover whether these concerns are relevant to girls in a non-Western context.
1.3 Purpose of the study and research questions

Purpose

The underlying purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of self-efficacy and personal identity of Australian Muslim girls in private Islamic schools and those in public schools. The study also included insight into the perspectives from Saudi Muslim girls in a public Islamic school and those in a private International school. This study examined the perceived experiences of the participants through their open-ended responses during interviews, giving the girls a voice. Global events have generated changing and challenging environments for children creating a requisite for both mutual understanding and for supporting students to construct positive identities. The particular contribution that this study makes to the existing information lies in the youth of the participants, who were pre-adolescent, and who therefore were not all identifiable as Muslims by wearing the hijab, nor were they experienced enough to feel the full impact of societal values or prejudices. Thus, it was appropriate at the time to investigate how the children described their identity and self-efficacy in order to gain insight into the needs of this particular group. This is particularly true for Muslim students with the concept of ‘Islamophobia’ becoming more real in society. Studies have shown that Muslims in Australia are increasingly feeling marginalised and harassed, and thus inquiring about the well-being and condition of young students’ identity and self-efficacy was deemed essential. This need was further emphasised in order to add to what little research appears to have been carried out with pre-adolescent girls presenting their own voices. While this group is not as easy to research, and their answers are based on a relatively short amount of lived experiences, the study has resulted in gathering some important data.

The research aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the ways in which girls actually identify themselves and locate themselves in both the Muslim community and the Western community, and the extent to which the context/place of the school was significant in enhancing the self-efficacy and personal identity of these girls. In addition, the study aimed to identify whether this differed according to different cultural groups in different contexts by adding valuable data from girls in Saudi Arabia. It was an expected outcome that significant data would
emerge from the research to recommend positive action in schools and communities that might influence the development and affirmation of identity and self-efficacy.

**Research Questions**

The study investigated the following questions to address perceptions of identity and self-efficacy of pre-adolescent Muslim girls.

1. How do Muslim girls in different cultural contexts identify themselves?
2. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of identity?
3. In what ways do Muslim girls develop self-efficacy?
4. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of self-efficacy?
5. What implications do perceptions of Muslim girls regarding their identity and self-efficacy have for leadership practices, the school and its community in influencing the positive development of their identities and improving their levels of efficacy?

**1.4 Significance of the study**

As a result of significant global events, ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’ are two words that have become increasingly used today. There are about a hundred thousand (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) Muslim children attending schools in Australia. This information combined with the thought of ‘Islamaphobia’ increasing in society has led to growing concerns amongst Muslim communities for the sense of place and sense of self of Muslim students. The specific issues of identity and social and academic self-efficacy are significant concerns to educational practitioners and researchers. Although numerous studies have been conducted on the identity and self-efficacy of students in a variety of educational settings and from various social perspectives, few have portrayed the situation of Muslim students, particularly pre-teens. Therefore, this study will make a valuable contribution to the literature in that it will explore the self-efficacy and sense of identity of Muslim girls and whether the students’ responses reflected that the current social political
climate has had any influence in shaping this. This study has the additional unique opportunity of adding insight into the perceptions of girls from a Saudi Arabian context, offering a distinctive cultural perspective to the literature. Future implications for this study will relate to the leadership of schools and how to provide for the particular needs of Muslim girls to enhance their self-efficacy and affirm their identity in positive ways.

1.5 Personal subjectivities and limitations

Of great relevance to this study is that the researcher is an Australian Muslim woman herself, who, as a visitor in Saudi Arabia, realised the unique opportunity of conducting this study. While recognising the advantage of having an insider view, it is a limitation in terms of the potential for positioning myself within the experiences of these girls. However, the fact that I was aware of this limitation allowed me to take it into account while conducting this research.

Furthermore, the results of this study need to be considered with caution as the study conducted was confined in a number of ways. Time constraints were an issue as the research needed to be proposed, conducted, analysed, and written up within the university’s time allowance. Furthermore data collection was made difficult as participating schools found it constraining trying to fit me into their very busy school schedules. Therefore the number of interviews and questionnaires that were conducted were limited to suit the time available. Again, time affected the number of participants. It seemed feasible that approximately 200 children would take part in the survey (50 from each school context) and 24 of these children would be the focus for interviews (6 from each school). However, only 125 students took part in the survey and 21 were interviewed, as the researcher could not wait for other students to bring in their consent forms. This included an unequal representation from each school with a larger proportion of girls being from the public schools in Australia. In addition, although the researcher spent over a year in Saudi Arabia to collect data, it was not possible to interview the Saudi girls.

It should be understood that young students may respond in a way that may seem more acceptable to the researcher whom they knew was also a teacher. To safeguard against the potential for misleading information being presented, data were triangulated with the
researcher’s and teachers’ own observations, and through in-depth interviews with groups of the students.

The researcher can only present the findings from this study of four school contexts in a particular geographical area and readers are encouraged to compare these with their own teaching context. This supports the case study design of a bounded study to allow for in-depth exploration to occur, but it is important to realise that broad generalisations about the outcomes of the research cannot be made.

Many possible factors which affect student perceptions have not been included in the case study questions, such as parent perspectives through in-depth interviews with parents or caregivers. Moreover, the study did not concentrate on measuring the actual levels of self-efficacy of the girls or their identity, but rather on the perceptions and the possible factors influencing them according to the girls’ own descriptions. In other words, the study was not an evaluation of student identity or self-efficacy and did not attempt to quantify such indicators.

1.6 Summary of chapters

**Chapter One**

The first chapter in this thesis introduces the study, the background of the research, and poses the research questions that guided the study. The remaining chapters explore the literature, the methodology, the results of the investigation and finally a discussion on the findings.

**Chapter Two**

This chapter describes the theoretical framework which underpins this study and the application of these theories as found in the literature. Within the theoretical framework, major theories of identity, hybridity, and self-efficacy are explored portraying the importance of understanding how children are continuously negotiating their possible identities within various experiences and contexts. A selection of theoretical debates on gender, education and single-sex schooling is also
included, albeit not exhaustively. Section 2.3 describes how these theories are relevant to the study especially the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls.

Accordingly, the theories framing this study are anchored in Albert Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy; Homi Bhabha’s theory of ‘hybridity’; gender and education related theories; and theories of identity which encompass all of the above theories. Following the theoretical framework, a selection of studies which applied each of these theories to particular situations or contexts were reviewed. The chapter culminates by bringing together the various themes in this literature review to discuss studies found specifically on the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls. This chapter forms the foundation for the analysis of what is primarily a study of Muslim experience.

Chapter Three

The contextual background described in Chapter Three covers the school and community contexts in which this study was conducted. This chapter provides a summary of relevant research regarding private Islamic and public schooling in Australia, together with a comparative outline of schools in Saudi Arabia, especially in relation to Muslim girls. The issues that concern this research are highlighted in this chapter, including the social interactions of students with teachers and peers, and the relevance to the study of school curricula. A key area covered in the chapter is the social context of Muslims in the community and in schools, as well as in the home environment. The chapter ends with an exploration of the role of schools, highlighting leadership and curriculum for Muslim girls.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four details the methodology adopted to undertake this study. As the research was predominantly based on the students’ own interpretations of self, and teachers’ interpretations of their students’ behaviour and academic performance, the study adopted an interpretive-qualitative paradigm as the underlying framework to present the various ‘realities’ or ‘truths’ the girls constructed from their experiences and perceptions. A mixed method research approach, using the ‘sequential explanatory model’, was employed as a suitable methodological model to
incorporate the strengths from the complementary quantitative and qualitative data gathered (Punch, 2005; Hunt, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

The research was conducted as a multi-site case study in order to collect detailed information about and self-perceptions of Muslim pre-adolescent girls in particular contexts. The study was substantially conducted with Australian Muslim girls from the State of New South Wales; however, it also drew on the cultural/religious ethos and values of Saudi Arabian girls to illuminate possible differences or similarities between diverse cultural contexts. The data collected during this study included responses from student questionnaires, student interviews, teacher focus groups and teacher questionnaires. Descriptions of the procedures adopted in this study have been included regarding the analysis of the data, considerations of validity and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. This chapter presents relevant literature to support the use and appropriateness of the methods selected to answer the research questions presented and finally to discuss the purpose of the study.

Chapter Five

The findings are presented in three chapters. This chapter discusses the results of the data collected from student questionnaires. The participants in the questionnaires were 125 students from Years 5 and 6 from schools in Australia and Saudi Arabia. Of these students, 74 were from two public schools and three private Islamic schools in Australia. In addition, 51 students from both a private international school and a public school in Saudi Arabia completed the survey. The findings of the data utilised the SPSS program to support the analysis of the structured response answers based on 80 efficacy items and 23 identity items. Analyses on the short, open-ended responses, based on 4 self-efficacy questions, are reported separately. A brief review of the self-efficacy and identity questionnaire findings has been provided at the end of each section.
Chapter Six

This chapter continues on from the previous chapter, presenting the findings of the student interviews. From among the 125 students who completed the questionnaires, eight girls from the private schools and 13 girls from the public schools in Australia participated in the interviews. The chapter includes brief profiles of the students who participated in the interviews. Data from the student interviews were coded and classified using conceptualisation and comparative analysis, so that particular themes that arose out of the interviews could be described in greater depth, under the two subsections, identity and self-efficacy. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings from the interviews.

Chapter Seven

This chapter analyses the third phase of the study, presenting the findings from the teacher focus groups and teacher questionnaires. The chapter includes brief profiles of the teachers who participated in this phase of data collection. Responses from the teacher focus groups and the open-ended questionnaires revealed important findings, which have been analysed and presented under particular themes regarding their perceptions of the Muslim girls they have worked with. The chapter includes a review of the findings from the focus groups and teacher questionnaires after each section.

Chapter Eight

A number of salient concepts have been raised in this study underlying theoretical concerns of identity formation and self-efficacy that can help illuminate the sense of place and sense of self of Muslim primary school girls. This chapter returns to the research questions posed at the beginning of this research to summarise the findings and link those findings with some of the relevant evidence from other studies reported on in the literature review. The chapter argues the extent to which pertinent theories raised in the literature review are relevant to explain and describe ideas
and issues raised from the findings, including those that contrast with previous research or add insight into previously unexplored interpretations.

Chapter Nine

The findings were compared and contrasted in order to arrive at some conclusions and implications for future research and application to the classroom. The recommendations presented in this chapter are drawn from the research and are intended to provide new avenues for researchers, teachers and leaders of schools to develop insightful, relevant and appropriate policies and programs. These will assist pre-adolescent Muslim girls in developing a positive self-identity and higher levels of perceived self-efficacy.
Chapter Two ~ Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical framework which underpins this study and the application of these theories as found in the literature. Within the theoretical framework, the major theories of identity, hybridity, and self-efficacy are explored portraying the importance of understanding how children are continuously negotiating their possible identities within various experiences and contexts. A selection of theories on gender and education is also included, albeit not exhaustively. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 describe how these theories are relevant to the study especially the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls.

Why is it that some children fail, sometimes by choice, in a school culture that they view as unsupportive or alienating, while others seem to exhibit resilience, find strength and confidence, in other words their identity and self-efficacy are more firmly grounded? The issue of identity is a significant concern to educational practitioners and researchers who acknowledge that humans have a need to be recognised and affirmed. Through questioning who we are, we reflect on knowing our place in the world and how we are viewed by others, searching for a sense of belonging (Rutherford, 2007). Research has shown how positive identity formation can contribute to valuable educational outcomes (Yeung, 2003). Self-efficacy has also been a critical concern not only to educators but also to social specialists in various domains. Beliefs of efficacy have been studied and analysed in diverse educational contexts as its importance to the academic and social successes of children has been supported to a great extent. Students who display adaptive engagement in class feel confident that they can learn and tend to be more motivated and use more self-regulatory strategies, thus improving their focus on mastery and feelings of efficacy (Yamauchi and Greene, 1997; Patrick et al., 2007).

Accordingly, the theories framing this study are anchored in Albert Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy; Homi Bhabha’s theory of ‘hybridity’; gender and education related theories; and theories of identity which encompass all of the above theories. Firstly, theories of identity are presented to illustrate the possible ways that Muslims would describe themselves and the intricacies and
complexities involved in identity formation. The question of having multiple identities and whether one is dominant is discussed. ‘Hybridity’ as a possible symbol of the ‘cultural synthesis’ (Bhabha, 1994; Manyak, 2002; Hoon, 2006) of Muslim experiences is then explored. The notion of hybridity is presented including various explanations and critiques of the theory. Next, the issues raised by self-efficacy theorists and the implication of one’s beliefs in their own abilities are examined. This includes the various perspectives on self-efficacy and more specifically Bandura’s notion of self-efficacy. Finally, issues regarding gender and education, and single-sex education specifically are discussed. This topic portrays the importance of recognising gender issues as influencing key aspects of girls’ sense of identity, and of self-efficacy, particularly as they concern the current study of girls in primary schools.

Following the theoretical framework, studies which applied each of these theories were reviewed in section 2.3. Most of the studies concerning identity examined the experiences of minority students and the difficulties they faced creating a ‘notion of self’ and developing a personal identity they accepted. These studies include specific examples on cultural and Islamic identity. Studies that applied elements of hybridity theory in portraying Muslim experience are presented in the following section. Literature on self-efficacy and agency are then presented, emphasising particular studies which have looked at efficacy and culture and efficacy of Muslims. Lastly, selected studies portraying the controversial issue of single-sex schooling in education are reviewed. Finally, section 2.5 draws together the various themes in this literature review to discuss studies found specifically on the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls.

This chapter presents these three main sections to ensure that clear depictions of the underlining theories and experiential evidence are included where relevant to what is primarily a study of Muslim experience. The following diagram illustrates the flow of concepts examined in this chapter.
Chapter Two ~ Literature Review

Identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls

- Notions of self: Cultural and Islamic identity
- Cultural Synthesis: Australian, Muslim or both?
- A visible presence: Agency and efficacy
- Single-sex schooling: Advantage to girls?

Theories

- Identity
- Hybridity
- Self-efficacy
- Gender, education and ‘self’
2.2 Theories

In this section, I critique the key theoretical approaches to my study, as an overview and a framework for investigating the research questions. The first approach is based on theories of identity including cultural and religious identity, with an emphasis on concepts of hybridity. This includes a critique of the socio-cultural theories of Homi Bhabha and his postcolonial concepts of hybridity and identity. The second related approach is based on the social-cognitive theory of Albert Bandura of self-efficacy and identity. As this study only included female participants it was deemed necessary to include theories on gender and education, particularly regarding single-sex schooling and development of self.

2.2.1 Identity

*We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves*  
*(Giddens, 1991, p.75)*.

In order to understand human experience, how individuals conduct themselves and relate to their surroundings, one must explore the concept of identity (Greenburg and Mahony, 1995; Alghorani, 2003). Anthony Giddens (1991), a widely cited author on identity, describes the search for a personal identity as a relatively modern phenomenon, possibly originating from Western individualism, where pre-modern culture emphasised relatively fixed attributes of identity such as lineage, gender, and social status (amongst others). However, nowadays people are constantly asked how they define or think about themselves, which almost always relates to how others define them and what opportunities are open to them (Greenburg and Mahony, 1995; Yeh and Drost, 2002). As local and global history and politics shape these opportunities, their impact on individual lives can be established by exploring identities. However, identities are not readily made for people to ‘unproblematically slip into’ (Rutherford, 1990) nor are they permanent or fixed (Gilroy, 2000; Buddington, 2001; Shah, 2006) but instead they are in a constant evolving process of ‘becoming’ rather than simply ‘being’ (Hall, 1996a; Peek, 2005). In Hall’s (1996a) words, identity construction is based on:

*Some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. (It is) a construction, a process never completed – always ‘in process’* (Hall, 1996a, p.2).
The struggle for identity and personal understanding is centred between the exterior world and our interior selves, between self and the other (Rutherford, 1990). More specifically, self-identity is something that needs to be consistently created and sustained in the impulsive activities of the individual with the ‘fundamental aim of building/rebuilding a coherent and rewarding sense of identity’ (Giddens, 1991, p.75). Identities tend to be defined in three ways: through difference; through multiple identity formation with the most salient or relevant depending on the context; and through the external influences of the wider society where identities are being given new meanings and mobilised for political purposes (Greenburg and Mahony, 1995). The meanings attached to belonging to one group or another and how such senses of belonging shape individuals’ relationships to others around them are open to immense change. As Buddington (2001) expresses:

*Children gain knowledge of self, their environment and their race through invention and re-invention, through the restless, curious, impatient, continuous, hopeful inquiry of their psychosocial, parental, and humanistic world* (Buddington, 2001, p.141).

Giddens (1991) describes this invention and re-invention as a form of ‘self-observation’ and ‘self-interrogation’ where the individual continuously practises ‘reflexivity of the self’. Regardless of the importance placed on development of the self, if children find themselves outside the boundaries of social acceptance, attaining the required ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) necessary to achieve success in mainstream society can be compromised by feelings of isolation and nonconformity (Zine, 2001). This lack of cultural capital leads to lower rates of academic success and a deficiency in ‘exhibit(ing) different modes and patterns of cultural consumption and expression in a wide gamut of domains’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.160). The importance of cultural capital is highlighted when examining cultural identity and the benefits positive identity formation produces for students.

**Cultural Identity**

*I just say, ’I was born here. My parents are from India’. It clears up every question* (Salma, in Peek, 2005).

Culture is theoretically understood as ‘difference’ (Bhabha, 1996; Hall, 1996a), highlighting the distinctive identities of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, race, class and nationality which combine to form a cultural identity. Hall (1990) presents two distinct descriptions of cultural
identity. The first portrays it as a reflection of common historical experiences and shared cultural codes; the second describes cultural identity as a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’ (Hall, 1990). Cultural practices and social others are props in the development, maintenance and construction of identity, since identity is viewed as inherently social and cultural (Nasir, 2004). Identity building involves a continual negotiation and renegotiation in cultural and social spheres, especially between children and schools (Nasir, 2004). Many authors have portrayed the benefits of positively developing the different parts that make up a cultural identity. For example, ethnic identity formation has been linked to psychological adjustment and overall well-being of children and adolescents (Britto, 2008). A major aspect of cultural identity, ethnic identity refers to ‘one’s sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership’ (Rotheram and Phinney, 1987, p.13; Phinney et al., 2001b). Difficulties are posed, however, when children have to deal with two or more groups they feel they belong to. While some choose one culture or ethnicity over the other, it is more common to find individuals adopting multiple identities symbolising ‘cultural synthesis’ (Bhabha, 1994; Manyak, 2002; Hoon, 2006).

It is important to note, however, the disputes regarding multiple identities and the process of acculturation, particularly in regards to integration and separation. The issue of how individuals develop a sense of community around national, cultural, ethnic, and racial group membership is crucial in situations of cultural ‘clashing, mixing, and integration’ (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005) or as will later be described as notions of ‘hybridity’. This clash of cultures causes conflicts between the different cultural values, attitudes, and expectations within individuals rather than between different groups (Phinney, 1999, cited in Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). Internal struggle is further propagated by the extent to which minorities are willing or allowed to retain identification with their culture of origin as well as the extent to which they are willing or allowed to identify with the mainstream or dominant culture (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). John Berry (1997) has described the negotiation between these two central issues as resulting in four distinctive acculturation positions: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalisation (Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001a; Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005; Awad, 2010). Integration, representing high identification with both cultures, and separation, representing identification largely with the ethnic culture, have been the two most promoted positions. However, authors have emphasised that individuals cannot be described using one or the other, but rather they
move between their various cultural orientations by engaging in cultural ‘frame switching’, described by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) as ‘shifting between different culturally based interpretative lenses in response to cultural cues’ (p.1018).

However, studies have also found that promoting either of these concepts has been unsuccessful in providing for minority cultures. Studies on acculturation have overlooked individual variations in the way multiple cultural identities are negotiated and organised within individuals and minority groups (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). In his work on integration and separation, Roy Brooks (1996) argues for the middle road of ‘limited separation’ as he portrays the failure of policies that support either extreme. He argues that both integration and separation have been unsuccessful in improving self-esteem or racial esteem, academic performance and racial relations within schools and in society generally (Brooks, 1996). Similarly, Phinney et al. (2001a) have found that different minority groups prefer and are characterised by each of the four possible identity categories of assimilated, separated, marginalised, and integrated. Nonetheless, they argue for strengthening both ethnic and national identity by encouraging a bicultural or integrated identity as well as acknowledging and supporting the varying interactions of minorities with mainstream society.

Our study and those of other researchers support the view that a bicultural or integrated identity is generally associated with higher levels of overall well-being than are the other identity categories (Phinney et al., 2001a, p.505).

Experiences of multiple identities require new paradigms for examining citizenship and belonging (Ifekwunigwe, 1997). Individuals of mixed or multiple origins or ethnicities are frequently negotiating different identities depending on ‘where they are’ both physically and psychologically and with whom they are interacting (Ifekwunigwe, 1997; Ramzan, 2009). Concepts related to multiple or integrated identities are often described as ‘hybridity’, a term which has caused a multitude of definitions, some of which have been separated from meanings associated with ‘multiple identities’. Nonetheless, hybridity as a concept has been covered extensively by the literature and is imperative to the study of identity. Some of the more pertinent issues associated with this study and hybridity have been included in the following section.
2.2.2 Hybridity

_The place of my hybridity is also the place of my identity_ (Minh-ha, 1992, p.129).

Over the last two decades hybridity has become a focal issue in cultural, colonial and postcolonial debates. Postcolonial theorists in particular (such as Gayatri Spivak, 1990, 1996; Homi Bhabha, 1994, 1996; Stuart Hall, 1990, 1996a, 1996b; and Paul Gilroy, 2000) have used the notions of hybridity and in-betweenness to question ‘fluid identities, cultures, and locations’ (Asher, 2005). The concept of hybridity, as described by Homi Bhabha, has been the most influential, controversial, and widely cited work in postcolonial studies (London, 2003; Loomba, 2005).

**Definitions of hybridity**

_There is no single, or correct, concept of hybridity: it changes as it repeats, but it also repeats as it changes_ (Young, 1995, p.27).

Hybridity has been defined in numerous ways beginning from its early use of botanical and biological mixing of two different species (Young, 1995; Coombes and Brah, 2000; Hutnyk, 2005) to describing ‘hybrid’ humans as half-breeds and half-castes (Young, 1995). Hybrid humans conveyed meanings of being ‘impure’, ‘racially contaminated’ and ‘genetically ‘deviant’’ (Young, 1995; Loomba, 2005; Hoon, 2006; Laragy, 2007). However, in recent discussions of hybridity, the term has come to symbolise ‘cultural synthesis’ (Bhabha, 1994; Manyak, 2002; Hoon, 2006) and the ‘modalities in and through which multicultural conditions get lived out, and renewed’ (Goldberg, 1994, p.10, cited in Hoon, 2006, p.11). Even more so today, hybridisation is seen as an issue in cultural, political and linguistic domains (Coombes and Brah, 2000; Laragy, 2007). The usage of the term ‘hybridity’ has described the travelling and mixing of cultures where Diaspora and the scene of migration witness the ‘diasporised’ meeting the host (Young, 1995; London, 2003; Gregoriou, 2004; Hutnyk, 2005). Laragy (2007, para.2) adds that ‘hybridity’ refers to ‘the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation’. Hall (1990, 1996b) describes it as ‘a cut-and-mix’ process, and Loomba (2005) refers to it as a ‘strategy premised on cultural purity and aimed at stabilizing the status quo’ (p.146).
These various definitions show how the term hybridity conjures up numerous images to do with mixing and combining, particularly during the ‘moment of cultural exchange’ (Hutnyk, 2005). However, it is important to note that hybridity theory remains a contested concept and needs to be seen as a process rather than a fixed identity (Hutnyk, 2005). Hybridity, then, is seen as an ‘unending, unfinalizable process which preceded colonialism and will continue after it’ (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p.42).

### Bhabha’s notion of hybridity

Homi Bhabha describes hybridity as an ‘interstitial passage between fixed identifications’ that ‘entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.4). It is a ‘difference ‘within’’ (p.13) that is portrayed by one author as a struggle for anyone who finds themselves located at the interstices as they ‘often experience multiple, contrasting identifications and struggle to arrive at meaningful syntheses across differences’ (Asher, 2005, p.1082).

Hybridity is a concept derived from Bhabha’s broader theories of postcolonialism, and is a social construction to describe the response to the constant diasporic movements across cultures that are prevalent today. Bhabha proposes the development among those whose location and heritage include multiple identifications of culture as a ‘third space’ where ‘the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.39; Bhabha, 1990; see also Fumiko, 2004). This third space suggests a sense of instability of signs and symbols and a change in the cultural language of racial pureness and fixity, making the structure of meaning and reference an uncertain process (Birr Moje et al., 2004; Fumiko, 2004; Carton, 2007; Laragy, 2007). Bhabha expressed this change in meaning, stating that ‘even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew’ (p.37). Rutherford (1990; see also Young, 1995) describes the ‘third space’ as enabling other positions to emerge and not just tracing two original moments from which the third emerges. Bhabha illustrates that all colonial identities exist in a ‘state of deconstructive liminality’ as opposed to existing in a domain of pure and indigenous subjectivity (Bhabha, 1994; Loomba, 2005; Carton, 2007; Laragy, 2007). He also stresses the interdependence of coloniser and colonised (Loomba, 2005; Laragy, 2007).
More specifically, Bhabha explores the notions of ‘cultural hybridities’ as relevant to the examination of cross-cultural boundaries and the movement of migrants across boundaries of cultural difference (Bhabha, 1994; Selby, 2004). The migrant is depicted by Bhabha (1994) as being in an ‘act of going beyond’ (p.4), ‘a moment when something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation’ (p.12). The veracity of experiencing hybridity is present for many Australians. The story of migration in Australia is closely related to the global Diasporic movements of the 20th Century and is a part of the history of multicultural Australia (Hage, 1998). Policies of multiculturalism appear to fortify conceptions of hybridity, as mono-culturalism is being derailed by traditions of ‘tolerance’ and ‘cultural pluralism’, albeit not very successfully according to some authors (Hage, 1998).

In her article, Selby (2004) describes how Bhabha uses hybrid language poems and art installations to demonstrate this process of something new created ‘while grounded in identifiable but disparate old meanings’ (p.148). She continues that, although hybridisation is a ‘delight’, the process involves struggle and an ‘unhomely’ moment, a space of creativity and loss that relates the ‘traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence’ (Bhabha, 1994, p.11). This process of creating something new, an integration, while losing something at the same time, results in an individual never again seeing themselves as of only one coherent community or identity (Selby, 2004; Barron, 2007). This has led to the creation of dually or even multiple hyphenated identities (such as the Muslim-Australian-Lebanese/Indian/etc students in this study) as displaced identities of post-independence and diaspora (Shohat and Stam, 1994). Further, the sense of discomfort of being in-between and the sense of loss are some manifestations of this process (Selby, 2004).

Hybridity, a fundamental element of Bhabha’s challenge to the residual effects of colonial and neo-colonial power, allows ‘colonial knowledge’ to be ‘re-inscribed and given new, unexpected and oppositional meanings, as a way of ‘re-staging the past’’ (Rizvi et al., 2006, p.254; see also Young, 1995; Loomba, 2005). It allows diasporic people in particular, to challenge ‘exclusionary systems of meaning’ and to undermine the symbolic binaries, particularly between ‘east’ and ‘west’, and which form the foundation of colonialism, nationalism and patriarchy (Aboul-Ela, 2004; Rizvi et al., 2006; Laragy, 2007).
Critiques of Bhabha’s notion of hybridity

Hybridity according to Homi Bhabha has been very influential for other theorists and postcolonial authors. However, the various and often conflicting approaches to this issue include certain negative critiques of the positive readings Bhabha uses in presenting his notion of hybridity (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Kortenaar, 1995; Dirlik, 1999; Lo, 2000; Ang, 2001; Manyak, 2002; Parry, 2004; Chan, 2004; Loomba, 2005; Hoon, 2006; Rizvi et al., 2006; Carton, 2007,).

One of the criticisms made of Bhabha’s notion of hybridity is concerned with his idea of ‘third space’. It has been argued that this description of hybridity infers that:

‘Mixedness’ cannot exist as an ontological state that is an aberration of a pure sense of racial identity ... this seems to place hybridity outside of the realm of historical consciousness since it is always already there as a state of being: omnipresent and universal (Carton, 2007, p.145).

This interpretation of ‘third space’ has been problematic for some authors as being especially confusing for critical ‘mixed-race’ studies since it suggests that ‘mixedness’ does not effectively propose the problems or locate the multiple meanings of what it means to be ‘hybrid’ (Ifekwunigwe, 1999) as it is a ‘universal normative condition’ (Carton, 2007).

Furthermore, Rizvi et al. (2006) point out that Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as resistance to the exercise of colonial power is ‘criticised for its valorisation of hybrid cultural forms’ (p.254). They argue that the ‘processes of cultural hybridization are never neutral, but involve a politics in which issues of economic and cultural power are central’ (p.254). Hybridity is useful as a theoretical framework to cure ‘cultural essentialism’; however difficult questions such as how hybridity takes place, the form it takes in particular contexts, the consequences it has for particular groups, and when and how particular hybrid formations are progressive or regressive, are not answered (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Chan, 2004). In addition, both Parry (1994) and Loomba (2005, p.152) criticise the notion of hybridity as it does not accurately present the ‘dynamics of anti-colonial struggle’ by disregarding the significance of the conflict between the colonisers and the colonised. Parry (2004) further argues that Bhabha’s view of hybridity seems to address the elite in the metropolis rather than unprivileged members of community who do not have the same choice of commuting between cultures.
Hybridity has further been disputed as having ‘paradoxical historical meanings’ and can often be contradictory where at times it is ‘transgressive and potentially radical’ at the same time as intending to stabilise the status quo (Loomba, 2005; Carton, 2007). A further contradiction of hybridity is that it does not allow for ‘different differences’ (Dirlik, 2000) and thus hybridity can become ‘a gloss that reduces all differences to a generic condition of mixture’ even though it is usually used to disturb restricted social and cultural groups (Manyak, 2002, Celebrating and Critiquing Hybridity section, para.2). Lo (2000) employs the term ‘happy hybridity’ to argue that this notion has been hastily accepted as being unproblematic; and others (Chan, 2004; Carton, 2007) believe that hybridity has the potential to support, rather than undermine, predominant notions of ‘race’ and has not taken into consideration the social and economic relations of power. Carton (2007) and Loomba (2005) further emphasise that the notion of hybridity needs to be historicised as it has become disjointed from the places and historical experiences which give it meaning. Loomba (2005) argues that Bhabha has reduced ‘colonial dynamics to linguistic interchange’ where everything outside colonial culture is handled with vagueness. In the words of Parry (1994, p.9), what Bhabha offers ‘is The World according to The Word’. Kortenaar (1995) simply portrays hybridity as ‘a metaphor that does not define a particular political program’ (p.40).

Others interpret hybridity as yet another way of rationalising the power of the colonisers to incorporate the colonised, or the power of the dominant ‘other’ to assimilate the ‘other’. For example, Simon During (2000) has suggested that concepts such as hybridity need to be re-examined as it causes postcolonialism to become a ‘reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category’ which is useless to the analysis of the global processes. He maintains that in order to understand how ‘colonial assumptions remain embedded within the new discourses and practices of globalisation’, a more critical postcolonialism is needed.

As Ang (2001) states, we need to consider that hybridity is not a solution and can never be a question of ‘harmonious merger and fusion’, but rather notifies us of the difficulty of living with differences. Hybridity however, is still not accepted by some people because of the overpowering and dominant ideology of identity, nationality, race and ethnicity; with mixture still seen as ‘contamination, a breach of purity and infringement of identity’ (Ang, 2001, p.200). Many see hybridity as a support for dissent which has been described as being threatening to society and needing persecution (Webb, 1996). On the other hand, dissent has also been promoted as
‘absolute individualism’, where every person has the right to choose their religious faith or other forms of cultural identity (Seed, 1996). More specifically, dissent is viewed as a living culture moving on or as Sunder (2010) describes ‘cultural dissent’ as a challenge by individuals within a community to modernise, or broaden, the traditional terms of cultural membership. Today, more and more individuals are claiming a right to dissent from traditional cultural norms and to make new cultural meanings—that is, to reinterpret cultural norms in ways more favourable to them. Not satisfied to choose between tradition and modernity, people in the modern world want both. They want culture, but on their own terms.

2.2.3 Self-efficacy

It is suggested by social cognitive theory that ‘people act on their judgments of what they can do as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions’ (Bieschke, 2006, p.80). Self-efficacy, a significant development in social cognitive and learning theory, has been a crucial theoretical concept for numerous researchers (see Pajares, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 2000; and Betz and Hackett, 2006). Albert Bandura, a noted theorist, is a pioneer of self-efficacy. He remains one of the key theorists in the field and his scale of self-efficacy is a useful tool for social cognitive researchers (Rule and Griesemer, 1996).

Definitions/perspectives of self-efficacy

Even though self-efficacy theory is viewed as only one approach (Betz and Hackett, 1997), Bandura (1997) proclaimed that ‘self-efficacy remains at the heart’ of the broader study of social cognitive theory. Many authors have reiterated Bandura’s idea of self-efficacy as generally referring to the beliefs a person has of their ability to effectively perform a task or behaviour (Schunk, 1984; Betz, 1997, 2000; Bieschke, 2006). Lent, Brown and Hackett (2002) describe self-efficacy as representing a ‘dynamic set of self-beliefs that are specific to particular performance domains and that interact complexly with other person, behaviour, and contextual factors’ (p.262).

As Bandura professes, there are no specific or general measures of efficacy. The number of behavioural domains is limitless (Betz, 2000) and thus for the purposes of this study only social and cognitive efficacy have been covered. The research examining social efficacy is relatively less
than that found on academic or cognitive efficacy. Social efficacy is defined by Smith and Betz (2000) as ‘an individual’s confidence in her/his ability to engage in the social interactional tasks necessary to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships’ (p.286). Or more concisely, social efficacy is ‘confidence relating socially with others’ (Patrick et al., 2007, p.86). The relationship between social skills and academic competencies has been shown to be significant (Smith and Betz, 2000). Academic and social self-efficacy are important in educational contexts as students who display adaptive engagement in class feel confident that they can learn and tend to be more motivated and use more self-regulatory strategies, thus improving their focus on mastery and feelings of efficacy (Yamauchi and Greene, 1997; Patrick et al., 2007).

**Related views and precautions in applying self-efficacy theory**

An overarching view of self-efficacy theory is that people are not only products of social environments but also producers that have a hand in selecting and shaping their environment (Bandura, 1997). Some theorists would argue against this view. Skinner (1971) for example, argues that freedom is an illusion and human behaviour is shaped and controlled by environmental contingencies. He states that ‘a person does not act upon the world, the world acts upon him (sic)’ (p.211).

Even theories that do speak of self-efficacy differ in their understandings of this concept. Some authors for example use the terms self-esteem and self-efficacy as if they were the same phenomenon. Bandura (1997) however, strongly rejects this representation stating that the two are completely different and refer to different things. He explained that self-efficacy relates to judgments of personal capability, whereas self-esteem relates to judgments of self worth. Self-concept has also been an ambiguously used term. Nevertheless, Bandura (1997) emphasises that self-concept does not do justice to the complexity of efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, Bandura (1997) found it worthwhile to differentiate between ‘perceived self-efficacy’ and ‘locus of control’. These phenomena are mistakenly viewed as the same but they are also entirely different, the former referring to beliefs about whether one can produce certain actions and the latter referring to beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes.
One of the major mistakes many researchers make when considering the theoretical context of self-efficacy is regarding the theory as a ‘trait concept’ rather than a ‘cognitive appraisal or judgment of future performance capabilities’ (Betz and Hackett, 2006, p.6). As Bandura states, self-efficacy must be measured against a behaviour (Bandura, 1997, 2006(b)) as it is not a universal trait but ‘a differentiated set of self-beliefs linked to distinct realms of functioning’ (Bandura, 2006(b), p.307). Therefore, assessment of self-efficacy cannot progress unless and until the relevant behaviour domain is carefully defined and delineated (Pajares, 1995; Betz and Hackett, 2006).

A product of self-efficacy is the concept of agency, about which an extensive literature exists and which is discussed in the thesis as part of Bandura’s ‘agentic perspective’. Nevertheless, this research is predominantly focused on the developing identities of pre-adolescent girls, and so has concentrated on the development of self-efficacy, rather than taking a critical theoretical approach to analysing power and social change implied through a broader examination of agency.

**Bandura and self-efficacy**

In Bandura’s words, self-efficacy, a key aspect of human agency, refers to ‘beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the course of actions required to produce given attainments’ (Bandura, 1997, p.3). Bandura (1997) believes that people are both producers and products of social systems and therefore the issue of self-efficacy is critical within networks of socio-structural influences. People will not attempt to make things happen if they believe they have no power to produce results (Bandura, 1997, 2006(a); see also Pajares, 1995 and Betz, 2000). Betz (2000) stresses that efficacy beliefs are a major basis of action where beliefs of personal efficacy direct people’s lives. The development and exercise of personal control is therefore greatly supported by the capacity to secure desired outcomes and avoid undesired ones, allowing people to contribute more effectively to the direction their lives take (Schunk, 1984; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 2000). These beliefs in efficacy influence a number of areas including the courses of action people follow, how much effort they consign to given endeavours, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in managing taxing
environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they fulfil (Bandura, 1997(a), 1997(b); Schunk and Meece, 2005).

More simply, self-efficacy is viewed as a ‘multidimensional mechanism’. As previously stated, the two areas of self-efficacy expectations covered in this study are social and cognitive self-efficacy perceptions.

An important aspect to consider is the great influence culture has on self-efficacy. The way efficacy beliefs are developed, structured, exercised and used varies across cultures (Bandura, 2002; Marat, 2005). Studies have shown how culture specific determinants impact on efficacy and performance achievement (Yamauchi and Greene, 1997; Earley et al., 1999; Gibson, 1999; Marat, 2005; Pulford et al., 2005) as well as on differences in students’ choice of learning strategies based on the country in which they are located (Chye et al., 1997). This includes whether a person comes from a figurative collectivist culture or an individualist society. Much has been written about the differences of these purported dichotomies, with a portrayal that collectivist cultures place less emphasis on self-efficacy. However, Bandura (1997, 2002) rejected this notion stating:

*People live their lives neither entirely autonomously nor entirely interdependently in any society ... Interdependence does not obliterate a personal self (Bandura, 1997, p.32).*

He pointed out that within the collectivist element, cultures vary greatly and that individuals are also affected by the context and consequently adjust their behaviour. For example, collectivists display a high level of ‘communalism’ with in-group members, but with out-group members they behave differently. As such, Bandura (1997) argues that self-efficacy is equally valued by collectivists because without a strong sense of self, people are easily overwhelmed by hardships in ‘their attempts to improve their group life through collective effort’ (p.32).

Self-efficacy theory is based on ‘triadic reciprocal causation’ (Bandura, 1997). The three major classes of determinants - behaviour, person and environment - will vary in their level of influence depending on the different activities and different circumstances (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Pajares, 1995). In addition, individuals draw their efficacy from a number of internal and external sources, varying in strength according to the immediate environment and specific behaviour. Bandura (1977) mentions four sources through which efficacy expectations are learned and modified. These include: experiences of successfully performing a behaviour (mastery experiences),
observing others model (vicarious learning), feedback (verbal persuasion), and lack of anxiety (emotional arousal) (see also Betz and Hackett, 1997, 2006; Betz, 2000; Barnes, 2004; Klassen, 2004; Schunk and Meece, 2005). Authors have also added three other sources influencing self-efficacy development including families, schooling, and peers (Schunk and Meece, 2005). For example, a highly capable student may experience feelings of high efficacy while participating in group work with lower ability students, while their efficacy decreases when they are placed in a group with other high ability students. This is in line with the big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE) introduced by Marsh (1987, 2008). This social comparison can be a key to promoting a sense of self-efficacy when children are placed with students of specific abilities (Schunk, 1984; Schunk and Meece, 2005).

According to Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy, ‘efficacious people are quick to take advantage of opportunity structures and figure out ways to circumvent institutional constraints or change them by collective action’ (Bandura, 1997, p.6). There are many facets of the self-efficacy theory that need to be considered including self regulation of motivation, proxy control, relinquishment of personal control, outcome expectancy theories, self guidance by envisioned possible selves, and control beliefs. Although these facets have not been specifically discussed in this review, their importance has been emphasised throughout the review including the following section on the effects of gender and education on self-efficacy and identity of girls. The following section is also important as it endeavours to rationalise the choice of focusing on female participants in this study.

2.2.4 Gender, education and ‘self’

An influential and respected author on gender issues, Madeleine Arnot (2009) describes the importance of considering gender within any social context, including the social significance of education. She writes:

*Gender relations are deeply embedded within other sets of social relations including religious, ethnic, community relations and social class cultures that affect men’s and women’s differential access to citizenship rights and entitlements* (Arnot, 2009, p.3).
Thus, as educational institutions are historically considered as sites for shaping relations between citizens, it is essential to recognise gender issues as influencing key aspects of girls’ sense of identity, and possibly of self-efficacy, particularly as they concern the current study of girls in primary schools. As is later discussed in this chapter, there is a prominent gendered aspect to identity formation. This is acutely experienced by Muslim women who are visibly marked as Muslims by what they wear (see for example section 2.3.3 regarding visibility and self-efficacy).

In this study of Muslim students in primary schools, it is important to note that the public school in Saudi Arabia was a single-sex (girls) school and two of the private schools approached in Australia had single-sex classes in the upper grades, whereas the public schools in Australia and the private international school in Saudi Arabia were co-educational. One of the issues for the researcher was whether there would be significant differences in the findings from the girls from different schools. A selection of recent literature on single-sex education was therefore researched. This is but one small part of the extensive literature written from a feminist standpoint on, for example, the status of girls and women in the community, on issues of power, equity, equality of opportunity, access, and on discrimination in language and the curriculum.

As highlighted earlier in Chapter One, the main focus of this study was not to explore fully those broader theoretical constructs of gender relations, and the decision was made not to include Muslim boys as comparison: the focus was primarily on the girls’ Muslim experience, without attempting to compare their viewpoints with those of male students, a topic for another thesis. In addition, the heart of the thesis was in the attention given to the perceptions of the girls themselves. The researcher acknowledges the significance of gender as a key marker of identity and self-efficacy. As a sub-set of this concern, it is shown here that single-sex schooling is a significant issue in most Muslim communities in both Australia and Saudi Arabia.

**Single-sex education and gender differences**

The literature on single-sex education and gender differences is extensive. Research on these issues vary from supporting single-sex education (Harker, 1997; Haag, 2000; Sullivan, 2009) to challenging the separation of boys and girls at school (Jones and Jacka, 1995; Harker, 1997); from explaining the different learning styles, learning experiences and influences that may affect
females and males (Warner, 2001; Funk 2002) to claims of equity, equality and ‘good’ education suffering if proper distinctions were not made between particular groups of boys and girls (Collins et al., 2000).

For decades now, researchers have been concerned about the different levels and types of attention that boys receive from teachers compared to that which girls receive (Single Gender Education, 2001; Warner, 2001; Funk, 2002; Arnot and Fennell, 2008; Arnot, 2009; Sullivan, 2009). Many studies have focused on boys’ concerns as the achievement of some girls has surpassed those of some boys. The cry ‘What about the boys!’ in the 1990s was a call to look anew at the gender differences in schools (see Foster, 1994, 2000 and Arnot, 2009). A number of authors have criticised the idea of looking only at gender difference, particularly when these differences are translated into forthright ‘disadvantage’ (Collins et al., 2000). Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000), report that differences both between and within gender groups need to be examined, with emphasis on the analysis of which trends and which differences matter and why. They also recommend that public debate needs to shift from the ‘boy versus girl’ approach and refocus on incorporating a ‘which boys, which girls?’ approach as differences within gender groups appear to be more significant than differences across gender.

Nonetheless, several studies have presented findings based largely on gender differences with little consideration for other factors. For example, some studies have found that more attention is given to boys than to girls in a co-educational classroom. These studies have found that boys are called on more often than girls, teachers most often direct the ‘challenging questions’ to the boys while the female students receive less ‘difficult questions’; and they are far more likely to ‘praise and give positive reinforcement’ to the intellectual contributions of males in the classroom, while making note of the socialisation skills of girls (Single Gender Education, 2001; Warner, 2001). As a consequence of the different levels and types of attention girls are receiving, it has been found that many young women experience a decline in self-esteem as their voices become silenced (Single Gender Education, 2001). Although some findings from studies have shown that girls had more favourable beliefs of self-efficacy as compared to boys, and others found no gender differences (Schunk and Meece, 2005), others have found that female students appear to have a diminished level of self-efficacy in educational settings with classroom interactions reinforcing messages of ‘low ability’ expectations (Funk, 2002; Schunk and Meece, 2005). Such findings have
led to the support of single-sex educational settings in many countries around the world. This has further been explored later in section 2.3.4, which presents studies regarding issues of single-sex schooling.

Contrary to some of the above findings, some scholars have reasoned that the source of self-esteem may actually differ in the different educational settings (Haag, 2000), therefore affecting the level of self-esteem of girls in various ways. Others have stated that the locus of control used may not have given an overall conclusive result of the origins of the high self-esteem found in girls from single-sex schools (Haag, 2000). Moreover, a significant number of studies have reported contrasting findings to those mentioned above, portraying that the belief that girls will do better in a single-sex school is not supported by data collected from research (Haag, 2000; Harker, 1997).

Some researchers have also gone so far as to say that co-educational settings have more potential for supporting and implementing counter sexist practices, dealing simultaneously with the curriculum and the attitudes of teachers, girls and boys (Harker, 1997). Furthermore, researchers have noted that when separating girls in classrooms, it is assuming that it is the girls who need to be remedied rather than alternative issues such as the curriculum, the school, or some other aspect of the girls’ social and cultural context (Jones and Jacka, 1995; Harker, 1997). They further state that the differences between girls will be made invisible if they are considered a homogenous group and as a problem (Jones and Jacka, 1995; Harker, 1997).

Several researchers have neither advocated nor opposed single-sex education. Byrne (1993, cited in Harker, 1997), for example, concluded that there was no convincing evidence on either side of the argument. Alternatively, studies have raised the issue that the emphasis should not be based on whether students were advantaged or disadvantaged by being in single-sex or co-educational settings, rather the emphasis should be on how these settings influence achievement behaviours through their interactions with learning variables (Harker, 1997). Students themselves have commented in one study that it would not matter if students attended a co-ed or single-sex school, or if their teachers were female or male, as long as all teachers were sensitive to the concerns of young women (Harker, 1997).

These final points suggest that the formulation of specific school policies and programs should be at the forefront of gender specific, and single-sex versus co-educational concerns. Many
researchers have noted the significance of gender considerations stressing that education reformists need to seriously take into account these research outcomes when developing policies regarding the promotion of ‘learning to learn’ (Yeung, 2003).

2.3 Applications

In this section, studies which applied each of the above mentioned theories are reviewed. Firstly, studies concerning identity were examined where the experiences of minority students and the difficulties they faced creating a ‘notion of self’ and developing a personal identity are presented. Specific examples on cultural and Islamic identity are also presented. Then, studies which applied elements of hybridity theory in portraying Muslim experience are detailed followed by literature on self-efficacy and agency with emphasis on efficacy and culture, and efficacy of Muslims. Lastly, selected studies portraying the controversial issue of single-sex schooling in are reviewed.

2.3.1 Notions of self: Cultural and Islamic identity

Identity

Many studies have shown how positive identity formation can contribute to valuable educational outcomes (Yeung, 2003) and is one of the most important psychological tasks for an adolescent (Rosenthal, 1987). Thus the onus is on educators to be aware of the many factors that contribute to the ‘identity and sense of self’ of students including race, ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, and generation (Proweller, 1999; Yeh and Drost, 2002). These factors may all be described as being part of cultural identity which plays a major role in the construction of one’s whole identity.

Cultural identity

There is a push for educators to consider the significance of cultural identity of students, particularly for those who are not from the dominant culture. Most of the research articles examined (Phinney, 1990; Sosa, 1990; Phinney et al., 1997; Proweller, 1999; Shwartz, 1999; Garcia and Molina, 2001; Henze, 2001; Phinney et al., 2001b; Baskin, 2002; Lipka, 2002; Yeh and Drost, 2002; Lue, 2003; Kabir, 2008; Su and Costigan, 2009) take into account the plight of students from
minority groups and the difficulties in finding a balance between their own cultural identities and that of the dominant culture they live in. These students must function in schools whose goals and values are set up and organised by the dominant culture, therefore creating in students contrasting ‘notions of self’ (Yeh and Drost, 2002) subsequently having an intense effect on their identity and cultural self-esteem (Zine, 2007). As the dominant culture represents itself as ‘the culture’ (Brah, 1996), students must learn to negotiate between these differing identities while facing tacit but powerful stereotypes and messages about their development and personal identity. In addition, there are many influences on the success or failure of negotiating identities, including counselling concerns, minority cultural values and beliefs, differences in behaviours, language, worldview, and past power experiences with the dominant culture (Yeh and Drost, 2002). It is the minority who usually negotiate their identities as their evaluation of success or failure is based on the norms of the dominant system (Nasir and Saxe, 2003). This has led to trends within some cultures or communities to create their own educational institutions (such as the Islamic schools described in this study) or even to withdraw from formal schooling altogether. For example, a study on the Romani community in Australia (known by the mainstream as gypsies) demonstrates the difficulties the Romani people have traditionally had towards mainstream education, wary of the consequences of assimilation and integration with mainstream cultural values (Morrow, 1998). Thus, many Romani have chosen the path which does not involve negotiating identities, but rather they stress the importance of upholding their Romani identity and traditional way of life.

Nonetheless, students often choose to adopt multiple ethnicities or identities (Yeh and Drost, 2002; Kabir, 2008; Su and Costigan, 2009). In a study by Kabir (2008) for example, many of the Muslim students described themselves as both Australian and their country of origin. However, one student noted that he would identify himself differently depending on who he was with – to his friends he was Iraqi, to strangers he would say Australian, and ‘the French side I keep to myself’ (Kabir, 2008). Not knowing how people would react to his French heritage (as his mother was French), this student decided to play it safe and keep the information to himself. Consequently, negotiating between identities is a complex process (Yeh and Drost, 2002; Su and Costigan, 2009), in which students need support to cope and succeed in forming a positive concept of themselves. This will assist students by contributing to their social-emotional development and self-esteem in school (Yeh and Drost, 2002). Being able to identify as a member of a group and
having a positive sense of belonging to that group, is found to be an imperative basis for self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997). Studies have suggested that identifying strongly with an individual’s various cultures can make the adaptation process easier (Kabir, 2008) with families playing an important role as a key learning ground for feelings of ethnic identity (Su and Costigan, 2009). However, if the ethnic group is identified negatively by society, then students may view themselves negatively (Tajfel, 1982, Phinney et al., 1997), making positive ethnic identity formation all the more challenging (Britto, 2008).

In addition, studies have shown that different cultures place different emphasis on the self. In Western culture, for instance, the individual is seen as the most important unit of society, and therefore students from ‘collectivistic’ backgrounds must learn how to be ‘assertive, independent, and confident to succeed in schools, but also must be able to shift back to being relational, modest, passive, and family-oriented at home’ (Yeh and Drost, 2002, p.2). Proweller (1999) noticed the significance of this for the school in her study which had the ability to resolve the conflict between individualism and collectivism, working on the common ground of shared experience (refer to sections on self-efficacy for more on collectivist and individualist cultures). Importance has also been placed on the inclusion of the culture-based expectations of peers, elders, significant others and so forth (Markus et al., 1997), who also influence how students behave and operate across cultures in order to avoid being alienated from society.

Other points raised in the literature on culture suggest positive ways of dealing with the issues affecting culturally diverse students. A few of these have shown how schools and communities can implement programs that place precedence on the affective domain, including self-esteem, family values, and cultural pride, and not just on achievement (Sosa, 1990; Henze, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Yeh and Drost, 2002; Lue, 2003). In their study, Garcia and Molina (2001) found that teaching the language and culture of the minority group, and improving the integration of immigrant students, not only enhanced self-esteem, but also reduced ethnic prejudice and ethnocentric behaviour. Other research portrayed similar results in studies on children from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds. When students were strengthened in their first language and had their cultural methods of learning incorporated in their schooling, there was an increase in self-esteem (Sosa, 1990; Lipka, 2002; Lue, 2003; Caldas, 2007).
Religious identity is an important aspect of cultural identity and is strongly related to the girls in this study. However, the importance of religious identity and how it interacts and traverses with other forms of social difference, such as race and gender, has not been given its due in studies on the schooling experiences of minority youth (Zine, 2001, 2008). Certainly, for girls, the wearing of the *hijab* as a visible manifestation of religious identity is a significant factor for the participants in this study, as will be shown in later chapters. Thus, studies on Islamic identity are included in the next section to illustrate the impact of religious identity for many individuals.

**Islamic identity**

Westernizing influences have challenged and continue to challenge religious minorities with some remaining isolated while others have adapted, and others have felt strong enough within their own community to bring up their children with both Eastern and Western influences (Alghorani, 2003). Unlike other religious groups, Muslims are often represented as a homogenous group despite being made up of multiple ethnicities, races, languages, nationalities and tribes (Afridi, 2001; Zine, 2001; Wise and Ali, 2008). Although there are many individual Muslims and even whole communities which place greater meaning on a secular culture, religious association for Muslims is usually deeply fixed in national identity so that the difference between ethnic and religious identity frequently becomes blurred (Asrif, 2001; Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Shammas, 2009). Therefore, the concept of identity for these youth is further deepened and the attempt to define or describe their identity is more complex. Their understanding of themselves as local and global citizens leads to varying ways of believing, being and behaving that are central to their identity as Muslims (Sabry and Bruna, 2007) with many carrying multiple layers of ‘self’ including familial, tribal, provincial, national and Islamic (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). These multiple layers of self are further affected by their Islamic ‘ways of knowing’, where worldviews, self-awareness and the nature of ‘reality’ are affected by explanations and teachings they have learnt through experiences with religion, culture and the world (Harris, 2007; Kazlev, 2009).

Nonetheless, Haw (2009) explains that the Muslims in her study were seeking a ‘purity’ of identity, unclouded by confusion, by placing more emphasis on being Muslim rather than on any other identifying trait. As one of the women in Haw’s study stated, ‘I would just say I was Muslim I would not even say I was a Pakistani Muslim or a British Muslim’ (Saira, in Haw, 2009, p.375). Peek (2005)
also reported that young Muslims in her study believed there was a ‘return to Islam’ among their generation with a growing appreciation of their religion. This appreciation stemmed from the effort they exerted to learn about their faith, unlike their parents who seemed to take their religion for granted, which consequently was the motivating force behind a more religious and practising generation of Muslims.

Muslims in general believe that they are comprised of one ‘Ummah’ or community irrespective of the differences of gender, ethnicity, colour, language and so on, with numerous references to this in the Quran (Shah, 2006). Basit (1997) noted that Muslims living in a non-Muslim country surmount the regional and sectarian differences, focusing on a collective Muslim identity instead (see also Shah, 2006). Although Islam is perceived as the primary marker of identity, it is not the only one (Yasmeen, 2008). Muslims are also taught through Quranic verses to respect regional, cultural and national differences, as Allah has revealed that he made people into nations and tribes (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Stephenson, 2008). Thus, Islamic identity encompasses ethnic identity, as expressed by one of the indigenous-Australian Muslim interviewees in Stephenson’s (2008) study:

*Islam recognises tribes and nations ... It doesn’t just say ‘you’re Muslim, that’s it’. It says yes, all Muslims are the same, but it does recognise we belong to different tribes and nations, so it doesn’t do what Christianity did to a lot of Aboriginal people [which] was try and make them like white people. So it allowed you that identity and it still does today, Islam allows you your identity, your tribe and nation and that is quoted in the Qur’an (p.7).*

As mentioned earlier, the salience of one particular identity will emerge as greater or more important amongst a person’s multitude of identities (Peek, 2005). It is portrayed in numerous studies that being Muslim is dominant in the hierarchy of identities that comprise a sense of self (Peek, 2005), as Muslims tend to emphasise their religious identity, more so than individuals from other religious groups (Shah, 2006). This shows a greater commitment to that role (Peek, 2005) which supports the perception that most Muslims are greatly influenced by Islam. Thus, it would be expected that their religious domain of identity is a major contributor to their wholly integrated identity (Alghorani, 2003). In a study by Bochner (1976), Muslim respondents associated themselves with Islam in one of the first three statements referring to themselves, unlike other religious groups who did not seem to be as strongly impacted upon by their religion. Muslims however, vary in their adherence to Islam, especially when they are adversely affected by their
surrounding environment (Alghorani, 2003), including those that dissent from the religion entirely, some of its precepts, or its followers. Nonetheless, most Muslims understand the universality and inclusiveness of the faith (Alghorani, 2003). Alghorani (2003) states that in order to achieve an Islamic identity a Muslim must adopt an Islamic value system which requires them to be in a constant state of exploring, gaining knowledge of, and practising Islam. However, many non-practising Muslims still strongly identify themselves as Muslims (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Shah, 2006), without externally displaying their connection to the faith leaving it as an internal facet of their identity. Nonetheless, many authors state that the essence of a Muslim’s identity is strongly connected to the seeking of knowledge (Sanjakdar, 2001; Alghorani, 2003). All learning guides the Muslim to developing a good character and personality and must be approached with the intention of developing ‘taqwa’, a deep and profound awareness of Allah (Sanjakdar, 2001).

In her study on the schooling experiences of Muslim youth, Zine (2001) found that the Muslim students did not conform to the dominant culture and were devoted to upholding an Islamic lifestyle by negotiating and maintaining their religious identities within their secular public schools. Zine (2001) also supported Jacobson (1998) and Berns McGowan (1999) citing their argument that religious identification served as an ‘anchor’ amidst the inconsistencies and disconnections faced by religious minority students. A vital ingredient in helping the students maintain an Islamic identity and lifestyle was the creation of positive peer support systems which helped Muslims reinforce Islamic values and codes of behaviour. Solidarity with other Muslims who experienced similar issues and challenges provided social and religious support to Muslim students developing an Islamic subculture within schools (Zine, 2001, 2008). This support by creating subcultures within schools has been found to enhance social relationships, increase involvement in school activities, and enhance teacher support (Oxley et al., 2000). Subcultures within schools have also been found to increase social capital where trust, belonging and shared norms are created and emphasised (Oxley et al., 2000).

Crozier (2009) also found girls in her study challenged the notion of the ‘passive oppressed Muslim girl’ demonstrating a strong sense of identity. These girls demonstrated acts of ‘self surveillance’ concerning participation or non-participation in un-Islamic activities (Crozier, 2009). Muslim parents were seen as a strong driving force in shaping their daughters’ ethnic identity, whilst second generation, young Muslim women have negotiated between their ethnic/religious identity
Chapter Two ~ Literature Review

and the identity of the dominant culture (Basit, 1997). Ethnic minority youth have shown a willingness to ‘adopt and adapt’ but within limits, adopting what they are comfortable with and rejecting what they do not like and what might transgress religious/ethnic boundaries (Basit, 1997; Yasmeen, 2008). Their identity is thus contextualised (Basit, 1997). Yasmeen (2008) however, found in her study that some Muslims felt a sense of being different to the wider Australian community which may be perpetuated by situations of isolation (such as attending Islamic schools, hanging out with their own ‘in-groups’, with no links to the wider community); and beliefs of being unaccepted and excluded.

Nonetheless, Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001) describe Muslims as adding a new layer to their identity as they develop a distinct bond with Australia without forfeiting their Islamic or ethnic heritage. This ‘hybrid Islamic identity’ is based on a commitment to the secular norms of Australian society and Islamic/ethnic traditions (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Yasmeen, 2008). Importantly, the process and dynamics of identity formation and the nature of Islam in Australia can be either fostered or suppressed by the larger Australian society (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). When the Australian mainstream appreciates cultural and religious needs of Muslim communities, Muslims need to reciprocate by showing their commitment to the legal and political framework of the nation (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001).

Finally, Britto (2008) has portrayed the need for a more cohesive conceptual framework for researching the way Muslim children clarify their identity, as current models of ethnic identity do not encompass specific criteria regarding what it means to be a Muslim child or adolescent. Britto (2008) claims that a conceptual model is needed, that incorporates the three predominant dimensions of a Muslim persons’ identity – religion, sex, and ethnicity. One of the more popular measures of ethnic identity is Phinney’s (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). However, this measure is an example of the models Britto (2008) described which do not include the various influencing dimensions on the identity of Muslims. Although some researchers such as Alghorani (2003) modified the items of the MEIM to assess religious identity rather than ethnic identity for his study on the identity of Muslim students (and is used as a research tool in this study), it still would not satisfy Britto’s idea of consolidating the multiple dimensions of an Islamic identity. Shah (2006), however, classifies four major strands of a Muslim’s identity in a model.
which aims to understand the complexity of identity construction of Muslims. These include: country of abode identity, country of origin identity, racialised identity, and religious identity.

### 2.3.2 Cultural synthesis: Australian, Muslim or both?


Negotiating multiple cultural identities is complicated and multifaceted. A large amount of the literature on acculturation and ethnic and cultural studies portrays the complexity bicultural individuals experience when discussing their dual cultural heritage in both positive and negative terms (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). These negotiations have often been described as experiences of cultural hybridity. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) have reported on individual difference in bicultural identity and how individuals perceive the extent to which their dual cultural identities intersect or overlap, and whether they are compatible and integrated or oppositional and difficult to integrate. They found that individuals with high bicultural identity integration (BII) usually described themselves as part of a ‘hyphenated culture’ or a combined, ‘third’ emerging culture, finding it easy to integrate both cultures in their everyday lives. In contrast, individuals with low BII described the difficulties of incorporating both cultures into a cohesive sense of identity and displayed increased sensitivity to specific tensions between the two cultural orientations. Feelings of internal conflict cause individuals with low BII to believe that they must choose between the two cultures as it is easier to assume one or none, but not both at the same time (Benet-Martinez and Haratitos, 2005).

Studies have reported these contradictory feelings of pride, uniqueness, and a rich sense of community and history, with those of identity confusion, dual expectations, and value clashes (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). Bhabha’s theory of hybridity has been drawn on by many authors to explain relevant concepts and issues in their studies. For example, in a study to explore ‘how language and literacy are practised and how content concepts are constructed in the multiple communities of practice that youth encounter’ (p.42), the concept of hybridity conceives that to make sense of the world and of oral and written texts, individuals in any community utilise various resources (Birr Moje *et al.*, 2004). Being ‘in-between’ these various resources of knowledge and discourse ‘can be both productive and constraining in terms of one’s literate,
social, and cultural practices and ultimately one’s identity development’ (Birr Moje et al., 2004, p.42). This concept resonates with the experiences of Muslim migration to Australia over the last 200 years and the slow but steady process of developing an Islamic community in Australia. Using a framework of hybridity to describe the Muslim experience may explain how Muslims have ‘simultaneously constructed, inhabited and moved between different groups and contexts’ (p.364) displaying en route what appears to be ‘different’ and ‘contradictory’ behaviour (Haw, 2009). As individuals are seen as actively creating a mediating space within their immediate context and locality, it is necessary to understand the connections between the external lived world of Muslims and their internal ‘felt’ worlds (Haw, 2009).

Utilising and being ‘in-between’ various resources of knowledge and discourse has been both productive and constraining for Muslims, particularly concerning the identity development of Muslims as a community and as individuals. Muslim migration and the process of developing an Islamic community demonstrates experiences of ‘in-betweenness’ and hybridity. While the first Muslim contacts were non-intrusive, they were somewhat productive leaving a linguistic and cultural mark on the indigenous communities of the Arnhem Land and neighbouring areas (Yasmeen, 2008). The subsequent interactions with Muslims occurred with the establishment of the British penal colonies; however as isolated individuals their Muslim identity was eroded by assimilation (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Kabir, 2005). Later the arrival of the Afghans, who left their mark on Australian history, brought with them the first symbols of Islamic permanency with the building of mosques. Large-scale settlement began after World War II and increased later with the onset of political crises such as the civil war in Lebanon and the Bosnian ethnic war (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Kabir, 2005). These more recent settlements of Muslim communities were in some ways ‘in-between’ in a predominantly non-Muslim society, an experience that can be both productive and constraining.

More currently, Muslims in Australia have been described as adopting a ‘hybrid Islamic identity’ where norms of the mainstream together with Islamic/ethnic traditions are simultaneously committed to (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). However this commitment to both cultures has been a rough road to travel with many Muslims experiencing difficulties in achieving true feelings of belonging, acceptance and appreciation (Kabir, 2008). It seems those Muslims who have experienced some success and progress in building a sense of worth and an identity that is
compatible with the mainstream community display characteristics of positive agency and efficacy.

### 2.3.3 A visible presence: Agency and efficacy

Student agency is seen to be one of the most important ingredients for academic and social success (Jackson, 2003). Consequently, self-efficacy is a key aspect of human agency and refers to the beliefs a person has of their ability to effectively complete a task or behaviour (Bandura, 1997). The self-efficacy of adolescents changes as they develop with important implications for their school performances, friendships, and career choices (Schunk and Meece, 2005). Therefore, exploring the efficacy of the participants in this study at this stage of their development and their schooling is beneficial. It has further been shown that by the end of their primary years, pre-adolescents have attained critical beliefs about their capabilities and their capacity to do well in school (Baker, 2006). The influences on these beliefs are numerous; however, culture has been shown to be one of the most influential factors in developing positive self-efficacy (or otherwise). The cultural aspects of a child’s identity and/or environment, including race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, gender, sexuality and class, may determine the level of self-efficacy gained from various sources as well as the manner in which self-efficacy beliefs develop in a child.

**Self-efficacy and culture**

Although self-efficacy operates in a generalized manner irrespective of the characteristics of the society, it is greatly influenced by culture. Bandura (2002) states that efficacy beliefs vary across cultures in the way they are developed and structured, the ways in which they are exercised, and the purposes to which they are put (see also Marat, 2005). Studies have shown how culture specific determinants impact on efficacy and performance achievement (Yamauchi and Greene, 1997; Earley et al., 1999; Gibson, 1999; Marat, 2005; Pulford et al., 2005) as well as on differences in students’ choice of learning strategies based on the country in which they are located (Chye et al., 1997). For example a person from a collectivist culture might develop their self-efficacy from those around them whereas a person from an individualist society might gain their self-efficacy
more from their own experiences of success and failure (Klassen, 2004; Pulford et al., 2005). In a study by Klassen (2004), it was found that differences in cultural beliefs were associated with differences in sources that predicted self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of Anglo-Canadian students in the study were found to spring from the self-oriented variables of past performance (or mastery experiences) and emotional arousal, whereas the Indo-Canadians’ self-efficacy was predicted by both self-oriented and other-oriented (vicarious experience and social or verbal persuasion) variables. Nonetheless, there have been inconsistencies in findings concerning ethnic differences in self-efficacy beliefs with some studies showing no significant differences and others showing ethnic minority students having lower self-efficacy than their white peers (Schunk and Meece, 2005).

Self-efficacy of Muslims

The literature on the self-efficacy of Muslims appears to be very limited. Measures of self-efficacy specifically concerning Muslims have been related to health issues and up until now only one study has been found from the educational context. This however relates to teacher efficacy on inclusion of students with disabilities (Romi and Leyser, 2006). A study by Ahmad (2001), mentioned the ‘agency’ of the Muslim women she studied in negotiating and renegotiating their social, cultural and religious identifications, however she did not delve specifically into their feelings of self-efficacy.

On a similar note, an important study on being a Muslim woman in contemporary Britain and the shifting ‘senses of self’ conducted by Kaye Haw (2009), questioned the relevance of multicultural policies and their influence on practices of social inclusion and socialisation. She demonstrates through re-interviewing the same participants 15 years on, that Muslim women have helped create and become part of a ‘settled and vibrant’ community that has ‘normalised diversity’, in contrast to previous multicultural policies which highlighted diversity as ‘difference’. Many of the participants who were second and third generation Muslims described their parents’ generations to be often ‘uneducated’, ‘silent’ and ‘silenced’. This was in contrast to their own experiences where they were born into one culture and brought up in and exposed to another (Haw, 2009). In addition, their schooling encouraged them to be independent and ‘to explore and feel valued for
who they were’ (p.372). However, the encouragement given by their school to integrate by honouring difference and diversity seems to have failed to support them appropriately (Haw, 2009). To compensate for this lack of support, the young Muslim women in Haw’s study embarked on a journey to discover who they were and where they belonged. This however did not include integration, defying the dominant discourses which placed them both within and outside of their communities, but through practising a visible presence (Haw, 2009). This apparent sign of agency and efficacy, has allowed more and more Muslims to engage in the professional and public life of their communities, showing no fear to visibly identify themselves as Muslims. This visibility not only included visible strength and solidarity in the community, but was also portrayed in a literal sense in the choices of Muslim women and girls to display their Islamic faith through their body, for example by wearing the hijab or displaying obvious signs of modesty (see Findings and Discussion chapters for evidence of similar experiences of the Muslim girls in this study).

Nevertheless, as in any culture or religious community, there have been individuals who have dissented from their cultural and Islamic backgrounds, displaying rejection for the doctrines and dissatisfaction with the Muslim communities they lived in. For example, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Fadela Amara are two prominent females who have dissented from their Islamic roots. Amara, author of ‘Breaking the Silence’, felt constrained in her upbringing amongst 10 children in the poor city outskirts of France which were largely populated by Muslims (Hari, 2007). Unhappy with the treatment young Muslim girls were receiving she launched a group called ‘Ni Putains, Ni Soumises’ (Neither Whores Nor Doormats) which encouraged acts of defiance against what she called the ‘fundamentalist vision’ of Islam including wearing make-up and not wearing the hijab. Taking her dissent one step further, Hirsi Ali renounced Islam (and all religion) completely and began to actively and provocatively speak out against traditions which she associated with Islam and Muslim communities (Hari, 2007).

One such tradition which dissenters have fought against is the emphasis on segregation which in Islam is observed in most social aspects of community life, and thus is practised by many communities who observe the Islamic lifestyle. However, many authors from Western cultures have also raised issues on the relevance and advantages of segregated education in terms of single-sex schooling. The following section covers some studies on the issue of single-sex schooling and whether it is an advantage to girls or not.
2.3.4 Single-sex schooling: Advantage to girls?

The debate on the advantages and disadvantages of single-sex schooling has been profound and incessant in the education forum. Many authors have been unsupportive of single-sex schooling. For example, Brutsaert and Bracke (1994, cited in Haag, 2000) found little effect of school context in their study of upper primary girls and boys in Belgian schools. In addition, while girls and boys seemed unmoved by the gender organisation of the school, boys were actually negatively affected by a prevalence of female teachers on staff, which decreased the boys' overall sense of well-being. Studies have also found that after single-sex schools converted into co-ed schools, students gained positively in self-concept and there was no change in academic achievement (Smith, 1996; Marsh et al., 1988). A ten year study by Smith (1996), of students’ attitudes and achievement in one all-boys’ and one all-girls’ high school in Australia that had converted to co-education found that although the self-concept of both boys and girls decreased initially, after 5 years it increased to a level higher than that which was measured when the students were in single-sex classrooms.

Nonetheless, other studies have recognised that several single-sex schools are ‘doing something different’ that may be reproducible in the co-educational context. These studies view policy and training interventions as particularly valuable (Haag, 2000). Numerous studies have also reported the positive effects and advantages of these settings, particularly for girls (see Harker, 1997), especially with the growing recognition of gender differences in learning styles (Single Gender Education, 2001; Arnot, 2009; Sullivan, 2009). For example, Syal and Trump (1996) note there were academic gains for boys when they were separated from girls in the classroom. Girls also gained, not only academically but they additionally attained an increase in confidence and self-esteem (Syal and Trump, 1996; Harker, 1997; Sullivan, 2009). Furthermore, Perry (1996) has found that girls feel freer to speak out in a single gender school. Investigations into the sustained effects on attitudes, behaviours and values of single-sex schools have further found that women who had attended single-sex schools had higher educational aspirations and were more likely than their co-ed counterparts to attend selective four-year tertiary institutions (Haag, 2000). Finally, single-sex schooling has been found to be of particular benefit for some minority ethnic groups (Sullivan, 2009).

In relation to Muslim girls, it is generally considered that single-sex schooling is preferred by many in the Muslim community as children reach adolescence (Basit, 1997). Based on Islamic principles
Chapter Two ~ Literature Review

of segregation, it not unusual to find that many schools in Muslim majority countries and Islamic schools in the West segregate boys and girls usually by the end of primary school and usually separate them in high school. Saudi Arabia may well be the only country where segregation remains dominant within all social structures including primary, secondary and tertiary education (el Sendiony et al., 1987; Sanabary, 1994; Hamdan, 2005). Contrary to popular beliefs of segregation implying a lesser social status, Saudi women support segregation as they find they have access to more jobs and do not have to compete with men (Hamdan, 2005). Absence of competition with male counterparts gave women a professional advantage for jobs in women’s schools, banks and universities. Authors have reported on the increase of Saudi women assuming a larger role in the educational system with many taking positions of greater responsibility such as school administrators, deans and heads of various units in women’s colleges (Sanabary, 1994). This increase in educated women has been greatly helped by the financial support provided by the government for students, as well as the segregated system which supports the Saudi cultural and religious way of life, thus leading to a general acceptance of female education (Sanabary, 1994).

The above sections illustrate the significance noted earlier of considering gender when formulating specific school policies and programs, together with considerations of identity, self-efficacy, religion and culture. Due to the various theories regarding single-sex settings and gender based learning, great support can be found for such settings in various educational contexts and in many countries around the world. The following section outlines some literature found on the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls, drawing together the relevance of the various theories and applications discussed in this chapter, to the current research.

2.4 Identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls

The decision to select pre-adolescent girls in this study emerged after finding little literature about the experiences and perceptions of Muslim girls at this age. However, authors such as Ahmad (2001) have found problems with including Muslim school girls in social research to act as ‘representatives’ of their community or ‘experts’ on their culture as they have had little life experience. She adds that few white British girls would be expected to be ‘experts’ on white British culture in the same way.
Nonetheless, the aim of this study is not to have the girls give their expertise on Islamic identity or Muslim self-efficacy. Rather it is to draw from the girls their understandings about their own identity and self-efficacy using their own voice. It has been argued that children at this age experience an increased capability to reasonably assess their abilities particularly in comparison to others, while simultaneously experiencing emotional, cognitive and physical changes (Rudasill et al., 2009). In addition, pre-adolescent girls are less self-conscious and self-protective, and thus described as being more honest (Funk, 2002; Apter, 2006). This is an opportune time to research the students as the oncoming stage of early adolescence brings with it a decrease in confidence, attitudes, and motivation with an escalating awareness of peers and their comparative abilities (Funk, 2002; Klassen, 2004; Caldas, 2007).

In Ahmad’s (2001) study on the identity of Muslim female students, it was found that the students played an active role in the construction and reconstruction of their social and personal identities. Their ‘diasporic identities’ (Brah, 1996) were effectively established by utilising their sense of agency. This involved a process of negotiating and renegotiating expressions of social, cultural and religious identities and finding a comfortable space between social life and the ‘self’. The way this space was perceived by others varied between being either ‘traditional’ or ‘modern/Westernised’, which in reality were inadequate descriptors as they often overlapped (Ahmad, 2001).

The importance of counteracting false and often negative images and knowledge of Muslims and of Muslim women (and which are usually portrayed through secondary sources) has been highlighted by many authors. For example, Nada Roude (2007), a Muslim education advisor, suggests that sending out positive images and telling positive stories of the Muslim community is ‘part and parcel of what it means to be an Australian’. In order to achieve this, Muslims just need to be given the opportunities to tell their stories and the opportunities to engage which might provide:

> insight about the beauty of what we can do together as a nation that has representatives from very diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, that can build the nation to be the most powerful nation on earth (Roude, 2007, www.smh.com.au).

She states however, the difficulty of being able to sustain a lifestyle based on negativity, where you are constantly being told that you are less than anyone else. Taking part in a study on Muslim girls by Peek (2005), Natasha experienced this sense of inferiority. She felt that she was forced to
choose between identities; however as neither choice would equal acceptance, she chose her Islamic identity over her being ‘American’.

*If they’re not going to accept me as an American, if they’re going to tell me I don’t deserve to be here, when I am an American, if they’re going to try to make me feel that way, then, hey, I’m going to be a Muslim. No one’s going to ever tell me, ‘You can’t be a Muslim. You’re not a Muslim. Go back to some other planet where there isn’t Islam ...if I have to choose, I choose to be Muslim’* (Natasha, in Peek, 2005, Religion as Declared Identity section, para.12).

### 2.5 Conclusion

Some of the key concepts such as culture, ethnicity, religion and gender, were reviewed. The exploration of identity, hybridity, self-efficacy, and gender, particularly from cultural and Islamic perspectives, has offered a vast, though not exhaustive, pool of information on how children are continuously negotiating their possible identities within various school experiences and contexts. The ideas raised were recognised as a significant part of the thesis and formed an important foundation while initiating this study, with the theoretical framework foreshadowing the progression of this research. Selected literature on gender, including single-sex schooling, have been reviewed; and literature that covers both theoretical and experiential evidence have been included where relevant to what is primarily a study of Muslim experience.

Irrespective of the studies cited above, there remains an apparent lack of literature on the self-efficacy of Muslim girls. Little qualitative research has been conducted on Muslim girls and their identity and even less on their self-efficacy. This stresses the significance and value the current study has in contributing to the chosen research area, particularly with the added specifications of being pre-adolescents and using their own voices to express their perceptions.

The next chapter examines the contextual background of this study providing an overview of the various school and social contexts relevant to this research. The final section brings these two areas together to consider the role of schools particularly in regards to leadership and curriculum for Muslim girls.
Chapter Three ~ Contextual Background

3.1 Introduction

The background to this research focuses on the school and social contexts in which this study has taken place. This chapter provides a description and analysis of relevant research related to private Islamic and public schools in Australia and schools in Saudi Arabia, especially with regard to the contexts in which Muslim girls attend school. In addition, a selection from the literature on social interactions of students with teachers and peers, and literature on school curricula have been included. The profound importance of political, social and cultural contexts on the individual is well supported in literature with formation of one’s identity changing in response to ‘social psychological and contextual factors’ (Phinney et al, 2001a). Thus, references to literature about Muslims in the community and in schools, as well as in the home environment, have been made to illustrate the social and current political milieu for Muslims in Australia. These two main sections culminate in the last section on the role of schools highlighting leadership and curriculum for Muslim girls.

The structure of the chapter consists of three main sections to clearly illustrate to the reader the school and social contexts of this study. In the first section, the public school system in Australia is explained with emphasis on how Muslims are currently being provided for. Secondly, details concerning Islamic private schools in Australia illustrate the role and significance of Islamic schools for the Muslim community. Thirdly, a depiction of schools in Saudi Arabia explains recent reforms in the education system and the importance of Islam in Saudi schooling. The subsequent sections detail studies on student interactions with teachers and peers and issues regarding the curriculum, questioning its partiality to a particular culture. These sections portray the various social and academic issues impinging on student development.

The next section of the chapter discusses the social contexts regarding Muslims in the community, Muslims in schools, and the home environment. Finally section 3.4 draws on literature to portray the potential for schools to provide for Muslim girls through appropriate and effective leadership for the staff, students and curriculum. This section will illustrate the strong connection between
Chapter Three ~ Contextual Background

the effectiveness of a school and the positive development of self-esteem, student achievement, and student behaviour. The contextual background chapter has been divided into these sections to ensure that a clear depiction of the key contexts of this study is provided. The diagram below illustrates the flow of concepts examined in this chapter.
Chapter Three ~ Contextual Background

Chapter map

School Contexts

Australian schools

Australian Islamic schools

Saudi Arabian schools

Teacher-student relationships

Peer interactions

Curriculum ‘partiality’

Social Contexts

Muslims in the community

Muslim students in schools

Home environment

Role of schools: Leadership and curriculum for Muslim girls
3.2 School contexts

In this section, the three main school contexts relevant to this study are described with information on the background of the contexts and some description of related literature. Significant interactions which take place in schools are also described including those between teachers and students, and peer interactions. Finally the issue of curriculum ‘partiality’ is discussed.

3.2.1 Schools in Australia

The schooling system in Australia includes both public and private/independent schools, with government policies encouraging consumer choice and competition within and between these two educational alternatives (Reid, 2002). Approximately 3.2 million students attend about 10,000 schools across Australia (Crump and Slee, 2005). Although public education is ‘free, secular, and compulsory’ (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Sanjakdar, 2001; Halse, 2004), over 30 per cent of these school enrolments are in non-government schools, with this number growing steadily (Reid, 2002; Halse, 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2004; Crump and Slee, 2005). In addition, there has been a great expansion in the number of smaller private schools with increased government funding directed their way (Reid, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2004; Crump and Slee, 2005). Importantly, reference to the contexts of schools being either public or private does not necessarily refer to social class in Australia, particularly in the case of religious schools, such as the Catholic diocesan schools, or small primary schools with an Islamic religious focus, with many students from a low socio-economic background enrolled in private schools and many students in a higher socio-economic bracket enrolled in public schools. This situation contrasts with the larger Independent and older Protestant Christian schools, which generally include boarding facilities for students and attract families who can afford the large annual fees for their children. As noted earlier, less than 20% of Muslim children attend private schools.
While these private schools are seen as having primarily individual objectives connected to certain religious, cultural or ethnic groups, public schools are recognised as transforming a group of people with a host of differences into a ‘civic entity called a public’ (Reid, 2002). Conceptualised as an underlying component of fostering democracy, public schools are becoming recognised as places where youth from a range of diverse backgrounds and experiences mix and learn to appreciate and respect difference (Reid, 2002). Recent studies have found that the dramatic move from public to private schools is mainly due to the severance of public schools from parents and communities, and a short supply of educational leadership that is active and creative (Reid, 2002; Halse, 2004). In addition, public education is struggling with balancing economic and political matters with principles of social equity characteristic of a democratic nation-state (Halse, 2004).

Whether public or private, there is a government requirement of all Australian schools that the curriculum should be multicultural ‘to prepare students for living in a multicultural society and a globalising world’ (Hickling-Hudson, 2003). However, despite sincere efforts to achieve multicultural goals for education, there remains a monocultural, ethnocentric tradition in public schools and many private independent schools (Hage, 1998; Hickling-Hudson, 2003). With almost 25% of Australians born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas (ABS, 2005), it is becoming essential that schools learn to deal with the needs of an increasingly diverse group of children.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the majority (over 80%) (Buckingham, 2010) of the 100,000 Muslim students in Australia are enrolled in public schools. As such, beginning in the 1990’s, Muslim groups have taken advantage of traditional ‘scripture’ classes to provide Islamic Studies to Muslim students (Carbines et al., 2006). In NSW for example, the Islamic Council of New South Wales caters for the needs of thousands of Muslim students in about 200 public schools through its ‘Islamic Scripture Teaching Program’, with teachers who are all volunteers. In-service courses and incentives such as travel expenses are provided by the Council, as well as an ‘Islamic syllabus’ to assist in instruction and materials for classroom use. Despite the immense efforts placed into these scripture classes, there are many limitations which adversely affect the success of such programs. These include short time durations preventing sustained and coherent program of study; generally unqualified and inexperienced teachers; widespread student behaviour issues; and students often feel embarrassed, reluctant or unwilling to take part in the classes for a
number of reasons including low self-esteem, lack of Islamic pride, extreme peer group pressure to conform and the desire to be accepted or integrated by the mainstream culture (Carbines et al., 2006). In addition, the efforts undertaken in NSW to provide Islamic education to Muslim students in government schools are not replicated across the rest of Australia (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a).

### 3.2.2 Islamic schools in Australia

Education is of great importance in Islam demonstrated through the first Revelation sent to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW, peace be upon him) to seek knowledge (Kysilka and Qadri, 1997; Donohoue Clyne, 2001a):

1. “Proclaim! (Read!) In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who has created (all that exists).
2. Created man, out of a mere clot of blood
3. Read! And thy Lord is most Bountiful
4. He who taught (the use of) the Pen
5. Taught man that which he knew not (Quran, 96: 1-5).

As early as they can speak, children are taught these verses, taught to seek and respect education. It is no surprise then that Muslim parents are looking for schools that will fulfil this requirement of learning. In line with theories of ‘separation’ mentioned in the previous chapter, some researchers have argued that Islamic schools may be the best chance Muslim children have of participating in an academic education and in the Muslim community (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a). Many Muslim parents in Australia, like those in the United States, believe that Islamic schooling will help reaffirm, strengthen, and preserve their children’s Muslim identity against the ‘threat of the modern world’, as well as provide greater quality education (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Benoliel, 2003; Merry, 2005; Zine, 2007, 2008). Figures provided in a study of independent schooling in 2005 found that there were 13,073 students attending 29 Islamic schools across Australia (ISCA and AIS, 2005). The demand for Islamic education has pushed the Muslim community to provide for the growing number of students on Islamic school waiting lists. The most recent ISCA snapshot of independent schooling shows a rise in students enrolled in Islamic schools with 16,917 students attending 31 Islamic schools (ISCA, 2009). These students make up 3.2 per cent of Australian students attending independent schools. Many of these schools still have extensive waiting lists.
Like all other schools in Australia, whether government or non-government, Islamic schools must follow the state curriculum and other national guidelines. However, in addition, the Islamic curriculum encompasses the cognitive, psychological, physical, social and spiritual domains of a total person balancing between secular and religious knowledge (Kysilka and Qadri, 1997; Sanjakdar, 2001). It is a greater aim of Islamic schools to produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also noble in character and can promote righteousness in society (Kysilka and Qadri, 1997; Sanjakdar, 2001). Merry (2006) has discussed the significance of Islamic schools basing his school philosophy on ‘tarbiyah’ in his work on Muslim schools in Western society, namely in North America. He notes that students who lead a school life guided by prayer, morality and God-consciousness (taqwa) are better behaved. Teachers and students have also described feelings of unity among the school community, especially as there are shared practices such as prayer, dress code, eating halal food, and celebrating Islamic holidays (Merry, 2006). The well-being of students is also enhanced as there is greater adult supervision and concern, fewer cliques, and more self-confidence among students (Merry, 2006). Similar sentiments have been expressed in Australian research also.

Nonetheless, Islamic schools have been accused of socially excluding their own students from the mainstream in society, thus exacerbating claims by others of creating segregated communities who refuse to socialise with society at large (Zine, 2007, 2008; Yasmeen, 2008). Such claims have led to concerns of the inability of private schools to promote a real understanding of difference, consequently dividing society all the more (Wilkinson et al., 2004). In a study on Islamic schooling in Canada, some teachers felt that both Islamic schools and public schools could benefit from systems of integration between them in order to share information and resources (Zine, 2007).

Ultimately, the main aim of Islamic schools is to create an Islamic environment where ‘children can grow to make their contribution to Australia as confident, contributing Muslims’ (Yasmeen, 2008. p.25) and as ‘confident, articulate and proud Australians, who look forward to providing positive role models for their peers’ (Carbines et al., 2006, p.xii). Parents have shown that the choice for sending their children to an Islamic school was to serve the dual purpose of educating their children concurrently with gaining an awareness of their Islamic heritage (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Carbines et al., 2006; Yasmeen, 2008). Interestingly, many of those who established Islamic schools in the United Kingdom and Australia were converts to Islam. These Muslims were
evidently aware of the secular values underpinning the public education system and thus looked for a more Islamic education for their children (Donohue Clyne, 2001a). Some parents have explained their choice for an Islamic school by providing reasons such as: they are not fully knowledgeable with Islamic ideas and traditions themselves; they have experienced growing up in Australia as a ‘child of difference’ and want their children to experience growing up in an accepting environment; and the fear that public schools would expose their children to drugs and the ‘Western way of life’ (Yasmeen, 2008). Thus, Islamic schools have become an ‘insurance mechanism’ for maintaining an Islamic identity. However, Muslim parents in Australia realise that their Australian-born children (about 36% of the Muslim community is Australian-born) will grow up in a non-Muslim, culturally and religiously diverse society where high levels of education are at the core of achieving a secure future, and thus the necessity to seek the best educational option for their children (Donohue Clyne, 2001a) is a daunting responsibility.

### 3.2.3 Schools in Saudi Arabia

Adolescents have been the most influenced by recent rapid social and economic changes in Saudi society (el Sendiony et al., 1987; Algarni, 2002). Consequently, education is at the head of the Saudi governments’ priorities with the education sector seeing important developments in the last 50 years (Hamdan, 2005; Christina et al., 2007; Saudi Network, 2007). Initially, education was based on informal schooling with the aim of teaching religious rituals such as reading and learning the Quran, *Hadith* and the Prophet’s *Sunnah* (el Sendiony et al., 1987; Hamdan, 2005). The last of the Gulf nations to introduce secular education, Saudi Arabia established its first girls’ school in 1956. Since then, thousands of elementary, intermediate and secondary schools have been established, in addition to colleges, higher institutes and seven universities (Saudi Network, 2007). Recent statistics from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics show that in 2008 84 per cent of primary school-age girls were enrolled in school, compared to 85 per cent of boys, with 94 per cent of all students continuing on to secondary education (UIS, 2008). The main language of instruction is Arabic; however, English is used for some university courses and in international schools.

There are three main authorities responsible for education in Saudi Arabia – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training (UNESCO IBE, 2007). There are other authorities (such as the Ministry of
Defence and Aviation, the Presidency of the National Guard, and the Ministry of the Interior) that provide their affiliates and children with kindergarten, elementary, intermediate, secondary and adult education. However, these authorities follow the educational ladder, study plans and curricula formulated by the Ministry of Education. The Supreme Committee for Educational Policy, established in 1963, is the highest authority supervising education in Saudi (UNESCO IBE, 2007).

There are also several international schools in the country which offer educational programs for foreign nationals residing in Saudi Arabia (Maps of World.com, 2009). International schools generally follow one of three curricula – the U.S. model curriculum, the U.K. model curriculum or the International model which is inspired by the U.S. model but also consists of language programs in Urdu, Hindi, Arabic and Filipino. These schools are usually approved and recognised by an educational body in their respective countries to which they belong and have obtained a licence for operation by the Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia (Maps of World.com, 2009).

Importantly, public education of all types and at all levels in Saudi Arabia is free, although it is not compulsory (Hamdan, 2005; UNESCO IBE, 2007). Privately opened schools may also receive some technical and financial aid from the government (UNESCO IBE, 2007). Emphasis has also been placed on the importance of the individual’s social well-being and identity development. Teaching was no longer limited to providing the learner with information. It now emphasised the nurturing of a qualified citizen who is capable of contributing effectively to the development and progress of the society through the development of personality, inclinations and capabilities (UNESCO IBE, 2007). In addition, special school counsellors, translated as ‘social specialist’ in Saudi Arabia, have been situated in school settings to provide professional counselling services. These services were defined as:

* a constructive process aiming to help the student to understand himself(sic), his personality, and his experiences; to identify his problems and develop his capacities; and to reach his goals in congruence with Islamic foundations (Education, 1999, cited in Algarni, 2002, p.48).

Islam is central to Saudi Arabian culture, preaching the equality and the rights of the individual, as well as distinguishing the family as being basic and central to society. Islam is a unifying force that sustains and guides Muslims in every aspect of their daily lives and thus it is automatically included and deeply embedded in the curriculum (Saleh, 1987; Al-Jabr, 1990; Bangura, 2004). The
education school policy (1978, cited in Al-Jabr, 1990), emphasised the development of the Islamic faith as the first and foremost key to equip students with:

> various skills and knowledge, to develop his (sic) conduct in constructive directions, to develop society economically, socially and culturally, [and] to prepare the individual to become a useful member in the building of his community (Education school policy, 1978, cited in Al-Jabr, 1990, p.109).

More recently, the centrality of religion remained embedded in the educational objectives of the country. In 2003, the Ministry of Education released their overall vision in a Ten-year Strategic Plan (2004-2014) which expressed:

> Engendering a new generation of male and female youth who embody the Islamic values in their persons, both theoretical as well as practical, are equipped with necessary knowledge, skills, and endowed with the right orientations, capable of responding positively to, and interact with the latest developments, and deal with the latest technological innovations with ease and comfort. They should be able to face international competition both at the scientific as well as technological levels to be able to meaningfully participate in overall growth and development. This is to be achieved through an effective and practical system of education which is capable of discovering the potentials and predispositions, and, create the spirit of action. All this, in an environment of education and training, charged with the spirit of instruction and edification (Website of the Ministry of Education, 2007, cited in UNESCO IBE, 2007, para.2).

Some critiques regard the educational systems of Muslim societies such as Saudi Arabia as incompatible with Western education, with requests by critics to change their educational systems (Bangura, 2004; Saeed, 2005). These critics have condemned the particular Sunni following of Islam in the education system of Saudi Arabia as following the ‘Wahabi’ school of thought (a label which supposed ‘Wahabi’s’ do not identify with themselves). Bangura (2004), however, argues that education in Muslim societies is compatible with Western education, regardless of the association with the Islamic way of life being the core of ‘tirbyi’ (Arabic term for education). In contrast, critics have discussed the inappropriateness of the Western education system in predominantly Muslim populations, arguing for an education that is tailored to the specific cultural and religious needs of the region (Christina et al., 2007).
3.2.4 Teacher-student relationships and teacher expectations

There have been contentious opinions on the influence and responsibilities of teachers on student learning and development. Positive teacher-child relationships have been consistently connected to school success (Baker, 2006; Jerome et al., 2008; Rueger, 2008; Crozier, 2009). These relationships are shown to provide children with the emotional security needed to interact fully in learning activities and scaffold the development of key social, behavioural, and self-regulatory competencies needed in the school environment (Pianta, 1999, cited in Baker, 2006). Adolescents in particular, gain motivation, success expectations, interest and satisfaction with school, and academic self-efficacy from their relationships with teachers (Baker, 2006).

Nonetheless, teachers can also have an adverse effect on students. The bulk of authors agree that most of the problems students encounter regarding peer attitudes, poor image of some subjects, and lack of esteem and confidence, often stem from teachers and the classroom environments they build (Byrne, 1993, cited in Harker, 1997; Archer, 2008). In other words, they do not develop independently from students alone. Studies have shown how easily students are affected by teacher expectations and interactions, especially when they portray low expectations of ethnic-minority students, and deliberately or unconsciously value some students over others (Saft and Pianta, 2001; Hughes et al., 2005; Archer, 2008; Jerome et al., 2008; Shah, 2008). For example, teachers who have lower expectations of minority and low SES students tend to have a greater adverse affect on these students (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Hughes et al., 2005; McKown and Weinstein, 2008). These low expectations are further complicated by misunderstandings and insensitivities of teachers towards ethnic and cultural differences of parents and parent expectations of their children (Basit, 1997; Crozier, 2009). Crozier (2009) found that teachers viewed minority parents as uneducated, non-English speaking migrants who lived in impenetrable communities, and must therefore have low aspirations for their children. Previous research has also shown that poorer relationships between teachers and minority students were developed creating less positive classroom environments (Saft and Pianta, 2001; Jerome et al., 2008). Minority ethnic youth seem to consistently be positioned as ‘other’ in regards to the portrayal of the ‘ideal pupil’ being white, male, and middle class so that even high achieving students are insecure in their successes (Archer, 2008). Some teachers have been reported as displaying bias in evaluating work of students, providing greater feedback and praise, less criticism, more
challenging instruction, and warmer, more accepting interactions to those they have high expectations of (Hughes et al., 2005). The way children interpret differential treatment results in repercussions on how they perceive their own abilities and performance expectations (Hughes et al., 2005; McKown and Weinstein, 2008). Moreover, the way children perceived that significant others talked to them affected their ‘self-talk’; that is, what they say to themselves with ‘emphasis on the words used to express thoughts and beliefs about oneself and the world to oneself’ (Burnett, 1995, p.1). Girls in particular, were found to be deeply affected by positive and negative statements made by teachers; leading to both positive and negative self-talk (Burnett, 1995).

In contrast to such opinions, authors such as Jackson (2003) place the greater responsibility on students themselves as ‘active agents’, and ‘critical decision makers’. He explains that we are cautious of blaming the students for their failures, instead blaming the inadequate schools, incompetent teachers, poverty, broken families, lack of social services, prejudice, discrimination and social inequality. Although Jackson agrees that these can play a part, he believes that it is the student who is central to the educational process.

The value a child places in their relationship with their teachers appears to decline as they get to Years 5 and 6. These relationships are described as becoming more functionally related, less emotionally controlled, and too weak to compete with the strong role parents and peers play in the lives of adolescents (Baker, 2006; Rueger, 2008). This could be due to the fact that home environments usually remain constant with consistent attachment figures, whereas children are experiencing regular fluctuations with factors such as teachers, classrooms and expectations in the school environment (Jerome et al., 2008).

In this brief section, some of the key issues debated among researchers have been raised. Given the broad scope of this research, the factors raised merely point to the importance of taking into account such a contextual background when considering the identity and self-efficacy of the young Muslim children who are participants in this study.
3.2.5 Peer interactions

A number of studies point to the implications of peer interactions and peer pressure on the development and well-being of students (Zine, 2001; Burgess et al., 2006; Singer and Doonenbal, 2006; Rueger et al., 2008). Social comparisons have been found to be an important source for learning appropriate social behaviours and perceiving ability levels relative to others (Schunk, 1984). Social experiences with peers are a major source of stress as well as a positive developmental tool for children of ethnic background (Chen and Tse, 2008), with friendships being of particular benefit to a child’s self-esteem and sense of self-worth (Schunk, 1984; Burgess et al., 2006). Minority children face a number of challenges such as inconsistencies between cultural norms and stereotypical attitudes, at the same time as learning to cope with these challenges and displaying their culturally related strengths (Chen and Tse, 2008). Muslim youth in particular have felt isolated and separated from their peers and the surrounding school environment mainly because of cultural misunderstandings and discrimination, which have increased since 9/11 (Britto, 2008). It seems imperative to critically delve, both theoretically and actively, into the reasons behind these negative attitudes towards Muslims. One possible reasoning, as suggested by Rosenthal (1987), is that adolescents who are insecure in their own identity are more likely to have negative attitudes towards other groups. Kabir (2005) has noted that the apparent xenophobic and discriminative attitudes that mainstream Australians held towards Muslims was because they were unfamiliar with Islamic culture or because Muslims were viewed as a threat to the majority culture and security. The implications this idea has for teachers and leaders, as well as school programs and policies, is quite noteworthy.

Many children display a desire to conform to the standards of their peers, extending at times beyond their actual presence (Caldas, 2007). However, in the aim of protecting themselves from the peer pressure to conform, other children share intimate information and build relationships with trustworthy friends (Burgess et al., 2006; Singer and Doonenbal, 2006). Zine (2001) for example, found the students in her study were positively peer pressured by social networks they had developed within the Muslim community, such as Muslim Associations; and negatively peer pressured by both Muslim students who followed the mainstream norms as well as non-Muslim peers. Students in Zine’s study found they had to foster relationships with other Muslims in order to create a support system based on affinity and mutual interest (Zine, 2001; see also Peek, 2005;
Shammas, 2009). The reported supportive relationships helped students withstand the social pressures that might jeopardise their religious identity, providing them with a higher level of security and comfort. Unsurprisingly, Muslims attending an Islamic school would feel this support more intensely. Their peer group is the dominant group, thus the Muslim culture becomes the dominant culture for them (Sanjakdar, 2001). Furthermore, in a study by Barron (2007), children as young as three and four also relied on peer groupings of the same ethnicity, indicating their need for familiarity and support.

In regard to gender, studies have found that during interactions of conflict with peers, girls were more likely to report feelings of embarrassment and internalise their emotions or choose inaction as coping strategies (Burgess et al., 2006). Furthermore, girls generated more pro-social strategies and were less vengeful than boys (Burgess et al., 2006; Rueger, 2008). Some of these potential feelings were explored with the participants in the current study to check whether they corresponded to Burgess’ and others’ work (see Chapter Six).

3.2.6 Curriculum ‘partiality’

*He who tells the story creates the culture (Lue, 2003, p.8)*.

With students from multiple races, ethnicities, and religions, classrooms are becoming ever more diverse, creating a great need for an inclusive curriculum and pedagogies that confirm and seriously employ the multiple literacies and experiences that students bring with them (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Proweller, 1999; Lue, 2003; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Authors such as Sabry and Bruna (2007) and Britto (2008), have discussed the theory of ‘cultural mismatch’ which regards the gap, or differences, between home and school cultures as being the main cause for academic failure. Traditional curricula do not adequately represent the history of minority students (Sabry and Bruna, 2007; Britto, 2008) and thus policies and practices need to be re-examined so as ‘white dominance’ is not promoted at the expense of other cultures and perspectives (Proweller, 1999; Zine, 2007, 2008). Adopting a curriculum that shows an appreciation of all students by encouraging the acceptance of differences among individuals produces numerous benefits including increase in self-esteem, development of critical thinking, and promotion of social justice.
(Baskin, 2002; see also Wingfield, 2006, for a number of strategies on integrating ethnic content into the curriculum). Optimum learning can be achieved when the diverse developmental, cultural, linguistic and educational needs of children are met where children and families feel accepted, and cultural and linguistic identities are acknowledged (Barron, 2007; Kirmani, 2007; Yasmeen, 2008). As Lue (2003) describes, ‘children need to see themselves in books’ (p.8). When children feel that authors who write about them understand who they are and what their needs are, they feel a common heritage with shared experiences (Lue, 2003).

Even so, many Muslim parents are concerned with the importance of an Islamic ethos in schools, which is why Islamic schools are still the optimal choice for parents who want a holistically Islamic influence on their children. The hidden curriculum of a school plays just as important a role as the written curriculum because of the strong influence it plays on the attitudes and behaviours of students (Sanjakdar, 2001). It is difficult to establish shared understanding and to build trust when the school and home do not share a common culture (Hughes et al., 2005). Accordingly, when the hidden curriculum, which is the total culture and ethos of a school, reinforces a students’ culture, it helps develop a genuine sense of belonging, comfort and pride (Sanjakdar, 2001).

Accordingly, the importance children place on schooling is crucial to the relevance and value they place on education and the role it plays in their future aspirations. Studies have shown the feelings children have about future participation in education are reliable indications of what they will actually do later (Croll et al., 2008). In addition, although children commonly viewed school as important for their futures, this did not necessarily mean that they intended to continue their education after they finished compulsory schooling (Croll et al., 2008). In her study, Shah (2008) referred to statistics which indicated that one-third of British Muslim students leave school without qualifications. However, she also cited Hewer (2001) and NCSL (2005) as showing that Muslim students appeared to perform better in schools with a larger Muslim population. This leads to the implications of identity and efficacy formation in private versus public schools.

The predominance of school in children’s lives will undoubtedly influence many aspects of their future lives, hence the grave implications of schooling experiences and relationships. Researchers such as Jackson (2003) however, place greater emphasis on student agency than on experiences schools may provide. He believes attitudes and beliefs students have of their own learning
combined with the creation of strong ‘micro-cultures’, allow students from every background to develop an ‘academic identity’ that is compatible with their other components of self.

3.3 Socio-political and cultural-religious contexts

One in every five people around the world are Muslims with this figure projected to increase in the future as Islam is claimed to be the fastest growing religion (Afridi, 2001; Robinson, 2001; Adherents.com, 2007; Britto, 2008). The rich diversity and range of culture and ethnicity of Muslims are sometimes overlooked, misunderstood, or unlike other religious groups, even represented as a homogenous group. However, one just has to visit Makkah during the pilgrimage season to witness that adherents of Islam are made up of multiple ethnicities, races, languages, nationalities and tribes (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Afridi, 2001; Zine, 2001; Wise and Ali, 2008).

3.3.1 Muslims in the community

Regardless of the large number of adherents in Islam, Muslims have not been well understood or accepted by the Western world symbolising the discourse of Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism’ (2003). Orientalism has been defined as ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’ (Said, 2003, p.3). This discourse has been demonstrated through examples of stereotyping, intolerance, and blatant discrimination recorded in the recent history of Western nations against Muslims, incidentally peaking during times of political and world conflict, such as the Gulf wars, and more so in the past decade since 9/11. Women who wear the hijab have especially been targeted by what Zine (2006, 2008) describes as ‘gendered Islamophobia’. Islamophobia has become a popular term used increasingly among writers to describe the ‘fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination’ (Zine, 2006). Muslim women have been framed as ‘backward and ignorant’ (Zine, 2006; Muhtaseb, 2007; Sensoy, 2007), as well as oppressed and with an absence of agency (Humphrey, 2001; Zine, 2006; Sensoy, 2007). Writers have expressed how these global political developments have further driven Muslims towards ‘self-exclusion’ and ‘in-group cohesion’ (Shah, 2008; Yasmeen, 2008) possibly in the pursuit of physical security or as a mere defence strategy (Shah, 2006). American literature has covered this issue extensively (see Said,
1997; Afridi, 2001; Ashrif, 2001; Shah, 2006; Sabry and Bruna, 2007; Sensoy, 2007; Isler, 2009), however similar issues occur in Canadian (see Zine, 2006, 2008) and Australian contexts (see Donohoue Clyne, 2001b; Humphrey, 2001; Poynting and Noble, 2004; Dunn et al., 2007; Wise and Ali, 2008), albeit to a lesser extent. The concerns highlighted regarding Muslims in Western societies, are extraneous in Saudi Arabian community life where Muslims are the majority and Islam is embedded in the everyday running of the country. Islam is considered the ‘way of life’ for the estimated population of 28 million Saudis, of whom 97 per cent are Muslims (Pew Forum, 2009). In addition, there are 5.5 million non-Saudi residents (CIA World Factbook, 2010) of whom the majority are originally from countries with a high Muslim population, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Egypt, Yemen, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria and Turkey.

In contrast, the Muslim community in Australia is a small part of Australian society making up 1.7 per cent of Australia’s population (ABS, 2007). Nevertheless, the last few years have seen increasing tensions surrounding Muslims in Australia. It is becoming increasingly the perception for Muslims that Australia is not giving them a ‘fair go’ and they are torn between being considered foreigners and being accepted as Australians. As already noted in Chapter One, it is claimed that Muslims are the most discriminated against and victimised Australians, that there was widespread rise in violence against Muslims and Arabs, and 90 per cent of female respondents reported experiencing racism, abuse or violence (Hassan, 2007). Hassan (2007) reported that the last ten years of the Australian Federal Government’s leadership has witnessed dramatic increases in abuse and violent attacks directed against Muslim Australians. Although there have been studies that show general support amongst Australians for Muslim women who wear the hijab (Dunn, 2009), hijab-wearing Muslim women have reported higher rates of racist incivilities and assaults than have Muslim men or those women not wearing types of Islamic cover (Dunn et al., 2007). Such abuse has led to Muslims becoming hostages in their own homes, afraid to venture out, and has included Muslim women and girls being spat on in the street, assaulted on public buses, having their scarves torn from them, mosques and schools have been vandalised and set alight, men have been arrested and charged without a lawyer, and men and women alike have been discriminated against in the workplace in both obtaining and retaining a job (Hassan, 2007). Furthermore, funding for various Islamic schools and communities has been removed by the Federal Government, associating donations to these with terrorism (Hassan, 2007).
The dominant groups in Australia have portrayed not only discrimination towards Muslims, especially those of Middle Eastern appearance, but also a fear of what they may represent (Wise, 2006). The climate of fear, which media has been stirring since 9/11 and the Bali bombings tends to be transformed into an element of hate against Muslims and Middle Eastern people. Thus, riots, such as the Cronulla riots in December 2005, seem to have been affected by such global influences as some rioters involved attacks on representations of religion. Rioters not only negatively connected Islam with the ethnic community they were demonstrating against but also offended non-Arab Muslims on a national and international level.

Overall, the media has played a major role in imposing particular stereotypical representations of Muslims (Said, 1997; Kabir, 2005; Dunn *et al.*, 2007). A recent report by the Independent Centre of Research Australia [ICRA]) has stressed one of the biggest challenges facing young Muslim Australians is religious and racial discrimination by the media, turning young Muslim Australians into a marginalised, alienated group within their own society (Hassan, 2007).

With all this in mind, one must consider the impact on students, in particular, a student’s rejection of values and practices of mainstream schools and classrooms (Nasir, 2004). Children sometimes fail by choice in a school culture that they view as unsupportive or alienating. Although multiculturalism has been a feature of Australian society, there remains evidence of hostility towards ‘non-whites’, including the Muslim community. However, in spite of apparent hostility and intolerance towards Muslims, there are suggestions that Muslim girls are overcoming discrimination and establishing a strong and vibrant place in Australian society.

Muslims have established strong roots in the Australian community. Beginning from as early as the late 17th or early 18th Century, indigenous and Muslim communities from Makassar in Indonesia, traded, socialised and intermarried (Kabir, 2005; Stephenson, 2008; Yasmeen, 2008) and the first Afghan Muslims arrived with the first settlers over 200 years ago. As their American counterparts have done in their communities (Afridi, 2001), Australian Muslims are becoming socially, politically and organisationally engaged. Muslim Australians have made headway in establishing a vibrant and successful community that is not seen as outside the mainstream, with evidence of embracing hybrid characteristics. Visible symbols of Islam and the presence of Muslims in the community are evident from an increase of mosques, schools, Islamic dress, Islamic education and social centres. Over the last decade greater numbers of Muslim women in particular have entered professions in,
for example, medicine, engineering and academia, and in the media, joining their male counterparts. Many Muslim women have used the public space to promote awareness about Muslim women’s issues and increase understanding about Islam (Mc Cue, 2008). Examples of this are found in literature, such as Randa Abdel-Fattah’s (2005) book ‘Does my head look big in this?’ which explores youth religious, social and cultural identity; public media comments, such as those made by Nadia Jamal (2006, cited in Mc Cue, 2008) and Fatima Shah (2004, cited in Mc Cue, 2008); and social research by various Muslim groups, such as The Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria’s published work (IWWC, 2003) on international global events that have affected the lives of Muslim women (IWWC, cited in Mc Cue, 2008).

Moreover, there is great debate surrounding the idea of having ‘Australian values’ (ABC Television, 2007; Mackay, 2007; Walsh and Karolis, 2008). The issues regarding Australian values come to the fore politically and in the media by trying to distinguish between what is seen by the white Protestant majority as ‘Australian values’ and those that are ‘un-Australian’. However, many in Australian society see this as an irrelevant term which unnecessarily creates divisions amongst various communities (ABC Television, 2007; Mackay, 2007), or in the very least Australian values need to be situated alongside global identity and values narratives (Walsh and Karolis, 2008). Unfortunately, this term has also created in many minority groups desperation to ‘prove’ that they are as Australian as anyone else and that they too embrace these ‘true Australian values’. Studies have even been conducted to demonstrate that young Muslims are in fact adopting Australian values (Kabir, 2008), portraying proudly that many students identify themselves more with being Australian than their heritage or national culture. Mohammed Zaoud (2007), a Muslim university student, who took part in interviews for ‘The face of Islam’, ardently expressed the irrelevance of differentiating between Australian values and other values:

*If you show me an Australian value, I can show you a corresponding Islamic value...everything we hold dear to our hearts as Australians is held dear to our hearts as a Muslim* (Zaoud, 2007, www.smh.com.au).

Even so, for many Westerners including those in Australia, Muslims remain the ‘other’, viewed with distrust as outsiders and a threat (Afridi, 2001; Ashrif, 2001; Donohoue Clyne, 2001b; Humphries, 2001; Kabir, 2005; Peek, 2005; Dunn *et al.*, 2007; Zine, 2007; Wise and Ali, 2008) to their safety and to their way of life. As such, Muslims’ sense of belonging to the nation and to their neighbourhoods is vulnerable as they begin to lack confidence in their social setting weakening
their trust in the world around them, or their ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991; Wise and Ali, 2008). Consequently, this distrust represents a taking away of many Muslim-Australians’ capacity for social action as their sense of social competence and efficacy is reduced (Noble, 2005). This may also explain why Muslim aspirations in education remain to a large extent unrealised as Muslims continue to be under-represented at all levels of qualifications across Australia, with the exception of 8.8 per cent of Muslim adults who completed their education with higher degrees compared to 4 per cent for the Australian population as a whole (Donohoue Clyne, 2001b).

It appears that a better understanding of Muslims and Islam needs to be fostered both locally and globally in order to enhance feelings of belonging, acceptance and appreciation. As Kabir (2008; see also Carbines et al., 2006) suggests, feelings of belonging seem to help overcome differences and adverse living conditions. Being understood and supported in their schools increased students’ sense of belonging, and thus Kabir rationalises that if politicians and the media ceased from labelling Muslims as the ‘other’, then the issues of alienation and unacceptance would be erased, or at least minimised. Such thoughts highlight the integration of the cultural, social and political contexts affecting the well-being and sense of self of Muslims. According to Carbines et al. (2006), true success in removing the sense of alienation that Muslims feel, will come with real progress in building a sense of worth and identity leading to full integration of young Muslims into the mainstream community.

*The twin goals of cultural pluralism and social inclusion, where all can play a full part in mainstream society, are undermined when people hold closed views about other groups. Closed views flourish when stereotypes are perpetuated by the media and by political and religious leaders; where cultural exchanges on a personal level are few; when ethnic communities become inwardly focused; where critical inquiry is discouraged; freedom of speech stifled, and those who are “different” in their speech, dress and customs are perceived as a threat to personal security and social wellbeing* (Carbines et al., 2006, p.94).

### 3.3.2 Muslim students in schools

With about 100,000 Muslim children attending schools in Australia (ABS, 2006) and the concept of ‘Islamaphobia’ becoming more real in society, there have been growing concerns amongst Muslim communities for the sense of place and sense of self of Muslim students. Muslim women have particularly been targeted as their dress code is a clear religious marker making them a visible
target for abuse and racial and religious hatred (Mc Cue, 2008). As more Muslims in Australia are being marginalised and harassed, it is crucial to inquire about the well-being and condition of their identity and self-efficacy and whether the current social political climate has had any influence in shaping their sense of self.

In many parts of the Western world, including Australia, there is an increasing demand for private Islamic schools as parents search for an education and an environment that is in harmony with their religious beliefs and practices. However, according to unpublished data from the 2006 Australian Census, the majority of Muslim children in Australia (around 80 per cent) attend public schools (Buckingham, 2010). As Muslims are becoming more visible in public schools, various strategies, materials and other forms of support have been implemented to help integrate them into the mainstream (Schwartz, 1999). However, few if any schools have acknowledged Muslim culture and history (Schwartz, 1999; Donohoue Clyne, 2001a) showing little consideration for the long history of Muslim migration and settlement in Australia, nor have they acknowledged contributions made by Muslims to the world’s knowledge in mathematics, medicine, architecture and science (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Said, 2001). Where there is a lack of acknowledgement, students find themselves and their communities absent in the curriculum, seeing themselves only through the ‘distorted lens’ of the dominant culture including various ‘myths, stereotypes and false images’ (Sabry and Bruna, 2007). A devaluing by ‘omission’ (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a) is further perpetuated by the misconstrued and ambiguous generalisations of Muslims from individual examples presented by the media which in turn affect the perceptions leaders and teachers have of student needs and educational destinations (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Shah, 2006). The HREOC report cited earlier (2004) shows students reporting a lack of teacher support over racial and religious incidents of discrimination and a perceived lack of understanding of students’ cultural and religious backgrounds.

Some of the prevalent issues for Muslim students arising in educational settings include debates about dress code, concerns about participation (or non-participation) in particular lessons or activities, misconceptions about their faith and practices, and low expectations (Zine, 2001; Archer, 2002; Wingfield, 2006; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Other major issues Muslims experience include racism, media hostility, association with terrorism, social exclusion, harassment, stereotyping, negative assumptions, religious hatred, and discrimination (Shah, 2008). Recent
work by Ata (2009) reveals that more than half of the non-Muslim adolescents he studied viewed Muslims as ‘terrorists’ and believed they ‘behave strangely’. These findings demonstrate the lack of accurate knowledge of Muslims and Islam and the inadequacy of the education system in providing students with such knowledge and understanding (Mc Cue, 2008). A succinct description of issues and challenges Muslim youth experience in the USA is provided by Sabry and Bruna’s work (2007) regarding areas of curriculum, instruction, and home-school relations. After interviewing Muslim parents, students and teachers in an American city, as well as drawing on one author’s own experiences as a Muslim, they found the challenges included: ‘inaccuracy and bias’ in curriculum and schooling, ‘insensitivity and unawareness’ in instruction, and ‘uncooperative, passive relationships between families and schools’ in home-school relations. Similar to what other minority groups have experienced, the stereotypes educators may hold about Muslim girls’ education and career prospects has been shown to play an important role in denying particular educational and employment opportunities (Brah, 1994; Basit, 1997; Zine, 2001). Many teachers also seem to hold the attitude that Arabs or Muslims are low achievers and are usually neglectful of their education (Wingfield, 2006; Archer, 2008). Underachievement, negative evaluations and bias in assessment can result from low teacher expectations of ethnic minority students (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Zine, 2001; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Thus, the self-esteem and emotional well-being of minority students may be compromised with many of them becoming disengaged from schooling (Zine, 2001; Shah, 2008).

Many second and third generation Muslims also risk acquiring the characteristics of the ‘Third-Culture Kid’. A Third-Culture Kid is described as someone who is caught ‘between cultures’ and has spent most of their developmental years in a culture other than their parents’ (Shah, 2006; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Their identity lacks a sense of belonging to a specific culture; thus, while young Muslims would not act as ‘typical’ Arabs or Indians for example, they are also not completely accepted in the society they were born and raised in (Sabry and Bruna, 2007). The Third-Culture Kid can be seen as occupying Bhaba’s notion of ‘third space’ (1994) as culture has become destabilised, uncertain and even ambiguous. The cultural mismatch between home and school relations places pressure on students as families and communities expect them to be good and proud Muslims, while teachers and schools expect them to conform to school and classroom guidelines (Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Researchers claim that when educators show little understanding of the various religious obligations of students, a divide is sure to form between
public schools and Muslim homes (Sabry and Bruna, 2007). This lack of understanding in turn is likely to create a barrier to learning (Zine, 2001, 2008).

In spite of the numerous studies on how Muslims and Muslim students have been negatively affected by the attitudes and intolerances of their teachers and wider communities, other studies have shown how they have overcome such obstacles. In her study on the schooling experiences of Muslim youth in Canada, Zine (2001) found that students were able to overcome such barriers particularly through strong family and peer support. The compelling and moving narratives of her participants show how they continuously:

*attempted to negotiate their religious identities within the context of a secular school system, despite having to contend with peer pressure, racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia* (Zine, 2001, p.418).

Zine demonstrated through the narratives of her participants how Muslim students are constantly negotiating the politics of religious identity in their schooling experiences of ambivalence, role performance, interaction and isolation. In other studies on Muslims, students were motivated by local and global events to take up positions of awareness campaigning, while others experienced an intense turning to Islam, strengthening their identity as ‘Muslim Americans’ (Peek, 2005; Isler, 2009). Mc Cue (2008) reported that the majority of Muslim Australian women have responded to abuse and discrimination with courage and assertiveness, ‘confident in their identity as Australian Muslims’, albeit the more vulnerable women among them have found it more difficult and at times resort to withdrawing from the public sphere. These include newly arrived immigrants and women with poor language skills.

In addition, there has been an increase in the number of community groups and schools that are working towards resolving some of the concerns mentioned above. For example, the Migrant Information Centre of Eastern Melbourne undertook the ‘Communities Together Project’ in 2004 which involved students and teachers from local schools taking part in Islamic sensitivity training (Mc Cue, 2008). Other studies have demonstrated the work done by some schools (including Islamic, Catholic, and government) to reduce potential isolation and alienation of Islamic youth through interschool cooperation, in assisting Muslim students and their parents to understand the feasibility of Islamic culture and Australian civic values and cultures coexisting, and in promoting the understanding of Islam among Australian students demonstrating its compatibility with other
Australian values and cultures (Carbines et al., 2006). These studies demonstrate the recent efforts on a national and local level undertaken in an attempt to create mutual understanding between the Islamic community and the broader Australian community (Carbines et al., 2006), as well as the ensuing benefits and advantages for both Muslim and non-Muslim students. Among the most prevalent of these is the breaking down of religious and cultural barriers and the building of knowledge about religious and cultural practices in authentic contexts, with students reporting that the experiences have enabled them ‘to test and better understand their own cultural identity’ (Carbines et al., 2006, p.ix).

The importance of creating mutual understanding and providing for the needs of students to construct positive identities is explored in Section 3.4 on the role of schools. The literature portrays the crucial roles in these schools that leadership, programs implemented, and the school environment play in the social and academic development of students. The effect of the home environment is however discussed below first.

### 3.3.3 Parents and home environment

The importance of parent support and the effect of their expectations on students have been found to be central factors in student achievement and adjustment (Powell and Peet, 1996; Raty et al., 2002; Klassen, 2004; Rueger et al., 2008). Although girls have been found to rely on peer support more than parent support, both boys and girls have demonstrated that parent support continues to be important to them in adolescence (Rueger et al., 2008). Therefore, these relationships need to be encouraged as parents still play a critical role in the ‘protection and positive development’ of their children (Rueger et al., 2008). Some research studies have indicated differences in ethnic perceptions towards parent support and expectations. For example, Klassen (2008) suggested that Asian students have been found to have a greater desire to meet the academic expectations of their parents than students of Western cultures. Basit (1997) found in her study that most Muslim parents had a positive attitude towards education, including that of their daughters, and were often seen as a liberalising force. Consequently, their daughters had high educational and career aspirations themselves. It was also found that immigrant parents frequently had higher academic expectations for their children than did non-immigrant parents.
(Klassen, 2004). These findings have great implications for the development of minority students. The importance of creating opportunities for parents to examine their beliefs and expectations about their child’s future and about their parental responsibilities in supporting their child’s development needs to be promoted (Powell and Peet, 1996).

3.4 Role of schools: Leadership and curriculum for Muslim girls

The critical role leadership and school environments play in the learning, well-being and self-esteem of students has been reported on and promoted by many writers (Sosa, 1990; Drake, 2000; Korir and Karr-Kidwell, 2000; Kuersten, 2000; Henze, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Yeh and Drost, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Shah, 2008). The role of leadership is indeed a major focus of educational writings, and only a few examples have been cited in this section of the chapter. Although leadership roles concern and affect all students, the following have been selected for their particular focus on minority students with some emphasis on Muslims in the Australian community. The success of a school relies heavily on its responsiveness to the diverse needs of students, parents and communities (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Drake, 2000; Shah, 2006; Sabry and Bruna, 2007), particularly within a multi-ethnic or multicultural school. Being adaptable is fundamental to being a responsive school, where changes in the environment lead to changes in school programs (Drake, 2000).

School leaders are seen as the key to success with the environments they create, the programs they implement, and the decisions they make. Studies have found a strong connection between a principal’s effectiveness and self-esteem, student achievement, and student behaviour (Korir and Karr-Kidwell, 2000; Shah, 2006). Principals who have a realistic school vision which they achieve in collaboration with teachers, parents and the school community (Korir and Karr-Kidwell, 2000; Shah, 2008), and have a positive belief system and values, have been shown to create a positive, inclusive school climate and culture (Korir and Karr-Kidwell, 2000; Shah, 2006; 2008) particularly for vulnerable groups such as Muslims, who feel marginalised or ‘misunderstood’ (Shah, 2006).
Implementing the three processes of affirming identity, building community, and cultivating student leadership has been found to create effective learning environments (Henze, 2001). Kuersten (2000) explains this further by describing ‘good’ environments as fostering both learning and self-esteem. This is achieved by acknowledging students and ensuring acceptance by others, having policies that support student growth, nurturing student voice in decision making, presenting opportunities for self-expression and self-exploration, and creating a stimulating, pleasant physical setting (Kuersten, 2000). Effective learning environments embrace ‘inclusive education’, affirming minority voices, histories and experiences (Baskin, 2002; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). The value of preparing teachers to be sensitive to religious and cultural differences (Shah, 2006) and improving teacher-child relationships, as demonstrated earlier, is also a critical part of a leader’s role as they are related to numerous academic and social outcomes (Jerome et al., 2008). In addition, establishing quality relationships between teachers and families of minority students has been found to be vital in creating appropriate and welcoming school environments (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Hughes et al., 2005; Carбинės et al., 2006). Having a diverse school staff further supports the needs of the school community as it provides role models and a diverse worldview to the curriculum (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Saft and Pianta, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Shah, 2006).

A number of studies focus on the importance of successfully creating culturally inclusive environments through state and government initiatives. Suggestions have been made at the state and federal levels that could improve interactions and cooperation among Muslims and the wider community. Ideas of who should be responsible for building bridges included agencies of state, social groups and minority/religious groups (Yasmeen, 2008). Both Muslim and non-Muslim Australians have already taken part in such initiatives including liaising between various social and administrative activities, interacting through sports activities, encouraging Muslims to serve on committees dealing with local issues, participating in inter-faith dialogues, and interacting with government and civil society agents (Yasmeen, 2008).

As having valuable role models (Parker-Jenkins, 1996; Saft and Pianta, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Shah, 2006) is a noteworthy aspect in enhancing the development and self-efficacy of students, then it is important to examine what Muslim women have achieved today, particularly in regards to leadership. This will provide insight into the possibilities that Muslim girls (like those in this study) may have of achieving their aspirations in the near future, and the importance of having strong
leaders (whether Muslim or non-Muslim, male or female) in schools who support the development of their self-efficacy and identity. Thus, the next section describes issues regarding women and leadership generally with some literature found on Muslim women in particular.

**Women and leadership**

As this study looked at the identity and self-efficacy of pre-adolescent Muslim girls, it was found to be pertinent to gain insight to their possible future as leaders and role models through the current literature on women and in particular Muslim women and leadership. This section begins by looking at women in leadership in general, minority women in leadership then finally focusing on Muslim women leaders.

Becoming a leader of an organisation may not be the ultimate aim of all females; however female leadership remains a prevalent issue amongst academic, corporate and political circles, particularly amongst feminist groups, in an attempt to fulfil the aspirations of complete gender equality. The fight against the trend of women generally filling fewer leadership roles continues despite the significant increase of women in the regular workforce. Considerable research (Irby and Brown, 1995; Fennell, 1997; Coffey and Anderson, 1998; Jones and Boulard, 1999; Foster, 2000; Korcheck and Reese, 2002; Madden, 2005; Blackmore and Sachs, 2007; Arnot and Fennell, 2008; Rodgers-Healey, 2008) has been conducted in the last decade across various fields to discuss, describe, explain, theorise, advocate and present solutions for this issue. In education for example, Herber (2002) and Blackmore and Sachs (2007) have found that the concept of the ‘glass ceiling’ still exists with women not advancing in the ranks of academia as well as not earning the status comparable to their numbers.

By the end of the 90’s there was a steep decrease in the number of women entering tenured, full-time educational management, which duplicated patterns in the wider workforce (Blackmore and Sachs, 2007). In the Australian context, Foster (2000) has found that women are greatly underrepresented in a range of occupations including principals and senior executive staff in schools with only 25% being women, even though 75% of primary school teachers are women. In addition, the EOWA (Equal Opportunity for women in the Workplace Agency) found in the Australian Census for 2006 that women in corporate leadership remained underrepresented and that women
were generally excluded from positions that have significant influence over business direction, the economy, public policy and the community in general (see also Foster, 2000). Furthermore, there was no increase from previous years, in the appointment of female CEOs in the 200 organisations studied, with just six companies (3 per cent) led by women. Other studies have discussed various issues in order to promote female leadership. Some of these include strategies that improve female leadership positions so that women are more effective in their roles (Madden, 2005); examples of successful female leaders and their positive contributions (Fennell, 1997; Jones and Boulard, 1999); and the significance of identifying a new space for women’s being, valuing and doing beyond the masculinist boundaries of leadership (Rodgers-Healey, 2008).

Despite the strength of the ‘Equal Opportunity Policy’ in providing a legal framework and a set of behavioural expectations concerning difference and diversity in the workforce (Blackmore and Sachs, 2007), research has shown that the majority of these leadership roles are further confined to those women from the dominant race, religion and culture (Madden, 2005; Blackmore and Sachs, 2007). In addition, when exploring the Western context, Muslim women seem to fill fewer leadership roles than other minority groups. How can these results be explained? Stereotypical images of Muslim women would explain that they are oppressed with little educational choices, let alone career choices, in a dominantly patriarchal religious culture (see Ahmad, 2001; Muhtaseb, 2007; and Sensoy, 2007). Another explanation could be that the increased fear and media against Islam and Muslims has affected their prospects of gaining leadership positions. The critical question here is how do educators ensure Muslim girls transgress these stereotypes and obstacles to achieve their aspirations?

Nevertheless, when Muslim women speak out, it is becoming increasingly evident that many of them are already overcoming these stereotypes and are actively taking part in Australian society. Jamila Hussain (2007), an Anglo-Australian revert to Islam, and an accomplished academic, has described numerous Muslim women she knows as university students and professionals who are not ‘sitting around waiting on their husbands’, despite many images of Muslim women as being oppressed. She continues that these women are out there working, looking after their kids and doing all the ‘normal things that Australian women do’. In her study on the civil and social participation of Australian Muslim women, Helen McCue (2008) found that the Muslim women in her study were generally well educated with over two-thirds having completed a bachelors or
higher level post graduate studies and almost half of the Muslim women leaders had or were completing post graduate studies at Masters or PhD level. These women were also found to be actively involved in the workforce, either part time or full time, and 40 per cent of the Muslim women leaders either are or have been involved in small business enterprise (Mc Cue, 2008).

Nadia Jamal (2007), a Muslim journalist and author, talks about her opinions on gender and Muslim women. She believes that women are treated differently because of their gender, regardless of their faith. Although agreeing that sometimes Muslim women are discriminated against, she believes it stems from cultural attitudes towards women, adding that more needs to be done to ensure the condition of women is improved not just in terms of the democratic principles Australians live by and the freedoms given to women, but also by the inherent rights given to women by *Allah*. Muslim women have also expressed the need for an increase in community leadership, which at the moment is restricted to being provided by Muslim Women’s Organisations (MWOs) and committed individuals (Mc Cue, 2008).

After searching for some comprehensive literature on Muslim women and leadership, the researcher found a gap with little research conducted in this area. By exploring the self-efficacy of the girls in this study as well as their aspirations and attitudes towards education, it was hoped that the researcher would be provided with insight to the girls’ beliefs about their possible future roles in society, particularly as potential leaders.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The contextual background has portrayed the value and necessity of cross-cultural investigations to further understandings of the implications of living in a multicultural world and of how students are functioning in multi-ethnic (and multi-religious) schools (Klassen, 2004). Although this study emphasises the current situation and needs of Muslim students, it is clear that other minority groups merit the same consideration. Through the above literature, the school and social contextual background of this study has been provided in order to offer insight into the key concepts affecting the participants in this study. The next chapter presents the methodological framework undertaken to conduct the study, including literature on the theories and the methods utilised throughout the research process.
4.1 Introduction

The study into perceptions and personal constructions of identity and self-efficacy of Muslim primary school girls was undertaken in both Australian and Saudi Arabian contexts. As the research was predominantly based on the students’ own interpretations of self, and teachers’ interpretations of their students’ behaviour and academic performance, the study adopted an interpretive-qualitative paradigm as the underlying framework to present the various ‘realities’ or ‘truths’ the girls constructed from their experiences and perceptions. A mixed method research approach was employed as a suitable methodological model to incorporate the strengths from the complementary quantitative and qualitative data gathered (Punch, 2005; Hunt, 2007; Creswell, 2009). This was achieved by using the ‘sequential explanatory model’ recommended by Creswell (1994; Creswell et al. 2003), that focused particularly on qualitative data, with some quantitative information allowing responses from the interviews to be understood in relation to a larger cohort of students.

The research was conducted as a multi-site case study in order to collect detailed information about and self-perceptions of Muslim pre-adolescent girls in particular contexts. The study was substantially conducted with Australian Muslim girls from the State of New South Wales; however, it also drew on the cultural/religious ethos and values of Saudi Arabian girls to illuminate possible differences or similarities between diverse cultural contexts.

The data collected during this study included responses from student questionnaires, student interviews, teacher focus groups and teacher questionnaires. This study was undertaken in five primary schools in Australia with 74 students completing a preliminary questionnaire and 21 of those students from the upper primary years participating in the qualitative in-depth follow up interviews. In addition, 51 students from both a private international school and a public school in Saudi Arabia completed the questionnaire. Seven teachers from Australia participated in the focus groups and three teachers from Saudi Arabia completed the open-ended teacher questionnaires. The mixed method approach united the qualitative exploration of the girls’ own written and
spoken narratives in their natural setting with the quantitative use of pre-structured data. The qualitative data were analysed using a coding system that incorporated conceptualisation, open coding, axial coding and selective coding at different stages of data collection. The quantitative data utilised the SPSS program to support the analysis of the structured response answers. Throughout the study, the researcher ensured the practice of bracketing (Crotty, 1996, 1998) so as to be aware of the researcher’s own subjective positioning, and to ensure that any prejudices held by the researcher were not passed onto the participants in the study. The last section of this chapter outlines how validity and trustworthiness of the study were considered by identifying the strategies adopted to address internal validity, external validity, and ethical considerations.

The following diagram summarises the concepts covered in this chapter.
Chapter Four ~ Methodology

Paradigm: 
Interpretive - Qualitative

Research Rationale: 
Purpose and questions

Research Design: 
Mixed method  
Multi-site case study

Participants: 
- 125 pre-adolescent Muslim girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia 
- 74 from private and public Australian schools 
- 51 from public and international Saudi schools 
- All completed questionnaires; 21 from Australian schools participated in interviews 
- Focus groups: 7 teachers from Australia 
- Teacher questionnaires: 3 teachers from Saudi

Data Collection Methods: 
Questionnaires  
Interviews  
Focus groups  
Teacher questionnaires

Data Analysis: 
SPSS program  
Conceptualisation  
Coding

Validity and Trustworthiness
Chapter Four ~ Methodology

4.2 Paradigm: Interpretive - Qualitative

An interpretive paradigm underlies qualitative methods (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003), to illuminate the central questions this study asks about the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim primary school girls. The interpretivist approach has been described by Crotty (1998) as looking ‘for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world’ (p.67). This study aimed to present the ‘multiple realities’ or ‘multiple truths’ which these girls constructed (Merriam, 1998; Sale et al., 2002) from their experiences and perceptions as pre-adolescent Muslim girls in Australia in addition to some valuable perspectives from Saudi Arabia.

The qualitative paradigm is an inquiry process that is characteristically naturalistic with the aim of understanding and studying people, things and events in their natural settings (Creswell, 1994; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Miller and Dingwall, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Punch, 2005). The basis of a qualitative paradigm is the building of a complex and holistic picture of a social or human problem with a report of the detailed views of the informants (Creswell, 1994; Bouma, 1996). Merriam (1998, 2002; see also Meyers and Sylvester, 2006) mentions five main characteristics of the qualitative method of inquiry, as summarised below:

1. Qualitative researchers are interested in **meaning** – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.

2. The qualitative researcher is the **primary instrument** for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.

3. Qualitative research involves **fieldwork**. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behaviour in its natural setting.

4. Qualitative research is **descriptive** in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.

5. The process of qualitative research is **inductive** in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

In addition, the quantitative paradigm was used as a complementary methodology. This enhanced the qualitative data as a larger cohort of participants answered the questionnaires providing general information to the researcher. While quantitative measures were included, qualitative data allowed more continuous reflection on the progressing research, more interaction with the
research participants, and more room for ongoing adjustments as the study proceeded (Bouma, 1996). When investigating the identity and self-efficacy of Muslim girls, a qualitative, interactive, ‘data-generating’ process was used. This allowed an exploration of the girls’ stories through their own written and spoken narratives in their natural setting rather than using pre-structured data and a controlled setting. Qualitative research is more suited and accessible to teachers as it has the added advantage of bringing together more closely both the researcher and the participants (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

To be succinct, this interpretive qualitative study exemplifies the characteristics of qualitative research as:

the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive (Merriam et al., 2002, p.6).

4.3 Research rationale: Purpose and questions

4.3.1 Purpose

As mentioned in Chapter One, the underlying purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of self-efficacy and personal identity of Australian Muslim girls in private Islamic schools and those in public schools. The study also included the added perspectives from Saudi Muslim girls in a public Islamic school and those in a private international school. This study examined the lived experiences of the participants through their narratives, giving the girls a voice. Global events have generated changing and challenging environments for children creating a requisite for both mutual understanding and for supporting students to construct positive identities. Thus, it was appropriate at the time to investigate how children described their identity and self-efficacy in order to gain insight into the needs of this particular group. This need was further emphasised as, to date, little research appears to have been carried out with pre-adolescent girls presenting their own voices. While this group is not as easy to research, and their answers are based on a relatively short amount of lived experiences, the study has resulted in
gathering important new data that allows new understandings of Muslim girls’ perceptions of identity and self-efficacy.

4.3.2 Research questions

The study focused on the following questions:

1. How do Muslim girls in different cultural contexts identify themselves?
2. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of identity?
3. In what ways do Muslim girls develop self-efficacy?
4. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of self-efficacy?
5. What implications do perceptions of Muslim girls regarding their identity and self-efficacy have for leadership practices, the school and its community in influencing the positive development of their identities and improving their levels of efficacy?

4.4 Research design: Mixed method

4.4.1 Mixed method design

Although the interpretive paradigm is usually qualitatively focused (Merriam, 2002), a mixed method design was utilised so that complementary data could be used to analyse the students’ interpretations and perceptions. The scope, depth and power of research were increased by combining the two approaches (Punch, 2005). The mixed method approach enables some triangulation of data. Hence, the validity of the information could be checked when comparing the responses from questionnaires, interviews and focus groups (Hunt, 2007; McMillan, 2008).

There are numerous models within the mixed method design with the most common specified as sequential studies, parallel/simultaneous studies, equivalent status designs, dominant-less dominant studies (Creswell, 1994), and designs with multilevel use of approaches (Tashakkori and
This study used the ‘sequential explanatory’ model where the researcher first conducted a quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003; McMillan, 2008). The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were used as a guide providing an overview of the students’ responses (McMillan, 2008). Following the questionnaires, qualitative data collection and analysis of the in-depth interviews and focus groups helped understand and explain responses given in the questionnaires. In this design, and as can be seen in the following chapters, integration of the first two phases occurred at the interpretation phase (Creswell et al., 2003) where findings are presented and discussed.

**Figure 4.1 Sequential Explanatory Design [Adapted from Creswell et al. (2003)]**

### 4.4.2 Multi-site case study

In the initial stages of this research, very few empirical studies were found regarding Muslim girls and only limited research on their sense of identity (especially concerning pre-adolescents). Very little information was available on issues of self-efficacy for Muslim girls. Thus, there were no decisive previous conclusions, findings, or generalisations that the researcher could base her study on and no expectations of what the results would be in this study. As case studies are employed for the significance they place on process, context and discovery (Merriam, 1998), they were found to be the most suitable inquiry mode for this research. Merriam (1998) described qualitative case studies as ‘intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or
social unit’ (p.27; see also Punch, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the case of pre-adolescent Muslim girls is a bounded system where the researcher ‘fence(d) in’ what was being studied (Merriam, 1998, 2002; Punch, 2005). The research conducted did not aim to generalise, so the researcher was able to explore and describe the research questions in the depth and detail made possible by the characteristics of this design.

Taking into account the issue of boundaries when conducting a case study is imperative. The focus of the research needs to be clearly defined and the specifics identified (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Stake, 1998; Punch, 2005). Accordingly, not all Islamic schools or public schools with Muslim students were studied, but rather a specific number of schools were selected with a defined number of students participating. Occurring in a ‘bounded context’, the case study thus defined for the researcher both what was to be the focus of the study and what defined the edge of the case; that is, what was not to be studied (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009). The case study was used to collect detailed information about, and self-perceptions of the Muslim girls in different contexts but also as particular individual children who are part of a particular group (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) with no comparison made with another group, such as non-Muslim children or boys (Bouma, 1996; Stake, 1998; McMillan, 2008). In addition, this study took place in primary school contexts and accordingly the case study design was used as many researchers declare it as being the most suited ‘format and orientation for school-based research’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.317).

The case study took on an explanatory form where an account of how the girls portrayed their self-efficacy and identity was provided (Neuman, 1994; Bouma, 1996; Yin, 2003). This study did not aim to test a hypothesis (as in exploratory studies), nor did it aim to provide a complete descriptive study of all aspects of the phenomenon affecting these girls (Yin, 2003). However, it did aim to discover and describe the relevant factors for this particular area of study (Bouma, 1996; Sarantakos, 1998; Yin, 2003; McMillan, 2008) and to explain and interpret relationships among the findings gleaned from the data (Creswell et al., 2003; Yin, 2003). As identity and self-efficacy are products of human culture, and these products are often explained by the concurrent state of society, then the explanatory case study approach was used effectively to provide a contextual explanation of the girls’ sense of identity and self-efficacy (Routio, 2007).
Furthermore, as several research sites were studied, this research is described as being a multi-site case study where the ‘experiences, implications, or effects of a phenomenon in different settings...produce data that show within-site patterns and cross-site synthesis’ (Bishop, 2010, p.589; Punch, 2005). Sometimes referred to as a ‘collective case study’, the researcher selected several schools as sites embedded within the case study of Muslim primary school girls, in order to achieve balance and variety, consequently increasing the opportunity to learn about the efficacy and identity of Muslim girls (Stake, 1995). Selecting these several sites or ‘sub-cases’ strengthened the ‘precision, the validity and the stability of the findings’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.29). This type of case study has been used as a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalisability of a study’s findings (Merriam, 1998), testing how results may vary within the different contexts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). It has also been shown that scholars prefer selecting multiple cases in order to answer explanatory research questions, as in this study (Bleijenbergh, 2010).

An important consideration in this research was to ensure as far as possible that the researcher’s own knowledge and presuppositions were bracketed, as explained by Michael Crotty (1996, 1998). In this way the data are not ‘tainted’ or prejudiced by the researcher’s own experiences. Arising from Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological ‘transcendental reduction’, bracketing requires the researcher to ‘set aside all previous habits of thought’ (Husserl, 1931, p.43), theories, presuppositions, ready-made interpretations, assumptions and so forth, so as to reveal engaged, lived experiences from the perspective of others (Ashworth, 1999; Gearing, 2004). Crotty (1996, p.272) urges researchers to ‘allow the data to speak for themselves’.

Using semi-structured interviews and open ended questions within this study were ways of achieving this. In addition, care was taken to ensure any themes identified in the data did in fact arise out of the data (Crotty, 1998). Nonetheless, Stake (1995) describes qualitative case studies as ‘highly personal research’ creating a unique interaction between the case and the researcher. Thus, some of the personal perspectives in the interpretation of the research are expected and often encouraged in qualitative studies (Stake, 1995). Furthermore, the researcher was from a similar cultural background to the students (especially regarding religion and gender) and to the teachers (being a teacher herself), which allowed the researcher more ‘open’ access to the participants assigning her with an insider or ‘emic’ status (Donohoue Clyne, 2001b; Sabry and
Bruner, 2007). The ‘emic’, described as the ‘culturally specific framework used by members of a culture for interpreting or assigning meanings to their experiences’ (Sabry and Bruner, 2007, p.46), aided the researcher in obtaining sincere responses in the interviews. Working within her own culture, the researcher was also able to interpret the meanings with greater ease due to the familiarity with the culture and an understanding of how issues and events may be perceived (Donohoue Clyne, 2001b).

### 4.5 Participants

The study focused on Stage Three (Years 5 and 6) female Muslim students from two public schools and three private Islamic schools in Australia, and a public and private international school in Saudi Arabia. A total of 125 students were surveyed of whom 74 were from Australia and 51 from Saudi Arabia. Most participants were between ten and twelve years old. Twenty-one of these girls, all from Australia, were interviewed. Furthermore, seven teachers from Australia took part in focus groups and three teachers from Saudi Arabia completed open-ended questionnaires. Anonymity of all participants was ensured, amongst other ethical considerations, as is discussed later in the chapter.

These participants were selected using ‘purposeful sampling’ (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Purposeful, or purposive sampling, is where information-rich cases are selected in order to learn in depth about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). This study employed the ‘criterion sampling’ strategy, one of 18 sampling strategies identified by Patton (2002). School contexts and students were selected if they met some of the ‘predetermined criteria’ set out by the researcher (i.e., Muslim pre-adolescent, primary school girls from public and private schools in Australia and Saudi Arabia; and teachers who have experience teaching Muslim girls, preferably the age group specified in this study). This sampling occurred at the case level before the data were collected, as well as within the case after the quantitative data was collected (Merriam, 1998).
4.5.1 Context of the study

This study sampled participants from four different school contexts. These included public Australian schools, private Australian schools, a public school in Saudi Arabia, and a private international school in Saudi Arabia. The two public schools in Australia lie in an outer city suburb with a large population of minority groups. Students from both these public schools come from a great variety of cultural, familial, socio-economic and religious backgrounds. The schools have a high percentage of minority students with approximately 50 per cent of them being Muslim students. Staff members at the school are also from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

One of the private schools in Australia lies in the same district as the public schools. The students at this school also come from various cultural, familial and socio-economic backgrounds; however they differ from the public schools in that all students enrolled are Muslims. The staff are made up of various ethnicities and up until three years ago all teachers at the school were Muslims. Of the three Islamic schools that took part in this study, this school has been established the longest. The other two Islamic schools are relatively new, established only three or four years ago. Similar to the first Islamic school, students at both these new schools are all Muslims and come from various backgrounds. The staff are also from diverse cultural backgrounds; however, all teachers are Muslims.

The public school in Saudi Arabia is in the city of Madinah, the second holiest city to Muslims after Makkah. The school follows educational policies of integrating Islam as part of the curriculum since Islam is central to Saudi Arabian culture. All public schools in Saudi Arabia are segregated by gender from Year 1 onwards. All teachers at this school are female Muslims, teaching girls who are all Saudi Arabian Muslims. The private school in this study is an International school located in a coastal region, a few hours from most major cities. It was set up by a private board of directors to provide for the children of the significant number of expatriates who live and work in this industrial town. The school implements the American curriculum and does not include any formal religious instructions. Students and teachers come from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds.

In Australia, the schools were selected on the basis of Muslim student population and accessibility to the researcher. Students from all schools self-identified as being of the Islamic faith when
sampling the participants. Students, parents and teachers were given information sheets as well as opportunities to talk to the researcher prior to giving consent. Information sessions were held to allow students, parents and teachers to ask questions and receive further details about the study. Consent forms were requested and those students who were given permission took part in the questionnaires and interviews. Teachers were then approached to participate in focus groups to discuss the issues surrounding the emerging data and this research. All but two teachers were employed at the schools studied. One teacher currently employed in the public system (but not one of the schools in this study) and another currently unemployed teacher expressed their interest in the study and were invited to join the focus groups.

4.5.2 Sample

Students

All Year 5 and 6 classes at the schools approached were invited to participate in the study, with options given of taking part in the interviews by nominating themselves. After clarifications and confirmations of the data collection process, and return of consent forms, participants in the questionnaires totalled 125 students from Years 5 and 6 from schools in Australia and Saudi Arabia.

The majority of girls ranged in age from 10-12 years old; however, there were also three eight-year-olds and five 13-year-olds from Saudi Arabia who participated. All girls in the Australian context spoke a second language other than English including one or more of Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Indonesian, Malay, Somali, Bengali, and Kiro/fulla. The majority of girls in the Saudi context spoke Arabic. All the public school girls and a few of the girls from the international school had Arabic as their first language. The rest of the girls attending the Saudi international school spoke English as a second language to Urdu, Chinese, Malay, or Hindi (these students were not from a Middle Eastern/Arab background).

From these students, 21 students from Australia continued the study with more in-depth data collection. A brief profile of these students is provided in Chapter Six. Eight of the interviewees attended private Islamic schools and 13 attended public schools. Five of the girls from the private school identified themselves as being either first or second generation Australians from an Arab
background, including four Lebanese, and one Iraqi-Palestinian. Two of the girls were second generation Australians, one from an Indonesian background and one from an Ethiopian-Djiboutian background. The eighth girl was a first generation Australian, born in India. In the public school there were five girls who were first or second generation Australians from Arab backgrounds including Syrian-Iraqi, Lebanese, Tunisian, and one girl who identified herself as a Palestinian-Jordanian-Syrian-Lebanese. Two students identified themselves as being from each of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia, with five of them being second generation Australians and one born in Pakistan. The last two students were first generation Australians, with one born in Sierra Leone and the other in Scotland with a Somali background. The majority of these girls have experienced the same school system throughout their schooling experience.

Due to the limited time available to the researcher in the Saudi Arabian context, it was not possible for student interviews to be conducted. In addition, girls from the public school in Saudi Arabia were refused permission by the school principal to complete the identity section of the questionnaire. Explanations provided to the researcher for this decision were vague and unsatisfactory. A brief reference to this issue has been made in the final chapter.

**Teachers**

After approaching a number of teachers from all the Australian schools in this study, only seven teachers took part in the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted with two groups, one in each context of a public and private school. The first group comprised of two highly experienced teachers from a public school, both of whom were Anglo-Australian and identified their religious background as Catholic. One teacher had 18 years teaching experience and the other teacher had 25 years experience. Both have worked in a variety of contexts including the public and private school systems, primary and secondary schools, and those with high multicultural student populations. The second focus group was conducted with four teachers from a private Islamic school and one teacher who was currently unemployed but had connections and ongoing communication with working teachers. All these teachers identified themselves as Muslims, and they were from various ethnic backgrounds including Lebanese, Egyptian, and South African. Their years of experience ranged from two to thirteen years. Only two of the teachers have taught in
both the public and private school systems, while the other five have only taught in private schools.

In addition, approximately twenty teachers currently teaching in Saudi Arabian schools were sent invitations to complete open-ended questionnaires based on similar topics covered in the focus groups. This was in place of face-to-face teacher focus groups due to time constraints. Only three teachers returned their questionnaires in the necessary time frame. All three teachers had experience teaching (including with Muslim girls) at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. They have also all had experience in both the public and private school systems with their years of experience ranging from seven to fourteen years. These teachers all identified as Muslims, with ethnic backgrounds being African-American, Malaysian and Australian-Lebanese.

**4.6 Data collection: Instruments**

A mixed method of data collection was used in this study to ensure that as much information as possible was gathered and that the data could be triangulated to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Each method has a particular strength and combining them provided the researcher with the potential for collecting unexpected data (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The researcher was able to elaborate and expand on the findings from questionnaires (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2008) through interviews and focus groups. The questionnaire for this research provided base-line data that was compared with the data from the in-depth interviews and analysis of the narratives. A pilot questionnaire was initially conducted to check the appropriateness of the questions.

In this study the data collection process incorporated the following three phases: 1) eight months administrating questionnaires in Saudi Arabia and Australia, 2) six weeks conducting interviews with the students in Australia, and 3) data collection from teachers through two focus group sessions with Australian teachers, and administrating questionnaires online with teachers in Saudi Arabia. The following table provides an overview of the data gathering methods used, how they were recorded, the participants involved and the general form of analysis.
Table 4.1: Summary of data gathering methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data gathering method</th>
<th>Recording of data</th>
<th>Participants and venue</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>125 stage three students; 3 private and 2 public schools in Australia; 1 public and one international private school in Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics, Conceptualisation, Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Notes, taped and transcribed</td>
<td>21 students, 13 from an Australian public school and 8 from a private school; during extra curricula activities.</td>
<td>Conceptualisation, Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Notes, taped and transcribed</td>
<td>5 teachers from a private school, and 2 teachers from a public school; after school hours on school premises</td>
<td>Conceptualisation, Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Questionnaire</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>3 teachers from a college in Saudi Arabia, through email</td>
<td>Conceptualisation, Coding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.1 Phase One: Questionnaire

Questionnaires are usually given to a sample of the population to learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes or beliefs (Neuman, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The questionnaire helped the researcher to obtain a small amount of information from a large number of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). However, a preliminary step to this phase included trialling questions on a small trial group of students and teachers. Questions were modified and adapted after initial responses were given to ensure they made sense and were feasible in gaining relevant data to answer the research questions. Students were surveyed during class time while the rest of the class remained with their teachers completing other activities. After introducing the questionnaire and providing information on how to complete it, students completed it at their own pace and those who needed help reading or understanding the questions were assisted.

The questionnaire administered in this study included two sections (see Appendices A and B). The first concerned self-efficacy and contained 40 structured response questions regarding social
efficacy and 40 regarding academic efficacy. There were also four open-ended questions which asked the girls to detail particular experiences.

The questions on self-efficacy were adapted by the researcher from a number of surveys, and trialled and edited before being presented to the participants. This process was repeated until the researcher was satisfied that the questions were understandable and well structured. The most suitable questions were selected, some were re-written, and variety was ensured in order to acquire a range of information covering many factors. Some questions were also similar in meaning but worded differently, or ‘reversed’ to check the reliability of the responses given by the children.

The open-ended questions allowed students to elaborate further on their feelings concerning school experiences. There were four open-ended questions which enquired about the following:

- The last time they felt really confident when they were in a small group,
- A time when they felt shy or upset,
- A time when they were learning at school and felt happy, and
- If they were sometimes unhappy at school, what would make them feel like that?

The girls were asked to describe each situation they wrote about in as much detail as possible.

The second section of the questionnaire, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Muslims (MEIM-M) (Alghorani, 2003), measured Islamic identity. The MEIM-M contained 23 structured response questions. The ‘Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure- Muslims (MEIM-Muslims)’ was used to measure the girls’ responses on identity. This measurement was first proposed by Phinney (1990, 1992) as the MEIM measuring ethnic identity. The MEIM has been found to be a reliable measure and has been used in many studies (Roberts et al., 1999; Alghorani, 2003; Worrell et al., 2006). However, Alghorani (2003) modified the items so that they were rewritten to assess religious identity rather than ethnic identity. Thus, as this study was concerned with the identity of Muslim girls, and as the literature indicated the strength of religion in a Muslim’s definition of their identity, it was found to be appropriate to use Alghorani’s adapted scale in order to
illuminate the girls’ perceptions and self-evaluation of their Islamic identity. Since MEIM-Muslims was used to measure Islamic identity, it provided information on the following:

2. Islamic Identity
3. Islamic Identity Achievement
4. Islamic Affirmation and Belonging
5. Islamic Behaviours
6. Non-Muslims Orientation
7. Respondent’s Religion (item 21)
8. Parents’ Religion (items 22 and 23)

An example item from this survey was ‘I am happy that I am a member of the religious group I belong to’. The girls were asked to select a number in the scale ranging between 1 and 4, where 1 through 4 indicates ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Agree’, and ‘Strongly Agree’, respectively.

These two sections provided a general idea of what Muslim girls perceive about their identity and their self-efficacy. They also provided a guide for the interviews as some issues were dealt with in further detail and others were clarified, with points from the girls’ narratives highlighted.

### 4.6.2 Phase Two: Interviews

The research relied on interviews as the primary method of data collection. All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Twenty-one participants, who had completed the questionnaires, were interviewed within a short time frame after the questionnaires were conducted. As will be discussed later in this chapter, consent was obtained from the participants (see Appendix D). They were interviewed twice within a few weeks of each other either in the library of the school, a meeting room, or in a quiet area of a hall. The purpose of the interviews was to have students impart their feelings and thoughts concerning their identities and sense of self-efficacy in a conversational manner. The students also reflected on the factors that may have affected their perceptions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).
A semi-structured interview was used during the research as it allowed more flexibility than structured interviews and provided room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the participants’ responses (May, 1993; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Bouma, 1996). This is especially beneficial when working with young children as their responses and actions are more often than not quite unpredictable and it was necessary for the researcher to be extremely alert and sensitive to their needs. In order to gain the most out of the interviews, taking the young age of the participants into account was crucial and thus, the interview questions were kept flexible, semi-structured and sensitive to the context of the interaction (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Punch, 2005). The questions used in the interviews were general and guided by the girls’ responses provided from the questionnaires and what the girls said during the course of the interview. In each case, the students were asked to tell stories about their lives and school experiences, giving concrete examples of how they have felt or behaved in particular instances.

As the semi-structured interview allowed more freedom and flexibility in the questions asked and the responses given, the interviews were recorded on tape. In addition, hand-written notes were used during and after the interviews to assist the researcher. Tape recording the responses also ensured that the researcher did not substitute her own words for those of the person being interviewed (May, 1993). It is very important in interviews to establish rapport, empathy and understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee as the researcher can then determine the appropriateness or significance of the questions to be asked (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Janesick, 1998; Fontana and Frey, 2003). Therefore, the researcher took steps towards ensuring the children felt at ease, such as taking the groups of students for special activities or having informal discussion sessions. Although it was the intention of the researcher to have at least three or four such sessions in all schools, scheduling extra activities was proved to be easier to do in the private schools than in the public schools. Access to the public school students and teachers was more difficult to obtain as staff had difficulty in allocating extra time for the researcher. Nevertheless, the girls appeared to be comfortable with the interviewer after initial feelings of nervousness and shyness. Some of the students commented on how they had started feeling more comfortable and one student even mentioned how she was more at ease than she was with any of her teachers. Undoubtedly, confidentiality and the absence of negative repercussions were greatly emphasised, which gave the girls added reassurance.
The first interviews were conducted in groups considering the age of the participants, and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. This was to ensure that students were not taken completely beyond their comfort zone by providing a sense of familiarity and security amongst their peers. It has been argued that there are four set research-based reasons for resorting to group interview techniques (Lewis, 1992, cited in Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). These are: to test a specific research question about consensus beliefs; to obtain greater depth and breadth in responses than occurs in individual interviews; to verify research plans or findings; and to enhance the reliability of interviewee responses (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Thus, the group interviews conducted in this study have assisted the data gathering by enhancing reliability and creating greater depth in responses. Researchers have also noted that, especially with children, it is easier for participants to form opinions of their own after listening to those of others (Krueger, 1988, cited in Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Marshall and Rossman (1995) point out that the results have high face validity because the method is readily understood, the findings appear believable, and it is relatively low cost.

The second interviews took place individually to allow students to further elaborate on their ideas and feelings. This allowed the students to tell their personal stories. Many of the girls were grateful that they were able to further express themselves. The individual interviews took approximately 30 minutes. Throughout the collection and analysis of data from interviews, the researcher remained aware of the situated understanding produced by interviews and how the interviews are influenced by her own personal characteristics including her race, class, ethnicity and gender (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Thus, as mentioned earlier, the researcher continued to be mindful of ‘bracketing’ her own presuppositions, prior knowledge and viewpoints throughout the interviews.

4.6.3 Phase Three: Teacher focus groups and questionnaires

Some of the girls’ teachers were asked to participate in focus groups and questionnaires in order to elaborate on their work with the children and on their daily observations of how the children deal with their school, family and wider community contexts. Teachers in Australia participated in focus groups and teachers in Saudi Arabia completed questionnaires. One of the difficulties of this
research was to obtain consent from the teachers approached. The researcher experienced reluctance to participate from several teachers, including some of the principals. Hence, the small number of teacher participants, especially from public school teachers and those in Saudi Arabia. Further reflections on this issue are revisited in the final chapter. However, those who agreed and who signed the consent forms provided valuable insights.

The focus groups were unstructured with the researcher’s function being more a facilitator or moderator rather than an interviewer (Fontana and Frey, 2003; Punch, 2005), which reduced the researcher’s control over the interview process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Questions and topics were supplied by the researcher to direct the group interactions. These produced data and insights concerning Muslim girls in their various school contexts which may not otherwise have been uncovered, at the same time as allowing teachers to elucidate their views, perceptions, and interpretations (Punch, 2005). Punch (2005) eloquently describes focus groups as being:

*an attractive data gathering option when research is trying to probe those aspects of people’s behaviour. They are inexpensive, data-rich, flexible, stimulating, recall-aiding, cumulative and elaborative (Punch, 2005, p.177).*

Two limitations of focus groups which the researcher remained aware of was the possibility of problems with group culture and dynamics, and with achieving balance in the group interaction (Fontana and Frey, 2003; Punch, 2005). As the researcher had some informal contact with most of the focus group teachers previously, rapport was easily established and gave the interactions ‘many of the characteristics of a prolonged and intimate conversation’ (Punch, 2005, p.172). This rapport also allowed for constructive disagreements to take place showing the researcher the range of opinions on the issues covered. In line with feminist perspectives on interviewing, the researcher continuously applied herself in minimising ‘status differences’ between her and the participants, developing a more equal partnership based on trust. This included discussing important biographical incidents, and issues which were mutually relevant (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

Due to time constraints and difficulties with access to schools, the researcher was unable to conduct focus groups with teachers teaching in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, a short questionnaire (see Appendix C) was developed using themes which had emerged during the focus groups to try and
elicit ideas and experiences teachers had with Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, only three teachers completed and returned their questionnaires electronically.

In contrast to the questionnaire administered with the students, this questionnaire was semi-structured and included 15 open-ended questions which encouraged teachers to use as much detail as possible when answering questions about their experiences with and their ideas regarding Muslim girls.

4.7 Data analysis

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science) program. This program was utilised to support the analysis of the structured response answers based on 80 efficacy items and 23 identity items. Data were generally analysed by seeking comparisons of percentages of responses to the various questions. Data were entered and edited in an SPSS data file to calculate general statistical differences for each question between the various school contexts. Tables and figures were used to pictorially represent the data.

The data from the qualitative sections of the questionnaire, the interviews and the focus groups were analysed by applying a coding system, as explained by Strauss and Corbin (1998), which includes open, axial and selective coding. These steps are further detailed below, demonstrating how patterns, themes, consistencies and exceptions to the rule were searched for in order to establish codes and categories to assist the researcher to allocate meanings to events and activities. Some general themes were derived from reading the literature, while others were added as data collection and analysis continued. The data analysis involved both ‘data reduction’, bringing the collected data into manageable chunks, and ‘interpretation’, bringing meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Sarantakos, 1998). Unlike purely quantitative analysis, the qualitative-based analysis which was implemented in this study began looking for patterns and relationships early in the research, analysing the data while it was being collected (Neuman, 1994; Merriam, 1998, 2002; Sarantakos, 1998; Punch, 2005). Once categories and the patterns between them were
identified, the emerging themes were evaluated and tested through the data for their adequacy, usefulness and credibility (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

The analysis of the available data involved five steps: locating key phrases and statements; interpreting the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader; obtaining, when possible, the participants’ interpretations of these findings; inspecting the meanings for what they revealed about the essential, recurring features of the case being studied; and finally offering a ‘tentative’ statement or definition of the case in terms of the essential recurring features identified (Janesick, 1998). Through constant comparative analysis, statements and ‘indices of behaviour’ that occurred were identified and reported. These steps of conceptualising and coding the data are described below.

**Conceptualisation**

Neuman (1994) believes concept formation is an essential component of data analysis and commences during data collection (see also Sarantakos, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It is therefore one way that data are organised and made sense of. As mentioned previously, the data were analysed by organising them into categories. From these categories of themes, concepts and relationships, new concepts were developed, conceptual definitions formulated and relationships among concepts were examined (Neuman, 1994). Analysing qualitatively, the researcher conceptualised as she read through, asked critical questions of, and coded the data.

**Coding**

To a qualitative researcher, coding is also an integral component of the data analysis procedure. In this study, coding was guided by the research questions; however, it also led to new questions. Miles and Huberman (1984, cited in Neuman, 1994, p.407) define coding as ‘retrieval and organizing devices that allow the analyst to spot quickly, pull out, then cluster all the segments relating to a particular question, hypothesis, concept, or theme’ (p.56). The data was inspected on three occasions, with a different coding used at each time.
Open Coding

This first form of coding was used to assign initial codes and locate themes in the first attempt to compress the large amount of data into manageable categories (Neuman, 1994; Punch, 2005). Open coding generally involved the process of labelling where comparisons were made and questions asked about the data to help generate abstract categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Punch, 2005). These abstract categories helped the researcher raise the conceptual level in the data (Punch, 2005). During this early stage, the researcher was still ‘open’ to new themes being created and to codes being changed in ensuing analysis.

Axial Coding

This is the second stage of coding where the researcher started with and focused on the organised set of initial codes rather than on the data (Neuman, 1994; Punch, 2005). The most important task here was to review and examine the initial codes, although additional codes or new ideas came forth and were noted. The researcher looked for categories or concepts that linked together and examined themes in more depth, with some dropped altogether (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Neuman (1994) believes axial coding strengthens the connections between evidence and concepts.

Selective Coding

Major themes were identified by the time the researcher reached this stage of coding. Data and previous codes were scanned by looking ‘selectively’ at the data for cases that portray the themes, making comparisons and contrasts after the data collection was completed (Neuman, 1994; Punch, 2005). Specific themes were reorganised and major themes were elaborated (Neuman, 1994). Selective coding is thus the process of integrating and refining the categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).
4.8 Validity and trustworthiness

There is an underlying assumption of naturalistic inquiry that reality is ‘holistic, multi-dimensional and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured’ (Merriam, 1998, p.202). Therefore, validity in qualitative research is concerned with the subjects’ construction of the world and the internal and external validity of the study needs to be checked using a number of strategies (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Merriam, 1998, 2002). The ethical conduct of the research also greatly shapes the trustworthiness of the study and thus must be seriously considered (Merriam, 2002).

4.8.1 Internal validity

Internal validity is concerned with how compatible the findings of a study are with the reality of the situation (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (1998, 2002) has identified six main strategies to enhance internal validity. These include: triangulation, member checks, long-term data collection phase, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research, and researcher’s biases. This study utilised triangulation, member checks, peer examination, and researcher’s biases. Triangulation established validity in this case study by using multiple sources of data as well as multiple methods to confirm the findings (Merriam, 1998; Fontana and Frey, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). For example, the survey included both fixed-choice questions as well as open-ended questions. Talking with the teachers during the focus groups also helped triangulate what the girls imparted to the researcher with what the teachers observed and understood about their students. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) refer to triangulation as the use of more than one data gathering process within a single study (see also Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Bloor, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998; Stake, 1998). This method added depth to the analysis and increased the validity of the data as different sources were used in which to compare the data.

Member checks and peer examinations were not extensively used; however, the researcher did take initial data and preliminary interpretations back to the participants to check that they were
compatible with the participants’ interpretations (Bloor, 1997; Janesick, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Morse, 1998). Teachers and the researcher’s colleagues were asked to comment on findings as they emerged with extensive discussions held throughout the data collection and analysis process (Merriam, 1998). By re-interviewing and re-analysing, the researcher was able to validate the data gathered from interviews (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). This was achieved by returning to the respondent with a summary of the major themes from the first interview, followed by another interview which allowed the interviewee to add further information. At the same time data were being re-analysed, and discussions with peers permitted the interviewer to check on the data that had been collected and to focus on the themes which emerged and on any points which did not seem clear (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Marshall and Rossman, 1995). It should also be noted that the validity and reliability of the interview data were increased with the use of tape recording and transcripts, as accuracy of the data gathered was ensured (Silverman, 1997).

The final strategy was ensuring awareness was present of the researcher’s biases. As it is not possible to be completely free of bias (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), the researcher self-reflected and clarified assumptions, worldviews or theoretical orientations she may have throughout the study. Being an Australian Muslim woman herself, the researcher was aware of the potential for positioning herself within the experiences of these girls. However, this awareness allowed her to consciously take it into account while conducting this research. Collecting data through interviews was the method where most care was needed as interviews are never ‘raw’ but are always ‘situated and textual’ (Silverman, 1993, cited in Punch, 2005). The interview method is influenced by many aspects including personal characteristics and biases of the researcher, the accuracy of respondents’ memories, response tendencies, dishonesty, self-deception and social desirability (Punch, 2005).

4.8.2 External validity

The question of external validity or generalisability from a sample to the general population was not the aim of this case study as the researcher wished to understand this particular group in greater depth (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Instead, the lessons learnt from the findings were made possible through in-depth analysis of a particular situation drawing on ways in which that
knowledge can be transferred to another situation (Merriam, 2002, 2009). Thus, to enhance the external validity and the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised (that is, applied to other situations), the following strategies were applied: ‘rich, thick descriptions’ that will allow readers to determine how similar their situations are and whether findings can be transferred; and ‘multi-site design’ where several primary school sites were sampled with a diversified group of pre-adolescent Muslim girls so that the results may be applied by readers to a greater range of other situations (Merriam, 1998, 2002). Both these strategies were detailed earlier in this chapter.

4.8.3 Ethical considerations

The validity of this study greatly relied upon the ethics of the researcher to conduct the study in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2002). The researcher’s relationship with participants, how much was revealed about the actual purpose of the study, how informed the consent actually was, and how much privacy and protection from harm was given to participants, were some of the major issues the researcher had to deal with (Merriam, 2002). Written consent was sought for all stages of the study from both adults and child participants, and confidentiality was emphasised at all times. As such, pseudonyms have been used throughout this study to protect the privacy of the participants and their schools. Another important ethical consideration which needed to be addressed at the outset of the study was the researcher’s assumptions about the context, participants, data and the dissemination of knowledge gained through the study (Merriam, 2002).

The researcher completed a lengthy process of complying with the requirements of the University’s Ethics Committee for conducting research with students. Official permission from the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee was also gained. In addition, permission was obtained from the NSW Department of Education and Training to conduct research in the state public schools and for the private schools the Principal’s permission was obtained. Consent was also received from the schools in Saudi Arabia.
4.9 Conclusion

The methodology used in this study was found to be successful in gathering and analysing the data for the research topic. The mixed method design and the case study helped in gathering the information, which answered the research questions set out at the beginning of the study. Many issues and factors concerning the identity and self-efficacy of the girls emerged. The next three chapters outline these findings and also include profiles of the girls who were interviewed and the teachers who participated. The implications that these findings hold are discussed in the concluding chapter.
5.1 Introduction

This study set out to investigate the self-efficacy and identity of Muslim girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia, and to explore how their social and cultural contexts have influenced their lived experiences. The findings from this study are presented in three separate but interlocking chapters so as to clearly present the results from the three phases of data collection. First, this chapter discusses the results of the data collected from the student questionnaires describing markers of identity as revealed by the data, such as ethnic origin, language, and religious persuasion. The data also reveal the impact of awareness these markers have on the self-efficacy of the students and their perceptions regarding treatment and stance of non-Muslims.

The findings from the questionnaire have been grouped into four categories: private Islamic Australian schools (three schools); public Australian schools (two schools); private Saudi Arabian school (one school); and public Saudi Arabian school (one school).

The findings of the data are reported as follows. Section 5.2 presents the student questionnaires which utilised the SPSS program to support the analysis of the structured response answers based on 80 efficacy items and 23 identity items. Analysis of the short, open-ended responses, based on four self-efficacy questions, is reported separately. A brief review of the self-efficacy and identity questionnaire findings has been provided at the end of each section.

The next chapter presents the findings from the student interviews using conceptualisation and comparative analysis, describing in greater depth particular themes that arose out of the interviews, under the two subsections, self-efficacy and identity. The third findings chapter presents the results from the teacher focus groups and open-ended teacher questionnaires. The following diagram gives a pictorial presentation of the chapter’s structure.
Chapter Five ~ Findings: Phase One

Chapter map

Findings
Phase One

Questionnaires

Self-efficacy
- 80 structured response items
- 4 open ended questions

Identity
- 23 structured response items
5.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was presented in two parts (see Appendices A and B). These two parts helped the researcher to obtain a small amount of information from a large number of participants (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). The first concerned self-efficacy and contained 40 structured response items regarding social efficacy and 40 regarding academic efficacy. There were also four open-ended questions which asked the girls to detail particular experiences (see Section 5.2.3). The second, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Muslims (MEIM-M) (Alghorani, 2003), measured Islamic identity. The MEIM-M contained 23 structured response items.

5.2.1 Self-efficacy questionnaire

The structured response items in the self-efficacy questionnaire aimed to give a general depiction of the girls’ perceptions regarding various factors that may influence or impact on their social and academic self-efficacy. These included their teachers, their peers, their families and of course themselves.

Almost a quarter of the items in the questionnaire aimed at finding perceptions the girls had regarding their teachers. These 19 items provided insight into the important influence teachers may have on the self-efficacy of these girls. A further 20 items intended to find perceptions the girls had regarding their classmates. Only four items referred to their families or other adults and the remaining 37 items inquired about beliefs the girls had regarding their own social and academic abilities and feelings they had towards particular statements.

Results for these items are presented below using a mix of tables and figures to help illustrate the various responses provided. Negative items (indicated by ‘R*’) were reversed when presenting the data in the tables. For example one question read, ‘My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset’. This was counteracted with, ‘My teacher really understands how I feel about things’. The girls were asked to select a number in the scale ranging between 1 and 5, where 1 through 5 indicated ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Unsure’, ‘Disagree’, and ‘Strongly Disagree’, respectively.
Social efficacy - Teachers

Of the 19 items regarding teachers and the participants’ efficacy, 15 items were based on social efficacy. These showed that the girls generally perceived themselves as having high social efficacy regarding their relationships with their teachers. Through the following tables it is shown that students felt their teachers supported them emotionally and academically, were approachable, cared about their learning and social well-being, and encouraged peer tutoring and mutual respect amongst peers. Notably, there was consistency amongst all the schools for most of the items.

Emotional support

Table 5.1 shows the results for items Sse3, Sse7 and Sse9 (Social self-efficacy). These items reflected the perceived degree of emotional support the teacher provided to the student, for example, ‘My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset’. Most girls agreed that their teachers understood and respected their feelings and opinions, providing them with the emotional help they needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly/agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly/disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse3R*</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse7</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse9R*</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table (5.2) shows more detailed information for item Sse9, ‘My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset’, including the breakdown of results from each school context. In total, a higher percentage of girls disagreed with this item with no marked difference amongst the schools including 86.2% of students from the private schools in Australia, 86.4% of girls from the Australian public schools, 81% from the private Saudi school and 67.9% from the public school in Saudi.
Table 5.2 Sse9 'My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (SA)</td>
<td>2 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 (SA)-Strongly Agree, 2 (A)-Agree, 3 (U)-Unsure, 4 (D)-Disagree, 5 (SD)-Strongly Disagree

Interest in learning

The interest and care a teacher shows in the students’ learning was covered by items Sse10, Sse14 and Sse15. Again the girls from all schools overwhelmingly concurred that their teachers demonstrated concern for their learning, as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Items relating to care and interest teacher shows in students' learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse10</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse14</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse15R*</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed
Furthermore, when looking specifically at item Sse10, ‘My teacher cares about how much I learn’, the results (see Table 5.4) show strongly that the majority of girls, over 85% in each school, have a strong belief that their teacher cares about their learning.

### Table 5.4 Sse10 'My teacher cares about how much I learn'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Social relationship

Items Sse17 and Sse20 regarded getting along with the teacher. Table 5.5 shows that almost 70% of girls agree or strongly agree that they find it easy to get along with their teacher.

### Table 5.5 Items relating to getting along with the teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse17R*</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse20</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed
The following figure (5.1), Sse20 'I find it easy to just go and talk to my teacher', shows again that most girls from all the schools concurred in their responses. However there were a greater percentage of girls who agreed or strongly agreed from the private school in Saudi Arabia with 81.8% as opposed to 68.6% from the private schools in Australia, 56.5% from the Australian public schools and 71.4% for the public school in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 5.1 Sse20 'I find it easy to just go and talk to my teacher'

Encourages peer tutoring

Two items (see Table 5.6) referred to how much a teacher was seen to encourage peer tutoring, Sse21 and Sse23. Around three quarters of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers allowed them to talk to friends to get help and encouraged sharing of ideas.

Table 5.6 Items relating to whether peer tutoring was encouraged by the teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse21R*</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse23</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed
Furthermore, when looking at item Sse23 specifically (see Table 5.7), there were no major differences between the schools with results of 74%, 77.3%, 77.3%, and 64.3% from the Australian private schools, Australian public schools, Saudi private school and Saudi public school respectively, although the Saudi public school has somewhat lower outcomes. However, when examining item Sse21 (see Figure 5.2), which was worded negatively as ‘My teacher discourages us to share ideas with one another in class’, more varying results were found between the schools. The Australian schools had fewer students who disagreed with the comment with 60.7% from the private schools and 73.9% from the public schools, than did the girls from the Saudi schools that had all but one girl from the public school disagree with the comment.

### Table 5.7 Sse23 'My teacher lets us ask other students when we need help with our work'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust. 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust. 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi 3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi 4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five ~ Findings: Phase One

Figure 5.2 Sse21 'My teacher discourages us to share ideas with one another in class'

Encourages peer respect

The extent a teacher encouraged respect amongst peers was portrayed in items Sse24 and Sse26. Overall results from both items show that over 85% of girls (see Table 5.8) believed that their teachers wanted them to respect their peers and did not allow negative comments about each other.

Table 5.8 Items relating to teachers encouraging peer respect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly / agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly / disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse24</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse26</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* R=negative item reversed

More detailed results can be seen in Table 5.9 for item Sse26, ‘My teacher wants us to respect each others’ opinions’. Almost all girls from all the schools responded positively, with 98%, 91.3%, 100% and 96.4% from the Australian private and public schools, and the Saudi private and public schools respectively, agreeing that their teachers encouraged respecting opinions of their peers.
Table 5.9 Sse26 'My teacher wants us to respect each others' opinions'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>65.2%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approachable

The following items, Sse27 and Sse31, related to how approachable the girls thought their teachers were. As shown in Table 5.10, the vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers were approachable in that they could explain their point of view to them (72.4%) and they can get their teacher to help them with their school work (87.7%).

Table 5.10 Items relating to teachers being approachable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse27</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse31</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed
Again, although the majority of girls from all schools responded positively, there was a slightly lower percentage from the girls attending the public school in Saudi Arabia (77.8%; see Figure 5.3) compared to the other school contexts (92% from the Australian private schools, 87% from the Australian public schools, and 90.9% from the Saudi private school).

![Figure 5.3 Sse31 'I can get teachers to help me when I get stuck on school work']

**Teacher expectations**

One item, Sse37, asked the girls their beliefs about whether they could live up to their teachers’ expectations, with the majority of girls (69.9%) agreeing that they could. Table 5.11 shows the private (68%) and public schools (56.5%) in Australia and the private school (63.7%) in Saudi Arabia generally concurred in their responses, however girls from the public school in Saudi responded more favourably with 89.3% agreeing that they could live up to what their teachers thought of them.
Table 5.11 Sse37 'I can live up to what my teachers think of me'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 (SA)</td>
<td>2 (A)</td>
<td>3 (U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust. 1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust. 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi 4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Academic efficacy - Teachers**

Items on academic efficacy as influenced by teachers produced more varying results than those on social efficacy. The four items portrayed the girls as having a lower sense of their academic efficacy regarding their educational relationships with their teachers, as compared to their social efficacy. The following tables and figures show how the girls fluctuated across the scales in their responses except when asked about class participation.
Grades dependant on teacher relationship

Item Ase9 asked the girls whether they thought their grades depended on their teachers' level of fondness for them. The girls generally differed in their opinions with 40.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 42.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Figure 5.4 shows that there were also patent discrepancies amongst the schools. The public school in Saudi Arabia in particular, greatly varied in their responses with the majority of girls (82.1%) agreeing that their grades would improve if their teachers liked them better. This is in contrast to the other three schools where the majority of students disagreed.

![Figure 5.4 Ase9 'I would get better grades if my teacher liked me better']

Teachers' opinion on academic ability

Item Ase14 asked students to respond to the statement 'My teacher thinks I am smart'. Results for this item, as shown in Table 5.12, revealed a large number of girls who were unsure about what their teachers thought about their academic abilities (36.4%). Nonetheless, more than half of the girls agreed their teacher thought they were smart, with a total of 53.8% responding positively. However, a greater number of girls (65.4%) from the private schools in Australia than those from the other school contexts agreed to the statement.
Table 5.12 Ase14 'My teacher thinks I am smart'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades dependent on teacher assistance

The following item asked the girls to what extent help from teachers impacted on their grades. Looking at Figure 5.5, which portrays the results from the girls to item Ase18, ‘Kids who get better grades than I do get more help from the teacher than I do’, differing responses between the schools can be seen. Although the private schools in Australia had girls who responded comparably between agreeing and being unsure about the statement, just over 50% disagreed. Similarly, around 55% of girls disagreed from both the public and private schools in Saudi Arabia. However, a smaller number of girls from the public schools (39.1%) in Australia disagreed, with an equal amount being unsure about the statement.
Answering teacher questions

In the last item regarding their teachers, the girls were asked the extent to which they answered questions from the teacher in class. Item Ase33 ‘I never answer questions from the teacher in class’, resulted in the vast majority of girls responding negatively, with 83.7% disagreeing that they never answer questions from the teacher (see Table 5.13). The following table further shows that there were was a high number of girls from each school disagreeing with the statement (84%-Australian private schools, 78.3%- Australian public schools, 90.9%- Saudi private school, 82.1%-Saudi public school).

Figure 5.5 Ase18 'Kids who get better grades than I do get more help from the teacher than I do'
**Table 5.13 'I never answer questions from the teacher in class'**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>2 (SA)</td>
<td>3 (A)</td>
<td>3 (U)</td>
<td>9 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>1 (SA)</td>
<td>1 (A)</td>
<td>3 (U)</td>
<td>6 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>1 (SA)</td>
<td>0 (A)</td>
<td>1 (U)</td>
<td>7 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>4 (SA)</td>
<td>0 (A)</td>
<td>1 (U)</td>
<td>9 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8 (SA)</td>
<td>4 (A)</td>
<td>8 (U)</td>
<td>31 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social efficacy - Classmates**

There were 12 items regarding classmates’ effect on social efficacy. Responses to these items were slightly more erratic when looking at the results of all the girls compared to the responses about teachers. However, they generally showed that the girls had high perceptions of social efficacy regarding their relationships and interactions with their classmates. Through the following tables the girls illustrate that they generally have positive social relationships with their classmates, their classmates care about their learning, and they can easily converse and cooperate with peers, including asking for assistance. Nonetheless, some clear differences were revealed particularly between the different school contexts.

**Social relationship with classmates**

There were three items which aimed at finding how girls perceived their social relationship with their peers (see Table 5.14). The items showed that the majority of girls believed they had a
positive social relationship in that they got along with their peers who were also noted as being nice to them. Only item Sse4, ‘Most students in this class want me to come to class everyday’, showed a greater difference in the girls’ opinions. However, the wording of this item asks about the opinions of the classmates towards the girls rather than what the girls can actually see (such as item Sse12, ‘Most students are nice to me’) or determine (for example item Sse28, ‘I do not get along with most of the students in my class’). This cautiousness to state a direct opinion of what others think is suggested by the large number of girls who were unsure (39.8%) about item Sse4.

### Table 5.14 Items relating to social relationships with peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse4</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse12</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse28R*</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Results for the different school contexts showed differences for item Sse4. Figure 5.6 shows almost twice as many girls from the public schools in Australia (60.9%) agreed that their classmates wanted them to come to class everyday than those from the private school in Saudi (33.3%). The private Australian schools and the public Saudi school also had fewer girls agree, with 45.1% and 50% (respectively) responding positively to the statement.

![Figure 5.6 Sse22 'Most students in this class want me to come to class every day']
Care about my learning

The following table (Table 5.15) shows the extent to which the girls believed their classmates cared about their learning. Both these items were worded negatively; however, they produced different results. Item Sse8 asked the girls to respond to the statement ‘Most students in this class want me to fail’, with the vast majority, 80.5%, disagreeing. Item Sse19, ‘Most students in this class do not care about how much I learn’, resulted in more varying responses indicating how the girls distinguished between the items with one concerning their classmates not caring either way and the other regarding their classmates actually wanting them to fail.

Table 5.15 Items relating to care classmates had for their learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse8R*</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse19R*</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Furthermore, when looking at Table 5.16, the results for item Sse19 show how the different school contexts responded to the statement ‘Most students in this class do not care about how much I learn’. Although a similar number of girls disagreed to the statement with 42% from the Australian private schools, 45.5% from the public schools in Australia, 50% from the private school in Saudi, and 42.8% from the Saudi public school, there were marked differences in the number that agreed. For example, the first three school contexts had about 26% or 27% of girls who agreed that most students in their class did not care about how much they learnt, whereas the public school in Saudi Arabia had the same number of girls agree (42.9%) as they had disagree (42.8%).
Table 5.16 Sse19 'Most students in this class do not care about how much I learn'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Sse19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>1 (SA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>2 (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>3 (U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>4 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>5 (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>122</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Confident and comfortable to converse

How confident and comfortable the girls were when conversing or interacting with other students in their class were indicated by items Sse13, Sse18 and Sse22 (see Table 5.17). Again, although the majority of girls concurred in their responses for most of the items, there were differences in opinion for item Sse13. Responses for items Sse18 and Sse22 showed the girls had high efficacy regarding explaining their point of view to their peers as well as starting conversations with them. In contrast, item Sse13 indicated that when other students disagreed with their opinions, 41.5% of girls were afraid to express their own opinions even though a similar number of girls (39%) were not afraid.
Table 5.17 Items relating to confidence girls had during conversations and interactions with peers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse13R*</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse18</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse22</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

These results were not disparate when broken up into the school contexts. However, as can be seen in Figure 5.7, item Sse22 showed that all but one of the girls from the public school in Saudi Arabia (96.4%) agreed that it was easy for them to start a conversation with their peers. This is in comparison to the other schools which had only 67.4%, 77.3% and 68.2% agree from the Australian private and public schools and the Saudi private school, respectively.

Figure 5.7 Sse22 'I find it easy to start a conversation with most students in my class'

Peer expectations

Item Sse29 asked the girls their beliefs about whether they could live up to the expectations of their peers, with more than half of the girls (59.7%) agreeing that they could. Table 5.18 shows the private (58.9%) and public schools (47.8%) in Australia and the private school (59.1%) in Saudi
Arabia generally concurred in their responses, however girls from the public school in Saudi responded more favourably with 71.4% agreeing that they could live up to what their classmates thought of them. The fewer positive responses in the first three schools were not because more girls disagreed but rather there were a significant number of students who were unsure of their response.

Table 5.18 Sse29 'I can live up to what my peers expect of me'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cooperating and asking for assistance

The following table (5.19) presents the results for items Sse30, Sse34 and Sse35 which ask about how girls cooperate with their classmates. The table indicates that the majority of girls believed that they worked well with other students with 86% responding positively to item Sse30. A considerable number of students, 65.3%, also agreed to item Sse35R* that they were good at getting peers to help them with social problems. However, on the similar issue of getting peers to
help, this time with homework, item Sse34 generated varying responses with 47.1% of girls responding positively and 31.7% of girls indicating that they found it difficult to get other students to help them with homework.

**Table 5.19 Items relating to cooperating with classmates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse30R*</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse34R*</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse35R*</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

When looking at each school context for these items, no major differences were found as the girls from each school generally agreed in their responses to each item. For example, Figure 5.8 shows around 65% of girls from each school responded similarly for item Sse35, in that they disputed the idea that they were not good at getting friends to help them with social problems.

![Graph showing percentage of agreement, unsure, and disagreement across different schools.](image)

**Figure 5.8 Sse35 'I'm not very good at getting a friend to help me when I have social problems'**

**Academic efficacy – Classmates**

Items on academic efficacy as influenced by classmates generally showed that the girls had average to high perceptions of their academic efficacy regarding their educational level compared to their peers, as well as regarding academic interactions with their classmates. Through the following tables the girls illustrate that they generally have positive academic interactions with
their classmates, such as in group work; they compare themselves favourably academically; they help others with their work; and they find it easy to participate in class discussions. Although there was general consensus for most items, the results reveal some considerable differences between the different school contexts, pointing to some interesting interpretations that are discussed in the last chapter.

**Valuable group member**

The questionnaire included three items, Ase7, Ase19 and Ase30, which asked about how valuable and helpful the girls thought they were as a group and class member. Table 5.20 shows 65.8% of girls agreed that they saw themselves as valuable group members, however only half the girls actually felt accepted in their groups (item Ase19R*). Nevertheless, a great number of girls (86.1%) did believe that they were helpful to others when they did not know what to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase7</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase19R*</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase30</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

There were no great differences between the four school contexts for item Ase30; however the following figures show how items Ase7 (Figure 5.9) and Ase19 (Figure 5.10) produced slightly varying results. For example, where 77.6% of girls from the private schools in Australia agreed they saw themselves as valuable group members, only 52.4% from the private school in Saudi concurred. In addition, 63.6% of girls from the public school in Saudi disagreed with the statement ‘During group work, I often feel unaccepted by other group members’, whereas the other schools produced similar results to each other with 47.1%, 50% and 48.1% of girls from the private Australian schools and the public and private Saudi schools (respectively) disagreeing.
Ability compared to classmates

How the girls perceived their ability in comparison to their classmates was revealed by items Ase12, Ase15 and Ase23. Unlike other responses from the questionnaire, the girls were not
predisposed in major numbers towards a particular response regarding their abilities. As can be seen in Table 5.21, just over half of the girls believed that they thought class work was easy even when other students did not, with more students being unsure than those who disagreed. Furthermore, responses were more spread out for item Ase15 which stated that classmates usually get better grades than they do. Each of the possible responses had about 30% of the girls indicating that they agreed, were unsure or disagreed.

**Table 5.21 Items relating to ability compared to classmates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase12</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase15R*</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase23</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Results for the different school contexts supported the general results above. However, some slight differences were found for item Ase15. For example, Figure 5.11 shows that only 21.7% of girls from the public schools in Australia agreed that their classmates usually got better grades than they do, whereas 50% of those from the Saudi public school agreed. In addition, where 40% and 39.1% of girls disagreed from the Australian schools, only 18.1% disagreed from the private school in Saudi with a large number being unsure (40.9%).

**Figure 5.11 Ase15 'My classmates usually get better grades than I do'**
Distractions

Item Ase28 asked girls to respond to the statement ‘When other students are distracting me in class, I often find it difficult to keep concentrating on my work’. The majority of girls, 71.8%, agreed that they found it difficult to keep concentrating. Nevertheless, Table 5.22 shows some differences for the school contexts. For instance, the private schools from both Australia (82.3%) and Saudi Arabia (72.8%) had a greater number of girls agree that they found it difficult to concentrate when distracted, than did the public schools (69.6% Australia, 53.6% Saudi).

Table 5.22 Ase28 'When other students are distracting me in class, I often find it difficult to keep concentrating on my work'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Aust.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>41.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Aust.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Saudi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Saudi</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Class discussions

The last item in the questionnaire, concerning academic efficacy, asked the students the extent to which they were able to participate in class discussions. The majority agreed that they found it easy, with 74.2% responding positively. The table (5.23) below further shows that there were many similarities between the four school contexts which included 74.5% from the private Australian schools, 69.5% from the public Australian schools, 72.8% from the private Saudi school and 78.6% from the public Saudi school.

Table 5.23 Ase40 'I find it easy to participate in class discussions'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social efficacy – Family/ other adults

There were 4 items regarding family members or other adults within the social efficacy section. The results for these items generally showed that girls have high perceptions of their social
efficacy regarding their relationships with their parents, other family members or other adults. The following tables illustrate that the girls felt they had high efficacy regarding parent expectations and getting help for social problems. Notably, there was consistency amongst all the schools for most of the items, except the one concerning parents taking part in school activities.

Family expectations, assistance and involvement

Table 5.24 presents the results for items regarding the parents of the girls, other family members or other adults. As can be seen from the table the vast majority of girls agreed to items Sse11, Sse16 and Sse25 which regarded living up to parent expectations and being able to get help with social problems from an adult or family member. Fewer girls responded positively to Item Sse40 however, which stated ‘I can easily get my parents to take part in school activities’, with little over 50% agreeing and about a third of the girls unsure (31.5%).

Table 5.24 Items relating to family expectations, assistance and involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse11</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse16</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse25</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse40</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, differences were found when analysing responses to item Sse40 according to each school context. Figure 5.12 shows the great gap between for example the private schools in Australia with only 35.3% agreeing that they could get their parents involved in school activities, and the public school in Saudi which had 78.6% of the girls responding positively. The other two school contexts were in between with 65.2% of girls from the Australian public schools and 59.1% from the Saudi private school agreeing.
The 9 items regarding their own self and social efficacy generally showed that girls indicate they have high social efficacy in relation to what they believe about their own social abilities and expectations they have of themselves. Through the following tables the girls illustrate that they generally believed they had good social skills in meeting and interacting with people as well as in dealing with problems. They also had strong beliefs in living up to their own expectations.

**Personal social abilities**

How the girls perceived their social abilities was indicated by items Sse1, Sse2, Sse5 and Sse38. Although the majority agreed that they often met new and interesting people (74%, Sse2), only 36.4% did not have problems getting to know new people at social events (Sse1). Item Sse5 further indicated that many girls (71.1%) believed it was their own personal ability which allowed them to acquire their friends. Many girls (74.2%) also indicated in item Sse38 that they were able to carry on conversations.
Table 5.25 Items relating to personal social abilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly/agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly/disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse1R*</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse2</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse5</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse38</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

There were no major differences when looking specifically at each school context with the majority of girls concurring with their responses to the above items. However, there were some differences with item Sse5 ‘I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends’. Compared to the private school contexts, Figure 5.13 shows a greater number of students from the public schools in both Australia (86.9%) and Saudi Arabia (81.4%) agreeing that it was their personal abilities which helped them acquire their friends as opposed to outside forces. In addition, although both the private schools had similar numbers who agreed (63.3% Australia, 59.1% Saudi Arabia), the school in Saudi Arabia had a greater number who were unsure with 31.8% of girls indicating as such and only 14.3% from the private schools in Australia responding similarly.

![Figure 5.13 Sse5 'I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends']
Dealing with problems

The following items (see Table 5.26) ask the girls to what extent they can deal with problems such as standing up for themselves and resisting peer pressure. The results indicate that a greater number of girls agree that they could stand up for themselves (76.9%) and deal with situations where they were being annoyed or hurt (60.5%), than those who could resist peer pressure (52.5%) and stand firm to someone asking them to do something unreasonable or inconvenient (55.9%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sse6</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse32</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse36</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sse39</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No marked differences were found in responses between each school context for item Sse6 with school results ranging from 56.8% to 68.2%. There were slight differences with item Sse32, with results ranging from 67.9% of girls from the public Saudi school to 85% of girls from the private Saudi school indicating that they stood up for themselves when they felt they were being treated unfairly. The other two school contexts each had about 78% of girls who agreed to the same statement. There were greater differences in responses for the last two items, as shown in Figures 5.14 and 5.15. For example, item Sse36, ‘I find it easy to resist peer pressure to do the things in school that can get me into trouble’, had 68.2% of girls from the private school in Saudi Arabia respond positively whereas only 25% of girls from the public Saudi school agreed. Both the Australian schools had similar results with 58.8% and 56.5% of girls from the private and public schools (respectively) agreeing that they could resist peer pressure.
Figure 5.14 Sse36 'I find it easy to resist peer pressure to do the things in school that can get me into trouble'
Own expectations

Item Sse33 asked the girls about their belief about whether they could live up to what they expected of themselves. Most of the girls agreed that they could, with 84.5% responding positively. The responses according to school showed similar results with both public schools having over 90% of girls agreeing as well as 82.4% of girls from the private schools in Australia and 72.7% of girls from the private Saudi school.

Table 5.27 Sse33 'I can live up to what I expect of myself'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Academic efficacy – Self

Most of the items concerned the student themselves and their academic efficacy. The 28 items produced results which showed varying levels of efficacy according to the issues covered by the items asked. These results are presented in the following tables and figures.
**Effort**

There were 7 items which referred to the effort the girls placed in academic aspects. The results, as shown in Table 5.28, indicate that the girls generally believed they placed effort into the work they did such as attempting difficult tasks, working hard, checking work, discovering reasons for difficulty in completing tasks, trying harder after failing a task, and motivating themselves to do school work. The item which received the greatest positive responses was item Sse2 which directly stated ‘I work hard in school’, with 86.3% of girls agreeing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase1R*</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase2</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase21</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase24</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase25</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase36R*</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

It is interesting to note that for four of the items, Sse1, Sse2, Sse25 and Sse36, three of the schools generally concurred in their results; however the public school in Saudi consistently had considerably more girls respond positively to each of the items. For example, while the other three schools varied in their results between 60.8% and 66.7%, there were 85.8% of the girls from the public Saudi school who disagreed with the statement ‘If something looks too complicated, I will not even bother to try it’. Figure 5.16 shows the differences for the four items by presenting the number of girls who agreed to each item (results for negative items Sse1R* and Sse36R*, have been reversed). Furthermore, the private school in Saudi produced lower results than the other three schools for items Sse21 and Sse24. Fewer students from this school (68.2%) checked their work to ensure it was done correctly than the girls from the Australian private schools (80.4%), the public Australian schools (87%), and the public Saudi school (78.6%). Similarly, fewer students from the private Saudi school (62.6%) worked out where they went wrong when they run into difficulty doing their class work than do girls from the Australian private (82%) and public (72.7%) schools and from the Saudi public school (82.2%).
Chapter Five ~ Findings: Phase One

Figure 5.16 Percentage of girls who agreed to questions regarding 'effort'

Level of security about ability

There were 5 items which aimed to find the level of security the girls had regarding their abilities. Items Ase5 and Ase38 had the highest number of girls agree with 87.7% and 84.4% of girls responding positively. These responses indicated that the girls believed they could achieve good grades if they tried hard enough, even if the work was difficult. Over half the girls also indicated that they felt secure about their abilities (Ase4) and 61% believed it was not difficult for them to get good grades in school (Ase6). Nonetheless, less than half the girls thought that they could handle unexpected problems (Ase3).

Table 5.29 Items relating to level of security about ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase3R*</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase4R*</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase5</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase6</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase38</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed
When analysing the responses according to school, there seems to be general agreement for items Ase5 and Ase38 with all results falling between 80% and 90%. However there were some notable differences for the other three items, especially Ase4 and Ase6. A greater number of girls from the public school in Saudi, 82.1%, disagreed with the statement ‘I feel insecure about my ability to do things’ (Ase4) compared to 43.2% from the private Australian schools, 52.2% from the public Australian schools, and 36.4% from the private school in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Figure 5.17 shows the public Saudi school also had more girls (85.7%) who agreed that it was not hard for them to get good grades in school, than did the Australian private schools (58%), the Australian public schools (60.9%), and the Saudi private school (36.3%).

![Figure 5.17 Ase6 'It is not hard for me to get good grades in school']

The following table (5.30) further shows the differences for item Ase3, ‘When unexpected problems occur, I do not handle them very well’. The public schools from Australia and the private school from Saudi had similar results with 47.8% and 50% (respectively) of girls disagreeing with the statement. However, the private Australian schools had a low number of girls who felt the same with only 38.8% disagreeing. In contrast, the public Saudi school had 60.7% of girls disagree that they could not handle unexpected problems.
Table 5.30 Ase3 'When unexpected problems occur, I do not handle them very well'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>1 (SA)</th>
<th>2 (A)</th>
<th>3 (U)</th>
<th>4 (D)</th>
<th>5 (SD)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% within SCHOOL</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Aust.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Aust.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Saudi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Saudi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance of school/education

The importance of school or education was indicated by items Ase8, Ase26, Ase29 and Ase37. The results presented in Table 5.31 show that the majority of girls concurred in their responses that showed their ideas about the value of schooling and education. For example, item Ase8 asked the girls about the level of importance they placed on what they learnt in school, with 92.5% indicating that they thought it was important. About three quarters of the girls also agreed that they liked class work they learn from even when making a lot of mistakes (Ase26) and they think about whether they understand what they are doing (Ase29). General similarities were found between each school context for each of the items.
Table 5.31 Items relating to importance of school and education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase8R*</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase26</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase29</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Good school

The girls were asked the extent to which they thought they went to a good school in item Ase10. The vast majority of girls, 86.9%, agreed that they did. Furthermore, there were no major differences in how the girls from each school context responded, with 83.7% from the Australian private schools, 91.3% from the Australian public schools, 95.5% from the Saudi private school and 82.1% from the Saudi public school agreeing.

Table 5.32 Ase10 'I go to a good school'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase10</td>
<td>86.9%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Aspirations

As shown in Table 5.33, results for the following items indicated what academic aspirations the girls believed they had. Many girls responded positively to the statement ‘When I am old enough I will go to college’ (Ase13) with 66.9% agreeing. Even more girls demonstrated that it mattered whether they did well at school (82.3%, Ase17) and that they would not quit school as soon as they could (79.8%, Ase22).
### Table 5.33 Items relating to academic aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase13</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase17R*</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase22R*</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Item Ase22 showed no major differences in the responses from each school context. However, there were slight differences for item Ase17 and greater differences in item Ase13. Both the private school contexts had about 80% of girls disagree that it did not matter if they did well in school; whereas the Australian public schools had fewer girls (69.6%) feel the same and the Saudi public school had almost all the girls disagree (96.4%). Figure 5.18 further shows the differences for item Ase13. While just over half (53%) of girls from the private schools in Australia agreed they will go to college when they were old enough, a considerable 90.9% of girls from the private school in Saudi Arabia concurred.

![Figure 5.18 Ase13 'When I am old enough I will go to college']
Beliefs about achievements

A number of items (see Table 5.34) asked the girls to state their beliefs about their achievements, with the results of all items except one showing that the girls had positive beliefs about their abilities. This included 80.6% of girls agreeing they usually understood their homework assignments (Ase16), 70.7% agreed that they were smart (Ase20), 72.6% agreed that they remembered information presented in textbooks and in class (Ase27), 65.8% agreed that they were good at finishing assignments by deadlines (Ase32), and 64.5% agreed they were good at organising their schoolwork. There was less conformity with item Ase11 as 43.1% of girls agreed and 32.6% disagreed that they achieved goals they set for themselves. It should be noted though, that the wording of the item, ‘When I set important goals for myself, I rarely achieve them’, caused some difficulties for the girls. The word ‘rarely’ was of particular concern, with many girls asking for clarification, indicating the possibility that other students may not have understood the meaning of the statement.

Table 5.34 Items relating to beliefs about achievements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase11R*</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase16</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase20</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase27</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase32</td>
<td>65.8%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase39R*</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Girls from each school context generally concurred with four of the items - ASe11, Ase16, Ase27, and Ase39. It is important to note that an untypically high number of girls were unsure about item Ase11 from the public Australian schools (30.4%), the private Saudi school (36.4%) and the Saudi public school (28.6%). In addition, some significant differences were found in items Ase20 and Ase32. As can be seen in Figure 5.19, for instance, a greater number of girls from the public Saudi school (89.3%) agreed that they were smart than did girls from the public Australian schools (54.5%) and the private Saudi school (59.1%). Figure 5.20 also shows how more girls from the
private Saudi school (81.8%) agreed they were good at finishing assignments by deadlines than girls from the other three school contexts.

Figure 5.19 Ase20 'I am smart'

Figure 5.20 Ase32 'I am good at finishing homework assignments by deadlines'
Reasons for doing school work

Responses to items Ase31, Ase34 and Ase37 indicate that the majority of girls agreed that they did their school work for the following reasons: they are interested in it (64.5%), they like to learn new things (85.2%), and finally because understanding the work they do is important to them (76.5%). There was less general consensus with item Ase35 as to whether the girls best liked work that does not make them think, with 45% indicating they liked work that made them think and 42.7% agreeing that the best work they liked was when they did not have to think.

Table 5.35 Items relating to reasons for doing school work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly /agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Strongly /disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ase31</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase34</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase35R*</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ase37</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

When looking at the different school contexts, each item produced several differences with some being quite important to this study. For example, while only 47.1% of girls from the private Australian schools agreed to item Ase31, ‘An important reason I do my schoolwork is because I am interested in it’, a more considerable 96.5% of girls from the public Saudi school agreed. Both the public schools in Australia and the private Saudi school produced similar results with 65.2% and 63.7%, respectively. In addition, Figure 5.21 shows slightly more girls from both public school contexts agreed that understanding the work they did was an important reason they did their school work. An even greater difference was found for item Ase35 where 78.6% of girls from the Saudi public school responded positively to the statement, agreeing that the best class work for them was work that did not make them think. On the other hand, the other three schools did not concur with only about 30% who agreed from each school.
Chapter Five ~ Findings: Phase One

Figure 5.21 'An important reason I do my school work is because understanding the work we do is important to me'

5.2.2 Review of self-efficacy findings

The questionnaire contained both a self-efficacy section and an identity section and allowed the researcher to obtain brief information from a large number of participants. The self-efficacy section contained structured response items covering both social and academic efficacy in addition to four open-ended questions which asked the girls to detail particular experiences. This section aimed to gain a general depiction of the girls’ perceptions regarding various factors that may influence or impact on their social and academic self-efficacy. These included their teachers, their peers, their families and of course themselves.

Findings showed that girls generally had a high perception of their social efficacy regarding their relationships with their teachers. The girls illustrated that their teachers support them emotionally and academically, are approachable, care about their learning and social well-being, and encourage peer tutoring and mutual respect amongst peers. Notably, there was consistency amongst all the schools for most of the items. Some of the more obvious differences in responses were found regarding getting along with the teachers; the teacher discouraging classmates to share ideas; and the ability to live up to what the teacher thought of them (see Figures 5.1 to 5.3 and Tables 5.1 to 5.11).
The findings on academic efficacy as influenced by teachers produced more varying results portraying the girls as having a lower academic efficacy regarding their educational relationships with their teachers, as compared to their social efficacy. There were also comparable differences between the schools in responses to most items related to teachers and their academic efficacy (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5 and Tables 5.12 and 5.13).

The findings regarding classmates’ effect on social efficacy generally demonstrated a sense of high social efficacy regarding the girls’ relationships and interactions with their classmates. The girls illustrated that they generally have positive social relationships with their classmates, their classmates care about their learning, and they can easily converse and cooperate with peers, including asking for assistance. Nonetheless, some important differences were revealed particularly between the different school contexts. These differences regarded questions on whether classmates wanted them to come to class everyday; whether classmates cared about their learning; the ability to start conversations with their peers; and living up to what their classmates thought of them (see Figures 5.6 to 5.8 and Tables 5.14 to 5.19).

Findings regarding academic efficacy as influenced by classmates generally showed that the girls believed they had average to high academic efficacy regarding their educational level compared to their peers, as well as regarding academic interactions with their classmates. The girls illustrated that they generally have positive academic interactions with their classmates, such as in group work; at least half compare themselves favourably academically; they help others with their work; and they find it easy to participate in class discussions. Although there was general consensus for most items, the results revealed some considerable differences between the different school contexts regarding feelings of being a valuable group member; being accepted by other group members; their ability level compared to their classmates; and their ability to concentrate when distracted (see Figures 5.9 to 5.11 and Tables 5.20 to 5.23).

The results for items on family members or other adults in relation to self-efficacy generally showed that girls have high social efficacy regarding their relationships with their parents, other family members or other adults. The girls displayed high efficacy regarding parent expectations and getting help for social problems. Notably, there was consistency amongst all the schools for most of the items, except the one concerning parents taking part in school activities (see Figure 5.12 and Table 5.24).
The findings regarding their own self and social efficacy generally showed that girls perceive they have high social efficacy in relation to what they believe about their own social abilities and expectations they have of themselves. The girls illustrated that they generally believed they had good social skills in meeting and interacting with people as well as in dealing with problems. They also had strong beliefs in living up to their own expectations. Major differences were found in items relating to acquisition of friends; standing up for oneself; and resisting peer pressure (see Figures 5.13 to 5.15 and Tables 5.25 to 5.27).

Most of the items concerned the student themselves and their academic efficacy. The findings from these items produced results which showed varying levels of efficacy for the various academic issues covered including effort, level of security about ability, importance of school/education, quality of school enrolled in, aspirations, beliefs about achievements, and reasons for doing school work. Many of the items regarding all of the above issues produced differences in responses between schools, with few items having significant consensus amongst the school contexts (see Figures 5.16 to 5.21 and Tables 5.28 to 5.35).

5.2.3 Open-ended questions

There were four open-ended questions which enquired about the following:

- The last time they felt really confident when they were in a small group,
- A time when they felt shy or upset,
- A time when they were learning at school and felt happy, and
- If they were sometimes unhappy at school, what would make them feel like that?

The girls were asked to describe each situation they wrote about in as much detail as possible.

**Question 1 – Feeling confident**

The first question drew out four major types of experiences in which the girls described feeling confident in. These included experiences while performing in front of a group of people, being
with friends, standing up for themselves, and demonstrating academic, social or sporting strengths. The girls wrote about several experiences, so that a tally of over 10% was deemed to be quite a considerable percentage. The majority of girls described their most confident moment to be while performing in front of a large group of people.

*When we were doing drama, I felt confident in front of everyone. I felt confident and happy (Private Australia).*

This was most apparent in the responses from the girls from the private Islamic schools in Australia, with 37% who had experienced confidence while performing. In contrast, only 13% of the girls from the public schools in Australia mentioned performing as a time of feeling confident, as well as 8% from the public school in Saudi and no one from the international school in Saudi feeling the same. Being with friends was the next most mentioned experience in which girls felt confident, again with 24% of girls from the private schools and 22% from the public schools in Australia. Girls from the Saudi schools also referred to situations with friends as giving them confidence with 19% of girls from each of the public school and the international school stating so.

*When I'm with my friends in the playground, because I can socialise, it's like I feel free (Public, Australia).*

The experiences regarding strengths, particularly academic and sporting strengths, were the next most mentioned. However, there was an obvious difference with only 8% of the private school girls in Australia compared to 22% of the public school girls mentioning confidence while demonstrating their strengths. Furthermore, there were a greater number of girls from both the Saudi contexts that also described similar experiences with 42% from the public school and 52% from the international school.

*When I got full marks in an exam. I told my friends, “See! I told you I was confident and I would succeed!” (Public, Saudi).*

The next situation produced fairly even results for girls in all the schools with 8% of girls from the private schools in Australia, 9% from the public schools in Australia, 4% from the Saudi public school and 5% from the international school that found themselves to be more confident in situations where they were standing up for themselves.

*Me and my friend stood up for each other and we didn’t get blamed for something that happened at school (Private, Australia).*
The girls from schools in Saudi Arabia had two additional types of experiences which made them feel confident. While only two girls from Australian schools mentioned situations with family members as giving them confidence, a greater number of girls from the Saudi schools (15%) included experiences with immediate and extended family members.

**Question 2 – Feeling shy or upset**

The next question concerning a time the girls felt shy or upset resulted in a wider variety of experiences including performing, issues with friends or family, being teased, embarrassing moments, demonstrating weaknesses or failures and feeling socially insecure. The most predominant situations for girls in the private schools in Australia were one-off embarrassing moments (26%), such as falling in front of a crowd; issues with friends (20%) such as fighting; and feeling shy or upset while performing (18%).

*When we went to a school party. I was shy because I was not wearing the scarf and other kids wore it (Private, Australia).*

There were some similarities with what girls from the public schools found to be shy or upsetting moments for them, particularly performing, with 17% of the girls feeling the same. However, the majority of experiences which were mentioned more by the public school girls differed and included being teased (22%), feeling socially insecure (22%), for example on the first day of school and demonstrating weaknesses or failures (13%).

*When I first started school. No one really talked to me (Public, Australia).*

The experiences which were more frequently mentioned by the girls in the Saudi public schools included problems with friends (19%), embarrassing moments (19%), issues with family or relatives (19%), and demonstrating signs of weaknesses or failure (15%).

*We had visitors come over. I didn’t greet them and my mother became angry so she punished me by not giving me a treat (Public, Saudi).*

The experience most often mentioned by the girls attending the international school in Saudi was demonstrating weaknesses or failures, with 24% of girls describing such a time. The other common experiences included embarrassing moments (19%), and being teased (14%). Performing in public
(10%), problems with friends (10%), and social insecurities (10%) were also seen as times of feeling shy or upset.

*Once I was upset because we had a PE test. I didn’t study so well and I got a bad grade. I was feeling sad when I saw my grade (Private, Saudi).*

**Question 3 – Feeling happy while learning**

Experiences while performing and issues with friends again appeared in the responses regarding the third question, which asked about a time they felt happy learning at school. Other responses included experiences involving achievement, learning, being with or doing things for their teachers, and other special moments. Experiences while learning and demonstrations of achievement were most frequently mentioned across all the schools. The responses mentioning learning were predominant with 49% of girls from the Australian private schools, 57% from the Australian public schools, 31% from the Saudi public school and 38% from the international school who connected happy times at school with learning. Being happy showing achievement also proved to be frequently mentioned responses with 22% of girls from the Australian private schools, 13% from the Australian public schools, 19% from the Saudi public school and 38% from the international school.

*I feel happy when we have discussions in class about Maths or questions that need evidence (Private, Australia).*

*Last year I did a NAPLAN test and I passed it. I got a trophy for it because I got bands 8 and 7 (Private, Australia).*

A major difference was found in how many girls described experiences with friends as being times of happiness. A substantial 50% of girls from the public school in Saudi showed the importance of friends to their happiness in contrast to no girls from the Saudi international school mentioning their friends during the times that they felt happy at school. In addition, a smaller number of girls from both the Australian school contexts, the private (12%) and the public (17%), mentioned friends during their happy learning experiences.

*When I hang out with my friends I feel there is no end to my happiness. I never used to have friends, then I bought a book on how to make friends and now I have heaps (Public, Saudi).*
Question 4 – Feeling unhappy at school

Issues with friends, being teased or getting into trouble, personally sad moments and issues with learning were the main categories of responses for the last question about a time they felt unhappy at school. Experiences surrounding being teased or getting into trouble seemed to be major issues for the girls in the Australian schools with 37% from the private schools and 39% from the public schools mentioning these situations as causing them to be unhappy at school. In contrast, only 8% and 10% of girls from the public and international schools in Saudi (respectively) mentioned being unhappy because of them being teased or getting into trouble.

When people tease my name or my scarf. They look at me like I’m a filthy creature (Private, Australia).

When people tease me or call me slow and also when people say rude stuff to me (Public, Australia).

On the other hand, the experiences which were of major concern to the girls in the Saudi schools, with 39% from the public school and 38% from the international school, were those surrounding learning, such as not understanding their work, low marks, or not able to answer questions.

I studied and was confident but then I didn’t do well (Public, Saudi).

I feel unhappy when I do not understand class work because I want to know how to do it because I want to do well at school (Private, Saudi).

Contrastingly, girls in Australian schools were less concerned by issues with learning as only 16% from the private schools and 9% from the public schools mentioned issues with learning as being times they felt unhappy.

The most frequently mentioned experiences to cause them unhappiness across all the schools were problems with friends, with 47% of girls from the private schools in Australia, 35% from the public schools in Australia, 50% from the public school in Saudi and 29% of girls from the international school in Saudi mentioning friends as reasons for being unhappy at school. These included friends excluding, breaking up or fighting with them, not having any friends, jealousy between friends, spreading or hiding secrets, and being bossed around or treated like ‘a nobody’.

When I get angry with friends, we do not agree and then we do not play together (Public, Saudi).
When I am at school and nobody plays with me, I get sad and feel left out (Public, Australia).

Probably when my friends dog [betray] me or when they chit chat about me (Private, Australia).

5.2.4 Review of open-ended questions findings

The four open-ended questions asked the girls to describe when they last felt really confident in a small group, a time when they felt shy or upset, a time when they were learning at school and felt happy, and the times they may feel unhappy at school.

Findings from the first question drew out four major types of experiences in which the girls described feeling confident in. These included experiences while performing in front of a group of people, being with friends, standing up for themselves, and demonstrating academic, social or sporting strengths. Although all the schools had one or more students mention an experience that fit the above categories, the school contexts differed in which type of experience was of greater reference.

Findings from the second question concerning a time the girls felt shy or upset resulted in a wider variety of experiences including performing, issues with friends or family, being teased, embarrassing moments, demonstrating weaknesses or failures and feeling socially insecure. This question also highlighted differences in school context as each school varied in the emphasis placed on each type of experience.

Experiences while performing and issues with friends again appeared in the responses regarding the third question, which asked about a time they felt happy learning at school. Other responses included experiences involving achievement, learning, being with or doing things for their teachers, and other special moments.

Findings from the last question about a time they felt unhappy at school identified the following categories from student responses: issues with friends, being teased or getting into trouble,
personally sad moments, and issues with learning. More obvious differences were found between the number of girls indicating these experiences from each school.

### 5.2.5 The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Muslims (MEIM-M)

The MEIM-Muslims modelled an existing measure which was developed by Phinney (1989, cited in Alghorani, 2003). Phinney proposed a multidimensional model of ethnic identity. She conceptualised ethnic identity as a multifaceted construct, which involves one’s feelings towards their ethnicity, attitudes about their ethnicity, and the knowledge one has of their ethnicity. To measure ethnic identity, Phinney constructed The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, MEIM. The key elements of the MEIM, as specified by Phinney (1992) are:

1. Self-identification as a group member
2. Attitudes and evaluations relative to one’s group
3. Attitudes about oneself as a group member
4. Extent of ethnic knowledge and commitments
5. Ethnic behaviour and practices

Alghorani (2003) adapted the MEIM so that its items were rewritten to assess religious identity, rather than ethnic identity. Leaving the general structure of the MEIM unchanged, he called the adapted measure the MEIM-Muslims.

The MEIM-Muslims, which measures one’s Islamic identity, was divided into the following five subscales:

1. The Islamic Identity Achievement sub-scale, based on 7 items of the MEIM-Muslims
2. The Islamic Affirmation and Belonging sub-scale, based on 5 items
3. The Islamic Behaviour sub-scale, consisting of only 2 items
4. The Islamic Identity sub-scale, which combines the previous three sub-scales: Islamic Identity Achievement, Islamic Affirmation and Belonging, and Islamic Behaviour. Therefore, it is made up of 14 items
5. The Non-Muslim Orientation sub-scale, made up of the remaining 6 items of MEIM-Muslims

The MEIM-Muslims was administered to 95 of the participants in this study, from the two school contexts in Australia and the private school in Saudi. Unfortunately, the principal of the public
school in Saudi did not wish her 28 students to complete the MEIM-Muslims measure, only providing permission for the self-efficacy questionnaire to be administered. No clear reason was given for this decision. Only one girl who attended a separate public school completed the MEIM-Muslims. However, her results have been omitted from the statistics in order to keep a realistic and balanced interpretation of the results, even though some mention of her responses is provided.

This measure starts with a fill-in-the-blank statement, asking the girls to report a religious self-identification. The statement reads as: ‘In terms of religious group, I consider myself to be ________’. After scoring the MEIM-Muslims, it was found that 4 girls from the Australian public schools and 17 from the private schools did not report any religious identification. While most of these 21 girls did not fill in the blank, some of them ranked themselves by completing the statement with words including ‘fabulous’, ‘beautiful’, ‘excellent’, and ‘shy’. One student considered herself ‘important’, adding in brackets the reason ‘because I am a Muslim’. Three girls gave a nationality, including ‘Jordanian’, ‘Australian’, and one ‘Muslim Lebanese Australian’. All the remaining girls reported a religious self-identification of being a ‘Muslim’.

The last three questions in the MEIM-Muslims, asked the girls to report their religion and each of their parent’s religion by choosing from a list of the main three monotheistic religions or the option to specify if other. The results indicate that all the girls reported their religion and that of both their parents as being ‘Islam’.

The remaining items in the MEIM-Muslims produced scores for the subscales: Islamic Identity Achievement, Islamic Affirmation and Belonging, Islamic Behaviour, and Non-Muslims Orientation. Although an important part of the original questionnaire, the Islamic Identity sub-scale, which combined three of the other sub-scales, has not been used in this study. It was found unsuitable to carry out detailed statistical analysis on such a generally small sample, using the same quantitative analysis Alghorani (2003) completed, which involved calculating the mean of the total score on Islamic Identity Achievement, Affirmation and Belonging, and Islamic Behaviours subscales.

For the subscales used, negative items (indicated by ‘R*’) were reversed when presenting the data in the tables. The girls were asked to select a number in the scale ranging between 1 and 4, where
1 through 4 indicated ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Agree’, and ‘Strongly Agree’, respectively. The results for these items are presented subsequently.

**Islamic identity achievement subscale**

There were 7 items within the Islamic Identity Achievement sub-scale of the MEIM-Muslims. Responses within the Islamic Identity Achievement subscale reflected the degree to which the girls stated that they thought about the meaning of their religious group membership (knowledge items are 3, 8R*, and 12) and had sought out information about their own religious group (exploration items are 1, 5, 10R*, and 13). Responding positively to the statements indicates a more ‘achieved’ Islamic identity while negative responses reflect identity diffusion or the lack of any effort to search for one’s Islamic identity (Alghorani, 2003). The following table (5.36) shows the vast majority of girls (between 66% and 90%) agreed that they thought about and sought out information about their religious group.

**Table 5.36 Islamic identity achievement subscale - 7 items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iid1</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid3</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid5</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid8R*</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid10R*</td>
<td>72.6%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid12</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid13</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Furthermore, these overall results were reflected in each of the school contexts, as can be seen below in the statement, ‘I have spent time trying to find out more about my own religious group, such as history, tradition, and customs’. Over 80% of girls from all the schools agreed that they spent time trying to find out about Islam.
Figure 5.22 iid1 'I have spent time trying to find out more about my religious group, such as history, traditions, and customs'

**Islamic Affirmation and Belonging sub-scale**

This subscale included 5 items which measured the degree to which one feels close to and part of the Muslim group (Alghorani, 2003). Similarly to the previous subscale, Table 5.37 shows that most of the girls, over 84%, responded positively to the statements indicating a strong sense of belonging to their religious group.

**Table 5.37 Islamic Affirmation and Belonging subscale – 5 items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iid6</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid11</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid14</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid18</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid20</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed*
Furthermore, when looking closely at each school context, all schools concurred in their responses with high percentages for each item. The only item which showed slight differences, as shown in Figure 5.23, was Iid11, ‘I have a strong sense of belonging to my own religious group’. 95.7% and 90% of girls from the public schools in Australia and from the private school in Saudi, respectively, agreed that they had a strong sense of belonging to their Muslim group. However, only 76.4% of girls from the private schools in Australia believed likewise.

Figure 5.23 Iid11 'I have a strong sense of belonging to my own religious group'

**Islamic Behaviour sub-scale**

One’s involvement in Islamic practices (Alghorani, 2003) was covered by only two items in the Islamic Behaviours subscale. Again, the majority of girls responded positively to the statements indicating that they considered themselves practising Muslims.

**Table 5.38 Islamic Behaviour subscale – 2 items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iid2</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iid16</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed*
No differences were found when looking more specifically at each school (see Figure 5.24). For example when looking at item iid16, ‘I participate in cultural practices of my own religious group, such as special food or customs’, 82.4% of girls from the private schools in Australia, 91.3% from the Australian public schools, 85% from the private school in Saudi Arabia and the one girl from the Saudi public school agreed that they participated in Islamic cultural practices.

Figure 5.24 iid16 'I participate in cultural practices of my own religious group, such as special food or customs'

**Non-Muslim Orientation sub-scale**

The Non-Muslim Orientation subscale is made up of the remaining 6 items of MEIM-Muslims. This subscale is based on the conceptualisation that attitudes towards other groups are strongly related to one’s feelings about their own group (Alghorani, 2003). For instance, it asks participants to respond to the following item: ‘I like meeting and getting to know people from religious groups other than my own’. The items of this subscale are 4, 7R*, 9, 15R*, 17, and 19. Table 5.39 shows responses were by far more inconsistent than the previous subscales. Item iid17 indicates that almost 70% of girls were involved in activities with non-Muslims, however only half of the girls responded positively to item iid9, ‘I often spend time with people from religious groups other than my own’. In addition, 86.1% agreed to item iid4 that they like meeting and getting to know non-
Muslims, suggesting that most girls had positive orientation to non-Muslims. However only 60% of the girls indicated that they enjoyed being around non-Muslims (item iid19, ‘I enjoy being around people from religious groups other than my own’). Finally, although responses to item iid15 portray that 75.3% of girls agree that they do try to become friends with non-Muslims, the girls varied in their opinions for item iid7, ‘I sometimes feel it would be better if different religious groups did not try to mix together’, with 57.9% disagreeing that it would be better and 42.1% agreeing.

### Table 5.39 Non-Muslim Orientation subscale - 6 items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iid4</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid7R*</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid9</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid15R*</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid17</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iid19</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R=negative item reversed

Some differences were also found when looking more closely at each school context, as can be seen in Figure 5.25. The greatest differences can be seen for items iid7R* and iid15R*. Only 45.1% of girls from the private schools in Australia agreed that it was acceptable for different religious groups to mix, in contrast to 65.2% from the public schools in Australia and 85% from the private school in Saudi Arabia. The one respondent from the public school in Saudi similarly thought different religious groups should not mix. Item iid15R* which stated ‘I do not try to become friends with people from other religious groups’, produced varying results with 68% and 73.7% from the private schools in Australia and Saudi Arabia, respectively, responding negatively to the statement (item results reversed in the figure), whereas a greater number of girls, 95.7%, from the Australian public schools had the same opinion. In addition, results for item iid9 show that more girls who attended the public schools in Australia (56.6%) and the private (international) school in Saudi Arabia (60%) agreed that they spent time with non-Muslims compared to those attending the private schools in Australia (43.2%).
5.2.6 Review of MEIM-M findings

The identity section incorporated the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure – Muslims (MEIM-M) (Alghorani, 2003), which measured Islamic identity. This measure modelled an existing multidimensional model of ethnic identity which was developed by Phinney (1989, cited in Alghorani, 2003). Alghorani (2003) adapted the MEIM so that its items were rewritten to assess religious identity, rather than ethnic identity. The MEIM-M contained 23 structured response items and included five subscales – Islamic identity achievement, Islamic affirmation and belonging, Islamic behaviour, Islamic identity, and the non-Muslim orientation subscale. However, due to the small sample in this study, the Islamic identity subscale was not included as it required substantial quantitative analysis.

The Islamic Identity Achievement subscale reflected the degree to which the girls thought about the meaning of their religious group membership, and had sought out information about their
own religious group. The findings show the vast majority of girls agreed that they thought about and sought out information about their religious group (refer to Table 5.36 and Figure 5.22).

The Islamic Affirmation and Belonging subscale measured the degree to which one feels close to and part of the Muslim group (Alghorani, 2003). Similarly to the previous subscale most of the girls responded positively to the statements indicating a strong sense of belonging to their religious group (refer to Table 5.37 and Figure 5.23). Again no major differences were found between the responses from the different school contexts, with the exception of one item. Notable differences were found regarding the item which directly asked about their sense of belonging to their religious group.

One’s involvement in Islamic practices (Alghorani, 2003) was covered in the Islamic Behaviours subscale. Again, the majority of girls responded positively to the statements indicating that they considered themselves practising Muslims (see Table 5.38 and Figure 5.24) and no outstanding differences were found between the schools.

The Non-Muslim Orientation subscale is based on the conceptualisation that attitudes towards other groups are strongly related to one’s feelings about their own group (Alghorani, 2003). Findings from this subscale show responses were far more inconsistent than the previous subscales (see Table 5.39) with varying results concerning being involved in activities with non-Muslims, spending time with non-Muslims, being positive about meeting and getting to know non-Muslims, enjoyment being around non-Muslims, becoming friends with non-Muslims, and mixing with non-Muslims. These differences were both within each school context and between the different contexts (refer to Table 5.39 and Figure 5.25).

5.3 Conclusion

The findings from the first phase of data collection have been presented above. The questionnaires provided a general overview of the perceptions the girls had of their self-efficacy and their identity as Muslims. The following chapter presents the findings from the student interviews, including brief profiles of the students involved.
6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the results of the data collected from student questionnaires. This chapter continues to explore the data by presenting the findings from the student interviews. In the following chapter, the data from the teacher focus groups in Australia and the Saudi teacher questionnaires are presented. Following these three chapters the study draws all the parts of the thesis together and then concludes with some recommendations for future research.

From among the 125 students who completed the questionnaires, eight girls from the private schools and 13 girls from the public schools in Australia participated in the interviews. Section 6.2 presents brief profiles of the students who participated in the interviews.

Data from the student interviews are here presented using conceptualisation and comparative analysis, describing in greater depth particular themes that arose out of the interviews, under the two subsections, self-efficacy and identity. The chapter ends with a summary of the findings from the interviews. The following diagram gives a pictorial presentation of the chapter’s structure.
Chapter Six ~ Findings: Phase Two

Chapter map

Findings
Phase Two

Participants

Interviews

Self-efficacy
- Ability beliefs
- Trust
- Teachers
- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Aspirations
- Parent expectations
- Confidence

Identity
- Differential treatment
- Stared at
- Non-Muslims
- Backgrounds
- Being myself
### 6.2 Participant profiles

Following is a table with a brief profile of each participant who took part in the interviews. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identity.

**Table 6.1 Student participant profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Language at home</th>
<th>Parents Background</th>
<th>General description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private Islamic School – Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>k-2 in public school, from year 3 onwards at the Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Mother Lebanese, father first generation Australian, Lebanese background</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>First generation Australians, Lebanese backgrounds</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adilah</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>Mother Indian, father first generation Australian, Indian background</td>
<td>Born in India, came to Australia when she was 4yrs old, always attended the Islamic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dina</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Ethiopian, Djiboutian</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joumana</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Mother Iraqi, Palestinian background, father first generation Australian</td>
<td>Always attended the Islamic school, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public School – Australia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Syrian/ Iraqi background</td>
<td>Born in Syria, came to Australia when she was 4 yrs old, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Krio, Fula</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Born in Sierra Leone, came to Australia when she was 9yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Language at home</td>
<td>Parents Background</td>
<td>General description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aasiya</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Mother Lebanese, father half French- half Lebanese</td>
<td>Born in Lebanon, came to Australia when she was 2yrs old, attended k-1 public school then returned to Lebanon, came back Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Mother first generation Australian, Lebanese background, father Lebanese</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasreen</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bangali (Bangla)</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalida</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Arabic and English</td>
<td>Tunisian</td>
<td>Born in Tunisia, came to Australia when she was 1yr old, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indonesian and English</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iman</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indonesian and English</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamila</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Mother Palestinian, Jordanian background, father Syrian and Lebanese</td>
<td>Attended same school since kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>Born in Pakistan, came to Australia when she was 8 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fariha</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Bangali (Bangla)</td>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>Attended the same school since kindergarten, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najwa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Somali and English</td>
<td>Scottish, Somali background</td>
<td>Born in Scotland, came to Australia when she was 9yrs old, always attended public school, wears the hijab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 The interviews

The research process relied on the interviews to provide depth to the data collected. The purpose of the interviews was to have students impart their feelings and thoughts concerning their identities and sense of self-efficacy in a conversational manner. The interviews were also used to have the students reflect on the factors that they feel may be affecting their perceptions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Twenty-one participants were interviewed within a short time frame after the questionnaires were completed. They were interviewed twice within a few weeks of each other. The first interview was completed as a group in a spare meeting room. This was to ensure that students were not taken completely beyond their comfort zone by keeping a sense of familiarity and security amongst their peers.

The second interviews took place individually in a quiet part of the library, to allow students the opportunity to elaborate on their ideas and feelings and to tell their personal stories. Many of the girls were grateful to be able to further express themselves. Some of the girls’ teachers were also invited to participate in the research process to elaborate on their work with the children and their observations of how the children deal with their school, family and wider community contexts. The data gathered from teachers are dealt with separately in the next chapter.

A semi-structured interview was used during the research as it allowed greater flexibility than the structured interview and provided room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the participants’ responses (May, 1993; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Bouma, 1996). This was found to be especially beneficial when working with children as their responses and actions are more often than not quite unpredictable. The questions used in the interviews were general and guided by responses provided from the questionnaires. In each case, the students were asked to tell stories about their lives and school experiences, giving concrete examples of how they have felt or behaved in particular instances.

Some teacher misconceptions may have hindered the data collection process and the information they passed onto students. For example, two different teachers from two different public schools referred to the study as being ‘the Arabic survey’, promoting the stereotype of Muslims being only
Arabs and confusing those students who were not from the ‘Middle East’. A number of substantial issues emerged from the comments made by the students during the interviews. Although many of the issues that arose can relate to both identity and self-efficacy, they have been presented separately under two major headings – (i) identity and (ii) self-efficacy.

### 6.3.1 Identity

As discussed in the literature review, people need to be asked how they define or think about themselves, which for children almost always relates to how others define them and what opportunities are open to them (Greenburg and Mahony, 1995; Yeh and Drost, 2002). The issues which arose concerning identity were mainly related to how these Muslim girls believed they were defined by others. The three common ways that identities tend to be defined, which include through difference; through multiple identity formation and through the external influences of the wider society (Greenburg and Mahony, 1995), were prevalent in many of the comments the girls made.

#### Treated differently

*‘They called me a black shit’*

When asked about how they thought they were treated by others, more than half of the girls who attended the private Islamic school in Australia commented that they were treated the ‘same as anyone else’.

> They treat me the same because they know it’s just a religion and my friends are not racist. They’ll accept us because they know that someone will treat them badly (in return). Samia

However, only one girl from the public school felt she was treated the same.

> They treat me fine, like normal. They think that every human is the same. They think I’m normal because they’re not really racist people these days and they think oh it’s normal because Muslims and Christians all live in this world together. Nadia
The rest cited at least one reason as to why they felt they were treated differently. Reasons for being treated differently were diverse and included skin colour, personality, dress, language, nationality, name, treatment in shops, different traditions, religion, appearance, and having different topics of discussion. Of the six students who stated they were treated the same, three of those also talked about situations which made them feel they were treated differently.

Most of the issues which the girls discussed related to either race or religion. For example, Nasreen was dismayed that her traditions were not appreciated and Hanan was told that her home country is the ‘shittest in the world’. Both Kathy and Hanan were deeply hurt by comments made about their skin colour, Hanan has been called ‘a black shit’ on a number of occasions and Kathy was told she had to die because she was black.

*They tease me like that, they call me black shit. They say I’m poor…. they say Africa is the shittest country in the world. Every time I go to school (I get told), ‘Go away, go to another school, don’t come back, bye bye I wish you die’. Hanan*

Other incidents included Joumana’s name being teased because no one could pronounce it, and Najwa felt left out because the non-Muslims always talked about non-Muslim things. Jamila also imparted thoughts of feeling different from others because she was ‘Arabic’ and Aasiya mentioned that when she is by herself people do not always recognise that she’s a Muslim. She expresses how she felt the difference in treatment when a previous teacher found out that she was.

*At my old school they used to think I was Christian, but then after I told a teacher, she started treating me in another way and that way I just felt different. She used to always talk to me and stay with me and help me with stuff but then she just acted in another way, she did help me but she wouldn’t be all so happy. She was just different. Aasiya*

Mona had also felt differential treatment on a number of occasions; the most poignant in her mind was when she was told to go back to Lebanon. She did not feel appreciated for who she was and what her nationality was.

*They protest that we should go out, we should go to Lebanon, we should go back where you came from … these people didn’t appreciate what I’ve got, what I do and what’s my nationality. Mona*

Some girls also commented on getting differential treatment because of their language skills. Inas was teased when she first came to Australia because she could not communicate fluently with her classmates. She felt left out and had been told on a number of occasions to ‘go away’ when other
kids were playing. Rawa mentioned being picked on because she sometimes reverted to speaking Arabic when she was upset or angry, and Jamila felt different and unwanted because other students spoke differently.

Another aspect of race or religion which caused some girls to feel they were treated differently was the way they were dressed. Mona talked about the negative attention and treatment received from ‘Australians’ because of the way she and her family dressed, with some of them wearing the hijab. Joumana, Najwa and Rawa also mentioned the ‘scarf’ or how they were dressed as being the cause of getting negative attention and comments. This made Najwa, who always wore the hijab, feel at times that she did not want to be different, expressing her discomfort at being the odd one out with the following comment:

I don’t wanna be different like maybe I’m the only one that’s Muslim, the Christians will always talk about what they want to talk about and I’ll just be left alone. Like why are they always talking about non-Muslim things, I shouldn’t be their friend, I’m just going to go away now and I just leave. Najwa

Joumana was convinced that her hijab would be the cause of her being treated differently and expected she will always get teased because of how she dresses.

I get some bad looks, I try to ignore them. I just don’t like it; I’m a person like them. I shouldn’t be treated in a different way. They don’t know how to pronounce it (my name) right so they start to make fun of it, and I wear the hijab, obviously they’re gonna tease me if they know I’m Muslim. Joumana

Two students however had unrelated reasons about why they felt they were treated differently. Adilah for example said she was treated differently because she was a quiet person and it had nothing to do with her religion or her racial background. Also on a positive note, the different treatment Huda talked about was because people liked her, she felt she was treated better.

**Being stared at**

‘I don’t know what’s the difference – me and them?’

When discussing how students thought they were treated, a number of students expressed feelings of being stared at. Hanan was the only girl to say that she did not feel that she was stared
at. However, her comments were in reference to shopping trips specifically, saying that she thought everyone was too busy going about their own business to take notice of her that much.

_"I don’t think people look at me that much because everyone is in their business, is going like this up down up down, going shopping like that, yeah so I don’t really think they look at me." Hanan_

All the rest of the girls interviewed confirmed that they were stared at, with most of them feeling negatively about the attention they received. Layal, Dina, Mona, and Kathy all declared that they were constantly stared at and each of them felt embarrassed, hurt, and uncomfortable. Mona further described that the looks she received generated feelings of fear and depression as well as embarrassment. This made her question what she could do about the issue as it was her religion in question and she could not convert. In the end she defensively questioned, ‘Why should I change?’

_"Well, I feel upset. It makes me, makes me feel scared because maybe these people will do something bad to me or like, make me embarrassed and that makes me depressed sometimes when I think about it and I try not to think about it and I just, all these bad memories come in my mind again. It’s my religion, what am I gonna do? I can’t, I can’t convert. ... Why should I change? It’s my religion, what can I do?" Mona_

When questioned by a man about why she wore the hijab and how unpleasant she looked with it on, Layal courageously replied that he should not be concerned with how she was dressed.

_"At the airport, this man saw me and my cousin wearing a ‘abayah’ and the scarf and he’s like, ‘Take off your scarf, why are you wearing it for? It’s not nice, it’s ugly’. And I told him, ‘Don’t worry about us, you’re not putting on the scarf, we are!’." Layal_

A few of the girls described why they considered they were being stared at. Joumana stated that people stared because they thought she was an ‘idiot’ for wearing the hijab, which perplexed her as she knew she was ‘going the right way’ by wearing it. Samia believed that they stared at anyone who was a ‘met-hajbe’ (a person wearing the hijab). She revealed that she was not the only one that was stared at and had people be racist to; it was everyone who wore the hijab that received the same treatment. Kathy wondered what the difference was between her and other people and after saying that she did not even wear the hijab, Kathy concluded that her colour must be why people stared, as if she was ‘weird’.

_"They all try and stare at me. I have no idea what they’re staring at. I’m not even wearing the scarf. I don’t know what’s the difference – (between) me and them. They’re only saying that because of my colour, as if I’m weird." Kathy_
Najwa reacted strongly to the issue of being stared at. She explained that she got angry and wondered why they did not look at themselves instead of staring at her, confessing that at times she would say things to herself about them which she should not be saying. She argued,

_Why are they looking at me? Why don’t they look at themselves? God created all humans and we shouldn’t be racist to other people. Like people are saying my skin colour it’s all yucky … maybe in my heart this is how God made me and I shouldn’t be worried about what they say about me. Sometimes I get so angry inside and say things about them which I shouldn’t be saying._ Najwa

When people say her skin colour is ‘yucky’, she tries to rationalise that she is happy with how she was created and she should not be worried about what people say about her. Nevertheless, she felt distressed about the looks people gave her to the point that she felt like either ‘throwing it (the hijab) off’ or just making everyone Muslim. She was deeply conscious of how different she felt being one of few in her community that wore the hijab. Najwa did however state that she tried to ignore the stares as best she could as she tried to understand why they only stared at her and not other people like her.

On a less intense note, Nasreen, Khalida, and Rawa seemed to take the idea that people stared at them quite matter-of-factly. They all agreed that people looked at them ‘weirdly’ and were ‘curious’ because of how they were dressed ‘differently’. Nasreen mentioned that she may be looked at, first because of her ‘dark skin’ and then because of her hijab. Rawa appeared proud that she dressed differently and did not ‘like to show anything’ from her body which other girls typically did. Nonetheless, it was the comments of Samia and Huda that suggested that they were not negatively affected by any stares they received. Both girls stated that although they were looked at, they did not care what people thought of them and they tried to ignore it, minding their own business.

_I have lots of people staring at me. I just mind my own business. And I don’t really care how, what other people think of me._ Samia

_If they look at me funny, I don’t care. I won’t look at them back, I’ll just ignore it … I don’t accept how they tease people like that._ Huda

Although Dina, Layal and Mona discussed how upsetting the issue of being stared at was to them, they believed what they were doing was the right thing, and so were learning to deal with unpleasant reactions from others. Dina no longer cared when she was stared at, it ‘doesn’t really
bother’ her anymore as she believes she is right in how she dresses and looks. She has also felt uplifted and strengthened by the fact that she has received many compliments about her hijab. She recalls a number of occasions where women have commented on how pretty she looks in the hijab and how nicely she puts it on. Mona also no longer cared because she understood that what she was doing was good for her and that’s all that matters.

_Just staring at me because of my looks and I’m like I don’t care. I mind my own business, I don’t really care what people think of me. I don’t really care what they say as long as I’m doing something good for myself. Mona_

Following from these thoughts about their perceived experiences with non-Muslims, the next section looks at interactions and more enduring relationships of the girls with non-Muslims.

**Non-Muslims**

_‘You don’t belong here, get out of our country!’_

On the issue of meeting non-Muslims, all but four girls described at least one negative experience regarding meeting or being around non-Muslims. One of the reasons given by Layal was echoed by Najwa, Inas, and Asma. She described how one of her reasons for feeling uncomfortable around non-Muslims was because they try to ‘change people’s mind to be Muslim’. Najwa, Inas and Asma related similar ideas during their individual interviews, with a description of experiences concerning friends or classmates questioning why they were Muslims and that they should change and be Christian.

_They always say to me, ‘What’s so special about your religion?’ and I’m like, ‘Everything’s special’. And she’s like, ‘Oh I do not think so’, and she started telling us about her religion and stuff and then I’m like, ‘I’m a Muslim and that’s it’. Inas_

Inas was told that there was nothing special about being a Muslim and therefore she should change, while Najwa was told on a number of occasions by different people, including some old friends, that being Christian was better than being a Muslim because Muslims were banned from some things. Furthermore, Asma was told that she was unlucky for being a Muslim as she could not do or eat all the things her friends could, she only had ‘one type of food’. 
Huda also felt uncomfortable around non-Muslims especially when they talked about her hijab. Although Joumana knows that ‘we should spread around the community’, she felt different and was too shy to be around non-Muslims when she wears the hijab. Layal was uncomfortable around non-Muslims when they were in larger groups of three or more. She felt left out as they talked about things she did not know about. She said she was fine with non-Muslims if there were three or less of them. Aasiya’s discomfort was expressed when she said that sometimes she felt wrong when she was around non-Muslims. Nasreen did not really want to hang out with them specifying her preference for hanging out with Muslims because she could talk about Islam with them.

_Sometimes I don’t really want to be with them actually. It’s not because they’re not Muslim, I just don’t want to be with them. I like being with people that are my religion. We can talk about our religion, but with them if we talk about it they might say, ‘Oh you think my religion is not true?’ They might take it seriously so that’s why I’d rather hang out with people that are my religion._ Nasreen

She thought if she talked about anything Islamic in front of non-Muslims they would feel like she was denouncing their religions making discussions sombre. However, she had nothing to say against non-Muslims as she did not know any - all her friends were Muslims. Both Adilah and Kathy expressed the feeling that they did not like to meet with non-Muslims; as Adilah explained, they were from a different background and she did not like how they teased her religion. Kathy said she was always teased by non-Muslims at her public school because of her skin colour being ‘ugly’ and not suiting her hair.

_When I was in public school, they would tease me in any way, my hair doesn’t match and my colour’s too ugly._ Kathy

Mona talked about how she sometimes felt like there was this ‘border line’ that she could not cross, particularly with some of her neighbours who have told her before that she did not belong and should leave the country.

_We just met because she just moved in and she’s like, ‘What’s your religion’? I’m like, ‘I’m Muslim’, and then she went racist. And she’s like, ‘You do not belong here, get out of our country!’.... like a border line, you can’t cross it, you can’t tell them a thing about our religious background, they just don’t like you because of your nationality and your religion._ Mona
She described some of her neighbours as being racists and related experiences where non-Muslim ‘Aussies’ abused family members, friends and herself because of how they were dressed, their nationality and their religion. In addition, Huda talked about the bad character of some people and her decision that therefore she did not want to play with some non-Muslims as they swear and do other bad things.

A few other students also mentioned the significance of having common topics of discussion about how they felt about meeting non-Muslims. When Layal mentioned her discomfort with being around three or more non-Muslims, her reasoning was because they would talk about things she did not know about and therefore she would feel left out. Joumana strongly argued that there was no point in talking to non-Muslims as they say different things to what Muslims say. She added that they had nothing in common and she seemed quite annoyed that they did not understand anything Islamic that she would say or talk about, in particular Islamic sayings in Arabic that were always on the tongue of many Muslims (particularly practising ones), such as Subhan-Allah, Insha-Allah and Alhamdu-lilah.

*There is nothing alike, nothing alike at all. Like mostly if I mention Alhamdulillah, I mention it and they go ‘What?, I think nah sorry. Like Inshallah, Wallah, when I say it they say ‘What?’ They don’t understand. I know we should spread around the community but I feel we’ve got different things. They use their religious sayings; we say something they won’t understand, what’s the point of talking to them? Joumana*

In addition, Jamila also emphasised her preference for Arabic speaking friends as they have the same language and could understand each other more.

Despite these comments by the students, many of the students did mention that there was no difference or they believed that there should be no difference, between them and non-Muslims and they did not have issues with meeting or being around them. After relating her negative experiences with non-Muslims, Mona was asked specifically whether she preferred Muslims. She replied that she did not care who she played with as long as they were good people. Even though Layal expressed her discomfort with being with large groups of non-Muslims, she did talk about the friendly and caring relationship she and her family had with her non-Muslim neighbour, as well as the fact that she liked to meet or get to know other non-Muslims. Aasiya had also mentioned her occasional feelings of discomfort with non-Muslims, yet she also stated that she did like to work with others and that she believed it was ‘not nice’ to only be with Muslims.
When we do dance and that we have other people with us, and in class we don’t just have all Muslim groups. I like to work with other people than my own religion. Sometimes I feel just wrong, I don’t feel like I’m in the right place but as well as that I think of it like it’s not nice to only wanna stay with Muslims. You have to play with other people, it’s not like they’re gonna give you alcohol or anything. But I like staying around them, all sorts of religions. Aasiya

Aasiya believed that Muslims should play with other people because, in contrast to what Layal believed, it’s not like they’re going to try and change you, for example ‘give you alcohol or anything’. Many of her friends in class and in her dance group were non-Muslims as well as students who attended her after-school Tae-Kwon-Do classes, explaining that she liked staying around people from all sorts of religions. Jamila and Najwa also both mentioned that no one was different and they enjoyed being with non-Muslims with Najwa especially pleased with the idea that the non-Muslims she sees outside of school ‘do not really teach me anything and I do not want to be teached (sic) anything’. Jamila stated that ‘just because their language is different, doesn’t mean it’s an excuse to hate them’.

Samia and Dina are the only two who did not mention any negative experiences or feelings towards meeting or being with non-Muslims. Dina had a family friend who was non-Muslim and she felt normal and comfortable around her as well as other non-Muslims she knew. Samia sometimes plays with her non-Muslim neighbour ‘so she (the neighbour) could feel a bit better’, and she said that she would choose both Muslims and non-Muslims to be around and that it did not matter what religion people had.

Interestingly though, one of the reasons Najwa gave for preferring Muslims as her friends was because she sympathised with the non-Muslims who would get sad or feel left out when they hung around her and her Muslim friends. This was especially apparent to her during Ramadan at her public school, when Muslims were given a special room to pray and rest in during lunch times. Non-Muslims were not allowed in and so they might have to wait for their friends outside, an idea which Najwa did not like, preferring to have only Muslim friends who could join her in the room.

(I prefer) Muslims, because if we had Muslims and non-Muslims, in Ramadan we go to a special room to pray and the non-Muslim person would get really sad because why are they all in there? Najwa

Most of the students from the private school did not seem to interact on a regular basis with non-Muslims. They either did not know anyone, only knew of a non-Muslim through someone they
Chapter Six ~ Findings: Phase Two

knew, or had neighbours who were non-Muslim. However, at the public school, students obviously had more interaction and on a more regular basis with non-Muslims be they teachers, peers or people outside school. Even so, it was the students and teachers at the public schools who still held stereotypical images of the Muslims. For example, as Nadia (Indonesian background) was walking to the room to take part in the questionnaire, the researcher witnessed one of her non-Muslim classmates dubiously ask her ‘Are you Arabic?’ When questioned by the researcher on her thoughts about this interaction, Nadia’s tentative explanation was that her classmate thought that the questionnaires were for Arabic people only and he might think ‘that Arabic people are mostly Muslims’. The announcement made by a teacher for the participants to go and complete the questionnaires may have inadvertently promoted this stereotype as she announced over the school speaker system, ‘Those involved in the Arabic survey, please go to the TLC’. The issue of how the girls themselves described their backgrounds is covered in the following section.

**Backgrounds**

*‘I’m either an Australian or a Muslim’*

The girls were asked what they considered their backgrounds to be. Almost all the girls were born in Australia; nonetheless they all mentioned the race or nationality of their parents as being their background, even those who had one or both parents also born in Australia. They were also quite specific in mentioning all the races that made up their family. For example Dina said she was half Ethiopian and half Djiboutian and Aasiya related that she was French and Australian because her father was half French and half Lebanese. Jamila also reported in detail that her father was Syrian and Lebanese and her mother was Palestinian but her granddad was Jordanian so...

> *I have lots... I just say that I’m Arabic. Jamila*

Samia even knew the specific towns where her parents came from in Lebanon, even though they were both born here in Australia.

> *Lebanese. I was born here in Australia, my background is Lebanon. My dad is from [townA] and my mum is from [townB], they were both born here. I’ll tell them that my background is Lebanese but I’m born in Australia, so I wouldn’t tell them that I’m only Australian. Samia*
The girls knew where each of their parents was born and a couple of them even mentioned where their grandparents were born. Joumana knew that her mum was born in Iraq but her mothers’ parents were born in Palestine.

(My background is) Arabic, Palestinian. (I was) born here, my mum was born in Iraq but her parents were born in Palestine, but my dad was born here. Joumana

The girls who did mention being Australian still found it important to state that their parents were from a different background. For example Layal stated that she was born here but her parents are Lebanese. In addition, even though Najwa did not identify herself as Australian, she did differentiate between herself and her parents’ nationality pointing out that she was Scottish but her parents were Somali. Only one of the girls born outside Australia, Aasiya, considered herself to be also Australian and would sometimes tell people so. The other girls born outside Australia, Adilah, Inas, Khalida, Hanan and Safa mentioned only their home countries as being their background, even those that came at a very young age and have basically lived their entire life in Australia.

After analysing the pattern of answers students gave, it seems they generally identified with being of the same cultural background as their parents, especially their fathers, and not necessarily where they were born.

I was born a Muslim. I think of myself as Lebanese too because my parents are. My father is Lebanese and you always have to follow your dad’s side mostly. I also think of myself as Australian because I lived here all my life, and my mum was born here and she’s Australian and I just consider myself Australian too. Rawa

Nasreen further stated that she would say she was Bangladeshi even though she was born in Australia because that is where her parents are from.

I’d say Bangladesh, but I was born in Australia but I’d say Bangladesh because my parents are from Bangladesh. Nasreen

However in contrast to this idea, Adilah was born in India but her father was born in Australia, and instead of declaring she was Australian because her father was, she identified herself as being Indian.
All girls identified themselves as Muslims or of being of the Islamic faith. It was interesting to note the comment by Adilah when she felt the need to emphasise that although her dad was from Australia he was still a Muslim

*My dad is from Australia but he’s a Muslim. Adilah*

Samia made a similar comment, feeling the need to say that she respected her country even though she was a Muslim.

*I’m a Muslim but I still live in Australia and I respect my country. Samia*

The comment made by Joumana was also noteworthy in quite a contrasting way as she found it necessary to say that she was either Australian or Muslim, she could not or would not describe herself as both; she could only be one of them.

*I won’t (say I’m Australian), I’m either Australian or Muslim. Joumana*

Despite some negative attitudes and experiences because of how the girls thought they looked or who they were, their pride in their backgrounds emerged in the above section. This pride is further highlighted in the following section which details their perceptions on the importance of being themselves.

**Being myself**

‘*I love being different because like I’m unique’*

The importance of being themselves was stressed by most of the girls who declared they were happy and proud of who they were. Mona and Samia emphasised that they were not bothered by what other people thought of them. Mona added that she did not need to be something she was not as long as she was doing something good for herself. Dina also considered that she was doing the right thing and nothing would make her change her religion.

*I know I’m doing the right thing... nothing can stop me from being a Muslim. Dina*
Pride took a great position in the discussions with Huda and Inas stating that they were proud to wear the hijab, Najwa declaring her pride for being a Muslim as God made her so, and Rawa was proud of her name and would not change it. Furthermore, students were resolute that they would not change themselves or try to be something they were not, because they were pleased with who they were.

*I'm not someone that likes to change myself and personality just because they want me to.*

_Dina_

_Because I'm being myself, I don’t need to be something I'm not._ *Mona*

_‘I like who I am and that’s it, I wouldn’t care._ *Asma*

Experiencing difficult situations because of her physical appearance, Kathy was still happy with who she was. She did not want to change anything about herself even though she was always teased about her skin and hair colour not matching.

_I say it does (match), Allah created me like that so I think it does. I think it’s perfect, seriously._ *Kathy*

When Inas was confronted by one of her classmates with the question ‘What’s so special about being a Muslim?’, she replied that everything was special and she would not change herself at all. In addition, Rawa expressed her contentment with being herself in an ideal way,

_I love being different because like I’m unique, my own way, it’s like I’m unique. No, never (wish to change)._ *Rawa*

Nevertheless, some of the girls wished at times that they could change some things about themselves such as their name, or how they dressed. Joumana, for example, felt like the odd one out and thus sometimes wished she did not wear the hijab. However, when asked if she would blend more with non-Muslims if she removed the hijab, Joumana stated that it would not change anything for her, she still would not talk to non-Muslims more. Nevertheless, she was happy being a Muslim. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, Joumana did not think of herself as an Australian because being a Muslim meant she could not also be Australian.

_Because it’s not who I am. I wear the hijab for a reason not because I’m Australian. Yeah (I’m either Australian or Muslim)._ *Joumana*
Although Jamila was happy with who she was, she sometimes felt embarrassed to be Arabic. She also longed to be ‘brown’, explaining that her family was brown skin-coloured and she wanted to be like them and not like her friends who she described as all being ‘white’. Aasiya also on occasion wished that her mum had named her something else, mostly because her name was frequently teased. She also expressed the desire to be a boy due to the fact that her brothers always got their way and were always allowed to go out. Furthermore, Aasiya liked the way some people thought she was American and so she occasionally wished she was American. However, on further contemplation she regretted saying that she wished her nationality was different as she likes to be who she is.

These girls were not only clear in describing who they were,

*I used to be something I’m not... I used to be very dramatic. I don’t need to be something I’m not.* Mona

*I don’t think anyone will encourage me to be a non-Muslim, nobody will encourage her to be a Muslim.* Huda

... but they also competently scrutinised what they had the ability to do.

*This is not my thing, not my talent.* Mona

*I just want to be smart, not too smart.* Kathy

A few of the girls summed up the importance of being who you are.

*(It’s important to be who you are) in front of an important group or there is someone very special in front of you.* Samia

*You don’t have to be like... be something you’re not.* Inas

*Not change everything, be someone different when someone be’s (sic) your friend.* Huda

Even though Samia stated that she was happy with who she was, she did say that she would not mind changing if there was something that needed changing.
Chapter Six ~ Findings: Phase Two

6.3.2 Self-efficacy

As discussed in detail in Chapter Two, self-efficacy is a key aspect of human agency and refers to the beliefs a person has of their ability to effectively complete a task or behaviour (Bandura, 1997). In this study, the issues which emerged regarding self-efficacy were concerned with how the girls perceived their strengths, their weaknesses, their aspirations, and the influence others may have on these abilities. Bandura (1997) believed that people are both producers and products of social systems and will not attempt to make things happen if they believe they are powerless to produce the results they want (Bandura, 1997; see also Betz, 2000). The areas of self-efficacy explored in this thesis are perceptions of academic and social self-efficacy.

Beliefs about abilities

‘I’m not wow smart, just smart’

Information relating to how the girls perceived their academic and social abilities was gathered by discussing with the girls their perceived strengths and weaknesses as well as directly asking them whether they thought they were smart or not and why they believed so. Dina, Adilah, Huda, Nadia and Joumana were the only students that confidently portrayed themselves as being smart by being good at and understanding their work and doing well in tests, without also mentioning a time when they felt they were not. Huda thought that she was not ‘wow smart, just smart’ and Nadia described herself as being ‘really really smart’ but she did not want to be and she was not as smart as her teacher and peers thought she was.

I’m not really that smart but they think I’m really really smart. I am really really smart but I don’t want to be smart. Nadia

In contrast, Safa and Rawa were the only two girls who showed quite some insecurity in their belief of how smart they were with Rawa being unsure whether she was smart or not, and Safa hesitantly replying that she was in the middle, then offering a cautious ‘not really’, and finally settling on a very indecisive and uncertain ‘I do not know’. 
All the other students talked about times when they felt smart or areas they were smart in, as well as times and areas when they felt the opposite. Mona felt smart because she tried hard; however, when she reached her ‘breaking point’, she would get bad marks and thus her peers would do better, making her feel unintelligent.

*When I try really hard, yes, but at times when I’m at my breaking point I get, not really bad marks but like C’s D’s, ... I just got an E for something I didn’t understand. Other people got better marks than me; sometimes I feel I’m not smart anymore because of the other people. Mona*

Kathy is sure that she is smart and mentions Math as a strength. Unfortunately she begins to think she is ‘dumb at school things’ because classmates always tease her about her weakness in grammar.

*(When they tease) I feel like I’m not smart or anything and I know that I am ... I feel so wrong and so not smart, terrible. Kathy*

She also describes how she feels like a ‘zombie’ in class as she gets easily confused when the teacher is trying to explain something. The most distressing thing to hear from Kathy, especially as a teacher, was the belief that she could not improve her weakness in grammar as her mum had the same weakness. Her mother never improved, to the point where she left a job because she was always corrected about her grammar, and so why would Kathy improve?

*How much people have already told me about my grammar? I’m so not good at it, I’m like the worst. (I won’t improve) because my mum’s like that. Kathy*

Kathy also believed others when they called her ‘dumb’ because she said that ‘they’re really smart’. She felt they must know that she was not really ‘good’ and so she would not bother trying to prove them wrong.

Hanan felt that she was the dumbest in her class as she used to fail all the time when she was in her country until they moved her to another school where she became one of the top students. At her present school she was doing generally well; however, Hanan experienced extremes of feeling smart or not so smart.

*Sometimes if I think that I’m smart, oh I go like big head, oh I’m so smart, I don’t need teachers! Then sometimes when I’m so dumb, I’m so sad. Hanan*
Both Samia and Aasiya commented that they were sometimes smart with Samia showing signs of modesty and Aasiya explaining that if she got high marks her teacher might think she was copying.

*What if the teacher thinks I’m copying someone when I get the right, high marks and if I’m getting low marks I’m not copying? Aasiya*

These feelings appear to be based on a previous experience at another school where one of her teachers believed she had copied her friend during a Math test. Aasiya explained herself as being the type to erase all her working out, and thus had no proof that she had completed the questions herself.

*Once at my old school because me and my friend we always sit together so the teacher thought that we were copying each other but we didn’t. Because I’m the sort of girl that if I do Maths things, see how we do the remainders and that, I rub them out when we do working out and the teacher thought I was copying my other friend, because my other friend she leaves them so she thought I was just like copying her and she made me do it all over again. Aasiya*

Najwa and Jamila both eventually conceded they were smart; however they were greatly influenced by how others portrayed them. They appeared to lack self confidence and their negative perceptions on their ability outweighed the positive. Najwa explained that she generally did well in class and the previous year she had considered herself smart. However, comments made by her current teacher sometimes led her to question her ability and confidence in achieving high marks. She also stated that she was getting lower marks this year than she had achieved the year before.

*If I get it wrong, she’ll just shout at me, so what’s the point? ...She just says that I’m not going to get a job and if you don’t read you’re not going to know anything and I’m always reading but she doesn’t even notice me. Najwa*

Najwa’s confidence was only boosted when she was around people who knew less than her, which was usually at home with her younger siblings. Jamila similarly was influenced by her sister who constantly told her she was not smart. After revealing that she did well in tests, her reports were always good, and both her teachers and family thought she was smart, the interviewer was able to find that Jamila’s sister’s opinions had the greatest impact on her.

*At home my sister calls me dumb and stuff like that. Jamila*
It was not until asking the question differently that Jamila admitted that she considered herself to be smart.

Indicators that helped form the perceptions these students had about their abilities included how many questions they were able to answer in class, what their teachers told them either directly or in their academic reports, homework and test results, and comparing themselves to results their peers got.

**Trust**

*I can trust her*

The issue of trust appeared to impact greatly on the girls as they all spoke of the necessity of trust in any relationship, including with friends, teachers, family and other community members. Levels of confidence and comfort were described as being based on the trustworthiness of the people they were with. For example, when discussing times when the girls felt the most confident, many of them mentioned situations with their friends because they could trust them and tell them everything.

*They’re trustworthy and I can tell everything.* Asma

*Because you’re very close to them.* Aasiya

The girls also mentioned trustworthiness as being an important trait in themselves which they named as being a reason for friends liking them.

*If anyone told me a secret or something I would keep it, I’m honest and trustworthy.* Aasiya

*They can trust me; I won’t tell anyone their secrets.* Samia

Rawa was the only student who voiced her feelings of not wanting to share information with people or tell anyone her secrets as they do not keep it to themselves.

*If I wanna tell them any secrets or anything it sometimes gets hard because nearly everybody has a big mouth. ... I don’t like sharing with other people because the other people they can either start laughing or they all have a big mouth and they just go and tell everybody.* Rawa
Dina and Mona also gave warnings on the importance of who to trust and how to pick a true friend.

*You shouldn’t go and tell everyone all your secrets. Only tell the one that you think is the most likely to keep your secret all the time. A person isn’t a true friend unless you know that they’re really trustworthy. You can trust them at anything anytime.* Dina

*Test them out before you tell them everything.* Mona

**My teacher**

‘My teacher thinks I’m good so I think I’m good’

The students spoke both negatively and positively regarding their teachers. Teachers were mentioned on numerous occasions when the girls were questioned about various issues including when they felt confident or otherwise, how well they thought they did at school as well as specific questions about their relationships with and their opinions about their teachers. Their responses demonstrated how they internalised and sometimes acted upon comments made by teachers about them.

Most of the positive comments given by the girls related to how teachers helped them. Dina, Mona and Aasiya all mentioned how teachers were always trying to help them and their classmates.

*She’s trying to help us get through this year and not repeating. I started liking the teacher because she wants us to be good, get good marks and go through the year, she doesn’t like doing bad stuff to us.* Mona

Kathy was very grateful to her teacher who would meet her after class to help her with her weaknesses, and Hanan appreciated how her teacher would constantly ask the class what they did not know in order to help them. Other girls also remarked how they were praised by their teachers.

*She thinks I’m interesting and sometimes I’m funny because sometimes I make her laugh. She thinks I’m a bit smart.* Huda

*My teacher describes me as sort of smart.* Samia
Academic issues were not the only areas teachers helped students with. Huda, Jamila and Nasreen mentioned how their teachers helped them with social issues, especially serious fights, with teachers presenting themselves as easy to talk to. Dina mentioned how teachers helped students improve their behaviour referring to one example of how,

*Teachers were always trying to help (a student) to stop swearing. Dina*

In addition, Mona was pleased to add her own example of improvement in behaviour where her teachers complimented her on changing into a ‘good girl’.

*I’ve changed into being a good girl. Even my teachers say that. Mona*

She remembers not only this praise for her change in behaviour but also other praise for her work efforts making them memorable times at school.

The encouragement teachers gave the girls did not go unnoticed. The girls seemed aware of the positive influence the encouragement they received had on their learning and on their day-to-day experiences. For example, when Mona was relating her adventurous experiences while abseiling, her instructors’ words of encouragement, ‘You can do it, believe in yourself!’, helped her take the challenge and give it a go. This ended with a joyful feeling of success as her teacher told her it was the best one yet.

*I started crying, and I’m like I can’t do this, this is not my thing, this is not my talent, … but the instructor he said, “You can do it, believe in yourself”. I started doing jumps and that’s when I realised I can do this and I can do it again and the teacher praised me that this one’s the best one so far and I’m like, ‘Yeay!’ Mona*

Adilah liked how her teacher encouragingly told students who got things wrong ‘you’re close’ or ‘better luck next time’. Dina was appreciative of her teacher because unlike other teachers she knew, this teacher believed that everyone had a positive side and she did not like to emphasise their negative aspects.

*Some of the teachers at the school look at the bad side of the student…instead of the teacher teaching us today because she’s saying that it really hurts her when people see the bad side of the student because she knows that everyone has a good side. Dina*

Layal, Huda, Jamila and Safa talked about how their teachers tried to involve all students in having a go, by giving feedback on everyone’s work and by giving them the opportunities to open up to
them. Samia found it noteworthy to relate an incident where her school principal showed students encouragement by interacting with them during special days like character dress-up day. Smiling, Samia described how she felt shy but pleased when her principal laughed at how she was dressed.

Furthermore, the girls valued the respect they received from their teachers. The girls from the public school showed greater appreciation and awareness of this respect that came from their non-Muslim teachers. Rawa, Hanan and Khalida spoke of how their teacher usually respected their point of view and their ideas about Islam. Rawa especially distinguished her teacher as not thinking about her and Islam like ‘others’ did.

_He doesn’t think like other people that think Muslims are dumb, Muslims are stupid, Muslims are this and that, he actually respects us too._ Rawa

Aasiya felt her teacher treated them the right way and also understood the issues which affected her and other Muslim girls.

_My teacher does treat us the right way, she understands us, she doesn’t make jokes about anything; she understands how Muslims are._ Aasiya

The comment made by Nasreen’s teacher was also highly regarded by Nasreen and her friends, giving them confidence and a sense of respect.

_He says it doesn’t matter how you dress up, you can still be Australian._ Nasreen

Huda shows a high regard for her teacher’s opinions as her beliefs about being a good student stem from what her teacher tells her. Being a teacher who ‘knows everything’, her opinions of Huda must be accurate.

_My teacher said I’m good so I think I’m good because she’s always right, she’s smart and she knows everything._ Huda

The teachers were also characterised by some of the girls as being ‘good’ teachers. According to Kathy, her teacher was good because she was fair, nice and a role model.

_I want this teacher to like me the most, she is so nice, she is so fair, everybody likes her, everybody wants to follow her, she’s like a role model._ Kathy

First impressions about a teacher were proven to be wrong as Nadia discovered. Her teacher ‘was not as strict as everyone thought’, leading her to become less shy as she got to know him more.
Hanan mentioned her teacher was nice and Nasreen was comforted with the idea that she could talk to her teacher when things got serious. When Najwa spoke positively about her teachers, it was not her current teacher that she thought of fondly. Her positive thoughts on teachers were based on her last year class and drama teachers and teachers that she had in Scotland. She was comfortable around them and could talk to them.

*They're really kind and they really help you and when you really have a problem they, like maybe your group is split apart, those two teachers they reunite you. Najwa*

These teachers were described as being kind and ‘better’, especially those in Scotland. They were better at teaching, nicer, and helped students when they needed it.

However, these teachers were also occasionally seen in a negative light by some of the same students. On the issue of encouragement, some of the girls referred to instances where teacher comments or actions made them feel discouraged or unmotivated to learn. For example, while Dina was talking about her teacher looking only at the good side of students she also pointed out how some teachers only looked at the negative side, with some teachers believing that she would grow up to be a bad person because she always ‘looked at the bad side’ (that is, she was pessimistic). Mona also recalled a time when her teacher told her that she did not need her opinion because she had other people’s opinions, making her feel discouraged to continue taking part in the lesson. She mentioned how this was not an isolated incident and that it had happened before. Adilah, who is in Mona’s class, also related a similar sentiment regarding her teacher sometimes not listening to her. She also added that sometimes she tries to be good; however she would be disappointed if her teacher did not notice her. Even though Adilah tries to excuse her teacher, such incidents as these have led her to conclude that her teacher may not like her.

*I try to be good and she doesn’t see me or do anything. Maybe she’s busy or something, like she didn’t have time. Sometimes I feel like our teacher doesn’t like me because she doesn’t listen to me. Adilah*

Samia felt upset that her teacher sometimes described her as being confused and Rawa and Khalida at times felt unappreciated when their teacher would be adamant about his opinions or ideas being right, ‘I say it’s this, it’s this’. Of all the students, Najwa seemed to have the greatest issues with her teacher. Almost all questions she answered would lead to some remark about her teacher, which were almost always negative. Comments made by Najwa regarding the matter of
feeling discouraged or unmotivated included not being picked for answers (even when she was the only one with the answer), being ‘screamed at’ for making a mistake while others were told ‘it’s alright’, being told that she would not receive help because she does not listen, and being told that she could not become anything worthwhile when she grew up if she stayed the way she was.

She chooses those two first and then when they got it both wrong and my hand is still up she says, ‘I’ll tell you the answer now’, and then the answer is what I had. ... (She thinks of me as) someone who’s like really, who doesn’t have an education, can’t get a job. Najwa

Other concerns the students had regarded the teacher’s personality or behaviour. Mona and Nasreen for example considered their teachers to be really strict, a trait Mona did not like teachers to have as it made her stressed. Huda and Najwa did not like it when their teachers yelled; however Huda did mention this mostly happened when she needed reminding to concentrate. In addition, it bothered Rawa how teachers, in her opinion, never took more serious action when students were in a fight or were being teased.

The teacher doesn’t hardly do anything, they’ll just go, ‘You go on one side and you go on the other side’, what’s that gonna do? Rawa

Hanan also had an issue with teachers not taking action when she reported verbal or physical harassment from other students in her public school.

I used to tell teachers and they don’t take action, that’s why anytime I get into trouble, the teacher says, ‘Why didn’t you tell someone?’, ‘Oh miss I forgot’... (One time) I came to the class and then tell the teacher and then got yellow card. If I shouldn’t of tell the teacher maybe I shouldn’t have yellow card. Hanan

On the other hand, Najwa was always blamed for any conflicts she was in, whether it was her fault or not. She would get so upset that she would refuse to answer the teacher for the rest of the day which predictably led to greater consequences when her teacher became even angrier.

For example, when I have an argument with someone she’s always blaming it on me, but the person that I argued with they’re the one that started it. And then she blames it on me and so I get really upset and whatever she says I just don’t answer back, and then she gets even angrier. Najwa

Some students also described the quality of the relationships they had with their teachers. Aasiya for example was clear about the distance she liked to keep, especially when the teacher was not in the best of moods.
I’m not the kind of person that really likes to get along that much with teachers. It depends on the teachers’ mood, if she’s in a good mood I would go up to her but if she’s in a bad mood I don’t like to go near her. Aasiya

Likewise, Hanan felt more comfortable away from her teacher as being next to her made her feel nervous. In fact, Hanan stated she felt like this with all teachers; however she was surprised at herself that she did not feel so with the interviewer.

*When she’s next to me oh I feel so nervous, I feel like going away ... I don’t really like sitting next to teachers. Hanan*

This nervous reaction evidently produces the feeling that she does not like to go to her teacher to ask her for something. Najwa and Safa had similar comments about their teachers, finding difficulty in talking to them.

*Sometimes I don’t feel like talking to the teacher ... not a lot of people in our class try and talk to her because she gets uncomfortable with things, just yells and makes us rewrite. Safa*

*I don’t find it easy (talking to her). Because I don’t listen to her so when I’m talking she just doesn’t listen to me. It’s like why bother talking to her, it’s like talking to a wall. Najwa*

The topic of teaching and learning also surfaced. Some of the girls generally did not seem to enjoy their time in the classroom. Najwa had problems with her teacher not explaining the work, which she believes affected her results during tests. Other times, Najwa would be bored and would not concentrate because she already knew what was being taught. Needless to say, this led to her getting into trouble.

*I think most of the time she doesn’t help me. When I need help she yells, ‘I don’t want to help you because you don’t listen when I’m talking!’ Some of the things she says I already learnt it in year 4 so I don’t really listen, I talk to someone... she gets really annoyed and she gets angry with me. Najwa*

One of the consequences of Najwa’s behaviour was to be seated in timeout, which Najwa described as ‘the teacher isolating’ her. Hanan also shows that she gets bored in class as she finds the tasks given by her teacher as being quite monotonous.

*When I come to school we’re just doing work like writing writing writing, and my hand gets tired and then the teacher just keeps writing on the board, oh it get me boring! Hanan*
On another note, Kathy felt continuously nervous in class as she never knows when she will be picked to answer questions. Her insecurity in her ability has led Kathy to stop volunteering answers and so now her teacher deliberately focuses on her.

*It’s too embarrassing if I get something wrong, every single time, so that’s why I stopped and now my teacher’s asking me to do it without my hand, without my putting my hands up. And like I’m not even concentrating ... I don’t want to say the answer but my teacher just forces me to say the answer.* Kathy

And while Safa felt like her teacher does not always check on her as a student, Nadia has her teacher pressuring her if she achieves results below her expected high standards.

*My teacher expects me to get really really good marks and when he saw that I got 16/50 once in my Maths test he got really really angry and he asked why did I get a bad mark, ‘You know you can get better and your average can get higher’. Nadia*

Mona believes that the way her teacher acts when she is angry and what she says to her makes her really stressed to the point that she cannot perform in her tests satisfactorily and she begins to feel depressed.

*She’s really strict and I don’t really like strict teachers. Sometimes she’s very angry, like on the verge of her breaking down... makes me feel like stressed out and she gives us threats, not like bad threats, but threats what would happen if you get bad marks. I feel like my teacher she’s very depressive to me like stressy. ... sometimes I don’t really like my teacher and that causes me to get a bad mark in my exam because I cry and get stressed.* Mona

**Strengths**

*‘The easiest one for me is science’*

When asked about their strengths and weaknesses, all the students were able to describe themselves with ease and come up with at least one strength and one weakness. Most of the strengths were based on something the girls thought they were good at or a personality trait they liked about themselves. It appeared that most of the strengths mentioned were also favourite hobbies or subjects they liked most. Many of the strengths seemed to have developed from a positive experience which the girls had talked about during the interviews. For example after relating her adventurous story of abseiling and rock climbing, Mona stated that her strengths were
Swimming, adventurous things, abseiling, rock climbing, giant swings ... I’m really good at trying new things. Mona

Taking the term ‘drama queen’ as a compliment, most of the stories that Dina divulged involved experiences she had while performing, both in and outside the school. In addition, many of the social problems she had were with a girl who tried to steal the limelight so that she could become the drama queen in Dina’s place. Consequently, it is understandable that Dina would describe her strength in this area.

Drama and maybe English because I’m really good with it. Dina

Layal described her inner strengths such as having patience towards others and towards herself, while Safa concentrated on her physical abilities in different sports.

I’m always patience on her, I don’t get stressed .... I like be patience towards myself, ... I talk to them good. Layal

Soccer, basketball and skipping, double dutch. Safa

The first strength Asma revealed was her skill in report writing, a strength her teacher agreed with as Asma had just received an award for it during assembly.

I’m good at writing information reports and I just got an award ... I’m good at reading and doing like comprehension. Asma

A number of girls also shared the strength of being funny. Mona, Inas, and Iman all spoke of how they enjoyed making people laugh (which was witnessed during the course of the interviews).

I like making people laugh. Iman

Weaknesses

‘I’m not good...’

The girls found it just as easy to talk about their weaknesses. Mona, Layal and Fariha, talked about behavioural weaknesses and weaknesses in their personalities.
Being serious, I'm not very serious at times, I can't act serious around people, ... the feeling like I got epilepsy when I chuck a fit, when I can't get my own way I used to chuck a fit. Mona

I can’t fix my own problems, I need my friends to fix it. Fariha

I don’t stand up for myself sometimes, it’s very hard to tell them no. Layal

Other students including Layal, Joumana, Rawa and Hanan, presented weaknesses in their abilities, such as physical and academic abilities.

Maths, she’s (the teacher) gotta explain it, I just get confused. Layal

I’m not good at sport, the sporty thing. Joumana

I went reading in front of the class ... I felt so dumb. Hanan

Sport, Arabic, and probably, probably, probably reading sometimes ... not that good at reading because I don’t really understand it. Rawa

Najwa, however, was the only student who found it difficult to come up with a weakness that did not involve her teacher, finally expressing her need to improve her grades.

Future aspirations

‘I wanna grow up to be a CSI’

The discussions about future aspirations were optimistic with all the girls having positive future aspirations. Most of the girls aimed for the conventional and predictable careers of being teachers, doctors and lawyers.

The most popular ambition amongst the girls, including Layal, Adilah, Joumana, Asma, Fariha, and Najwa, was becoming a teacher, and these students knew why they chose such a career and what was needed to be successful.

I can be a teacher.... it’s a very good thing to experience. Layal
Be a teacher ... and don’t do things that my teacher does and be a really good role model for other people and my students who want to be a teacher after me or something when I retire... I’ve got a fair idea of what I should do with my students. Najwa

A really good teacher you need laughter and jokes... organisation. Joumana

Huda, Inas, Jamila, Hanan, Nasreen and Aasiya all wanted to be doctors. Both Aasiya and Hanan also wanted to be lawyers.

When I was small I used to always want to be a doctor because my mum she always used to faint... but if I was 25 or 30, I would actually be a lawyer and help out people, like if they’re in places they can’t get money to buy a house I will help them out and I would also talk to them like after court. Aasiya

However, some had atypical choices of what they wished to become. For example, Dina had high aspirations of becoming a CSI detective, and Mona wants to be a person who studies plants and animals. Both girls also strongly believed that they could achieve such high aspirations.

I think I’m capable... I feel I can make a difference. Mona

Nadia wanted to be a photographer as did Iman, who also added the hope of becoming a designer. Samia had two different ambitions, the first a shop for Muslim women’s clothes and the second was to become a pharmacist. Kathy had the distinctive ambition of wanting to become a ‘karate person or a swimmer’. Aside from wanting to be a doctor or a lawyer, Hanan also mentioned her desire to become a model.

I’m gonna study hard ... I wanna pass the HSC... a doctor, a doctor and a model. I wanna become a lawyer, a lawyer or a doctor. Hanan

Safa wanted to be a computer specialist and already showed her great interest and talent in the area.

I love computers, I go on everyday... I know how to fix computers. Safa

It was quite interesting to hear the motivation behind some of these girls’ aspirations. Nasreen’s desire to be a doctor was prompted by her compassion for the poor people who could not afford proper medical care.
Because people in poor countries they might be really, really sick and they have to pay for it and if I go I would only take money from the rich people and I wouldn’t take money from the poor people. Nasreen

Najwa was determined to be a classroom teacher who her students could look up to, making sure that she did not follow in her teacher’s footsteps.

Be a teacher ... and don’t do things that my teacher does and be a really good role model for other people and my students who want to be a teacher after me or something when I retire. Najwa

Furthermore, Mona wanted to live her great grandfather’s dream after he dedicated his work to his family.

Generations ago, my great grandpa studied plants and animals and he left a note that my grandpa this time gave me. He’s like, ‘I dedicated all this, all this to you, and I’m like I feel I can do this. Mona

It was remarkable to hear that the foremost ambition Samia and Jamila aspired to be was to take care of someone special to them.

I just always had it since I was a kid, to stay at home and help my mum. Inshallah if I get married I’ll stay at my mum’s, like every day I’ll go over to her and do the housework that needs to be done. Even from now she already has tired feet and I usually help her. Samia

Neither of the girls wanted to go to university or get a job, until they could be sure that these important people in their lives were taken care of.

Because my grandmother has broken bones, I live with her and my mum lives in a different house. I don’t like to leave her alone and I’m used to staying with her, and if she gets a sore back I have to give her cream. Some of them (my family) don’t like me to do it but I like doing it because I wanna get good marks like Hassanaat (rewards from Allah) and I don’t like my grandma to get hurt or something like that. ...Maybe (go to college or university) but if no-one’s taking care of her like I can’t leave her. So I have to let my mum go to her or something like that. If my mum will be at work, like I have to stay home. Jamila

All the girls believed that they were capable of achieving their future aspirations, with all their comments containing phrases such as: ‘I can achieve’, ‘I can be’, ‘I wanna be’, ‘I believe’, and ‘I have to study hard’. Some girls also added criteria of how they would be able to do so.

I do want to become a lawyer ... I want to get high grades so I can get better knowledge. I’m saying that’s it, next year I have to start studying because if I want to become a lawyer I have to study. Aasiya
Parent expectations

‘Come on, you have to be a doctor!’

The expectations that these girls thought their parents had of them were both encouraging and similar to what the girls wanted or expected of themselves. Mona, Huda, Aasiya, and Hanan specifically mentioned their parents’ strong beliefs that they could achieve what they wanted to.

*My parents are like, ‘Try your hardest, you can do it!’ Huda*

Encouragement and support were more stressed by Nadia, Iman, Inas, Joumana, Aasiya, Fariha and Safa, when they described the expectations their parents had of them. These parents described the benefits of the careers they encouraged their daughters to take, motivating the girls to follow the same aspirations and expectations they had of them.

*My parents do support me. Aasiya*

*Because my parents think it’s really good education and they want me to do it. Nadia*

*Yeah, they think it’s a good job, yeah (they always encourage me). Safa*

Layal based her idea that her parents supported her and felt that she could achieve her aspirations by the way her mother reacted to her school results.

*My mum saw my exam, my portfolio and she was really impressed with me. Layal*

Only Najwa’s parents had different expectations of what they wanted their daughter to be. However, being the fifth child amongst twelve, she did not really get the time to discuss the issue with her parents.

*I don’t really share things with my family, I just, I’m always in my room, ... or I have to do my chores so I don’t really get to sit down and talk to my family and they’re just pushing me into being a mosque teacher, a mosque tutor, which I don’t really want to be. I want to be who I want to be. Najwa*
Najwa indicated that she wanted to be a normal teacher as opposed to a ‘mosque’ teacher which her parents wanted her to be. However, she still talked of the encouragement and support she received from them concerning her school work and for decisions she had made.

*I’ve got the support of my parents. Najwa*

In contrast, Nasreen’s mother would put her down and tell her that she did not think Nasreen was good enough, even though she had high expectations of her and was continuously pressuring her to do well. Nasreen was especially burdened because she was the eldest and had to be the first example of success.

*My mum doesn’t really think that I’m good in school, she wants me to be number one person in this class but I’m not. She expects me to be ... I’m the oldest; she wants me to get the highest mark and highest thing so I can teach my brothers and sisters to be like me and she wants at least somebody in the family to be high. What she couldn’t do she wants to do with her children. My mum wants me to be a doctor, a surgeon. Sometimes when she gets angry, she doesn’t really think I can, ‘You’re saying that you wanna be this, you wanna be that, and you do not even study, how can I expect anything of you? I’d rather expect from your little sister!’* Nasreen

Even so, Nasreen said she would like to please her mother, more specifically because she wanted to prove that she could accomplish what her mother both expected of her and yet portrayed scepticism that Nasreen could achieve it.

*I want my mum’s dream to be happy.... I think that I will try to do it; yeah I think that I will. Sometimes I don’t think that I can but most of the time I think I can. I have to prove it to my mum that I can do it, I want to show her off that I can do it, sometimes she thinks that I can’t do it. That’s what makes me more angry, that I have to prove it. Nasreen*

**Confidence**

*‘I’m a good leader!’*

The subject of confidence came up frequently in relation to many other issues including confidence with friends as opposed to strangers, confidence in class with peers or teachers, confidence with family, and self-confidence. By the end of the interviews, most of the girls had described a number of situations or areas in which they felt confident and those in which they felt
shy, embarrassed and lacked confidence. These indicators of social self-efficacy have been described as key to establishing a sense of trust and well-being (Bandura, 1997; Schunk and Meece, 2005).

One of the most common reasons the girls mentioned as giving them confidence was being with friends. Dina for example stated that when she was around her friends she could communicate with them with ease without continuously feeling nervous. Mona, Samia, Kathy, Aasiya and Nasreen had similar opinions, agreeing that friends were always with them and thus they were comfortable enough to say what they wanted and act how they wanted.

"You’re around your friends like 5 days a week, you always know what to do with them, you know what to say. It makes you confident to tell them something." Samia

Kathy added that she was so confident and comfortable around her friends, especially when they smiled at her, that she could ‘act crazy’ and express her feelings or just jump up and down. Some of the girls compared the confidence they had with their friends with how they felt around their family.

"It’s mostly with friends you feel confident because in front of your family you don’t." Aasiya

"Friends are always with you and you feel comfortable with them. Your parents aren’t always with you. They don’t have time to always listen to you." Nasreen

"Probably because some of what you want to talk to your family about they won’t feel comfortable about, and they’ll probably say no don’t do this, no don’t do that. They won’t know what you’re talking about but with your friends they’ll actually stand by your side." Rawa

Asma supported the other girls’ comments that friends were always with you. She added that your family was not always there for you while Rawa tried to give an explanation for this. In contrast, Layal showed that she lacked some confidence with friends especially when they asked her to do something she did not really want to do. Layal said she was too shy and could not bring herself to say no to her friends.

In regards to class sessions and school in general, many girls stated that they were confident. Dina directly stated that she was confident; she was a good leader, and she enjoyed the stage. Mona also portrayed her confidence as she explained that she was a capable student because of her
confidence, a sentiment that her ‘conscience’ agreed to. Showing off her talents was what helped Kathy be confident in class, and Aasiya was confident performing as she was used to it. Joumana felt confident in the school she was in because everyone was Muslim and she felt comfortable. In addition, Nadia’s confidence was raised because of how her peers always wanted to work with her.

_Sometimes they fight to have me in their group because they think I have good ideas._ Nadia

On the other hand, the girls also showed how they lacked confidence in many class situations. For example, Layal, Asma, Hanan, Jamila and Aasiya stated that they felt shy and insecure if they had to say something in class, either in discussions or just answering a question. This was because someone might laugh at them or tease them if they said something wrong.

_I know the answer but I’m too scared to put my hand up because I’m scared I might get it wrong or something._ Asma

Nadia would hesitate before she said something in class because she was afraid to give a different opinion and Nasreen rarely gave her opinion in class at all. Rawa also disliked giving her ideas in front of her peers because she thought she would get laughed at or be told that other ideas were ‘way better!’

Comments made throughout the interviews also showed that many of the girls had high levels of self-confidence. For example, Hanan mentioned that even though she does not always do well in class, if she just put some effort into her work and tried, she could become the lawyer or doctor that she wants to be. Furthermore, Samia’s confidence rose when she realised that other girls, especially from the older grades were the same as herself, just older. Adilah also felt that she overcame her insecurities once she met someone and got to know them.

In contrast, other students showed low levels of self-confidence. Layal for instance, declared that she was usually confident, although she would feel shy when she was pressured by her peers to do something. Being teased was what caused Jamila, Khalida and Kathy to lack self-confidence, while talking about their feelings made Huda and Adilah nervous. Kathy, Joumana, Adilah, Asma, Safa, Najwa and Nasreen all described themselves as being shy especially when meeting new people or
having to do something in front of groups of people. Layal, Adilah, Safa and Najwa further explained that it was hard getting to know people because they did not know what to say.

Layal also showed lack of confidence in her school work. She commented that no matter how much she practised she just did not improve. Rawa implied her lack of self confidence when she described feeling unsure about her abilities. She added that if she did not know how to do a task or answer a question, she would just leave it out or not do the work all together.

*Sometimes I'm not sure if I'm good at doing this and that. If I don't know it, like homework, I pack it away or I just miss that question.* Rawa

Joumana also showed a lack of self-confidence when dealing with problems, especially social issues with friends or classmates. She explained how at first she would try to ignore the situation but when she could do that no longer, she would need to ask her mum for help, who would then give her advice on what to do and say. Samia explained that she felt shy and insecure in big groups or when doing things by herself. She preferred working in a group, especially if it involved performing in front of someone.

*I don’t feel confident when I have to do something in front of a big group, a big crowd. And I don’t like doing something by myself, I like doing it in a group because I feel more confident because it’s not only me and they’ll be looking at more other people instead of only me.* Samia

### 6.3.3 Review of interview findings

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to have students impart their feelings and thoughts concerning their identities and sense of self-efficacy in a conversational manner.

A number of substantial issues emerged from the comments made by the students during the interviews relating to identity and self-efficacy. The issues which arose concerning identity were mainly related to how these Muslim girls believed they were defined by others. The three different ways that identities tend to be defined (see Greenburg and Mahony, 1995), were prevalent in many of the comments the girls made.
It appeared that *most* of the girls:

- experienced feelings of being ‘different’ on a number of occasions;
- experienced the sense of being stared at (mostly negatively) by those they were ‘different’ to;
- had experienced both positive and negative relationships with non-Muslims leading to both positive and negative attitudes towards interacting and communicating with them;
- regarded their backgrounds as being both Australian and as their parents’ nationality or country of origin; and

- were happy and proud of who they were.

The issues which emerged regarding self-efficacy were concerned with how the girls perceived their strengths, their weaknesses, their aspirations, and the influence others may have on these abilities. Self-efficacy is a key aspect of human agency referring to the beliefs a person has of their ability to effectively complete a task or behaviour (Bandura, 1997).

Again, summarising the findings, *most* of the girls said that they:

- considered themselves ‘smart’ in particular areas but also named areas they felt the opposite, and the influences on their confidence in their ability;
- mentioned trust as a necessity in the relationships they had with friends, teachers, family and other community members in giving them comfort and confidence;
- internalised and sometimes acted upon comments made by teachers about them leading to both negative and positive feelings towards and relationships with teachers;
- confidently spoke of and were aware of their strengths as well as their weaknesses;
- had optimistic aspirations regarding their futures and ambitions with criteria of how they were going to achieve them;
had parents who had high expectations of them and continually gave encouragement and support; and

felt the greatest levels of confidence when they were with their friends.

Comments from the girls also revealed some misunderstandings and stereotypes that non-Muslims seemed to have about Muslims. These included:

- Muslims were not Australian, they were only Arabs,

- they only had one type of food, and

- they were ‘unlucky’ because they were restricted with what they could do and eat.

Further discussion and interpretations concerning these points have been included in Chapter Eight.

6.4 Conclusion

The findings from the second phase of data collection have been presented above. The interviews provided an in-depth description of particular themes that arose out of the interviews, under the two subsections, self-efficacy and identity. The following chapter presents the findings from the teacher focus groups and teacher questionnaires, including brief profiles of the teachers involved.
Chapter Seven ~ Findings: Phase Three

Chapter Seven

Phase Three: Teacher Focus Groups and Questionnaires

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters discussed the results of the data collected from student questionnaires and the student interviews. This chapter continues with presenting the findings from the teacher focus groups and questionnaires. Section 7.2 presents brief profiles of the teachers who participated in the focus groups and section 7.3 presents brief profiles of the teachers who participated in the questionnaires.

As part of the research, teachers in the Australian schools took part in focus groups and teachers in Saudi Arabia completed questionnaires in order to elaborate on their work with the children and their perceptions of how the children deal with their school, family and wider community contexts. The first focus group comprised of two highly experienced teachers from a public school. The second focus group was conducted with four teachers from a private Islamic school and one teacher who was currently unemployed but had connections and ongoing communication with working teachers. Three teachers employed in a university college in Saudi Arabia completed the questionnaires. These three teachers were experienced in teaching at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

The chapter includes a review of the focus group findings and ends with a summary of the findings from the teacher questionnaires. The following diagram gives a pictorial presentation of the chapter’s structure.
Chapter Seven ~ Findings: Phase Three

Chapter map

Findings
Phase Three

Participants

Teacher focus
groups

Teacher questionnaires

Australian context
- Participants
- Differences with girls over time
- Changes with Muslims girls
- Perceptions of Muslim girls
- Positive experiences
- Negative experiences
- Home environment
- Teacher effect
- Leadership

Saudi Arabian context
- Participants
- Differences with girls over time
- Changes with Muslims girls
- Perceptions of Muslim girls
- Positive and negative experiences
- Home environment
- Teacher effect
- Leadership
7.2 Teacher focus groups in the Australian context

Seven teachers from Australia agreed to take part in the focus groups. Most of the teachers have had experience teaching in both private and public schools with years of teaching ranging from two to 25 years. At the time the focus groups were being conducted, two of the teachers were teaching in public schools, four of them were teaching in an Islamic private school, and one was unemployed. The focus groups utilised unstructured interview techniques where teachers were able to express in detail their experiences with and their ideas regarding Muslim girls. A few guided questions allowed the interviewer to draw out information on certain topics or issues of interest which had emerged during the student interviews. Relevant topics of discussion are analysed and presented below.

The following is a profile of the teachers in Australia who took part in small focus groups. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identity.

Table 7.1 Profile of focus group teachers in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Current school</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Religious background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>18 years experience; last 12 in primary, before that in high school; last 15yrs worked in areas with high population of multicultural students; also worked in Catholic system.</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>Public school</td>
<td>25 years experience; 3yrs teaching; 22yrs school counselling; worked with students from preschool to high school; worked in a variety of areas with high multicultural population.</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samira</td>
<td>Private Islamic school</td>
<td>2 years experience; middle and upper primary</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny</td>
<td>Private Islamic school</td>
<td>13 years experience; major in creative/performing arts; taught in both low socioeconomic areas and high affluent areas; taught K-6; 3yrs in British international school in Egypt.</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.2.1 Choice of student sample

Teachers were asked their opinions on whether conducting the study on this particular group of participants was worthwhile, relevant and feasible. Teachers unequivocally believed that it was both imperative and appropriate to study Muslim girls at this time, noting in particular their age as being ideal to study issues of identity. After discussing the age of the girls, Fiona rejected the notion that they were too young to express themselves stating that girls at this age were very articulate and already had a strong sense of who they were. Mary agreed with this suggestion, adding that it was a ‘good time to get them’ because in the last years of primary school, students still have that voice which they tend to lose when they enter high school, going backwards as they feel like fish out of water once more. In addition, Mary stated that students do not seem to find that voice again until the last year of high school as their sense of self and their goals get disturbed along the way, especially in the middle years. Girls in upper primary were also described by a number of teachers as having a good understanding of peer relationships, an understanding which also later may be disrupted as girls become more concerned with peer acceptance. When they do find themselves again, they come out at the end of high school probably like the person they were in upper primary but with more of an adult view of the same valid and set goals. Sometimes they come back even stronger, very self aware of the kind of person they want to be.

7.2.2 Difference between girls then and now

The plight of girls in education has been a long standing discussion, and so the teachers were asked whether they found any differences regarding teaching and dealing with girls say from 10-15 years ago, and with girls from now. Teachers all agreed that there were still some stereotypes
about the subjects girls should do and what instruments they should play in a band. This was more apparent in co-educational schools, and thus the teachers at the public school talked of the possible advantages that single-sex schools had in specific areas of social and academic learning.

*Girls tend to be a lot more assertive in a girls’ school than when they’re in a co-ed school. Certain girls, I’m not saying all, ok, and certain girls benefit more being in a girls’ school, they can be who they are, they don’t have to worry about having makeup and what they look like and what have you. And if they’re bright they can excel. But if you’re bright in a co-ed school, some girls don’t want to look too smart because of the boys. Fiona*

*I think single-sex high school benefits girls immensely; I think that boys probably do better in co-ed environment. It’s a really nasty twist, it’s not like there’s a win-win. There’s all those things that get exemplified in an all boys school that diffuses when there is co-ed, but all the things in our (females) strengths that make education best for us, are best shared amongst ourselves. Mary*

Fiona and Mary both felt that the best balance was to keep them separated for some things and allow plenty of opportunities to bring them together to work with each other in specific tasks.

One of the greatest changes found by teachers was that girls were more socially aware and knew where to get help if they needed it. They were also more open to the idea of asking for help, encompassing the concept of ‘I have a problem and I need help’, even though they were still insistent on ensuring their parents would not find out. Not only were there more self-referrals, but the girls who were doing so were also from a younger and younger age group. However, it was believed that the idea of accepting help was still not effectively established in some cultures, with some parents having issues with using counselling in particular.

Another change the public school teachers found noteworthy, was how families now responded to what a Western education looks like and what comes with that. These teachers expressed how Australian schools were concerned with the whole child, not just enforcing sitting at desks doing writing tasks. They were also more involved in helping parents with their children in a range of areas if parents were unable to do so themselves or if parents actually asked for help. This change was more evident in communities that have been established longer and were more settled. Community members now came to the schools and conveyed their need for help or inquired about how they were able to assist the school or their child, in a range of issues including those areas that schools were not traditionally involved in. Notably, children also seemed more
empowered to make a difference in their own homes, asking for help on how to deal with issues their families were experiencing.

### 7.2.3 Changes with Muslim girls specifically

When looking at Muslim girls specifically, teachers believed that as a group they seemed more empowered than they may have been years ago. Some teachers, including Penny and Samira, found that more Muslim girls were taking education more seriously than their mothers would have or other girls may have a few years ago. These teachers believed that until recent years, it was prevalent amongst Muslim girls to be talking about marriage as their major aspirations rather than possible career choices. However, this is changing with a transformation in girls’ attitudes generally, and the increase of Muslim girls specifically who are attending higher education courses.

However, teachers could not differentiate Muslim girls from any other traditional Anglo-Celtic or traditional European culture. There was a range within Muslim girls as there was amongst any girls, for example some of them had a strong voice while others did not. This partly depended on the education of their parents and what their expectations of their girls were.

Fiona stated however, that she did find a difference in some girls depending on the ‘type of Muslims’ they were, for example their cultural background or race, which greatly affected issues such as aspirations and expectations. She specifically found that after dealing with a lot of Indian Muslims, they appeared to have different aspirations to some of the ‘Arabic’ families she knew. Arab students, girls especially, seemed to receive no pressure regarding education whilst Indian students had to be the best. This teacher also related how one student told her of the irony that her brothers got all the opportunities but they were not interested, whereas the girl was actually brighter but the importance of her education was disregarded by her parents.

Some issues were still particularly prevalent amongst the Muslim community, such as girls being overly protected or not allowing them to go out on their own, especially on camps or sleepovers at friends’ houses. When the teachers were asked whether this was another issue that could be generalised, they replied that it may have been years ago, especially amongst other European
cultures such as Greeks or Italians, or even amongst religious fundamental groups such as strong Catholics, but nowadays it was predominantly Muslim girls who experienced such matters. Mary noted that it may happen with the odd isolated family but having a girl so isolated and protected from her peers, even after school, would make her start ringing alarm bells through her head. However, with a Muslim family she would not think like that, it would be an expected reaction.

7.2.4 Perceptions regarding Muslim girls

This section reports on teachers’ perceptions of Muslim girls. Some of the major topics of discussion which dominated the interviews included the social grouping of Muslim girls, the hijab, being disengaged from learning, being confident, different ethnicities within the Muslim community, and the identity of the Muslim girls.

The Muslim group

In public schools, teachers noticed that the Muslim girls tended to group together. This was attributed to boundaries in their social life outside of school which Muslim girls experienced. Although Muslims in Kindergarten did not seem to group, teachers were surprised at the lack of interaction once students became aware of the parameters of their own culture. Situations such as not attending birthday parties exemplified and broadened the gap between the Muslim girls and their peers. The girls would get invited a few times but eventually would stop getting asked, which teachers saw as closing them off from a lot of interaction. This was common for teachers to witness even amongst different Muslim communities where some were stricter with their ‘halal’ rules. Furthermore, whether girls wore the hijab or not was another reason that some teachers found caused Muslim girls to group together. If there was a large group of girls at a school who wore the hijab, they tended to group, whereas if there were only a few girls and it was uncommon in a school, the girls tended to assimilate and were not necessarily identified as hijab wearers. The other girls in the school did not seem to make a distinction and neither did the Muslim girls of themselves. When asked to detail the reasoning behind this, teachers believed that small numbers
of a particular group are forced to mix with others and make friends; they do not have much of a choice.

Teachers in the public school did not think that Muslim girls were alienated by their peers; it was the grouping that alienated them. Fiona found the biggest distinction was when some girls wanted to start having boyfriends and parties and the Muslim girls who knew they were not going to be allowed, would withdraw themselves and form another social group within the larger group. This teacher similarly did not see that other girls were excluding them but rather it was happening ‘naturally’. But again, Fiona and Mary saw this issue of grouping in many other cultures and not just with Muslims. On the positive side though, these teachers noted that by the time they reached Year 6, girls found ‘barrier breakers’, something they had in common, like athletics, which ‘almost legitimised their friendship’.

Although the teachers from the Islamic school agreed that Muslim girls grouped together, they placed greater emphasis on the general reasoning of why they do this than did the public school teachers. Penny stated that grouping was an identity issue where girls and boys identify with a particular group or find similarities with others and therefore they group themselves. Furthermore, Amal recalled that even though girls at her high school were mostly the same religion, you would have groups such as the surfy girls, the studious girls, the ‘met-hajbeen’ who were religious, the ‘met-hajbeen’ who were rebellious, and even groups that would hang out together by nationality. There was also always a group of girls who banded together because they did not ‘fit in’ with any other group. As Samira stated,

> It’s the laws of nature; you will swarm to whoever is similar to you. Samira

These teachers from the Muslim school similarly believed that grouping was social and was not specific to Muslims or Muslim girls. Examples were given of communities who grouped together for specific reasons, one of the obvious being race and culture related. As Amal commented,

> Just drawing to you how people love staying with what they’re familiar with. It’s your comfort zone; you can’t step out of it. Amal
The wearing of the hijab seemed to elicit many opinions and stereotypical stories about Muslim girls. A number of the stories teachers told showed how girls who wore the hijab were portrayed as unintelligent, unsocial, and unapproachable.

This was illustrated by Fiona when relating how students reacted when their Muslim friends started wearing the hijab. These Muslim girls were clever and topped many of their classes; however other students began treating them as though they were not serious students anymore.

At the previous high school I was at, the school was predominantly Anglo-Saxon, then we had a lot of Asian kids come in and probably about 2 or 3 years after that, a couple of our Muslim girls in Year 11 started to wear the hijab. And all of a sudden the reaction of the kids was like, ‘oh’. And the girls were really clever and they said, ‘Well we haven’t changed who we are, it’s like if you’ve got short hair and you grow your hair or you have really long hair and you cut it short. You made these jokes before, you didn’t offend us then and you’re not going to offend us now. But it took the kids a long time to go, ‘Oh they’re still smart’, because they put the scarf on, or the hijab, it’s almost like their IQ dropped, ‘Oh they’re not serious students anymore’. They used to top Science and they used to top Math just because they’ve got the hijab it hasn’t done anything. And you could just see the girls dealt with it really well. They’ll say, ‘We’ve still got the same sense of humour, we’re still going to laugh at the same silly jokes, just chill’. Fiona

Students were not the only ones who received differential treatment due to wearing the hijab. Mary related a story about one of her Muslim colleagues. After completing a hajj pilgrimage, this Muslim teacher decided to wear the hijab and returned to school all covered up. This caused a surprising reaction from the rest of the staff, some of whom she had considered close friends.

We had a teacher on staff that had always worn one, and then we had another teacher who went away to the Hajj and came back covered up, and the social interaction of the staff was absolutely fascinating. People she would have counted as a friend, friends more than just a colleague; they came to me and they said, ‘Well why has she done it?’ Because she wants to! She’s still the same person, I was just like appalled. I was amazed by it. I still go and have a coffee with her and people have said, people have said things as silly as, ‘Don’t people stare at you?’ Mary

For Mary, it was astonishing to find that a group of educated adults, who worked with Muslim parents and children on a day-to-day basis, reacted in such a way, as if Muslims were a novelty. She explained that possibly because it happened so close within their own circle, the teachers did not know how to deal with such an action. The experience did however make her aware of
underlying issues that they had as a staff regarding Muslims. She theorised that the Muslim teacher seemed to have become ‘one of them’, and teachers had mixed feelings of fear and ignorance of the changes their colleague had made. In addition, they may have been unsure whether her views had changed and if she was the same person they knew, or whether she had become very religious and they had to be wary around her.

_It was a bit of an eye opener for me because I sort of thought, ‘ok’. Mary_

Teachers found it important to note that they had many mothers who did not want to enforce the hijab on their daughters because of bad experiences they had had. These mothers were aware of, and experienced firsthand, the prejudices in the community towards Muslim women who wore the hijab. Thus, they left the choice to their daughters, hoping that they would have an intact self-esteem and not be judged by what they looked like.

The increased visibility of the hijab was featured prominently during the discussions. During the focus groups, teachers wondered and discussed the possibility of there being a turnaround in wearing the hijab after September 11. Fiona mentions how the hijab during this time became really visible, whereas previously people would identify with being a certain religion but have no obvious outward sign. Other teachers agreed, reflecting that people may have felt more comfortable as there were more people wearing the hijab, and therefore encouraging even more people to wear it. Some teachers did mention though how the hijab was more widespread in Sydney than any other state capital.

_One of our friends came to Sydney and she was just totally shocked by the number of people that wear the hijab because she said in Melbourne they do not. And she said, ‘When you go to Adelaide there is even less people, but I’m sure there is just as many Muslims but I think they’re more spread out, they don’t have the community, they don’t have their [Suburb A]’s and [Suburb B]’s, so there might be 3 or 4 in every suburb’. But then we were talking recently, and she said that there are certain suburbs where you start to see it a little bit more. Fiona_

The inner city suburbs were acceptable, where people were familiar with seeing girls wearing the hijab, not only shopping but also those working in a variety of shops. Teachers explained how it was good for girls to see that they could work and not feel intimidated because there were so many other girls wearing the hijab too. It was also noted that parents benefited from seeing more
hijab-wearing girls working as they might start allowing their daughters to work, encouraging and valuing education along the way.

Nevertheless, other teachers mentioned that even in Sydney, you would not have to go too far out to find a community that would be shocked to see a woman in the hijab walking in a shopping centre. To illustrate this idea, Nadia spoke of her experience when she decided to take a walk while visiting one of the Western Sydney outer suburbs. During her hour long walk, she received everything from dirty looks to whistles, culminating in a remark of ‘I could rob a bank in that’, referring to her traditional ‘abayah’ and long hijab. Mary admitted that she personally found it confronting when she saw Muslim women who also covered their face. It made her feel nervous as she could not see the whole face, even though she was acquainted with many parents in the schools that she had worked in who dressed in this way. She added though that it was fascinating, especially when the door was shut and it would all come off.

\textit{Actually one of the mothers that did that was an Australian that had converted, I always thought that she was just trying extra hard, she used to wear black gloves and everything. And then as soon as she came in, and it was really funny, she’d throw it all off and she had this really Aussie accent, and I was like oohh this is really all too tricky for me. I don’t get this, I don’t know why, I just think I don’t get it, I have to be honest with you that I don’t get it, I don’t get that you need to be that much. Mary}

The way a woman wore her hijab was also seen as important to her image and what others thought of her.

\textit{Yeah well what kind of hijab is she wearing well what kind of a Muslim is she? Whereas we look at each others’ scarves and go ooh where did she get that scarf from? Fiona}

Fiona also stated that when you see the elaborate way an Indian Muslim woman dresses, people do not see them in the same way. Mary added that it may be because you cannot tell a Muslim Indian woman from a Hindu woman because they drape their garments in a similar manner. She found it difficult to distinguish between the two. Again, the teachers reached the conclusion that it was beneficial for girls and boys to see these different variations of the hijab as they see Muslim women in all areas of life. Just as they see other women personalising the way they dress, they can start to understand that the hijab does not take away who these women are as individuals.
Some teachers, particularly those from the Islamic schools, suggested that girls who wore the hijab may feel more comfortable and supported in Islamic schools simply because the hijab was part of the school uniform and all girls wore it to school in the upper grades. Amal has noticed that girls are less embarrassed to get up and speak when they do not feel different, when they are the ‘popular culture’. In contrast, she believes girls in a public school would feel shy because only a few of them wear the hijab. Feelings of difference and alienation may also be heightened by the fact that some girls are forced to wear the hijab and therefore step into school with a sense of paranoia.

When some kids are forced to wear the scarf, and then step into school they might feel more alert to what’s happening, more alienated. They may be turned off education, withdraw themselves and hide in a little corner. I don’t think they want to stand out or be put on the spot. But here they don’t have that issue. Kids can dare to do more things, they have more confidence. Amal

Samira agreed with this notion, stating that in the Islamic school the hijab is not seen as a barrier of difference at all whereas in public schools it is an obvious visual change. She surmised that this visual change would automatically result in judgements being made about the girls who wear the hijab. However, she said that in Islamic schools the consistency of the students’ uniforms allowed them to ‘dare’ without feeling different. Some of the teachers however, still maintained that it depended on the student and their levels of confidence citing examples of Muslims in non-Muslim schools who although they were aware of their difference, they did not find it as a barrier stopping them from fitting in or doing what other students did.

The disengaged

From comments made by teachers in the public system, it appears that Muslims at some of the schools they worked in were seen by many of the staff as disengaged and low achievers. Boys from an Arabic background were more likely to be described as such; however girls were also seen in a similar light. Fiona explained how there was a stereotype of who was meant to be doing well, a label she was sure would not be present in Islamic schools where all students might be getting the message they could try their best and achieve. For example, if girls wanted to do Physics or Math, they might be more likely to without having to be an ‘Indian or native’ student, as was the
predominant case in public schools. In one of the high schools she worked in, Fiona stated how it was clear that there was a misconception that Arab boys were low achievers and would most likely become car drivers or mechanics. And thus when a couple of the boys were succeeding and achieving high results, staff were surprised that they did not fit the stereotype.

*Usually they do not associate high academic achievement with Muslims. Fiona*

Fiona began to explain her objection to this idea by stating that it was an incorrect perception because ‘obviously in their own country they’re exceptionally bright’, adding that ‘even here’ they were. Mary further elaborated how ‘even here’ in Australia you could find Muslims who were intelligent and had succeeded academically.

*Well there are lots of Indian doctors and lots of Saudi Arabian, like when people looked and scratched the surface they would realise. Mary*

Fiona showed her agreement adding how she found it interesting when patients at a medical centre seemed shocked when two Muslim female doctors would show up wearing hijabs.

*What’s interesting at my medical centre, two of the women actually wear the hijab and you can see people do a double take when they come out because maybe they don’t expect women who are Muslim to be doctors. Fiona*

This comment led to teachers discussing the idea that Muslim women typically chose jobs in the teaching profession and not careers that were prolonged and demanding like that of a doctor. Teachers found that this idea needed to be turned around for girls and girls needed to realise that nowadays, they are required to be independent and cannot keep relying on having a husband to support them. Samira stated that many girls are already showing that they were not going to put up with what their mothers and grandmothers may have put with.

Another reason which according to the public teachers increased the disengagement of Muslim girls was that unfortunately their parents did not seem to care enough. From a few examples in the teachers’ experiences, when these daughters were having trouble, their parents’ advice was usually to just drop out of school. At one school in particular, the girls were more obviously disengaged. School was too difficult for them and their parents would not allow them to try alternatives such as TAFE. Therefore, school had become a place to socialise, with these girls gaining little education. When these girls left high school or were asked to leave, they had nothing
to fall back on except working in a relative’s shop or waiting around to get married. Nonetheless, Mary continued to point out that this was not confined to Muslim girls only.

*That again, that picture might be Muslim Arabic girls in [areaA] but if you went out to [areaB] that’d be Anglo girls in the same situation.* Mary

There were many examples of ‘Anglo’ schools with an entrenched poverty cycle that had every opportunity; they spoke the language, have been here for generations, and yet they continued to fail. Thus it was deduced by the teachers that the blame lies in both the parents in those communities and in the teachers and schools who have not quite pinpointed the problem (or solutions) in regards to engagement and retention.

**The confident**

Many teachers believed that Muslim girls usually showed high levels of confidence and carried an attitude of being able to do something ‘if I wanted to’. Basma strongly believed that Muslim girls, including those wearing the hijab, showed that they were aware of their differences and were able to overcome any obstacles without hindering their ability to go forward. This was in contrast to the beliefs of some of her colleagues, who thought that Muslim girls had higher confidence in schools, especially Islamic schools where they could see other girls dressed like them and who followed their beliefs. Samira felt strongly that Muslim girls in her Islamic school had higher levels of self-efficacy than girls in some public schools or places where they are the minority. Such an observation is an interesting comparison with some of the interviewed comments from the girls.

Furthermore, Samira commented that having confidence or a strong character trait was not a choice girls had. Some of these things were conditioned by society and eventually become embodied within the child. She thought it was inspirational if somebody had confidence wherever they went but she thought girls in particular were rarely born or instilled with a sense of security. Therefore, she still strongly believed that the environment the girls were in greatly affected their confidence, especially for Muslim girls. It was in Islamic schools that she found the girls portrayed greater levels of confidence as they do not see that they are different and where everyone is wearing the same thing. Basma supported Samira’s idea, finding that the girls she taught looked up to their teachers who were also ‘met-hajbeen’. She felt that the girls believed they could
achieve because of their role models at school, who were mostly young female Muslims wearing the hijab, and so their dreams seemed more realistic.

*I think because all the teachers here are young, they feel that we’re not too far away from where they’re going to get to soon.* Basma

However, to a number of teachers the ‘if I wanted to’ statement sounded like something from a typical teenage girl, as it almost exonerated them from having to try harder and gave them a sense of control over their ability. Again, teachers pointed out that it depended on the individual. Nevertheless, some girls were described as not wanting to put the effort in and not wanting to be seen as a certain stereotype. It also appeared that some girls would rather be seen as ‘the dumb bimbo’, and so showed no outward signs of confidence.

**The ethnicities**

Throughout the interview, teachers conveyed their views about different groups that made up the Muslim community. For example, Mary viewed Indonesian Muslims as being stricter with their religious views and lifestyle.

*Because I’ve found them in my dealings a lot more fundamental, they’re kind of typical of anybody that’s a recent convert, they take on everything, boots and all sort of thing, I found and sometimes their families are very single minded, very driven.* Mary

Teachers raised the possibility of such a stereotype being because Indonesians and Malaysians come from a country that is predominantly Islamic in population with an Islamically run government, whereas Arab countries for example, they’re not all Muslims and many have adopted a Westernized lifestyle, including many Western customs.

Accordingly, teachers discussed the perception that some community members had about the composition of the Muslim community. Muslims were generally perceived as being Arabic and more specifically they were usually described as being Lebanese.

*You ask people, “Where do most Muslims come from?” and they’ll tell you Lebanon, which is just ridiculous, and you’d be like no its actually Indonesia, and they look at you aghast, but that’s one of those things.* Mary
Teachers explained that what many people did not realise was that the first Lebanese migrants, who would have come out with the first waves of war in the thirties and forties, were in fact Catholics. When this Lebanese Catholic community is asked about the impact of recent events, they express feeling hurt from the backlash they now receive because they had always been accepted as part of the wider community. They do not deny their Lebanese origins, but they try and explain that they’re not Muslim. To the teachers, it’s all about race.

*Mary: all they have to say is they’re Lebanese, and unfortunately it’s just, it’s really the Lebanese that have been targeted, as a race*

*Interviewer: as a race*

*Mary: as a race thing yeah*

*Fiona: and they go but we’re not Muslim... but they then feel really bad, because they feel that they’re being derogatory. But they go we don’t want our shops bombed and stuff because people think that we’re the terrorists*

*Mary: and it wasn’t even Lebanese, it wasn’t, like it’s really bizarre how that connection was made*

### The Muslim identity

Teachers of both focus groups were asked whether they found Muslim girls identified strongly with being Muslim. Penny responded that it depended on the environment the girls were in and how positive or negative it was either inside her Islamic school or outside of the school. Fiona, speaking on behalf of her public school, believed that a school that celebrates diversity and accepts all difference positively affects the identity of any student, Muslim or otherwise. The community and how Islam is embraced, as well as Muslim families, also played an important role. However, she also believed that families who over emphasise the importance of being a Muslim by saying that they were better than anyone else was just as damaging as being told you were not as good as anyone else. She found that some boys she has encountered had the attitude of ‘do not mix with infidels’ which obviously did not work in their favour. During the same discussion, Mary pointed out though, that you would not get such an obviously discriminatory sentiment in primary school where students are more contained. Instead you find that parents would tell students for example that you are not going to that persons’ house for whatever reason. This issue was seen by Fiona as an example of how children fed off the community.
Among the Islamic school teachers, Samira and Amal believed that Muslim girls greatly identified as being Muslim in Muslim schools because they were supported traditionally, religiously and culturally. They did not have to experience fasting alone or celebrating Eid alone as their Muslim peers would in public schools and rather than have their religious beliefs and actions suppressed, they were celebrated for them. Having female teachers who wear the hijab further strengthens and supports the girls in forming and confirming their identity in comparison to a Western public school where ideas about their identities may be questioned and challenged resulting in feelings of insecurity.

7.2.5 Positive experiences with Muslim girls

For Fiona, the most positive experience she had with Muslims was when the Year 11 girls wore the hijab. She took pleasure in seeing the girls show strength enough to defend who they were and to continue going forward showing that they were like everyone else and that they too could be successful. It was also satisfying for her to see the other students accepting the Year 11 girls’ decision when initially they had reacted negatively to this change in their peers, assuming they had changed personally and academically as well. It took about six months for the Muslim girls to reassimilate, with Fiona ascribing possible reasons which helped the girls. One of the reasons was a small student population which increased the girls’ ability to get back into the social circle. In addition, their parents were supportive allowing them to participate in certain activities that other Muslim students may not have been allowed to. These parents were also aware of the difficulties their daughters may be facing.

*I think the parents appreciated how hard it was for their girls. One mum said, ‘I do not want my daughter to be a target and that’s why we never insisted before so we left it up to her’. Fiona*

Samira also finds it a positive and satisfying experience when girls in her class proudly tell her about their decision to wear the hijab outside of school. Although she is a Muslim, this teacher revealed that she only wears the hijab in school as part of the school dress code and so feels
inspired by these girls and the step they have taken spiritually. She also finds it interesting how the girls are very private, very discreet when they want to ask for anything, especially such things as a tissue to blow their nose or to be allowed to use the bathroom. Samira uses the Arabic word ‘*khushu***’ to describe their character, which generally means humility, devotion and concentration. In spite of her feminist nature, which demands that girls should not be embarrassed about anything they do, she finds the girls ‘dignified and delicate’ and even stated that she thinks it is specific to that group of girls as she has not seen such attention to personal etiquette in other schools or with girls she knew while growing up.

A positive experience for Mary several years ago was when a Muslim girl in one of her ‘Family and Community’ classes decided that she did not want to just get married and not continue her education as her parents had wanted for her. This student had aspirations of becoming a nurse and even though she did get married first, her determination and drive allowed her to make those aspirations a reality. With the support of her new husband, she continued her education and became a nurse.

One of the most satisfying experiences for Nadia was when she was working in a public school and was approached to provide Muslim students with Islamic scripture. Other students attended scripture classes (or other activities for non-faith students); however there were no provisions made for the Muslims for reasons outside the schools control.

> When the students asked me if I would take them for scripture because they didn’t have someone come for them, I was hesitant, you know, especially in a public school where you’re not supposed to promote your beliefs and that, even though they do Christmas. But anyway, I checked with the principal and the kids were so happy that I took the class. And just from the lessons it was actually sad to see how little they knew about their religion, at the same time as really pleasing to see how motivated they were to learn. Nadia

### 7.2.6 Negative experiences or concerns with Muslim girls

One of the leading concerns for Fiona was when she met parents who appeared not to value their daughter as a person, treating her as a commodity instead.
Mine would be where the parents don’t value that their daughter is an individual, a human being. That she’s a commodity and our job is to keep her chaste for when the right person comes along and her job is not to question, she’s had enough education. Fiona

This teacher had parents who clearly stated that their only hope for their daughter was for her to become a good mother. She would argue with them the importance of education, trying to point out that a good mother needs a good education.

I remember talking to some parents, ‘If you really want your daughter to be a good mother, the best thing you could do is let her have an education because she’s going to be her children’s primary educator’. And that made them stop and think and I was like, ‘Well that’s true, if you think that’s going to be her job in life to be a mother, you want her to be the best mother she can be, and if she can’t read and write, how is she going to teach her children that?’ They really had to stop and think. I said, ‘You know you want your grandchildren to know that their mother is an intelligent person’. Fiona

Fiona felt sure that her reasoning would make some parents think again, but she said she was disappointed and saddened when some parents continued to think it was too much trouble. They would rather keep their daughter at home until the right person came along, keep her out of trouble, or otherwise no one was going to want to marry her. Penny had similar issues with parents, trying her best as a teacher to show them the importance of a girl’s education even if they were to ‘just get married’.

One of the most concerning experiences Mary had with a Muslim girl was when this girl ran away from home and was sleeping on the veranda of the school. However, Mary attributed this situation to the girls’ already dysfunctional family stating that in her experience she found that it was rare and uncharacteristic of a Muslim girl to run away. Other negative experiences Mary had regarding Muslim students usually involved boys and crime, stating that she found the girls in these families better off.

Most negative experiences I’ve had have not been with girls, they’ve been with boys involved with crime, and the girls actually from those same families fared a lot better because of the protection mechanism within the family unit, so I’d have to say other than one runaway, I’ve had conversations similar to Fiona with people saying that my girl doesn’t need to do that, but the worst worst things I’ve seen is in relation to boys and boys falling in a cycle of generational crime within a family and those aren’t newly arrived families either, they’re established Arabic families that’ve been here a long time. Mary
Samira found one of her experiences as both interesting and concerning. One of the Muslim girls she was teaching for the day at a public school spent an entire lesson drawing an inappropriate image on her bag. The teacher found it interesting because Muslims were usually deemed as part of a conservative culture; however this girl who looked conservative because of the hijab, was not acting very conservative. The girl was nonchalant enough to show Samira the bag with no apparent concern for possible consequences.

A negative situation which Penny experienced was when she found a Muslim girl crying terribly while other students and teachers just walked past her. After struggling to get her to talk, this girl told Penny how one of the boys had teased her and her family about the hijab they wore.

“One of the boys had told her that she wears a rag on her head, and her mother wears a rag and her grandmother wears a rag and they all wear a rag, so they’re called rag head. And she was completely distraught and offended and was totally, I mean totally distraught, sobbing, hysterical. Penny

Penny felt that it only took this event, which would last with her for the rest of her life, to destroy any self confidence this girl may have had. The issue was so traumatic for this girl that it grew to the point of needing to ask for parental involvement. Penny tried to explain why this one comment would have had such an effect on this girl.

“She’s already conscious of being scarved let alone in a situation where she’s not comfortable like a public school where there is only 2 or 3 scarved girls, by a non-Muslim boy who has no idea about Islam at all, but probably heard it in the media or from his parents and has gone and said this one comment. She just had days and days of crying and parental involvement, it was huge and negative for her, and sad because it happens quite a lot, it’s common. Penny

7.2.7 The home environment

The effect families have on children is unquestionable. Therefore it was not surprising to find teachers discussing how parents’ experiences, attitudes and actions affected the education of their children.

The educational background of either of the parents was a major issue according to the teachers. They regretted that some families have not had the opportunities of an education and therefore were illiterate not only in English, but also in their home language. They felt that lack of literacy
made it challenging for parents to help their children be literate in English and to support their academic learning. On the other hand, some families have made the education of their children a priority even if they were uneducated and could not succeed educationally themselves. These parents found alternative ways to support their children to become successful, such as asking others to be of assistance to their children with areas they could not help in.

Another issue for Fiona and Mary was that some parents came from a poor impoverished background, and therefore were already behind in trying to build a quality life for their families and provide their children with all their needs. They believed that these parents were also less likely to value education, adopting instead a survival strategy. Consequently, the education of their children was not a priority resulting in those kids falling behind the rest of their peers.

The specific Muslim group or community these families came from also made a difference according to some teachers.

_Fiona: I know that there are different types of families, well there are different types of Muslims too, even within the Arabic community, there is the Lebanese Muslims, there is the Iraqi Muslims, you know what I mean?_

_Mary: and even there is your own different groups like your Sunnis, and there is all that._

As the conversation with Fiona and Mary continued, it became clear that these teachers accepted that many other migrant families had successful and prosperous lives prior to arriving in Australia. Therefore, the experiences and aspirations of migrant families when they were back in their home country were also believed to play a role in influencing the education of children. Mary reflected that previously in her experience, migrants were farmers and poor families coming to escape wars, whereas recent groups of immigrants were not farmers, they were families with money. Nevertheless, they still came impoverished because they had used everything they had to get to Australia. Their skills and background though, allowed them to swiftly get on their feet and the high expectations they had of themselves they passed on to their children. They made the most out of the system as they had done in their home countries, ensuring more than just their families’ survival, but also that their kids would get an education and they would succeed. It was again highlighted by teachers that this was not confined to Middle Eastern or Muslim families, but it rather had to do with education and aspiration. Mary and Penny both believed that you do not
have to be educated to have aspirations, but if parents had no aspirations for their children, then it would be more difficult for these students to accomplish something.

At the other extreme, some teachers also commented how having unrealistically high expectations was damaging to some students. As described by Fiona, not all students can get an end of high school score of 99 per cent, no matter how hard they tried. This potentially could be very disheartening to students who would end up seeing themselves as failures.

Furthermore, the public school teachers noted the specific effect fathers and brothers may have on girls as being imperative to positive self-esteem. This especially included the messages Muslim girls received regarding respect for women and the importance these influential male figures placed on the girls’ independence, intelligence and their ability to succeed. It was from these initial relationships with men that girls would get their first messages regarding women. Teachers described the ideal father would be saying to his daughter that she could do whatever she wanted, that anything was possible and they would show interest in what she was considering doing. These comments implied that the public school teachers believed that Muslim fathers did not commonly encourage their daughters to have high aspirations.

In contrast, Basma’s example of her own father encouraging her academically led to other teachers commenting that there were many examples of parents, including fathers, who encouraged their daughters; however, there remained a need to see similar experiences with more girls today. Mary emphasised the importance of the parents’ encouragement ‘to start right from the word go’ as she finds students are becoming disengaged from learning during primary school. Basma described how her being the only Muslim at school, the only one fasting, the only one not dancing with boys, did not stop her from achieving everything else. She attributed her determination to her parents emphasising that she was ‘an Australian’ and could still do everything that other students did at school to succeed, unless it was not compatible with Islam. She argued that the families who socialised their children into believing they were different to non-Muslims, made it difficult for their children to push through the system. Other teachers supported this idea, stating that home environment and good role modelling played a significant factor in the success of the girls. Penny gave an example of how students at one public school felt that they did not fit into the school, so they rebelled and acted anti-socially, to the point where police would get involved.
Penny’s comments sum up many of the factors that have been mentioned above.

When we look back at families they were illiterate, not only in second language but also in their first language, couldn’t read and write Arabic or English, so low socio-economic background where there is misinterpretations, misrepresentations, all those mis’s, coupled with the fact that they go to a school that may or may not support their needs as a Muslim or a Lebanese Muslim, in a society that doesn’t support their parents. Maybe their parents don’t see education as an important valuable thing, so the girls didn’t value education, but the parents, the home environment, wasn’t giving them the tools to understand that, ‘I can finish school, I can achieve, I can go on to uni and I can get a degree, earn a living, become a successful member in society’, etc, so they weren’t getting this at home. Penny

Another example was given by Penny of how the home environment may affect not only the child’s attitudes towards education but also their confidence. At an affluent school she worked in with a large population (over 90%) of academically driven Chinese students, there were only pockets of Muslims in each class. However, many of them had really strong personalities and were confident. The school captain was a Muslim boy and the school vice captain was a Muslim girl who wore the hijab. These children came from families who had the same high aspirations as their Chinese, mainly Buddhist peers, and were educationally pushed to achieve from a young age. Their solid backgrounds helped them have confidence, know who they were and be religious, in terms that they could identify as Muslims, fast and do other Islamic things. Consequently, she warned that teachers needed to be careful when generalising that Muslims would be more comfortable in an Islamic school rather than out there in a public school.

If you shelter them too much in these types of environments, what happens when they do go out there, are they strong enough in their own belief? Do they have enough self confidence, belief in themselves? Penny

However, Samira was still adamant that schools played a greater role than families did in instilling beliefs in children. She argued that ultimately we are a product of our social construct and schools as an institution, are the social conditioning hub, where thirteen key years of our life are spent.

This is where it’s happening, this is where your ideals and hopes and dreams are formulating and if you go to a school that doesn’t sort of, it’s not like your vision-board of what you want to be when you grow up, you’re not going to have that hope. Whereas these girls in this school, I know I can’t protect them from what’s out there, but I can actually train them. I teach them to use the etiquettes of Islam and how to deal with them. I feel they’re very much influenced by what’s going on around here. Samira
7.2.8 **The teacher effect**

When asked to what extent teachers’ expectations affected Muslim girls, there was a general consensus amongst the teachers that it depended on the school, the school culture, and how much teachers knew about the community. An example was given of how numerous Muslim boys in a public school were seen as being either lazy or trouble makers, or even both; so troublesome that even ‘their own culture will not have them’. These boys were asked to leave a private Islamic school because they had not worked hard enough and they were not wanted there any longer. And thus the message the public school teachers had about these boys was established. Being labelled failures at their previous school coupled with the initial impressions of teachers at their new school, these boys often began as weak, disengaged students, and therefore they themselves inadvertently reinforced the stereotype.

The effect Muslim teachers had on their Muslim students was emphasised by many of the teachers who taught in Islamic schools. When a Muslim teacher is portraying her love for her religion and her love for teaching these children, this will be instilled in these children. The belief in any school that teacher and child share something in common gives them an intricate connection which fosters self-esteem. For Samira, the Islamic school eases the process of success and acceptance. She described the environment of the school she worked in as functioning as a community, united, with the majority of students portraying high self-esteem. The fact that religion is a major part of a Muslim’s life creates a stronger connection within the school community of parents, teachers and students.

*We have a strong emphasis on community, community acknowledgement, especially because we have religion instilled here, and religion and God and the Sunnah, it’s our lifestyle. So religion is the umbrella for seeing the students and the teachers and the parents, and that actually encompasses and binds us all together. So when Mr [Principal] or I’m talking to a parent about a child, we have this common acknowledgement, that we’re all a part of this same dream, this same hope, that we all want this student to be, number one, an excellent Muslim and, number two, they can be an excellent Muslim in this country. Samira*

Teachers found this common interest, this social and cultural capital, in life difficult to build in public schools because teachers had no mandate to facilitate religious lessons or push forward their religious ideals. However, other teachers did point out that not all Islamic schools have been as successful in building or maintaining such positive and effective relationships within the school community.
community. Amal spoke about an Islamic school where education was not promoted and communication between parents and staff was strained. Thus, the Muslim girls there seemed affected by this as the main concern for many of them was their appearance and who they were going to marry.

Another way teachers influenced their students was how confidently they presented themselves. Penny stated that when a teacher acts confidently, children will take it in. When they are told that they can achieve something and are given the tools on how to achieve in society, how to behave and how to overcome issues and problems they may face, the self image of the teacher, of her confidence and success, is passed on to the students.

7.2.9 The roles of leadership

Teachers thought that having teachers who were easily identifiable as Muslims would greatly benefit not only Muslim girls but also Muslim boys, and not just in a private school but also and especially in the public system. For students to see a female in a position of authority, and moreover if she is a Muslim, was seen to be a valuable role model for students and staff alike. These Muslim teachers would ‘normalise’ the idea of a Muslim women being educated and quell stereotypes such as ‘all Muslim women are at home with twenty children’ and have a husband that bashes them.

Furthermore, the teachers felt that the issue of disengagement needed to be addressed. School leaders and classroom teachers needed to find ways to engage and empower students, including Muslim girls. Mary was one teacher who eloquently described the great importance of engagement.

Empower them, and make them care. In high school it’s engagement but it’s more than engagement, it’s about them recognising their self-worth; that they need to do something for themselves, because if you do everything it’s not going to work either. The more you do, they’ve got learnt hopelessness, and I think that’s across most of those communities. There is other stuff that underpin, there is crime, there is other stuff that underpin all those communities that have those issues, and that’s whether it’s an Islander community, an Anglo one or a Middle Eastern one. Mary
Most of the teachers described their schools as being supportive of Muslim girls; doing everything they could to make them feel that they are just as important as every other girl in the school. The concern teachers from public schools do have though, is that schools are not receiving the correct support from parents as they are also disengaged. Therefore, no matter how hard the teachers try, there is only so much they could do.

Teachers from the Islamic schools also suggested that private and public schools need to collaborate more with each other. For example, they could come together for events and activities such as public speaking, debates, sports carnivals, and competition sports. Teachers found that presently Islamic schools were somehow isolated from being with non-Muslims which did not help break down the stereotypes. They felt that lack of inter-school contact was confirming to students that they were somehow a minority and they were different. Therefore, relationship-building activities would teach them to accept one another, teach them tolerance and integration.

*I feel that’s what they need, I feel to help them feel that they can achieve, I think that’s the only step that we (the Islamic schools) are really missing.* Basma

### 7.2.10 Review of teacher focus group findings

Teachers from Australia took part in focus groups in order to elaborate on their work with Muslim girls and their perceptions of how Muslim girls deal with their school, family and wider community contexts. Two of the Australian teachers were teaching in a public school, four were teaching in a private school, and one was unemployed at the time of the study. Their teaching experience ranged from two to 25 years.

The unstructured focus groups brought forth numerous topics regarding Muslim girls, their identity and their self-efficacy from the teachers’ points of view. The analysis of the interviews through focus groups were coded and classified into the following topics: choice of student sample, difference between girls then and now, changes with Muslim girls, perceptions regarding Muslim girls, positive and negative experiences with Muslim girls, the home environment, the teacher effect, and the roles of leadership.
To summarise some of the main findings from the focus groups, it was found that all teachers agreed with the urgency and relevance of researching Muslim girls’ perceptions of self and self-efficacy at this time, noting in particular their age as being ideal to study issues of identity. Regarding differences they have found with girls over time, they all agreed that there were still some typical stereotypes about subjects and activities that girls could take part in, but that girls were more socially aware today and knew where to get help if they needed it. Families appeared to now understand better what a Western education could provide for Muslim girls. Muslim girls specifically seem more empowered and academically orientated but many issues still remained prevalent in the Muslim community including over-protection and not going out unchaperoned. The perceptions teachers had of Muslim girls were expressed through topics such as the social grouping of Muslim girls, the hijab, being disengaged from learning, being confident, the different ethnicities within the Muslim community, and the identity of the Muslim girls.

Some of the positive experiences teachers related included seeing Muslim girls show strength enough to defend who they were and to continue going forward showing that they were like everyone else and that they too could be successful, and to see the other students accepting their position in the class. There seemed more general acceptance of when girls made the decision to wear the hijab outside of school; when they had higher aspirations than just getting married; and when the girls showed commitment to their Islamic education. The negative issues teachers experienced included having parents treat their daughters as commodities; and incidents such as the story of a runaway girl from a dysfunctional family; of Muslim girls who acted inappropriately in class; and of a girl extremely affected because of being teased about her hijab.

Teachers expressed their beliefs that parents’ experiences, attitudes and actions affected the education of their children. There was also a general consensus amongst the teachers about the effect that teachers’ expectations had on Muslim girls. They expressed that it depended on the school, the school culture, and how much teachers knew about the community. Through leadership initiatives, student disengagement was found as needing to be addressed, greater collaboration between public and Islamic schools was needed, as well as having positive role models. However, teachers agreed that schools were predominantly supportive of Muslim girls, doing everything they could to make them feel that they are just as important as every other girl in the school.
A point which continued to come up throughout the discussions was that teachers could not differentiate Muslim girls from any other traditional Anglo-Celtic or traditional European culture. There was a range within Muslim girls as there was amongst any girls. Many teachers also stressed the importance of instilling values regarding the importance of education and forming a positive identity at an early age. They also stressed that the self-efficacy and identity of girls depended on a combination of factors including school programs, school culture and ethos, teachers, school leadership, the home environment, student backgrounds, and school-community relationships.

7.3 Teacher questionnaires in the Saudi Arabian context

Due to time constraints and difficulties with access to schools, the researcher was unable to conduct focus groups with teachers teaching in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, a short questionnaire was developed to try and elicit ideas and experiences teachers had with Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, only three teachers completed and returned their questionnaires, although their insights have proved invaluable. These teachers have had experience teaching in both private and public schools in various contexts in various countries. Years of teaching experience ranged from 7 years to 14 years. At the time of data collection, these three teachers were teaching in a college. The questionnaire included 15 open-ended questions and encouraged teachers to use as much detail as possible when answering questions. These questions covered the same themes as those analysed and discovered with the Australian teacher interviews about their experiences with and their ideas regarding Muslim girls. This allowed for comparisons to be made between the two contexts. In addition, the international experience of these teachers has provided the study with a wider range of data concerning viewpoints about Muslim girls, as the teachers themselves made their own comparisons with their experiences in the United States, Malaysia and Australia.

The following is a profile of teachers in Saudi Arabia who completed the open-ended questionnaires. Pseudonyms are used to protect their identity.
Table 7.2 Profile of questionnaire teachers in Saudi Arabia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Current school</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amani</td>
<td>College in Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>6-7 years experience; taught at a private Islamic school, public school and various volunteer programs in the US; students have ranged in age from 5 to 40; past three years teaching in Saudi</td>
<td>Muslim, American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubiah</td>
<td>College in Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>14 years experience; 2 years in the USA teaching accounting for freshman year students; 9 years in Malaysia under Canadian Program for Malaysian students and international students; past three years teaching in Saudi.</td>
<td>Muslim, Malaysian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>College in Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>9 years experience; 7 years in Australian schools, public and private as well as tutoring; and 2 years teaching in Saudi.</td>
<td>Muslim, Australian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.1 Choice of student sample

The first two questions asked the teachers their opinions on the importance of this study and in particular the relevance and value of choosing Muslim girls in this age group. All teachers agreed that these kinds of studies were of great importance. Amani added that there was a need to better understand Muslim girls in order to help them succeed and become accomplished women. She also preferred the idea of studying girls in this age group as it would offer insight into the educational system and needs of the girls prior to reaching post-primary education. Similar comments were made by Rubiah who thought that understanding Muslim girls at an early age would allow appropriate strategies to be implemented, if not already in place, to help the girls successfully and effectively gain knowledge to be used in later life. She emphasised the value of studying Muslim girls in Saudi as being a ‘good idea’ because not many studies have been completed using this group of students.

7.3.2 Difference between girls then and now

Teachers differed in their ideas about whether they found differences in the girls they were teaching now to those they had taught when they first started. Rubiah, for example, believed that
students nowadays were more eager to learn compared to students in the past. They also liked to compete to get better marks. Nadine however thought that girls now were no different to those she had first taught. She stated that both in the past and now, girls fell into various groups, such as those that were studious and those that were not academic minded. Interestingly, comments made by Amani indicate that she described differences within the students of that time rather than between past and present. She stated that she would have found more differences between students she taught in the past than those she teaches now.

“I believe when I first started teaching that I would have found more differences, at that time. Nowadays, even with cultural differences and being in a completely different setting, there are many similarities. They are girls as you would find anywhere else. Amani

7.3.3 Changes with Muslim girls specifically

Some changes were noted that were specific to Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia. Nadine commented on how in recent years you found more girls who went on to higher education than would have in past years. Marriage was left later for some girls, who now made education a priority. She also related an example of a student returning to study to complete her wish of being educated.

“My second year of teaching at the college I had a student who I found was in her mid thirties, with 8 children, one of whom had passed away. She was the most hardworking and the most motivated student I had ever had in a long time. At the same time as being one of the top students in the class, she was also being a wonderful housewife who ran home at lunchtimes to get food ready for her husband and children, then rush back to class, frantically apologise for being late a few minutes and start scribbling notes she had missed while catching her breath. Then, rushed home in the afternoons to be there before her children got home so she could help them with their homework and listen to their days’ events. She was amazing. The other girls really looked up to her. This is a student with high motivation and self-efficacy and I’d love your study to tell me why! Nadine

Nadine’s last comment supported the desire of the researcher to find out why some girls continued to put effort into achieving and succeeding, controlling aspects of their lives, especially academically, while others seemed to be resigned to what was given to them or forced on them.
In contrast, Amani found that many girls she taught still had issues with their attitudes about education. She believed that many students she worked with have no real goals or ideas about what to do with their education. She also found that they do not have the drive and commitment to plan for a real future after completing their education. She commented that girls had fewer opportunities once they completed their studies than male students, even though they made up the majority of students. Rubiah also had an issue with the segregation of male and female students as she was of the opinion that it hindered student performance. In her experience, the learning environment was more challenging in co-educational classes.

*Boys usually have better performance in certain areas and girls have better performance in other areas. So if we combine both groups, the outcome I think will be better. Rubiah*

### 7.3.4 Perceptions regarding Muslim girls

Similar issues to those that emerged in the teacher focus groups in Australia were also used through the questionnaires in order to establish how Muslim girls were perceived by the teachers in Saudi. These included how the Muslim girls grouped together, their hijab, their confidence and academic levels, and how they identified themselves.

#### The Muslim group and the hijab

Perceptions two of the teachers from the college had about how Muslim girls relate to others mostly came from their experiences teaching in their home countries. Amani from the United States, for example, found that there were differences with how the girls related to others.

*In the public school system, there are students who assimilate to American culture and there are those who are in between and those who tend to only spend time with other Muslim girls. However, there do not seem to be any major problems. Amani*

She also found that although the Muslim girls may have grouped together, no major issues arose. Amani added that hijab had become common enough that questions were not asked. Rubiah added that as Muslim girls in Malaysia had to compete not only with boys but also with non-
Chapter Seven ~ Findings: Phase Three

Muslims, she found that they were more hardworking than the girls she taught in Saudi, in order to improve their performance.

**The confident**

One of the questions in the survey asked the teachers what they believed the confidence and self-efficacy levels of girls studying in Saudi Arabia to be. All teachers agreed that it was low and that it was difficult to motivate girls to be interested in their studies or to widen their aspirations or immediate goals. Amani did add, however, that she can see this slowly changing as girls begin to challenge the cultural norms of their society. Nadine had similar beliefs, stating that she could see many girls lacked the confidence to take part in many school activities, but that she also could see more girls attempting areas outside of their comfort zone. In addition, although some girls did not seem interested in many other things aside from their physical image, they still had an air of confidence about them and the attitude of ‘lack of interest rather than lack of confidence’.

**The academic**

Academic levels amongst girls in Saudi Arabia were seen to be low with students seen as not placing enough effort into their studies. Rubiah added that she sees the girls coming to college just to escape their homes and only a few students put effort into their studies. Nadine however, also noted that low academic levels were seen across the board with boys’ achievement levels possibly lower than those of the girls. Nonetheless, she again commented how this was changing as the Saudi government had for the past few years emphasised the importance of education by opening more schools and universities and placing greater initiatives to keep students at school. However, she believed that the results would be slow to appear.

**The Muslim identity**

Comments made regarding how the teachers believed the girls identified themselves, were slightly different. Rubiah for example found that the sentiment of being a Muslim girl was very high amongst girls in Saudi Arabia when she compared it to those in Malaysia. Amani found the
question difficult to answer; nevertheless she felt that girls of Saudi nationality identified more strongly with being Saudi than they did with being Muslim. In her response to the question, Nadine commented that the Saudi girls in particular were very proud of being Muslim, with some of the girls able to directly link their ancestral family tree to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW, peace be upon him). However, she added that the girls were even more proud of being Saudi and living in a country which gave them so many privileges for being Saudi Arabian by descent.

### 7.3.5 Positive and negative experiences with Muslim girls

Responses from the teachers regarding their positive and negative experiences with Muslim girls were found to be consistent with experiences teachers teaching any students would have. Amani, for example, commented that her best experience was seeing her students perform well on an exam and having them thank her for teaching them. Her most concerning experience was when she saw a great lack of concern for education. Nadine’s most positive experience was seeing the mother of eight consistently get high marks in her exams, and trying her best to balance her family life with her studies. She found this student as a great role model to her peers, not only academically but also giving advice on how to be a good wife, mother and Muslim. Her most negative experience was having a group of girls admit that there was no use in studying and getting an education because they were not going to do anything with it anyway.

### 7.3.6 The home environment

All three teachers agreed that the influence of the home environment on the girls was considerable. However they differed in the kind of influence they received. Rubiah believed that the influence was negative, commenting that some parents she knows showed no concern for their daughters’ education giving no support or encouragement. However, Amani disagreed, stating that parents in Saudi Arabia influence girls a great deal by involving themselves in the needs of their daughters and what they were learning. In addition, as soon as any complaint or comment was made by students to their parents, the college received a call enquiring about the
issue. This showed the considerable influence Saudi parents tried to implement in their child’s education. Nadine’s comments included that on many occasions she saw mothers visiting the female campus or attending functions such as open days and presentation assemblies, showing their involvement and support of their daughters’ education.

### 7.3.7 The teacher effect

Both Rubiah and Amani believed that although some teachers may have some influence, foreign or international teachers have limited influence. Amani added that this was because they were restricted in what they could say and do, and Rubiah noted that the girls’ sense of self did not allow them to accept any ideas from their teachers.

_An international teacher does not have much influence on identity and self-efficacy on Saudi girls. Most girls have a very strong self-identity that limits them from communicating with the teacher or even listening to the teacher’s advice. Rubiah_ 

Nadine, on the other hand, believed that teachers have a great sense of responsibility towards their students who are definitely influenced by their teachers. She found the girls she teaches are hungry for advice and someone to confide in, sometimes clearly witnessing the outcome of the student acting on the advice. She gave a great example of advice she gave one student who had given up hope of studying pharmacy as the only way to do it was to travel abroad, an impossible task now that she was getting married to a man who was well settled in Saudi Arabia.

_So I told her, if she was interested in pharmacy and creating medicines to help the sick, why didn’t she think of ‘Toub-al-Nabawi’ (Medicine of the Prophet, natural remedies used in the days of the prophet)? This way she could still learn a very useful skill in the field of medicine right here in Saudi Arabia. The immediate change in the girls’ motivation and spirits was obvious; she stood thinking over the idea which had never occurred to her. Nadine_

### 7.3.8 The roles of leadership

There were numerous issues which teachers raised concerning support provided to Muslim girls. One concern was about providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls. For example, Amani commented that some boys’ schools are equipped with technology, such as Smart Boards, while girls’ schools are not. From her experience, she also believed that the female campus she teaches
in did not receive the same care and attention that the male college did. Rubiah noted that leaders needed to provide more opportunities for Muslim girls so that there is healthy competition that would lead to growth. In addition, Amani believed that if the education system implemented the Islamic ethos rather than following societal norms, it would help ensure that all students were given the same opportunities, male and female. She added that this had to start early.

*I also believe they have to start at the elementary level so that good practices will continue throughout their education.* Amani

Amani did state however, that the King of Saudi Arabia was already beginning to address such issues by giving women a more public role in Saudi society. One way he was helping to make this possible was by appointing women to high office. Nadine also mentioned a lack of educational and technological resources which would assist the girls in their learning. However, she added that the girls were supported socially, with numerous activities and functions held at the college throughout the year. She also added that some of the schools she knows of, as well as the college she is teaching in, were trying to provide student welfare support, although in her opinion, such support was still inadequate and unsophisticated with plenty of room for improvement.

### 7.3.9 Review of teacher questionnaire findings

Teachers from Saudi Arabia completed questionnaires in order to elaborate on their work with Muslim girls and their perceptions of how these girls dealt with their school, family and wider community contexts. The three teachers who completed the questionnaires were experienced in teaching in various contexts in a number of countries. Their years of experience ranged from seven to 14 years and at the time of study they were all teaching in a college in Saudi Arabia. For purposes of comparison, the 15 open-ended questions used in the questionnaire were based on the following issues which emerged during the teacher focus groups in Australia: choice of student sample, difference between girls then and now, changes with Muslim girls, perceptions regarding Muslim girls, positive and negative experiences with Muslim girls, the home environment, teacher effect, and the roles of leadership.
The findings from the teacher questionnaires found that teachers from the Saudi Arabian context similarly believed the study was of great importance as there was a need to better understand Muslim girls; however, they emphasised the additional significance such a study had for girls in Saudi Arabia as not many studies have been completed using that particular group of students. These teachers differed from the Australian teachers regarding changes with girls over time. The Australian teachers based their answers on stereotypical attitudes of both mainstream society in what girls could study and on the Muslim community in its attitudes towards girls and education. The Saudi teachers had differing opinions about whether teaching girls had changed over time but they agreed that more Muslim girls specifically continued on to higher education than would have in the past. The perceptions these teachers had about Muslim girls were centred on the same topics as those that emerged with the Australian teachers, such as how the Muslim girls grouped together, their hijab, their confidence and academic levels, and how they identified themselves.

The positive experiences that the teachers in Saudi related were more general than those mentioned by the Australian teachers whose situations were more specific to Muslim girls. They included seeing students perform well on exams, students being grateful to their teacher, and a mother of eight who returned to continue her education and balanced home and studies. Again the negative experiences were more general and could apply to any girls. They included seeing girls who lacked concern for their education, and having girls admit their belief that studying and getting an education was useless because they were not going to use it anyway.

The teachers in Saudi Arabia also believed the influence of the home environment on the girls was considerable with some describing how it was negative influence and others commenting on the positive way parents involved themselves in their daughters education. They also generally agreed that some teachers may have some influence on the girls; however a particular issue in Saudi Arabia is that of foreign or international teachers having limited influence. One teacher did however stress her belief that teachers have a great sense of responsibility towards their students who are definitely influenced by their teachers, especially as they are hungry for advice and someone to confide in. Some of the ways teachers suggested leadership could help Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia was by providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls, and providing greater educational and technological resources which would assist the girls in their learning. They did however state that improvements were already obvious with women starting to play a greater
public role in Saudi society. There was also social support for girls in schools with many extra-curricular activities taking place and burgeoning, although somewhat rudimentary, student welfare support systems put in place.

7.4 Conclusion

The findings from Phase Three of data collection have been presented above. Teacher focus-groups and questionnaires provided insight into the teachers’ perceptions of how Muslim girls dealt with their school, family and wider community contexts or how they may be affected by them. The previous two chapters presented the findings from Phases One and Two - the questionnaires and student interviews. While the student questionnaires provided a general overview of the perceptions the girls had of their self-efficacy and their identity as Muslims, the student interviews provided in-depth information regarding their perceptions.

Some of the findings suggest supposed contextual differences in the perceptions of the girls regarding their identity and self-efficacy. Notable implications were also made from the findings regarding the influences of others on the girls. The following chapter discusses these implications from the surveys, interviews, focus groups and teacher questionnaires, in light of the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Three.
8.1 Introduction

A number of salient concepts have been raised in this study underlying theoretical concerns of identity formation and self-efficacy that can help illuminate the sense of place and sense of self of Muslim primary school girls. Theories of identity, with evidence from applied studies including the current study, revealed three themes of significance to this study, including multiple identities, Islamic identity and hybridity. Issues surrounding multiple identities revealed the primary ideas of ‘becoming’ (rather than ‘being’); and belonging which were influenced by both internal and external factors including those relating to how others define the girls, and to personal pride. The concept of Islamic identity raised issues of cultural capital; shared cultural codes; separateness; and stereotypical views. Examining hybridity more specifically in relation to identity presented questions of conflict between internal and external notions of identity; relevance of the notion of ‘hybridity’ in describing these particular participants; and the significance of associating concepts of ‘other’ with the ‘visibility’ of Muslim girls. The investigation of theories of self-efficacy drew attention to the researcher’s aim to consider the perspectives of these young Muslim girls concerning their self-efficacy. The categories of interest that emerged related to the perceived impact from both internal and external factors on the students: their positive and negative experiences; separateness, otherness, teacher attitudes, the curriculum, peer influence, and the home environment. While these influences reflect evidence at the system level of unequal power, social control and significant social-cultural change, these were not specifically articulated by the research participants.

The study focused on the following questions:

1. How do Muslim girls in different cultural contexts identify themselves?

2. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of identity?

3. In what ways do Muslim girls develop self-efficacy?

4. What multiple factors impact on their perceptions of self-efficacy?
5. What implications do perceptions of Muslim girls regarding their identity and self-efficacy have for leadership practices, the school and its community in influencing the positive development of their identities and improving their levels of efficacy?

Theoretical approaches were explored in the process of developing a research framework around theories of identity, hybridity, and self-efficacy. A research plan was developed including a review of selected literature, visits to schools, formulation of research questions, formal data collection and informal discussions with stakeholders. These formed an integral combination during the process of this research in order to address the topic of identity formation and self-efficacy of Muslim primary school girls. While the research was initiated due to concerns for the sense of place and sense of self of pre-adolescent Muslim girls, the issues surrounding this topic go beyond the particular needs of this minority group. The focus on Muslim girls, however, has highlighted some of their particular concerns within their specific environments.

This chapter links the findings from this study with some of the relevant evidence from other studies reported on in the literature review. It also argues the relevance of pertinent theories raised in the literature review to explain and interpret ideas and issues raised from the findings, including those that contrast with previous research or add insight into previously unexplored interpretations. Again, the chapter is organised into the sections used in previous chapters, as can be seen by the following chapter map. The abovementioned research questions were addressed in each relevant section with Section 8.2 dealing with Research Questions 1 and 2; Section 8.3 dealing with Research Question 3; and Section 8.4 dealing with Research Question 4. The fifth research question is addressed in the final chapter.
Chapter Eight ~ Discussion

Chapter map

Perceptions of identity and self-efficacy of Muslim primary school girls

Notions of self and cultural synthesis

A visible presence: self-efficacy and influencing factors

Differences between school contexts
8.2 Notions of self and cultural synthesis

One of the aims of the study was to find out how the Muslim girls identified themselves and what factors influenced their perceptions of identity. Although earlier theories emphasised fixed attributes of identity, more modern theorists, such as Rutherford (1990), Giddens (1991), Hall (1996a), and Peek (2005), are continuously evolving and redefining the concept of identity formation as a process of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’. However, it is also clear that new paradigms of identity and belonging are needed (Ifekwunigwe, 1997) as many youth today, and not just newly arrived immigrants, are negotiating between multiple identities. Theories of internal and external influences on identity formation proved to be of significance to this study’s particular participants (refer to Hall, 1990; Rutherford, 1990; Greenburg and Mahoney, 1995; Buddington, 2001; Yeh and Drost, 2002). These theories have provided greater understanding to the researcher and supported this thesis in making a significant contribution to the development of identity formation theories in today’s world. As will be discussed, the young Muslim girls portrayed how they perceived themselves in accordance with how they believed others defined them, their feelings of belonging, and personal pride with their chosen identities.

8.2.1 Multiple identities

As illustrated by the numerous issues raised during the student interviews, the majority of the girls perceived their identity in relation to how they believed others defined them. The common mistake of essentialising identity as one dimension, as mentioned in Chapter Two (in this case, being perceived as Muslim), was contradicted by the great variety of explanations given by the participants. Discussing feelings of difference, experiences of being stared at, perceptions of their relationships with non-Muslims and their own background, the girls exemplified the three ways Greenburg and Mahoney (1995) claimed as to how individuals define their identity, that is, through perceptions of difference, multiple identity formation, and external influences. The girls all believed they were Australian and felt a sense of belonging to both the school community and the wider society; however, they were particularly aware of the differences between them and other students from the dominant culture. For example, various comments made by the girls
demonstrated their awareness of differences in religious beliefs, home language, dress, and even topics of discussion. This awareness shaped the girls’ relationships with their Muslim and non-Muslim peers, teachers and neighbours which were open to immense change as meanings of belonging altered with different experiences and events. Despite negative experiences which they believed related to their religion or ethnicity, the girls displayed great pride in who they were in both religious terms and culturally. Amongst all the girls, only Joumana seemed to have a cultural clash with her identity. She could not see how she could be both Australian and a Muslim, it was either or. Joumana portrayed feelings of internal conflict with choosing between two cultures, rather than being able to assume both at the same time, as Benet-Martinez and Haratitos (2005) described as happening with students who displayed low ‘Bicultural Identity Integration (BII)’. And thus she chose Muslim over her Australianness, as did ‘Natasha’ in Peek’s study (2005).

Referring to Asher’s (2005) description of the ‘struggle to arrive at a meaningful synthesis across difference’, Joumana’s struggle with her multiple identities and her personal conflicting feelings of having to choose one identity over the other brings to surface the debate of cultural hybridity and the question of third space (Bhabha, 1994). However, Bhaba’s notion of hybridity is strongly centred on the cross-cultural experiences of migrants and the Diaspora. The history of Muslim migration to Australia, and the issues of being a community ‘in-between’ a largely non-Muslim society has led to descriptions of Muslims in Australia as having a ‘hybrid Islamic identity’ (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001). In spite of this, any attempt to apply the concept of a ‘third space’, according to Bhabha’s descriptions, to the Muslim girls in this study is somewhat problematic as most of them are Australian born or have lived in Australia since infancy. This coupled with their relatively young age makes it difficult to consider them as having what Shohat and Stam (1994) described as ‘displaced identities of post-independence and Diaspora’. Of course it can also be argued that the experiences of their migrant parents have indirectly affected the children. Given that there were no original moments from which the third emerges (see Rutherford, 1990 and Young, 1995), the Muslim girls’ experiences are more fitting with Ang’s (2001) depiction of hybridity as highlighting the difficulties of living with difference. As Kabir (2008) noted, attempting to commit to both cultures has been difficult for some Muslims as they experience issues with feelings of belonging, acceptance, and appreciation. Greater discussion surrounding the concerns with applying hybridity to this study has been included later in this chapter.
Consequently, as the girls in this study have repeatedly demonstrated their awareness and perceptions of living with difference, the complex process of negotiating between identities (Yeh and Drost, 2002; Su and Costigan, 2009) becomes more pronounced for such a group. The young Muslim girls who spoke confidently of their negotiation between their multiple identities (be it Muslim, Indian, Australian, or a girl) portrayed a more positive concept of themselves and narrated their perceptions of others as seeing them positively as well. For example, Dina stated that she was proud and sure of who she was, ‘I know I’m doing the right thing’, and confidently discussed her strengths. At the same time, she described positive attitudes from others, such as how others saw her hijab as beautiful, and her teacher telling her she has improved academically and in her attitude. Successfully negotiating between identities has been shown to assist students by contributing to their social-emotional development and self-esteem in school (Yeh and Drost, 2002). Being able to identify as a member of a group and having a positive sense of belonging to that group, is found to be an imperative basis for self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997).

Studies have suggested that identifying strongly with an individual’s various cultures can make the adaptation process easier (Kabir, 2008) with families playing an important role as a key learning ground for feelings of ethnic identity (Su and Costigan, 2009). Unfortunately, the comments of some of the girls support the claim that if the ethnic group is identified negatively by society, then the students may view themselves negatively (Tajfel, 1982; Phinney et al., 1997) with some girls wanting to change their name or the way they dressed, or were ‘embarrassed’ to be identified as ‘Arabic’. This challenged the formation of a positive ethnic identity (Britto, 2008).

Some theorists have placed great emphasis on identifying particular cultures as being either collectivist or individualist. Different cultures are said to place different emphasis on the self; however, this concept as a dichotomy has also proved to be a problematic theory to apply to this study. In Western culture, for instance, some believe the individual is the most important unit of society, and therefore students from ‘collectivistic’ backgrounds must learn how to be ‘assertive, independent, and confident to succeed in schools, but also must be able to shift back to being relational, modest, passive, and family-oriented at home’ (Markus and Kitayama, 1991 and Yeh and Hwang, 2000, cited in Yeh and Drost, 2002). This shifting from collectivism to individualism can be seen in the girls from the Australian schools as they displayed, for example, both modesty while exhibiting strengths, and assertiveness while defending themselves. For example, for one of the
open-ended questions in the questionnaire, many girls chose to describe situations where they were standing up for themselves when asked about when they felt confident. It can also be claimed that the girls from the Saudi schools displayed more collectivist characteristics as they appeared to develop their self-efficacy from those around them (Klassen, 2004; Pulford et al., 2005) mentioning family and teachers more often in connection with their strengths and experiences of confidence. However, looking critically at the findings from this study one could not conclusively group the girls as belonging to one group or the other. The girls from all the contexts displayed both collectivist characteristics such as modesty, passiveness and family orientated opinions and experiences, as well as individualistic characteristics such as confidence in self, assertiveness and individualism.

This supports Bandura’s (1997) claim that people are neither entirely autonomous nor entirely interdependent in any society. The strength of working on common grounds of shared experiences (Proweller, 1999) is thus suggested as being paramount in resolving the conflict between individualism and collectivism while also considering the culture-based expectations of peers, elders, significant others and so forth (Markus et al., 1997, cited in Yeh and Drost, 2002), as they have a significant influence on how students behave and operate across cultures. Bandura (1997) argues that individuals are affected by context, adjusting their behaviour in various culturally appropriate manners to suit the collectivist elements they find themselves in. There is certainly a fierce debate regarding the dichotomies of collectivism and individualism, both in the education field as well as philosophically and sociologically. For example, the philosophical debate on individualism is reflected in the works of Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) who take the notion of identity to political and global dimensions. They claim for instance that the life of one’s own is a global life, that is, ‘what happens within your own life has a lot to do with worldwide influences, challenges and fashions or with protection against them’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.25). Indeed, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) consider social cohesion as dependant on the recognition of individualism, alongside diversity and scepticism. Moreover, Bandura (1997) pertinently states that ‘interdependence does not obliterate a personal self’. In fact, the creation of a personal self, a personal identity, has been described as a ‘task’ that needs to be performed (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).
Being so young, the girls showed an understandably un-definitive and provisional identity. For example, when discussing being themselves during the interviews, the girl’s portrayed strong pride in being who they chose to be as well as in how God had created them. However, Samia added, with general consensus from the other girls, that if there was something that needed changing then she did not mind changing. Indeed, this supports the idea that identity formation is a process of becoming and not something the girls were born into or had adopted from a selection of readily made identity choices. This additionally emphasises the unique opportunity this research has provided in seeking an understanding of young Muslim girls before they have experienced the greater maturity and challenges of their older siblings and their parents. Undoubtedly, it is a unique opportunity to explore the ‘becoming’ of a young Muslim girl. Many of the girls verbalised this internal negotiation of their identity as they described who they thought they were, what they wanted to change, what they would not change, who they wanted to be, and who they did not want to be. This further brings up the notion of identity construction as being based on shared cultural codes and the negotiation between our exterior world and interior selves, as described by Hall (1996a) and Rutherford (1990). Indeed, negotiations during the course of constructing an identity need to become a practice of ‘social reflexion’, a practice that includes living a ‘reflexive life’ which involves ‘processing contradictory information, dialogue, negotiation, (and) compromise’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.26).

8.2.2 Islamic identity

The importance of shared experiences on the formation of a positive self-identity is stressed for these girls as they negotiate between various identities including cultural and religious. Although there are a great number of Muslims who do not actively interact with Muslim communities, the girls in this study from all school contexts portrayed a strong association with other Muslims, especially in the home environment. For Muslims, the concept of one ‘Ummah’ is based on what Proweller (1999) described as working on the common grounds of shared experiences as many Muslims believe they belong to one community regardless of the differences of gender, ethnicity, colour, language and so on, with numerous references to this in the Quran (Shah, 2006). This collective Muslim identity (Basit, 1997) however begins with a focus on the individual and their path to self-improvement. As Bandura (1997) claimed, a strong sense of self leads to greater
success in the attempts made to improve group life through ‘collective efforts’. For a Muslim, this includes the seeking of knowledge (Sanjakdar, 2001; Alghorani, 2003), which leads to the development of a good character and personality, and a deep and profound awareness of Allah (taqwa) (Sanjakdar, 2001). Findings from the survey indicate that the girls understood the importance of developing their personal selves through the seeking of knowledge. The findings showed the vast majority of girls agreed that they thought about and sought out information about their religious group which is in line with the findings of other studies showing the strong connection between a Muslim’s identity and the seeking of knowledge (Sanjakdar, 2001; Zine, 2001; Alghorani, 2003).

Nonetheless, shared experiences with other Australians, both Muslims and non-Muslims, also underscored the girls’ identification with being Australian and possessing some level of cultural capital regarding national identity and social acceptance. The importance of attaining required cultural capital has been strongly emphasised by Bourdieu and his peers (1977, 1992), not only for the social well-being of these students but also their academic success, as has been mentioned in the literature review. Furthermore, attaining some level of cultural capital is strongly associated to the process of acculturation, and as many authors have noted (Brooks, 1996; Berry, 1997; Phinney et al., 2001a; Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005; Awad, 2010), the emphasis being on integration or ‘limited separation’. As the girls in this study have demonstrated a connection to both their ethnic/religious identity as well as their national identity, they are well on their way to what Phinney et al. (2001a) describe as a bicultural or integrated identity that supports a high level of well-being.

As several studies have suggested (Asrif, 2001; Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001; Alghorani, 2003; Peek, 2005; Shah, 2006; Shammas, 2009), Islam, in conjunction with ethnicity, was a principal identifier in the hierarchy of identities mentioned by the girls in this study. Many authors (Sanjakdar, 2001; Alghorani, 2003) have also suggested achieving an Islamic identity involves adopting an Islamic value system. Even at such a young age, the majority of girls indicated their belief that they were practising Muslims although many admitted that they could improve on some aspects such as the wearing of the hijab (which is not even considered compulsory at that age). Many demonstrated ways they practised ‘self surveillance’ concerning participation or non-participation in un-Islamic activities, as the girls in Crozier’s (2009) study did. However, a number
of girls from the public schools did indicate the difficulties of negotiating between what was Islamically acceptable and what their peers or schools asked them to do. This was unlike older Muslim girls who were identified in some studies (Basit, 1997; Yasmeen, 2008) as having the ability to ‘adopt and adapt’ what they were comfortable with and rejected what they did not like or what might transgress religious/ethnic boundaries.

As other studies have indicated (Wilkinson et al., 2004; Zine, 2007; Yasmeen, 2008), the issue of ‘separateness’ appeared to be a problem with some students. Results initially indicated that the girls who attended public schools in Australia and the international school in Saudi Arabia, and thus interacted more with non-Muslims, had more positive views of and saw the benefits of interacting with non-Muslims more so than the girls attending Islamic schools. However, when delving deeper into the issue during the interviews, the girls who attended the public schools reported more concerns with these interactions through their own experiences with teachers, peers or people outside school. Having experienced these interactions on a more regular basis, the girls attending the public school in Australia in particular, were exposed to and experienced the difficulties that may occur with different cultures, whereas the girls at the private school were tentative in their remarks, mainly guessing at the possible difficulties that exist, through third-party experiences or secondary sources. Very few reported incidents they had experienced first-hand, however almost all girls agreed that there should not be any problems or differences between themselves and mainstream society. The girls portrayed their credulous sense of righteousness, equality and absence of discrimination through their beliefs that different cultures and religions should meet and live together. However, past experiences combined with tendencies to fear difference and being seen as the ‘other’ also portrayed their expectations of negative encounters with non-Muslims and the idea that things were less complicated if everyone was of a similar background. These insecurities are consistent with the ideas presented by Archer (2008) who states that minority youth are consistently positioned as ‘other’ in regards to the portrayal of the ‘ideal pupil’ being white, male, and middle class, even though the private school students were all Muslims, and many of the classes the public students were in could have up to half their peers being Muslim.

Through the interviews with teachers, it became clear that a number of teachers at the public schools still held stereotypical views of Muslims and Islam in general, despite the considerable
Muslim student population at their schools, and even a few Muslim colleagues. These stereotypes became apparent through the researcher’s own interactions with teachers during data collection, through the stories teachers narrated during the focus groups, as well as through the perceptions that some girls portrayed about their teachers. Although numerous studies have discovered that many Muslims, including the girls in this study, strongly identify with being Muslim foremost before other identifiers, they nevertheless also describe themselves in numerous other ways. However, it appears that the ‘other’ (in this case non-Muslims) choose to group Muslims not only by their religion, but as non-Australian. A number of authors indicated the fact that Muslims are often represented as a homogenous group despite being made up of multiple ethnicities, races, languages, nationalities and tribes (Afridi, 2001; Zine, 2001; Wise and Ali, 2008). This notion was evident in the current study as the researcher encountered staff members from a number of the schools approached who referred to the study as being an ‘Arabic survey’ or quite adamantly stated that they did not have enough Muslim girls because they did not have girls who were Arabic or Somali, the two labels which apparently represented ‘Muslim’ to one particular staff member. The following excerpt from an initial conversation the researcher had with an executive staff member at one of the schools approached (but did not end up participating) indicates the discouraging presence of stereotypes amongst the leaders of our schools:

Staff member: We don’t have Arabic girls
Researcher: Not just Arabic, Muslim
Staff member: Oh, well, I don’t think we have that many, we don’t really have Somali girls so we don’t have many Muslim girls

8.2.3 Hybridity

Hybridity has been a much contested theory, with some of the prevailing contentions emerging whilst examining the relevance of hybridity to this study. As Young (1995) so aptly stated, the concept of hybridity changes, leaving no single or correct meaning. As such, some of Bhabha’s perspectives on hybridity have raised some serious questions about the application of hybridity as a theory to cross-cultural situations, particularly in the current Australian milieu. The above discussion on multiple identifications has portrayed the inaccuracy of essentialising identity as one dimension and illuminated identity formation as being a process of ‘becoming’. This process
should also include the concept of hybridity, as Hutnyk (2005) highlighted that hybridity should be seen as a process and not as fixed identity(ies). The verity that many youth today are negotiating between multiple identities, and not just immigrants who have experienced diaspora, further emphasises the conflict of hybridity as being excessively based on the dichotomy of coloniser and colonised (see Chapter Two). Again, Bhabha’s views are questioned as Shohat and Stam (1994) underline the relevance of viewing hybridity as being a continuous process which came before colonialism and will endure long after it.

Although Bhabha (1994) describes hybridity as symbolising ‘cultural synthesis’, he stresses the notion of ‘third space’ as being an amalgamation of two cultures where the hybrid third emerges. However, the girls in this study have demonstrated that their hybridity has not solved questions of their identity but rather exemplified the difficulties they experience of living with differences (Ang, 2001) and negotiating between their multiple identities. An interpretation of ‘third space’ more suitable to the girls’ situation would be that of Rutherford (1990) who perceives the ‘third space’ as enabling other, multiple positions to emerge, and not just from two original moments. Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco’s (1999) representation of finding a ‘third place’, or more adequately a ‘meeting place’, is also a more apt description of the experiences of the girls in this study, as they explain that the point of interaction between two or more cultures is not an ‘accommodation’ of either culture (see Chapter Two), but rather an ‘encounter’ of both (or all) cultures, the process of experiencing interculturality:

*Intercultural interaction is neither a question of maintaining one’s own cultural frame nor of assimilating to one’s interactant’s cultural frame, it is rather a question of finding an intermediary place between these two positions – of adopting a third place. ... the third place is therefore a point of interaction, hybridity and exploration. It is not accommodation ... but an encounter (Crozet et al., 1999, p.5).*

Beck and Beck Gernsheim (2002) further emphasise these encounters as being a process of being ‘constantly engaged in discarding old classifications and formulating new ones’ (p.26) in which identities emerge as a result of the intersections and combinations of numerous cultures and identities. Similarly, Crozet and Liddicoat (1999) incisively describe culture as being ‘an interrelated configuration of archaic, residual and emergent (eminent) cultures’ (p.114). Accordingly, evidence from the girls in this study shows that they did not think of themselves as one face, one self, nor did they describe themselves using singular depictions, ‘I am this (and nothing else!)’. Many of the
girls described themselves as part of a ‘hyphenated’ or a combined ‘third’ emerging culture (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005) as they described the encounters they had of integrating their various cultural and religious backgrounds into their everyday lives. This reveals that many of the girls were beginning to demonstrate high ‘bicultural identity integration (BII) as they displayed feelings of pride, uniqueness, and a rich sense of community and history (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). On the other end of these positive experiences of cultural hybridity, one student, as mentioned earlier, clearly demonstrated low BII as she found the values and expectations of her Australian and Islamic cultures clashed leading her to feel compelled to choose between the two cultures (Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, 2005). Here, Joumana indicated that she could not be two things at the same time and attempted to put an ‘either or’, a dichotomy, in her identity. A few students fell in between these two binaries shifting between pride in their cultural integration and the struggles they had with dual expectations and identity confusion, which was exacerbated by how they believed others viewed them. Although Muslims in Australia today have been described as adopting a ‘hybrid Islamic identity’ (as mentioned in Chapter Three) where norms of the mainstream together with Islamic/ethnic traditions are simultaneously committed to (Saeed and Akbarzadeh, 2001), the girls have revealed that commitment to both cultures has at times been a rough road to travel. Stereotypes and comments made by others were amongst the experiences the girls related which made it difficult for them to achieve true feelings of belonging, acceptance and appreciation (Kabir, 2008).

Some of their responses, however, along with those of the rest of the girls, were characteristic of how these hybrid cultures and identities form the basis of social integration and interculturality. Being in this ‘meeting place’ utilises the mind’s understanding of how different worldviews operate to allow the individual to freely explore and concurrently to accept themselves and others in a process of intercultural dialogue, thus developing a sense of interculturality (Ramzan, 2009).

The current positioning of the participants as pre-adolescent Muslim girls in Australia epitomises the notion of a ‘meeting place’ of cultures that ‘encounter’ each other. It was apparent that the girls were finding an ‘intermediary place’ that they were comfortable with and which incorporated their multiple identities of being Muslim girls of various ethnic backgrounds, growing up in Australia (or Saudi Arabia). Many of the girls’ comments revealed attempts at trying to understand ‘how the self and the other operate within their respective cultural boundaries’ (Crozet et al.,
Consequently, the context of this study requires examining ‘interculturality’, or the notion that people’s sense of identity can expand and understand (if not incorporate) the feelings of identity of others. Essentially, the ‘third space’ needs to be understood as a place where the cultural perspectives of self and other intersect and are negotiated by each individual rather than a fixed point which is common to all learners (Liddicoat et al., 1999; Ramzan, 2009).

8.3 A visible presence: self-efficacy and influencing factors

A further aim of the study was to find out in what ways the Muslim girls developed their self-efficacy and what factors impacted on their perceptions of self-efficacy. Similar to identity formation, self-efficacy is claimed to be drawn from a number of internal and external sources, of which their impact will vary depending on the immediate environment and specific behaviour. A number of theorists, as discussed in the literature review, emphasised the influential interaction of other person, behaviour and contextual factors on the self-beliefs of a person (Bandura, 1977; Lent et al., 1994, cited in Bieschke, 2006; Pajares, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Lent et al., 2005). The findings from the current study, in combination with the literature and theories reviewed have shown how the girls’ perception of their self-efficacy was impacted on by numerous factors, particularly in the school environment. The issue of being enrolled in single-sex schools or classes is also discussed regarding its relevance or impact on perceived levels of self-efficacy (with particular comparisons between this study’s participants made in sections 8.4.3).

In accordance with Bandura’s (1977) four sources where efficacy expectations are learned and modified, results from the questionnaire and comments made during the interviews indicate that the girls generally draw on their efficacy from families, school, and peers through feedback (verbal persuasion) and mastery experiences. The considerable level of influence that parents, teachers, and peers have on these girls regarding their self-efficacy, particularly academic efficacy, was apparent as the girls reiterated what significant others have said about their strengths and weaknesses. They also described experiences of successful performances relating such achievement to the academic level of their peers or siblings. The feedback the girls received while
performing publicly or while demonstrating their academic, social or sporting strengths increased their confidence and thus their belief in their abilities. However, negative experiences or feedback during similar situations were also the cause of decrease in levels of self-efficacy. In addition, the support and high expectations that teachers and parents were perceived as having of their students and daughters were associated with the girls’ beliefs of the power they had to produce results and succeed (Pajares, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 2000). Examples of how these are demonstrated in the findings are described below under the relevant factors.

8.3.1 The ‘inner self’ factor

The girls showed high levels of perceived academic efficacy as they demonstrated a developing level of ‘personal control’ to secure their desired outcomes and thus contributing effectively to the direction their lives will take (Schunk, 1984; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 2000). Taking control of their futures, the girls, for example, had all thought about their future ambitions and could list the criteria of how their ambitions were going to be achieved, whether they were supported by others or not. Considering studies have shown that feelings children have about future participation in education are reliable indications of what they will actually do later (Croll et al., 2008), it is a positive indication of where these girls are leading to academically. In addition, this sense of agency has been emphasised by Bandura (1997) and other theorists (Schunk, 1984; Betz, 2000) as being critical to achieving positive self-efficacy. Portraying the presence of a sense of power to produce results shows that the girls are more likely to attempt to make things happen (Pajares, 1995; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 2000). They showed that they were well on the way to becoming ‘stage managers of their own biographies and identities and also of their social links and networks’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 23). Their motivation behind these aspirations supported this sense of power as many of the girls had distinct and definite reasons for these ambitions. As is noted in the interview section of the findings chapter, reasons included compassion for poor people, becoming a better role model than own teacher, following great grandfather’s dream, and ensuring care was taken of someone special to them before they did something for themselves. Amongst others, these motivating factors demonstrated the importance of others in these girls’ lives with the girls further showing insight into the value of relationships and of social capital. The girls ensured the presence and stressed the importance of trust in their relationships between all
significant others, including teachers, parents and peers. Trusting and being trustworthy provided the girls with feelings of comfort and confidence.

As the essence of self-efficacy is the belief one has of their capabilities to effectively perform a task or behaviour (Schunk, 1984; Bandura, 1997; Betz, 1997, 2000; Bieschke, 2006), the girls in this study have demonstrated that they have strong beliefs in their ability to achieve regardless of their current failings. Although the results from the questionnaires indicated many girls were unsure of their abilities compared to their classmates, the interviews revealed most of the girls considered themselves smart. However, they perceptively declared their weaknesses as well as possible remedies to overcoming them rather than surrendering to their situation with no hope of achieving. Only Kathy from one of the private schools was convinced that she could not improve on her grammar skills, just as her mother never had. The other girls rationalised that through effort and perseverance, and by asking for and receiving help from others, they had a chance of improving their performance in a task or behaviour. The girls thus displayed ‘adaptive engagement’ in class where their confidence to learn and motivation to use self-regulatory strategies will consequently improve their focus on mastery and feelings of efficacy (Yamauchi and Greene, 1997; Patrick et al., 2007).

Results indicated that the girls were most happy and comfortable in school while experiencing positive situations that accentuated their confidence through showing their strengths, and their feelings of being valued. This was contrasted with feelings of unhappiness caused by being undervalued and unappreciated, and where their weaknesses and inabilities were made obvious to others. For example, Najwa describes her confidence as being at its highest only when she was with people she knew had less knowledge than her, usually her younger siblings. This is consistent with Marsh’s (1987, 2008) big-fish-little-pond effect (BFLPE) which dictates that students display increased self-efficacy while participating in group work with lower ability students.

8.3.2 The teacher factor

The findings showed that the girls generally had a high perception of their social efficacy regarding their relationships with their teachers, due to teachers providing emotional and academic support, being approachable, caring about student learning and social well-being, and encouraging peer
tutoring and mutual respect amongst peers. These findings suggest that girls gain, as Baker (2006) reports, motivation, success expectations, and interest and satisfaction with school from their relationships with teachers. Baker (2006) however, had also added that academic efficacy increased due to positive relationships with teachers. Despite the positive effect on social efficacy teacher relationships had on the girls, results generally showed that the girls had comparably lower perceptions of academic self-efficacy than social self-efficacy.

The stereotypes that many teachers appear to have of minority students may have served to challenge the girls’ sense of low academic efficacy. The teachers who participated in the focus groups imparted that many teachers they knew displayed lower expectations of particular minority students in combination with misunderstandings and insensitivities towards ethnic and cultural differences of parents and parent expectations. This is in line with previous studies conducted by Basit (1997) and more recently by Crozier (2009) who describe these stereotypes as adversely affecting the self-esteem and confidence of students. A number of girls in the study indicated how certain actions, personality traits or attitudes of their teachers led them to feel discouraged or unmotivated to learn. For example, Mona described feeling discouraged to continue participating in lessons when her teacher indicated she did not need her opinion in class discussions; and Adilah described feeling unmotivated to learn as her teacher seemed to take no notice of her which often made her feel that her teacher may not like her. Nevertheless, contrary to the findings presented in the literature (Saft and Pianta, 2001; Archer, 2008; Jerome et al., 2008), the students themselves showed no indication that they connected these actions, traits or attitudes to the belief that teachers were prejudiced in their treatment or that any of their issues arose from bias towards the students for being Muslims or from a minority group. In fact, a number of girls described their teachers as being understanding, accepting, and respectful towards them as Muslims and the issues which affected them as Muslim girls. This was found in both the public school contexts and the private school contexts, with no obvious patterns or differences between how the girls described their teachers. It is interesting to note that some of these teachers were the same ones who displayed stereotypical behaviours against one of their Muslim colleagues who adopted the Islamic hijab. Nonetheless, it was difficult to discern whether these positive descriptions were due to the girls’ apprehensiveness of their comments getting back to their teachers.
One stereotype revealed through the interviews and focus groups was the attitude that Arabs or Muslims were low achievers and were neglectful of their education. One teacher confirmed the presence of this stereotype when she disclosed the common misconception that ‘Arabic’ boys in particular were low achievers and would most likely become car drivers or mechanics. She also described the genuine surprise staff felt when some of their Muslim Arab students were actually succeeding and achieving high results. Previous studies have reported similar findings (Wingfield, 2006; Archer, 2008), indicating the gravity of this stereotype on the self-esteem and emotional well-being of students which become compromised and lead to a snowball effect of disadvantages. With a compromised self-esteem and emotional well-being comes disengagement from schooling (Zine, 2001; Shah, 2008), disengagement leads to low achievement, which then leads to educators holding low expectations of the girls’ education and career prospects, which in effect denies the students particular educational and employment opportunities (Brah, 1994; Basit, 1997; Zine, 2001). Nonetheless, only one of the girls portrayed such stereotypes from her public school teacher. However, in contrast to the above findings about students becoming disengaged, Najwa showed resilience to her teachers’ low expectations stating that she was going to become a teacher, and more importantly - a better role model than her current teacher. Thus, her strong sense of efficacy was portrayed as she epitomized Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory which views people as producers that have a hand in selecting and shaping their environment and not only as products of social environments.

The study by Burnett (1995) reported the deep effect positive and negative statements made by teachers had on students, particularly girls, leading to both positive and negative ‘self-talk’. Similarly, many of the remarks made by the girls in the current study demonstrated how they internalised, repeated and sometimes acted upon comments made by teachers about them. It is fortunate that most of the girls were able to evoke positive comments which affected their beliefs and behaviours, in addition to the negative comments they made regarding themselves.

Although findings agreed with some of the literature which indicated that Muslim students experienced numerous challenges surrounding dress code, participation in particular lessons or activities, and misconceptions about Islam and its practices (Zine, 2001, 2008; Archer, 2002; Wingfield, 2006; Sabry and Bruna, 2007), there were numerous findings which contradicted the results from other studies. For example, the HREOC report (2004) showed students reporting a
lack of teacher support over racial and religious incidents of discrimination and a perceived lack of understanding of students’ cultural and religious backgrounds. Although the girls shared experiences of other students discriminating and lacking understanding, complaints about their teachers generally did not include lack of teacher support or misunderstandings regarding their cultural or religious backgrounds. Only Aasiya mentioned a teachers’ change in behaviour towards her when the teacher found out she was a Muslim. Here Aasiya demonstrated a weakening in her ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Wise and Ali, 2008) as she connected her teacher’s differential treatment to finding out that she was a Muslim. The theory of ‘othering’ is emphasised on such occasions, particularly as numerous scholars (Afridi, 2001; Ashrif, 2001; Donohoue Clyne, 2001b; Humphries, 2001; Kabir, 2005; Peek, 2005; Zine, 2006, 2008; Wise and Ali, 2008) have portrayed that Muslims are commonly positioned as ‘other’ and thus treated with bias.

8.3.3 The curriculum factor

Studies reviewed in the literature have emphasised the importance of students finding themselves and their communities in the curriculum, rather than only seeing themselves through the lens of the dominant culture (Schwartz, 1999; Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Said, 2001; Sabry and Bruna, 2007). Omitting Muslim culture and history from the curriculum, along with ambiguous generalisations presented by the media, may lead to inaccurate perceptions leaders and teachers have of student needs and educational destinations (Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Shah, 2006). As discussed in the above section on teachers, these perceptions of leaders and teachers have led to students becoming disengaged. However, it is interesting that the written curriculum was not mentioned by either the students or the teachers during focus groups as being a cause for disengagement or for students feeling different, left out, discriminated against or stereotyped. On the contrary, a number of students from the public schools did mention the gratitude they felt to some teachers who did not force them to participate in particular lessons (such as tasks about Easter or Christmas).

The impact of the hidden curriculum was however highlighted by both students and teachers during the interviews and focus groups. As mentioned in the next section, students attending the public schools in Australia were aware of the differences between themselves and the dominant
culture of the rest of the school. Although they mentioned receiving support for cultural/religious issues (for example being provided with a room for prayer or to rest during Ramadan), they acknowledged the need for familiarity and support by portraying a reliance on peer groupings of the same ethnicity or religion, as Barron (2007) also discovered.

Showing a greater awareness than their students did of what Bruna (2007) and Britto (2008) described as the theory of ‘cultural mismatch’, teachers described the many differences found between the school environment and the Muslim students’ homes. Teachers from the public schools particularly spoke of the difficulties of getting students to participate in certain activities and not being able to effectively communicate to parents their importance. This highlighted what Hughes et al. (2005) deemed to be caused by school and home not sharing a common culture, leading to a lack of shared understanding and difficulties in building trust. Subsequently, this shortcoming has been described by Kabir (2005) as mainstream Australians being unfamiliar with Islamic culture or viewing Muslims as a threat to the majority culture.

Comments made to some of the girls in this study by their peers regarding Islam and Muslims reinforce this lack of understanding. Similarly to what Ata (2009) found in his study on how Muslims are viewed by non-Muslim adolescents, the girls described stereotypical and misinformed comments including being told they were not Australian, believing only Arabs were Muslims, they only ate one type of food, and they were unlucky and restricted. At least one of these beliefs (only Arabs were Muslims) was reinforced by teacher comments and attitudes during the study as the researcher witnessed students being called over the school’s loud speaker to take part in the ‘Arabic survey’. Thus, these findings support McCue’s (2008) claim that the education system has been inadequate in providing knowledge and understanding about Muslims and Islam.

Consequently, a number of teachers concurred with Sanjakdar’s (2001) idea regarding the hidden curriculum, stating that many Muslim schools they knew of helped reinforce the students’ culture. Students developed a genuine sense of belonging, comfort and pride as they shared in the total culture and ethos of the school, which in effect indicated the level of the students’ cultural capital. Nonetheless, the teachers also warned that not all Islamic schools have been as successful in providing such an environment with a strong and culturally rich school ethos, stressing the importance of promoting education and open communication amongst the school community, predominantly with the home environment.
8.3.4 The peer factor

Although the girls’ perceptions of self-efficacy seemed influenced somewhat by their teachers, the greater influence appeared to come from peers and peer interactions. Numerous studies (Zine, 2001; Burgess et al., 2006; Singer and Doonenbal, 2006; Rueger et al., 2008) support the findings from this study that close friends were a main influencing factor towards the high social efficacy the girls had. Regarding their relationships and interactions with their peers, the findings portrayed positive social relationships with classmates, classmates caring about each other’s learning, ease while conversing, and cooperating with peers. The girls expressed feeling their greatest level of confidence when they were with their friends. Trust in these relationships was greatly emphasised by the girls as being the basis of their confidence, security and comfort. Maintaining and developing this trust to include others around them is crucial in improving and increasing their sense of efficacy and ultimately their ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991; Wise and Ali, 2008), which has been found to be lacking in many Muslim-Australians (Noble, 2005). In order to avoid following similar patterns, the trust the girls in this study seem to have in the world around them needs support and protection to create a confidence in their social setting and thus, their sense of belonging to the nation and to their neighbourhoods – all before the apparent feelings of distrust towards Muslims from the dominant culture become evident to these young minds reducing their capacity for social action and sense of social competence, as many studies have reported on (Afridi, 2001; Ashrif, 2001; Donohoue Clyne, 2001a; Humphries, 2001; Kabir, 2005; Peek, 2005; Zine, 2006; Wise and Ali, 2008).

Interactions with peers during group work highlighted perceptions of both the academic and social efficacy of the girls. It was interesting that the girls differentiated clearly between their beliefs about themselves and what they thought their peers felt towards them, with a much greater number believing they were valuable group members and helpful to others, even though only half actually felt accepted in their groups. In addition, as Burgess et al. (2006) reported in their work, many of the girls in this study similarly displayed feelings of embarrassment and internalised their emotions during interactions of conflict. They were also more likely to display pro-social strategies than anti-social including showing no indication of seeking revenge which supports the findings of Burgess et al., (2006) and Rueger (2008).
Schunk (1984) reports that social comparisons have been found to be an important source for learning appropriate social behaviours and perceiving ability levels relative to others. Similarly, the study has found that peers also positively affected the girls’ perceptions of academic efficacy as they effectively compared their educational level to their peers and experienced positive academic interactions with their classmates. The girls did not specify who these positive interactions were with, that is Muslim or non-Muslim peers; however, in conjunction with the findings of Chen and Tse (2008) and Britto (2008), they did describe the difficulties of interacting with non-Muslim peers as there were inconsistencies between cultural norms, cultural misunderstandings and stereotypical attitudes. Interestingly, when looking at each school separately, girls from the public Saudi school portrayed significantly more positive relationships with their peers (as is discussed in the next section on differences between the school contexts). Considering this school is single-sex, these findings may support theories that girls attending single-sex schools have greater levels of efficacy and self-esteem (see sections 2.2.4 and 2.3.4 of literature review, and section 8.4.3 of this chapter) than those attending co-educational schools. However, claims that girls attending single-sex schools had higher educational aspirations (Haag, 2000) were not supported by these girls’ responses (see for example Figure 5.18 in Chapter Five).

In addition, similar to findings from studies by Zine (2001), Peek (2005) and Shammas (2009), the girls explained that although they did not mind interacting with non-Muslims, they generally preferred the supportive relationships they had with other Muslims as it was easier with, for example, topics of conversation, religious and cultural language they used, and religious observances they participated in. The structure of these relationships was also discussed during the focus groups, with teachers expressing their observations of Muslim girls tending to group together, adding however that grouping was a social phenomenon and not specific to Muslims or Muslim girls. Theories regarding socialising and the natural instinct to create networks in a community maintain the importance of such experiences as collective norms and trust in enhancing group members’ life chances (Lin, 2001). As such, these sub-cultures, particularly within public schools, provided the girls with greater levels of security and comfort. Undoubtedly, as the Muslims attending the private Islamic schools were the dominant group, and thus Islam was the dominant culture, they felt this support more intensely (Sanjakdar, 2001).
As many children illustrate a desire to conform to the standards of their peers (Caldas, 2007), it was not surprising to find some of the girls in the study experienced times when they wanted to change something about themselves, such as their colour, their name or the way they dressed, to make them more mainstream. However, according to the girls, these were temporary thoughts and feelings which appeared the strongest after being negatively peer pressured by non-Muslim peers (Zine, 2001). Thus, as mentioned above, and as reported by Zine (2001), Peek (2005) and Shammas (2009), the girls found comfort in relationships they fostered with Muslim peers based on affinity and mutual interest. It is important to remember though, that despite the obvious comfort and security the girls felt with other Muslims, they remained steadfast in their ideals that no one was different, difference was not an excuse for hatred or discrimination, and that it was ‘not nice to only hang around Muslims’.

8.3.5 The home environment factor

Findings regarding the influence of the home environment on self-efficacy indicated the positive impact that parents had on most girls through their high expectations of their daughters and continuous encouragement and support. This positive influence was illustrated as the girls displayed high self-efficacy especially regarding parent expectations and getting help for social problems. The girls strongly believed their parents expected them to achieve high results and succeed in achieving their ambitions. They also displayed no concerns with their ability in getting assistance from their parents or other members from their home environment when they had social problems. Similar to the findings Basit (1997) reported, the parents, especially mothers, had a positive attitude towards the education of their daughters which filtered through to the girls who had high educational and career aspirations themselves. These findings concur with literature that indicates the continuing importance of parent support in the protection and positive development of children through to adolescence (Rueger et al., 2008). They also support the promotion of creating opportunities for parents to examine their beliefs and expectations about their child’s future and about their parental responsibilities in supporting their child’s development (Powell and Peet, 1996).

There was one area where girls from the private Australian schools appeared to display a considerably lower efficacy than the other participants which was in getting their parents to take
part in school activities. Some girls did not give explanations for why they could not get their parents to be involved in school; however, a number of students indicated that it was not their inability but rather it was that their parents had other commitments including work, study and other children to look after. Despite lack of parent involvement being due to something as understandable and unavoidable such as work commitments, it has been portrayed by numerous studies to be immensely beneficial in the social and academic experiences of children (Peterson-Del Mar, 1994; Smith and Holdaway, 1995; Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith, 2000; Kessler-Sklar and Baker, 2000; Pena, 2000; Crozier, 2001; Geenen et al., 2001; Sheldon, 2002). Although parents were not included as participants in this study, it is important to explore the reasons behind some parents not taking part in school activities. Past studies have portrayed the idea that parents of minority students often do not participate or involve themselves in their child’s schooling because they feel marginalised (Crozier, 2001). However, it would seem plausible that such reasons would probably not apply to Muslim parents who have students in an Islamic school. Thus, this is an area that requires further research, particularly regarding Muslim parents in Australia.

8.4 Differences between school contexts

Sociological and ethnographic research has shown the important role context plays on both the identity and self-efficacy of individuals. Identity has been described as being contextualised (Basit, 1997) with individuals negotiating their identities by adopting and adapting according to their context. Context has been particularly emphasised in theories of self-efficacy as contextual factors have been presented as greatly impacting on self-beliefs in combination with other individuals and behaviour (Lent et al., 2002; Lent et al., 2005). In addition, if the approach of ‘which boys, which girls?’ (Collins et al., 2000) is to be taken, it follows that differences among and between these girls be taken into account. Thus, some variations in the findings are discussed below to illuminate possible differences according to context in how the girls identify themselves and in the perceptions they have of their efficacy levels. These results however, should be taken cautiously as they rely heavily on the quantitative data collected, which may be regarded as relatively small in sample size. The sample size was also a reason behind tests of significance not being conducted on the quantitative data as the numbers in the questionnaires were not sufficient. Thus, such
statistical comparisons were not made. Moreover, the findings chapter should be read carefully for the greater number of similarities found between the various school contexts.

### 8.4.1 Identity

There were few differences found between the various contexts regarding their responses of Islamic identity. The reader should also be reminded here, that the public school in Saudi Arabia did not consent for its students to complete the identity section of the questionnaire. Nonetheless, the few differences that were highlighted from the other three school contexts are interesting to note. For example, concerning feelings of belonging to their religious group, almost all the girls from the public Australian schools and from the private Saudi school indicated a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community, considerably more than the girls from the private Islamic schools in Australia. It is intriguing that girls in an all-Islamic school did not feel as strongly in their sense of belonging to their own religious group. However, it seems unsurprising that as the identity of being a Muslim for the girls from the public school would stand out more amongst the rest of the school, then it is inferred that they would also feel more protective of this special difference, and thus hold strong to this distinct aspect of their identity.

Furthermore, the greatest inconsistencies surfaced when students were asked questions regarding their non-Muslim orientation. For instance, less than half of the girls from private schools in Australia agreed that it was acceptable for different religious groups to mix, whereas approximately two thirds of the girls attending the public schools in Australia, and 85% of the girls from the private Saudi school thought it was acceptable. In addition, significantly more girls from the Australian public schools indicated that they tried to become friends with non-Muslims compared to the two private school contexts. There were also fewer girls from the private Australian schools who indicated that they spent time with non-Muslims than those from both the Saudi private school and the Australian public schools. Both the above examples further highlight the impression of ‘separateness’ as an issue, as mentioned in the above discussion. They seem to support the idea that private religious based schools lead to forms of isolation and segregation from mainstream society. As teachers mentioned during the focus groups (an idea which also emerged in the literature), there seems to be a need to encourage and implement systems of
integration between the two different school systems. However, it should clearly be noted that the above differences were derived from the questionnaires, whereas comments made during the interviews regarding non-Muslims did not show such a great difference in the opinions of the girls. It did emerge from the interviews though, that the girls from the private schools did not interact on a regular basis with non-Muslims as did the other girls. This has been discussed earlier in this chapter in greater detail (see discussion on Islamic identity under section 8.2).

8.4.2 Self-efficacy

A number of contextual differences were found regarding perceptions of self-efficacy, particularly in areas concerning their self, their teachers and their peers. One such difference was found in the number of girls who agreed that it was their own ability which allowed them to make friends, with considerably more girls from public schools agreeing so. Another difference which stood out regarding the girls’ social self-efficacy showed that significantly fewer girls from the Saudi public school found it easy to resist peer pressure, with twice as many from Australian schools perceiving they could and more than two thirds from the Saudi private school believing they could.

Differences were also highlighted when the girls were asked for their perceptions regarding academic efficacy. For example, the public Saudi school generally had more girls respond positively to questions on effort in class work, considerably more who thought they were smart, and who agreed that it was not hard for them to get good grades in school. In addition, significantly more of these girls disagreed that they were insecure about their ability to do things or that they could not handle unexpected problems. A great difference was also found between these girls and those from private Australian schools with considerably more indicating they do school work because they are interested in it. More of these girls also agreed that the best type of class work did not make them think; that is, they did not have to place great effort into the task.

Results indicated that girls from the Saudi private school were less likely to check their work or work out where they went wrong, and more agreed they could finish assignments by deadlines than girls from the other three contexts. These girls also indicated that they were more insecure about their ability to do things than the other girls and more of them found it harder to get good
grades in school. On the other hand, twice as many of these girls from the private Saudi school believed they would go to college when they were old enough than girls from the private Australian schools.

A greater number of girls from both Australian and Saudi Arabian public school contexts indicated they did their work because understanding it was important, than did girls from the private schools. However, in contradiction to these responses, girls from the public schools in Australia were conspicuous in their responses with not many of them believing it mattered if they did well in school.

A number of differences were also found in the responses the girls gave regarding their teachers. For instance, both Saudi schools were more likely (all girls but one) to describe their teachers as allowing peer tutoring in class than girls from the Australian school contexts. Girls attending the private international school in Saudi Arabia indicated that it was easier for them to approach their teachers than it was for the other girls, with the girls from the public Australian schools finding it the most difficult. Girls from the public schools in Australia also indicated a greater belief that peers who get better grades get more help from the teacher than they do. A greater number of girls from the private Australian schools believed their teachers thought they were smart, than did girls from the other contexts.

A greater gap was found between the public Saudi schools and the other contexts in a number of their responses. For example, slightly fewer girls from the public Saudi school agreed that they could get teachers to help them when they needed help with school work, as compared to the other three school contexts. In addition, significantly more of these girls believed they could live up to their teachers expectations, and the majority believed their grades would improve if the teacher liked them better as opposed to the majority disagreeing from other schools.

Finally, some differences were also found in the responses regarding their peers, again with the greatest variance coming from the Saudi public school. For example, all girls but one from the public Saudi school found it easy to start a conversation with peers, compared to only about two thirds from the other schools. More of these girls were also sure of being able to live up to peer expectations, and more agreed they were accepted by their peers during group work. In addition, a greater number of girls from both private school contexts found it more difficult to concentrate
when distracted. Finally, twice as many girls from the public Australian schools agreed classmates wanted them to come to class everyday than from the private Saudi school.

Overall, girls from the public school in Saudi portrayed a stronger belief in their academic self-efficacy than girls from the other three school contexts regarding beliefs about effort and ability. On the contrary, girls from the private school in Saudi Arabia portrayed weaker beliefs in their academic self-efficacy, with the Australian school contexts varying in-between the two. These results allude to the crucial significance of cultural context and its effects on the comfort and confidence of the students. The public school girls in Saudi undoubtedly feel comfortable in their surroundings where they share the language and the culture of both their immediate school environment and the larger community. In contrast, the International school in Saudi has for example an English medium in a country where Arabic is the first language. This may cause some students to experience feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence.

In addition, students from Saudi appeared to have closer relationships with their teachers compared to the public school girls in Australia. Being a minority in a mainstream school, the public school girls in Australia may have experienced a sense of insecurity and the notion of being outsiders which Shah (2006) describes as feelings of being marginalised or ‘misunderstood’. This is in contrast to the experiences of the Saudi girls, particularly from the public school, as they not only belong to the dominant culture of the school but also that of the mainstream community. These apparently closer relationships Saudi girls had with their teachers may also explain why girls from the public school placed greater emphasis on teachers’ assistance as leading to greater results (see for example the Findings Chapter on teacher self-efficacy). Furthermore, as the curriculum is tailored to the majority (see Chapter regarding school contexts), it is evident that the Saudi girls in the public school were particularly supported by the hidden curriculum and the granted assurance of ‘belonging’ and having better opportunities. Thus, it is understandable why girls from the Australian public school demonstrated sentiments of differential treatment as they were aware of their minority status and the provisions (or lack of) that needed to be made to accommodate them in the mainstream school.

Some differences were also highlighted in the open-ended questions, where particular experiences were predominant for each of the various school contexts. For example, when describing situations or experiences they felt confident in, girls from the private Islamic schools in
Australia were more likely to indicate experiencing confidence while performing, whereas girls from both Saudi Arabian schools indicated a greater likelihood of feeling confident while demonstrating academic and sporting strengths. With the exception of two girls from Australia, a considerable number of girls from Saudi Arabia were the only ones who mentioned confidence with immediate and extended family members. Girls from the public schools in Australia were not as concentrated with their answers, however a slightly greater number indicated confidence when they were with their friends or when they were displaying their strengths.

Open-ended responses regarding times when the girls felt shy or upset drew out some interesting contrasts. For example, where no girls from both the public school in Saudi Arabia and the Australian private schools indicated being teased or feeling socially insecure as being one of their major issues, the public schools in Australia had almost half of the girls and the private school in Saudi had a quarter of the girls list such experiences as being times of shyness and being upset. Specific examples given by the girls showed that most of the teasing was of a discriminatory or racist nature. Of greater concern for the girls attending the private Australian schools were issues with friends and embarrassing moments, and the public school girls in Saudi had dispersed answers with their shy or upsetting moments being caused by friends, family, demonstrating weaknesses or failures, and embarrassing moments.

Fewer differences were found when the girls described a time they felt happy learning at school. However, while the majority of girls from each school described experiences while they were learning or demonstrating their achievements as being happy times, half the girls from the public school in Saudi indicated the significance of their friends in their school life. These girls emphasised that being with friends while learning at school was of greater importance to them, than indicated by the other girls.

The last question also brought out some differences. All the schools had a significant number of girls indicate issues with friends as causing them to feel unhappy at school. However, where the Saudi school girls stressed issues surrounding problems with learning as being of major concern, the Australian school girls indicated being unhappy because of issues with teasing or getting into trouble.
8.4.3 Single-sex schooling

To recapitulate, the public school in Saudi Arabia was a single-sex (girls) school and two of the private schools approached in Australia had single-sex classes in the upper grades, whereas the public schools in Australia and the private international school in Saudi Arabia were co-educational. As mentioned in Chapter Two, it was of interest to the researcher to find if there were any significant differences between the school contexts in this study and whether being in a single-sex educational context had any influence on the perceptions of self-efficacy or identity of the girls. Nonetheless, the study did not have a specific question about single-sex schooling for the girls, most of whom had no other experience of a different school, so that their perceptions of self-efficacy and identity were not coloured by a lens of ‘type of school’. For the teachers, there was some discussion among those teachers who had experienced both single-sex and co-educational schools. The interpretation of the data therefore is extrapolated from both the quantitative and qualitative findings. Although the study did not provide sufficient information to justify a comparative study, the findings drawn from the data did elucidate some important differences relating to the context. It should also be highlighted that the school contexts which are divided as single-sex or co-educational are similarly divided as schools with an all-Islamic contextual factor and those with a mixed-religion contextual factor, respectively. Hence, it would be unreasonable and problematic to pinpoint categorically which of the factors is the determining factor in how the girls perceive their efficacy and sense of self.

Nonetheless, when analysing the comparisons made in the previous section from the perspective of single-sex schooling versus co-educational, one of the differences found was that girls from the all-girls public Saudi school, portrayed significantly more positive relationships with their peers indicating greater levels of social efficacy and self-esteem than those attending co-educational schools. Another finding which may support single-sex schooling was that no girls from both the public school in Saudi Arabia and the Australian private schools indicated being teased or feeling socially insecure whereas almost half of the girls from the co-educational contexts of the Australian public schools and a quarter of the girls from the private school in Saudi listed such experiences as being times of shyness and being upset. In support of co-educational schooling however, fewer of the girls in the single-sex context found it easy to resist peer pressure and there were more girls from a co-educational context agreeing it was their ability which allowed them to
make friends. These differences illustrate the varying opinions on single-sex education found in other research (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2.4 on gender and education). In addition, as Arnot (2009) suggests, gender relations are deeply embedded within other social relations, which affects the differential access to citizenship prerogatives. Thus, it is problematic to explain the above findings only by pointing to single-sex schooling as distinctly the ‘cause’.

The perceptions of academic efficacy of girls from the private Australian schools and those from the public Saudi school also produced findings in support of both types of schooling contexts. In opposition to single-sex schooling, fewer girls attending single-sex schools indicated having higher educational aspirations. Nevertheless, more of these girls indicated they placed effort in class work, they thought they were smart, agreed that it was not hard for them to get good grades, were more secure about their ability to do things, and could handle unexpected problems, than those attending co-educational schools.

In regards to their identity, fewer girls from the single-sex school contexts indicated a strong sense of Islamic identity. For example, as was mentioned earlier, not as many of these girls as those from the co-educational school contexts indicated a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community. This reinforces the supposition that where everyone is from a similar religious background, there will be less mention of this identifying characteristic.

Notwithstanding, the comparisons mentioned in the previous section also showed differences between the girls who were in single-sex schools or classes; just as there were differences between the girls in co-educational school contexts. Thus, although some comparisons have been made from the findings, the issue of single-sex schooling remains an ongoing debate with strong and convincing arguments for both sides of the discussion. Nonetheless, the impact of the context on efficacy and identity formation is supported by some trends and differences found in this study and thus need to be taken into account in areas of leadership. As teachers have commented on the lack of knowledge regarding the problems or solutions surrounding engagement and retention of students in general, answers may be found in the strengths of single-sex schooling in combination with those of co-educational schools. The great contribution this study makes is accordingly further emphasised as the immense potential for other studies to follow-up with in-depth comparative studies on differences between Muslim and non-Muslim countries, and single-
Chapter Eight ~ Discussion

sex versus co-educational schooling is highlighted; particularly in their effect on Muslim girls’ perceptions of identity and self-efficacy.

8.4.4 Differences in teacher perspectives

As the study investigated the perspectives of teachers from the various contexts, it follows that any differences and contrasts that surfaced between the Saudi and Australian teachers’ comments should be considered. Thus, some variations found in the findings are discussed below to illuminate possible differences according to context in how the teachers described Muslim girls’ identity and self-efficacy.

One such difference was in the way teachers described how the Muslim girls identified themselves. For example, comments from teachers in Australia indicated that Muslim girls often strongly identified with being Muslim and their visibility as Muslims was a discernible issue. However, teachers in Saudi Arabia observed that their students more often thought of themselves as Saudi first and then as Muslims. This reiterates the previously mentioned notion (see section 8.4.1) that when the majority feel they are ‘similar’ then the comparable identity indicator is not an issue. Being Muslim is part of the dominant culture. Consequently, the teachers’ responses appeared to also support this notion in that when the teachers in Saudi discussed positive or negative experiences they had with Muslim girls, they were rather general and could apply to any girl. The Australian teachers, on the other hand, mentioned positive and negative experiences they had specific to Muslim girls, such as the group of girls who wore the hijab and were still able to show they were academically successful. Teacher responses additionally portrayed that some issues which were not of major concern in Muslim majority schools (that is, the private schools in Australia and the schools in Saudi Arabia), were considered by Australian public school teachers as noteworthy. These included the common grouping together of Muslim girls, the wearing of the hijab, the apparent disengagement from school, communication issues with parents, stereotypes regarding parent perceptions of education and teacher perceptions of student ability. These differences highlight the implications of quality leadership and appropriate teacher training, as is discussed in Chapter Nine. Teachers with a minority Muslim population discussed Muslim girls as a separate group that needed differential treatment and assistance, inadvertently illustrating the
impression of ‘those lot’. The hidden curriculum of teacher subjectivity is thus revealed further with plausible links made to the girls’ perceptions of differential treatment and feelings of belonging or otherwise.

In addition, when discussing the future aspirations of Muslim girls, the teachers in Saudi Arabia described how nowadays there were more Saudi girls who would go on to higher education than in the past. However, when discussing differences in past and present girls, teachers in Australia were more concerned with issues regarding stereotypical attitudes of both mainstream society in what girls could study and of the Muslim community in its attitudes towards girls and education. They commented that although there have been improvements, some stereotypes were still prevalent. Differences in the confidence of Muslim girls were also highlighted by teachers with the teachers in Saudi Arabia and those from the Islamic private schools in Australia indicating most Muslim girls displayed high levels of confidence. Although teachers commented that confidence levels depended on the individual student, the Australian public school teachers believed that some girls did not want to put the effort in or be seen as a certain stereotype; thus, the girls showed no outward signs of confidence. On the other hand, teachers from the Australian Islamic school strongly emphasised that the high confidence levels of their girls was due to the Islamic school environment and the Muslim female teacher role models at school.

These differences have strong implications for future investigations, particularly the necessity of comparative research. In addition, the essential need for more comprehensive studies on identity and the ramifications that contextual factors may have on the sense of self of Muslim girls as well as how the roles of leadership regarding these issues, is further illuminated by the above mentioned differences.
Chapter Eight ~ Discussion
Chapter Nine

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the recommendations and conclusions of this study by dealing with the fifth research question regarding implications for leadership practices, the school and its community. The findings were compared and contrasted in order to arrive at some conclusions and implications for future research and application to the classroom. The recommendations presented here are drawn from the research and intended to provide new avenues for researchers, teachers and principals of schools to develop insightful, relevant and appropriate policies and programs that will assist Muslim primary girls in developing a positive self-identity and higher levels of perceived self-efficacy.
Conclusions:
Leadership and Muslim girls

Implications
Recommendations

Teacher awareness
Leadership
Curriculum

Limitations of the study

Suggestions for future research

And thus…
A new paradigm?
9.2 Implications and recommendations: Leadership and the curriculum for Muslim girls

A final aim of this study was to find what implications the perceptions of these Muslim girls regarding their identity and self-efficacy have on leadership practices, the school and its community in influencing the positive development of their identities and improving their levels of efficacy. The findings from this study in combination with previous studies and the insight of the relevant theories all lead to the critical role leadership and school environments play in the learning, well-being and self-esteem of students (Sosa, 1990; Drake, 2000; Korir and Karr-Kidwell, 2000; Kuersten, 2000; Henze, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Yeh and Drost, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Shah, 2008). The importance of leadership in schools was additionally highlighted by comments made by teachers, particularly regarding the blame they lay in both parents and schools not being able to pinpoint the problems or solutions regarding engagement and retention of students on a whole. It is daunting to contemplate that the answers may lie in what other researchers (Zine, 2001; Shah, 2008) found to be the cause of disengagement of minority students (see Chapter Three, section 3.3). That is, the real possibility that these Australian students, particularly Muslims, are experiencing incidents where their self-esteem and emotional well-being are being compromised.

The literature has shown positive ways of dealing with the issues affecting culturally diverse students by placing precedence on the affective domain, including self-esteem, family values, and cultural pride (Sosa, 1990; Henze, 2001; Baskin, 2002; Yeh and Drost, 2002; Lue, 2003). Accordingly, the findings from this study have highlighted the importance of creating a nurturing environment where Muslim girls are given the freedom and opportunities to experience the process of ‘becoming’ the self they are comfortable with. Throughout the process of ‘becoming’ the woman they choose to be, these pre-adolescent girls are negotiating between their multiple identities of being young Muslim Australian girls of various ethnic backgrounds growing in greatly varying school and social contexts. Consequently, ‘interculturality’ as a concept should be accentuated with support given for incorporating its values in the early stages of a child’s schooling. The implications this concept has for mainstream and minority students attending both public and private Islamic schools are extensive. For example, as teachers noted during the focus groups, collaboration is essential between public and private schools to minimise the effects of ‘separateness’ as an issue, to foster mutual understanding, and to create shared experiences.
Furthermore, this study highlighted the magnitude that perceptions of difference and external influences have on the identity formation of the Muslim girls. As such, leaders in schools, including teachers, need to embed in their students not only the value of diversity, but also the positive connotations of difference in both the mainstream students and the minority groups in their schools. Many girls demonstrated similar attitudes to Rawa who acknowledged her difference at the same time as commenting that it was her difference, her ‘uniqueness’ that made her special, and thus she had positive perceptions of her social self-efficacy and her identity formation. Studies have shown how teachers can help students build self-esteem and efficacy by assisting them to identify internal, personal attributes that make students different and independent, as well as by emphasising the students’ positive attributes (Yeh and Drost, 2002). Undoubtedly, finding similarities between different people and establishing cultural capital is also of great importance to ensure feelings of belonging and acceptance by all students; a point which students and teachers alike continued to bring up during the interviews. Some students continued to emphasise the fact that no one should be treated differently and that we are all the same and teachers emphasised that most characteristics and behaviours they saw in the Muslim girls could be applied to any group of girls no matter what their cultural, religious or social background was. This is a crucial point which many teachers need to take into account, especially considering that during the course of the study the researcher herself observed that teachers and students alike continued to hold stereotypes towards and attribute particular behaviours to Muslims.

The necessity of dealing with stereotypes that are present in the mainstream Australian community (and in many other societies for that matter) is unquestionable. This has great implications on the successful development of social and cultural capital among the Muslim community, especially its youth. Teachers, school leaders, and even the wider community need to be educated not only about Islam the religion (and its different interpretations by various Muslim groups), but also about Muslims as one community as well as the many sub-communities within that. This knowledge may also help ease the issues that teachers have with the cultural mismatch between the home environment and the school, accentuating the urgent need for school-community liaison. Greater understanding on the schools behalf will provide more opportunities for teachers to support the Muslim girls in their specific needs and to be more open to their cultural and religious identities. Many teachers spoke of the benefits gained when they were able to talk to parents directly about their daughters’ education and schooling. The parents were able
to communicate their issues and perceptions and the teachers were able to pass on important information regarding the academic needs of the student. Thus, welcoming families into the school is one form of fostering a sense of common interest and mutual understanding. In addition, Shwartz (1999; see also Phinney et al., 2001) suggests helping families cope with varying levels of acculturation, language differences, and conformity to tradition as it will help students to improve and develop a positive identity. A further point which emerged from this study regarding parents, especially mothers, was the great positive influence they had on their daughters particularly regarding their education and future aspirations. Again, the common misconception evident in the literature and by some comments in the focus groups, that Muslim parents do not encourage their daughters to become academic was undermined as the girls spoke of the encouragement and support they received from home. This support needs to be fostered and encouraged to ensure its continuity and to allow parents the opportunities to examine their beliefs and responsibilities towards their child’s education.

Unfortunately, such matters as quelling entrenched stereotypes take time and society’s views are difficult to change without continuous and concerted campaigning. Hence, it is essential to develop a sense of agency in young Muslim girls. Strength in agency and positive self-efficacy will enable the girls to feel in control of their own lives, and in effect contribute to the lives of others. Having these strengths and positive characteristics will undoubtedly contribute to breaking common stereotypes held about Muslim women, along with the position and image of Muslim women being uplifted. Such examples as the story of the Year 11 girls, which one of the teachers related, need to become common narratives and experiences of many other Muslim girls. Using their intelligence and strength of faith, these girls were able to quell a stereotype that Muslim girls were restricted, un-academic and disengaged from schooling. There are numerous ways in which agency and efficacy can be fostered; however, one of particular benefit is that teachers can help orient students to the future, giving them a sense of individuality and freedom, a goal to look forward to, a sense of their ‘future self’. It is much easier for majority students to internalise these aspects as the expectations, motives, social behaviours, language, and cognitive patterns are one and the same as those of the dominant system (Yeh and Drost, 2002). Providing students with greater opportunities to participate in school activities and partake in areas usually dominated by the mainstream students would also allow for positive efficacy and agency to develop. This was exemplified by Penny’s story during the focus groups of the Muslim boy who became school
captain and the vice-captain Muslim girl who wore the hijab in a school with over 90 per cent Buddhist Chinese students (see Chapter Seven).

Consequently, this study has shown that the context the girls are in will inevitably have some effect on students. Comments made by a number of teachers in the focus groups, particularly teachers who have taught or are teaching in both public and Islamic schools, have perceived a difference in the sense of belonging, comfort and pride of Muslim students. Some teachers reported, as Sanjakdar (2001) found, that when the culture of the girls was reinforced by the total culture and ethos of the school, or the hidden curriculum, it seemed to ease the process of success and acceptance. The Islamic schools also functioned as a community, united where the central life focus of Islam strongly connected students, teachers, parents, school, and community. Although teachers concurred that the success schools and teachers had of providing students with a sense of belonging depended on the school, the school culture, and how much teachers knew about the community, it was the religious and cultural connection between student and teacher that was believed to foster self-esteem. However, as the literature showed, most Muslim students in Australia are enrolled in public schools and so providing for their particular needs and nurturing their sense of belonging to both the school and the community needs to be seriously considered and accounted for. Aasiya for example, showed a great sense of belonging to the school community, although it was a public school. She took part in various school and community activities, such as dancing and Tae Kwon Do, and had various circles of friends made up of girls who shared common interests, such as the athletics girls, her Arab/Muslim friends, or her classmates. This study has demonstrated that children have the ability to navigate through the different contexts of their school, their home and the wider community. Some may regard the girls' differing methods of handling each context as contradictory, however these girls spoke of their experiences as a natural course of their lives, without being consciously aware of the acquired skills of adapting to their various contexts. This leads back to the substantial value and benefits of creating cultural and social capital.

Alternatively, using interculturality as a paradigm, the school community can also benefit from some form of interaction with the minority culture. For example, some of the girls in this study mentioned issues with language and cultural or Islamic terms used, thus as Garcia and Molina (2001) found in their study, teaching the language and culture of the minority group, and
improving the integration of these students, will not only enhance self-esteem, but also reduce ethnic prejudice and ethnocentric behaviour. Other research portrayed similar results (Sosa, 1990; Lipka, 2002; Lue, 2003; Caldas, 2007). Furthermore, Henze (2001), Baskin (2002), and Yeh and Drost (2002), believe that providing opportunities to study and appreciate their own history and culture is another method in improving the sense of self of minority students.

In addition, the value of acknowledging the learning style of students, which are considerably influenced by culture, is evident. Therefore the social context in which they are observed needs to be more carefully considered from a cultural perspective rather than just assigning particular behaviours as indicators of individual personality or character (Yeh and Drost, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Leu, 2003). One method of acknowledging the influence of culture is by ceasing to be ‘identity blind’ and starting to build ‘identity sensitive’ education (Jackson, 2003). Educators need to realise that students from specific minority groups need academic ‘microcultures’ formed (Jackson, 2003) as they are apt to have difficulties with the academic work and strategies of the dominant culture.

A number of studies have portrayed the considerable number of Muslim women who have reported experiencing racism, abuse and violence (HREOC, 2004; Poynting and Noble, 2004; Hassan, 2007). However, the girls in this study do not appear to have yet reached an understanding of the reality some Muslim women experience, or the severity of the apparently widespread racial and religious discrimination. Therefore, what teachers and leaders do with these pre-adolescent Muslim girls now and later in high school, will be crucial in consolidating their identity, self-esteem and self-efficacy. If such widespread discrimination is to continue against Muslim females, they need to be equipped with powerful and empowering social and cultural tools in order to limit the influence such possible negative experiences will have on them. In fact, the girls in this study were already beginning to demonstrate positive identity formation (incorporating their multiple selves) and self-efficacy. They also exhibited ontological security in their display of trust to those around them and in the belief that they were essentially the same as everyone else. As mentioned earlier, this trust that the girls have in the world around them needs to be protected and supported to ensure confidence in their social setting and a sense of belonging to their local and global community. This support is especially needed as they approach and travel through the difficult adolescent years with teachers commenting during the focus
groups that at this age, teenagers begin to question themselves and their abilities, with a great increase in their insecurities. Thus, starting early is emphasised.

*When they’re younger, you’re instilling the values of the importance of education and the importance of their identity, and it doesn’t matter who you are or where you are that you can achieve something. I believe that it really starts early, because if you don’t have that either from the home or from the school, from a younger age, it’s very hard to get back into them when they’re in high school. Nadia*

Similar findings have been noted in the literature review. These girls are also at a critical age where they are still positive, impressionable, idealistic, accepting and open. Thus, it is an ideal time to ingrain values of community, cooperation, and in essence interculturality, in both minority groups and the mainstream dominant cultures utilising specific programs and policies.

It should also be noted that the girls in this study were still reasonably sheltered and were still developing their sense of self. In a few years time, they will be faced with bigger choices (such as whether and when to wear the hijab) and will encounter many more obstacles and first hand experiences (including discrimination and stereotypes) rather than the current impressions and experiences they have had passed onto them from others. Adolescence may also bring rebellious behaviour towards their religious or cultural traditions, towards the expectations of previous generations or even towards the communities they live in. The potentially rich and interesting information that can be obtained from following these girls up in five or ten years’ time is undeniable.

Finally, findings from this study and the literature reviewed have both shown how important it is for teachers to take into consideration the issues mentioned above regarding identity formation in order to best provide for minority students. Students often choose to adopt multiple ethnicities or identities (Yeh and Drost, 2002; Kabir, 2008; Su and Costigan, 2009), and therefore teachers should be aware of this and not try to pressure or expect children to form a single identity, nor should they prioritise one over the other (Yeh and Drost, 2002). Understanding the theories behind identity formation, including the concept of hybridity is a crucial step for teachers in laying the foundations of accepting and effectively supporting students in forming their own personal identities.
9.3 Limitations of the study

This study provided an insightful view into the beliefs pre-adolescent Muslim girls had of their identity and self-efficacy in Australia with added perspectives from Saudi Arabia. However, while drawing conclusions from the research findings, it is imperative to allow for some limitations.

One of the leading limitations was the size of the sample. The number of participants representing Muslim girls from the various contexts is considered rather small and thus general and overarching conclusions about the identity and self-efficacy of pre-adolescent Muslim girls cannot be made. In addition, the data were collected in only two suburbs in Australia, where the representation of the Muslim community varied from being largely populated by Muslims to having a scatter of Muslim families.

As the sample size was small, this study did not represent the diversity of the Muslim community in its participants even though students from various backgrounds were included. Therefore, general results should be interpreted cautiously as culture has been shown to greatly affect identity and self-efficacy. Indeed the small sample size was a motivator to use narratives as a form of data collection to gather more detailed and in-depth life-stories of the girls. Although this process was initiated in one of the private school settings, it was difficult to continue in the other schools due to the conglomeration of all the other limitations, mainly time limits and accessibility.

A further constraint to this study was the difficulty in accessing public schools and more specifically public school teachers who were willing to take part in the focus groups. The apparent misconceptions for some schools about the nature of the study (for example, ‘Arabic survey’) may have impinged on teacher perceptions of the research resulting in a certain level of non-acceptance towards the researcher’s presence. One school in particular was reluctant in allowing the teacher access to staff requesting for example that she not remain in the staffroom when the teachers arrived for their morning tea. In addition, the role of the researcher was questioned with the principal’s concern about what their students had said about their teachers and that the teachers could not ‘give their side of the story’. Given that the students were told their responses were absolutely confidential and would not identify them as individuals, the request led to a potential ethical and moral conflict, and to some awkwardness when the researcher explained that she could not reveal individual students’ statements. Fortunately, the student population of
these schools was large and this disagreement did not jeopardise the outcomes of the research, with data from all participants included. Thus in the end, more girls from public schools took part than those from the more newly established private schools, as those that participated had a small student population. It is important to consider that there were more public school girls represented than private school.

9.4 Suggestions for future research

It is expected with any research project undertaken that new questions will emerge as the researcher attempts to answer their initial research questions and as the limitations make it difficult for one study to completely give justice to a particular topic. This study provided crucial conclusions about the perceptions that young Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia and especially in Australia had about their identity and self-efficacy. However, as a result of studying the girls in both public and private school contexts, new questions and areas of concern were highlighted as possible subjects for future investigation. Thus, the following is a list of suggestions for further research:

1. As one of the leading ways the girls identified themselves was through their perceptions of how they believed others defined them, it would be beneficial to look into what mainstream Australians, in their own words, believe about Muslims. Kabir (2005) has noted that the apparent xenophobic and discriminative attitudes that mainstream Australians held towards Muslims was because they were unfamiliar with Islamic culture or because Muslims were viewed as a threat to the majority culture and to security. The implications this idea has for teachers and leaders, as well as school programs and policies, is quite noteworthy, with possible suggestions arising as to how to effectively familiarise mainstream society and students with Islamic culture.

2. The above suggestion directs one to propose that the curriculum taught in schools, both public and private, needs to be analysed in great depth with a candidness that will allow bias, stereotypes, inaccurate facts, and the omission of complete cultures relevant to all Australian society (and not just Muslims), to be recognised and amended.
3. This study did not aim to measure the levels of self-efficacy and identity the girls had but rather it was an aim to allow the girls to use their own voices to portray their own perceptions regarding their identity and self-efficacy. However, this study revealed the serious need in ethnic and religious identity research to devise reliable and valid measures of ethnic and religious identity. To accomplish this, it is important to distinguish between general aspects of ethnic and religious identity that apply across groups and specific aspects that distinguish groups. General measures would be valuable in addressing the important questions about ethnic and religious identity that are raised by theory. The need for such measures is supported by Britto’s (2008) claim that a consolidated conceptual model of the multiple dimensions of an Islamic identity is needed to appropriately research the way Muslim children clarify their identity (as discussed in Chapter Two).

4. In a study by Klassen (2004), it was found that differences in cultural beliefs were associated with differences in sources that predicted self-efficacy. This study found no major differences in the sources impacting on the girls’ perceptions of their self-efficacy. Islam was a generalising religious and cultural aspect of all the girls in the study and although there was some variety in the ethnic background of the girls, there was limited representation of such differences found in Australian society. Thus, it would be interesting to further examine this by completing a similar study on girls with different cultural beliefs, with sufficient representation from both the mainstream and the multitude of minority groups, to determine if there are differences. In addition, a greater representation of girls from Saudi Arabia, including more in-depth data collection, would have given the study more grounds for an insightful and compelling comparative study between the two countries.

5. Similarly, as boys were not represented in this study, the research should be repeated with Muslim boys, ideally those who are in the same schools or similar schooling contexts. This may help to determine if their experiences in the same schools have impacted on their perceptions of identity and self-efficacy in the same manner as the Muslim girls or whether their voices will demonstrate disparate perceptions of their sense of self. This study reiterated the sensitivity of the position Muslim boys are in, especially in Australian
Chapter Nine ~ Conclusions

society, with a number of comments made by the teachers suggesting that Muslim or Arab boys were commonly seen as uneducated and disengaged from both schooling and society, and experienced greater issues with mainstream society (see teacher comments in section 7.2 of the Phase Three findings chapter).

6. Another important issue is to conduct similar studies which take into consideration the impact of other factors, such as the participants’ socioeconomic status. Most past studies also seem to have neglected this as a variable (Phinney, 1990).

7. A longitudinal study on the same girls in five or ten years’ time after they have experienced adolescence and as they enter adulthood would give insight into how their earlier self-beliefs and attitudes supported or hindered their development through the years, whether their ideas have changed, how their future was affected, and of course how their perceptions of self-efficacy and identity have developed.

9.5 Conclusion

This study has highlighted the importance of enquiring into the identity and self-efficacy of pre-adolescent Muslim girls using their voices to gain insight into their perceptions. This does not apply only to Muslims but to all minority groups whose needs must also be met. At the core of the above discussion is the necessity for leaders to move beyond the assumptions and stereotypes, ‘to understand the extent of de-motivation the Muslim students make conscious efforts to struggle against’ (Shah, 2006, p.227). The manner in which the findings of this study help to work against the negative stereotypes of Muslim girls and women is accordingly an important contribution of this thesis. Similar to what researchers such as Zine (2006) have found, the girls in this study portrayed an opposition to the stereotypes they encountered at school and the wider community, which rendered them ‘oppressed, backward, and uneducated’ (Zine, 2006). Concepts of sharing, ownership, values and respect are essential to instil in individuals and groups in order to effectively encourage an environment that contributes to achievement (Shah, 2006). Halse (2006) adds the need to return to ideas of ‘social capital’ within community discourse allowing a space to
share and understand differences, and to demonstrate a collective concern for all members of society. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), social capital is:

> the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.119).

The consequences of not investing in social capital may be that Australian society becomes isolated individuals and groups who are concerned about self rather than community advancement and are divided by differences rather than enriched by them (Halse, 2006). The insight of Tajfel (1982) over two and half decades ago, rings true today with recent opinions of social and cultural researchers, as well as teachers in this study, agreeing that if opportunities were presented for in-groups and out-groups to relate in certain forms of interaction, the ‘depersonalisation’ of members of an out-group can dissolve or at least be diminished (Tajfel, 1982).

In solution, the need for a concept such as ‘interculturality’ becomes more evident, particularly as the populations of all societies have become so diversified (Crozet et al., 1999). Such a concept allows for greater equality as it emphasises that everyone has an ethnic background that should be valued and that ‘ethnicity is not limited to those outside the dominant culture’ (Crozet and Liddicoat, 1999, p.117). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) also highlight this diversification and lack of a pure, single culture as individuals have become ‘nomadic’:

> It is a travelling life, both literally and metaphorically, a nomadic life ... a transnational life stretching across frontiers (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.25).

This study has further recognised the identity formation of the girls as a passage to ‘becoming’ the self they choose to be. This journey of ‘becoming’ involves the girls in making ‘choices about what to hold and what to relinquish, what to adopt and what to let pass’ (Liddicoat et al., 1999, p.181). This all takes place in the ‘third place’, or ‘meeting place’, where every intercultural interaction leads to a renegotiation of the original and evolving cultural identity. This negotiation continues to validate, value and include both self and other until ‘a comfortable position leading to a hybrid third place’ is established (Liddicoat et al., 1999, p.181).

Consequently, the self-efficacy of students has been shown to be enhanced by motivating children to achieve, exposing them to positive academic and social models, and teaching them strategies to
Chapter Nine ~ Conclusions

overcome challenges (Schunk and Meece, 2005). Schooling in particular has many possible influences on the self-efficacy of children including instruction methods, learning levels, performance feedback, competition, grading practices, amount and type of teacher attention, and school transitions (Schunk and Meece, 2005). In addition, good schools, both private and public, have been described by Spinner-Halev (2005) as those that help students deepen their understanding of themselves and of others, so that they can explore their identity as they wish. Peers also play an influential role in the self-efficacy development of students as they contribute greatly to self-perceptions and socialisation (Schunk and Meece, 2005). Furthermore, teachers working with children in multicultural settings need to recognise the strength of self-efficacy beliefs in predicting accomplishments across cultures as these could be the best indicator of future accomplishments (Klassen, 2004). In order to facilitate and provide support in a nurturing learning environment in the most effective manner, school leaders need to also develop and enhance self-efficacy within themselves, their teachers, and parents (Losee, 2000), and not just within the students.

Finally, a key realisation for the researcher emerged that self-efficacy and identity cannot be separated nor can the impact of one be preferred over the other regarding the formation of a positive and healthy sense of self. Both relate to and affect each other. In line with the well-known quotation, ‘prevention is better than cure’, it is of great value that this study has illuminated the serious need to reach students at an early age to ensure they develop positive self-efficacy and are supported in the formation of their own chosen and negotiated identity. All before stereotypes and negative experiences get a chance to impact on what type of adults they turn out to be and what attitudes they will hold towards themselves and towards mainstream society. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that the various issues discussed above as affecting identity formation and self-efficacy will have distinctive outcomes for different students. How the school context advantages or disadvantages a child depends on the individual student, their personal and school circumstances, their specific settings, and individual experiences. As Basma stated, giving a concise description of the ideas of all the teachers:

So the teacher does have a huge role, and also the school ethos, school culture, home background. It’s a myriad of factors. I don’t believe you can pinpoint it on one particular thing like just the classroom, just the school, just the family life. It’s lots of factors. Basma


References


References


Laragy, (2007). *Hybridity: Key concepts in postcolonial studies.* Retrieved July 22, 2007, from The Imperial Archive, [http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm](http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm)


References


The Holy Quran, Chapter 96: verses 1-5, interpretation of the meanings.


Yasmeen, S. (2008). *Understanding Muslim identities: From perceived relative exclusion to inclusion*. Perth: Centre for Muslim States and Societies, University of Western Australia.


Appendix A: Self-efficacy questionnaire
SELF EFFICACY QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: __________________ Age: ___________ Class: __________
School: _______________ Date: __________
Language spoken at home: _______________ Nationality: ____________

This survey will help me find out how confident you feel about learning and about your confidence interacting socially with others. Don’t worry, this is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. No-one will know what you wrote except me.

Please read the questions carefully and tick the statement that you think describes your feelings the best in the first part of the survey. Choose only one answer. Do not talk about your answers with anyone else.

The second part of the survey includes four open-ended questions where you can write as much detail as you want. Please answer all the questions.

Example:

A student may say: ‘I think pepperoni pizza is best’,

- If you are really positive that pepperoni pizza is best, place a tick in the (Strongly Agree) box.
- If you think that it is good but maybe not great, place a tick in the (Agree) box.
- If you can’t decide whether or not it is best, place a tick in the (unsure) box.
- If you think that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, place a tick in the (Disagree) box.
- If you are really positive that pepperoni pizza is not very good, place a tick in the (Strongly Disagree) box.

Thank you for filling in this survey. 😊 😊 😊

Najah El-Biza

(University of Wollongong, Australia)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Efficacy</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I find it difficult to get to know new people at a social event.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I often meet new and interesting people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My teacher does not respect my opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Most students in this class want me to come to class every day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I have acquired my friends through my personal abilities at making friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am able to deal with situations where others are annoying me or hurting my feelings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My teacher really understands how I feel about things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Most students in this class want me to fail.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My teacher does not try to help me when I am sad or upset.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My teacher cares about how much I learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I can live up to what my parents expect of me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most students in this class are nice to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I am afraid to express my opinions when others classmates disagree with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My teacher likes to see my work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My teacher does not want me to do my best in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I can get adults to help me when I have social problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I find it hard to get along with my teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I can explain my point of view to other students in my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Most students in this class don’t care about how much I learn.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I find it easy to just go and talk to my teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Efficacy</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. My teacher discourages us to share ideas with one another in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I find it easy to start a conversation with most students in my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. My teacher lets us ask other students when we need help with our work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. My teacher makes sure that students don't say anything negative about each other in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I can always get someone in my family to help me with a problem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. My teacher wants us to respect each others’ opinions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I can explain my point of view to my teacher.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I do not get along with most of the students in my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I can live up to what my peers expect of me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I work badly with other students in my class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. I can get teachers to help me when I get stuck on school work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I always stand up for myself when I feel I am being treated unfairly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I can live up to what I expect of myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I find it difficult to get another student to help me when I get stuck on homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I’m not very good at getting a friend to help me when I have social problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I find it easy to resist peer pressure to do the things in school that can get me into trouble</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I can live up to what my teachers think of me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I can carry on conversations with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I stand firm to someone who is asking me to do something unreasonable or inconvenient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I can easily get my parents to take part in school activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Efficacy</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. If something looks too complicated, I will not even bother to try it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I work hard in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When unexpected problems occur, I don't handle them very well.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel insecure about my ability to do things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I could get the best grades in class if I tried enough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It is not hard for me to get good grades in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When the class does group work, I see myself as a valuable group member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What I learn in school is not important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would get better grades if my teacher liked me better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I go to a good school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. When I set important goals for myself, I rarely achieve them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Sometimes I think an assignment is easy when the other kids in class think it's hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. When I am old enough I will go to college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My teacher thinks I am smart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My classmates usually get better grades than I do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I usually understand my homework assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. It does not matter if I do well in school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Kids who get better grades than I do get more help from the teacher than I do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. During group work, I often feel unaccepted by other group members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I am smart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. When I finish my work, I check it to make sure it's done correctly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I will quit school as soon as I can</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Efficacy</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. When the teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer even if the other kids don’t</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. When I run into difficulty doing my class work, I go back and work out where I went wrong.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Failure just makes me try harder.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I like class work that I’ll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I often remember information presented in class and textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. When other students are distracting me in class, I often find it difficult to keep concentrating on my work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. When I’m working on a problem, I think about whether I understand what I'm doing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I help other kids when they don’t know what to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. An important reason I do my schoolwork is because I am interested in it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I am good at finishing homework assignments by deadlines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. I never answer questions from the teacher in class.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. An important reason I do my schoolwork is because I like to learn new things.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I like class work best when it does not make me think.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I find it difficult to motivate myself to do school work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. An important reason I do my schoolwork is because understanding the work we do is important to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Even if the work in class is hard, I can learn it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I am not very good at organizing my school work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I find it easy to participate in class discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 2:

Answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

(a) When was the last time you felt really confident when you were with a small group of people. What was happening?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

(b) Describe a time when you felt very shy or upset. What was happening?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

(c) Describe a time when you are learning at school and you feel happy. What is happening?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

(d) If you are sometimes unhappy when you are at school, what makes you feel like that? What is happening?

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: The Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure-Muslims (MEIM-M)
THE MULTIGROUP ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE-MUSLIMS
By: Jean S. Phinney
Adjusted to measure Islamic identity by: Mohammad Adnan Alghorani.

Instructions:
In this country, people come from a lot of different cultures and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or religious groups that people adopt. Some examples of the names of religious groups are Muslim, Christian, Jew and so forth.

Every person is born into a religious group, or sometimes two groups, but people differ on how important their religion is to them, how they feel about it, and how much their behavior is affected by it. These questions are about your religion or your religious group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please, fill in! In terms of religious group, I consider myself to be __________.

Use the numbers given below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement!

4: Strongly Agree.
3: Somewhat Agree.
2: Somewhat Disagree.
1: Strongly Disagree.

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my own religious group, such as history, traditions, and customs. ______

2. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own religious group. ______

3. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own religious group. ______

4. I like meeting and getting to know people from religious groups other than my own. ______

5. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my religious group membership. ______

6. I am happy that I am a member of the religious group I belong to. ______

7. I sometimes felt it would be better if different religious groups didn’t try to mix together. ______
8. I am not very clear about the role of my religion in my life. __________
9. I often spend time with people from religious groups other than my own. __________
10. I really have not spent much time trying to learn more about the culture and history of my religious group. __________
11. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own religious group. __________
12. I understand pretty well what my religious group membership means to me, in terms of how to relate to my own religious group membership. __________
13. In order to learn more about my religious background, I have often talked to other people about my religious group. __________
14. I have a lot of pride in my religious group and its accomplishments. __________
15. I don’t try to become friends with people from other religious groups. __________
16. I participate in cultural practices of my own religious group, such as special food or customs. __________
17. I am involved in activities with people from other religious groups. __________
18. I feel a strong attachment towards my own religious group. __________
19. I enjoy being around people from religious groups other than my own. __________
20. I feel good about my cultural or religious background. __________

Place a check mark next to the best answer to each question!

21. My religion is:
   [ ] Islam  [ ] Christianity  [ ] Judaism  [ ] Other (write in) __________

22. My father’s religion is:
   [ ] Islam  [ ] Christianity  [ ] Judaism  [ ] Other (write in) __________

23. My mother’s religion is:
   [ ] Islam  [ ] Christianity  [ ] Judaism  [ ] Other (write in) __________

Thank you for your time!
Appendix C: Teacher questionnaire
Teacher questionnaire

Please answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. Give specific examples of experiences/stories where possible. Type your answers under each question, use as much space as you need. Try to answer the questions with girls living in Saudi Arabia in mind.

Give some details about your background (include years of teaching, where taught, ages, type of schools etc)

•

What is your opinion about the importance of this study (please read attached abstract)?

•

What is your opinion about using this particular group of students, especially regarding their age?

•

Have you found any differences in your experiences teaching girls from when you first started teaching and girls nowadays? Please explain.

•

Are there any issues that you believe specifically concern Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia? If so, give details.

•

If you are teaching or have taught in an international school, how do you find Muslim girls relate to others in the school, and how do others relate to them (teachers, students, other community members)?

•

How would you describe the levels of self-efficacy of girls in Saudi Arabia?

•

How would you describe the general academic levels of Muslim girls in Saudi Arabia?

•

How strongly do you find Muslim girls identify with being Muslim?

•
What is the most positive/ satisfying/ interesting experience you have had with Muslim girls?

•

What is the most concerning or negative experience you have had with Muslim girls?

•

How much influence do you think parents living in Saudi Arabia have on their children in regards to identity and self-efficacy, especially girls? Give a specific example

•

How much influence do you think teachers have on identity and self-efficacy of Muslim students in Saudi Arabia, especially girls?

•

How do you think the schools you have worked in have or have not supported Muslim girls?

•

What do you think leadership can do or needs to do, to ensure Muslim girls are being provided for, both academically and socially?

•
Appendix D: Child and parent consent form
Appendices

Consent Form for Students and Parents

Research Title: A study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia

Researcher’s Name: Ms Najah El-Biza

I have read the participation information sheet and have had the chance to ask the researcher any other questions I have. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time from the study without affecting my treatment at school in any way.

I understand that the risks to me are minimal in this study and have read the information sheet and asked any questions I may have about the risks. I understand that I will be involved in two 30 minute tape recorded interviews, one with other students from my school and the second one individually. My name will not be used to identify my comments or actions in the study.

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 4457.

By signing below I am consenting to:

- Being surveyed by the researcher during my normal school activities.
- Having two tape recorded interviews of about 30 minutes each with the researcher asking me about myself.

I understand that information from me will be used for a thesis and possibly other published studies and I consent for it to be used in this manner.

Consent Form for Students and Parents

Research Title: A study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia

Researcher’s Name: Ms Najah El-Biza

I give permission for my child ________________________________ (please insert your child’s name) of class ______ to participate in this research.

By signing below I am consenting to my child (please tick):

☐ Being surveyed by the researcher during normal school activities.
☐ Having two tape recorded interviews of about 30 minutes each with the researcher asking my child about themselves.

Parent/ Guardian Name (please print) ________________________________

Parent/ Guardian Signature ________________________________ Date________

Student Name: __________________________ Student signature __________ Date________
Appendix E: Teacher information sheet with consent
PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

TITLE: A comparative study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by the researcher Najah El-Biza at the University of Wollongong. The underlying purpose of this research is to investigate the self-efficacy and personal identity of Australian Muslim girls in a private Islamic school and those in a public school in comparison with Saudi Muslim girls in a public Islamic school and those in a private school. This study will examine the lived experiences of the participants through their narratives, giving the girls a voice. As more Muslims in Australia are being marginalized and harassed, it is crucial to inquire about the well-being and condition of their identity and self-efficacy. The research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the ways in which girls actually identify themselves and locate themselves in both the Muslim community and the western community, and the extent to which the context/place of the school, the management, and relationship-building of school leaders, is significant in enhancing the self-efficacy and personal identity of these girls. In addition, the study aims to identify whether this differs according to different cultural groups in different contexts.

INVESTIGATORS
Ms Najah El-Biza
Faculty of Education
02-9822 9626 (Australia)
0559271120 (Saudi Arabia)
neb89@uow.edu.au

Dr Christine Fox
Senior Lecturer
02-4221 3882
christine_fox@uow.edu.au

Dr Narottam Bhindi
Associate Professor
02-4221 5477
nbhindi@uow.edu.au

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS
If you choose to be included, you will be asked to participate in an interview. The interview will be conducted as a focus group consisting of other teachers from your school. The interview will be audio taped to support the researcher in accurately recording your comments. I will send you the transcript so that you can correct or add to what you have told me. We also wish to audio-tape two interviews with up to six of your students about their perceptions on their identity and self-efficacy.
POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Apart from the time taken for the interviews, we can foresee no risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong or with your school.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This research will provide an increase in knowledge and understanding about the situation of Muslim girls in today’s society, through the exploration of their identities and self efficacy. It is expected that significant data will be drawn from the research to recommend positive influences on identity and self efficacy, for leaders and school communities to implement. Findings from the study will be published in a Doctoral thesis and possibly published in educational journals. Confidentiality is assured, and the school, you and the students will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UoW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

Teacher Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________
Appendices
Appendix F: Child information sheet
Participation Information Sheet for Children

Dear Student

I would like to invite you to take part in a study about what it is like to be a primary school student in Australia. The purpose of this study is to find out how you feel about yourself and school. Your experiences and ideas as Muslim girls are very important for schools and teachers who are developing educational programs.

These are the people from the university involved in this study

Najah El-Blza  Dr Christine Fox  Dr Narottam Bhindi
PhD Student  Senior Lecturer  Associate Professor
Faculty of Education  Faculty of Education  Faculty of Education

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO DO

You will be asked to complete a survey about your day to day experiences at school. For example, question 14 of Part one asks you to agree or disagree to the statement ‘My teacher likes to see my work’. An example question from part 2 includes agreeing or disagreeing to the statement ‘I find it difficult to motivate myself to do schoolwork’. Also, if you volunteer to be one of six students from your school to be interviewed, we will talk about your ideas for about 30 minutes during school hours at your school. The first interview will be with the other five students and the second interview will be an individual 30 minute interview. During the interviews I will tape your group and individual discussions and write down notes.

Apart from the two interviews and taping the voices of your group, we can see no risks for you. Your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may choose to stop at any time and remove any information that has been gathered to that point.

This research will provide knowledge and understanding about what it is like for Muslim girls living in today’s society and it will give good ideas to school leaders and communities how to help you better. We will not use your name or the school’s name. You and your teacher will not be identified in any part of the research.

If you have any concerns or complaints about the way this research has been conducted, you can tell your teacher or parents or contact the University Ethics Officer, on (02) 42214457.

Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix G: Parent/Caregiver information sheet
LETTER OF INFORMATION TO PARENTS/CAREGIVER

Dear Parent/caregiver

Your child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Ms Najah El-biza from the University of Wollongong. The project is entitled ‘A comparative study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia’. We write to seek your approval and assistance to conduct research and to involve your child as a participant.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to investigate Muslim girls’ sense of belonging and capabilities in the school environment. This study will examine your child’s lived experiences through their narratives, giving them a voice.

INVESTIGATORS

Ms Najah El-Biza
Faculty of Education
02-9822 9626 (Australia)
0559271120 (Saudi Arabia)
neb89@uow.edu.au

Dr Christine Fox
Senior Lecturer
02-4221 3882
christine_fox@uow.edu.au

Dr Narottam Bhindi
Associate Professor
02-4221 5477
nbhindi@uow.edu.au

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS

If you agree for your child to be included, your child will be asked to participate in a survey. If they volunteer, they may also participate in two interviews during school hours at their school. The first interview will be with five other students and the second interview will be an individual 30 minute interview. During the interviews the researcher will audio record your child’s comments.
POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

We can foresee no risks for your child. Your child’s involvement in the study is voluntary and she may withdraw from the study at any time and withdraw any data that she has provided to that point. If by any chance your child is worried, the school will provide any support needed by your child.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This research will provide an increase in knowledge and understanding about the situation of Muslim girls in today’s society, through the exploration of their identities and self efficacy. It is expected that significant data will be drawn from the research to recommend positive influences on identity and self efficacy, for leaders and school communities to implement. Findings from the study will be published in a Doctoral thesis and possibly published in educational journals. Confidentiality is assured, and the school, you and the students will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research about the conduct of this research, you can contact the Ethics Officer, on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix H: Letter to school principals
LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal

Students and their teachers at your school have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Ms Najah El-Biza from the University of Wollongong. The project is entitled ‘Self efficacy and identity: A comparative study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia’. We write to seek your approval and assistance to conduct research.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the:

- the self-efficacy and personal identity of Australian Muslim girls in a private Islamic school and those in a public school in comparison with Saudi Muslim girls in a public Islamic school and those in a private school.
- the lived experiences of the participants through their own voices
- the ways in which girls actually identify themselves and locate themselves in both the Muslim community and the Western community, and the implications that the context/place of the school and relationship-building of school leaders has on enhancing the self-efficacy and personal identity of these girls.

Approval is sought to visit the school for each day for a total period of three weeks. During these visits the researcher would like to survey, then interview the students in a group and then individually, as well as their teachers as a group.

The ethics of the research has been reviewed by the University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Please find attached to this letter the Participant Information Sheets for the teachers, children and parents/caregivers.

The findings of this research will provide an increase in knowledge and understanding about the situation of Muslim girls in today’s society, through the exploration of their identities and self-efficacy. It is expected that significant data will be drawn from the research to recommend positive influences on identity and self-efficacy, for leaders and school communities to implement. If there are any ethical concerns you can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, University of Wollongong on (02) 42214457. Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact members of the research team.

Yours sincerely

Ms Najah El-Biza
Faculty of Education
02-9822 9626 (Australia)
0559271120 (Saudi Arabia)
neb89@uow.edu.au

Dr Christine Fox
Senior Lecturer
Supervisor
02-4221 3882
christine_fox@uow.edu.au

Dr Narottam Bhindi
Associate Professor
Supervisor
02-4221 5477
nbhindi@uow.edu.au
Appendix I: Emails to Saudi teachers
Email One:

Salaam everyone,
Inshallah you're all well during this blessed month. I would like to ask you guys a favour. I am sure you all know that I am completing my PhD and Alhamdulilah I’m somewhere near the end. However, I have found that I have some missing data that I need for the study concerning teachers’ opinions on girls studying in Saudi (not necessarily just Saudi girls). So, I was wondering if you could fill out this questionnaire for me to help me out a little, it would be greatly appreciated and your ideas will really give an important perspective to the study. It would be ideal if I could get them back by the end of the week (my week which is Friday!!lol) but of course if you need more time I would still be glad to have them. I’m not sure if you have started teaching yet.
I am sending the abstract of the study as well to give you an idea of what it's about.
Also if any of you could forward this email to other teachers you know who are teaching or have taught in Saudi and could fill this out it would be great.
Thanks in advance, jazakum allahu khairan

Najah

Email Two:

Salaam everyone, inshallah you're all well. Eid Mubarak to all, I hope you had a good holiday.
I just want to ask everyone again if you could please take 10 minutes of your time and answer the few questions on this questionnaire about teaching girls in Saudi Arabia. I would really appreciate it and you would benefit my study greatly. Also could you please pass this on to other teachers you know teaching in Saudi.
Thank you all again, jazakum allahu khairan

Najah
Appendix J: Approval letter from the Department of Education
Dear Ms El-Biza

re SERAP number: 2008172

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled Self efficacy and identity: A comparative study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principal of the nominated school to seek their participation.

Your approval will remain valid until October 2009.

This approval covers the following researcher to enter the school for the purposes of this research:

   Najah El-Biza - expiry date October 2009.

You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to the school.

I drew your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

1. School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering data must also be sought.

2. The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.

3. The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.

4. Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed, please forward two hard copies of your report. One should be mailed to South Western Sydney Regional Office Building A, 500 Chapel Road BANKSTOWN NSW 2200 and the second to the General Manager, Planning and Innovation, Department of Education and Training, GPO Box 33, SYDNEY, NSW 2001.

Yours sincerely

Tom Urry
REGIONAL DIRECTOR
SOUTH WESTERN SYDNEY
30 October 2008
Appendix K: Approval letter from the UOW Ethics committee
INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL
In reply please quote: HE08/201
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 4457

10 October 2008

Ms Najah El-Biza
16 Lansbury St
Edensor Park
NSW 2176

Dear Ms El-Biza

Thank you for your response dated 8 October 2008 to the HREC review of the application detailed below. I am pleased to advise that the application has been approved for Australian Schools. A letter of approval to conduct the research in Saudi Arabia must be supplied before research can be commenced there.

Ethics Number: HE08/201
Project Title: Self-efficacy and identity: A comparative study of Muslim primary school girls in Australia and Saudi Arabia
Researchers: Ms Najah El-Biza, Dr Christine Fox, A/Prof Narottam Bhindi
Approval Date: 10 October 2008
Expiry Date: 9 October 2009

The University of Wollongong SESIAHS Humanities, Social Science and Behavioural HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document. As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

You are also required to complete monitoring reports annually and at the end of your project. These reports are sent out approximately 6 weeks prior to the date your ethics approval expires. The reports must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

Yours sincerely

A/Professor Steven Roedenrys
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

cc Dr C Fox, Faculty of Education
Appendix L: Approval letter from Saudi school
سمع الله الرحمن الرحيم

البلاط الملكي

المؤسسة الملكية لإالتقاء والاتحاد

الأمير عبد العزيز بن عبد العزيز بن عبد العزيز

المؤسسة الملكية لإلتقاء والاتحاد

البلاط الملكي

مهمة: توظيف وبرنامج التطوير الإداري والتدريب والتطوير والتطوير والتطوير والتطوير والتطوير

تميد مدار الحفظات التامة التابعة لمؤسسة وليد الأمر بسميع بن عبد العزيز تتميز بالشبكة في مدار الحفظات التامة، كما أنها تتميز بالإمكانيات المتاحة.

وأعلنت مشاركة ودعمها لباحة وتعليم الكتب والكتب والكتب والكتب والكتب.

وعلّمته مهنة الإقامة.

مؤسسة وليد الأمر بسميع بن عبد العزيز تتميز بالشبكة والكتب والكتب والكتب والكتب.

اسم: 

المملكة العربية السعودية - جدة - حي الروضة - تليفون: (2223) 2019